

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

As I was reading this Gospel preparing for the sermon today, I had a sense that it would be great if we could take Jesus at his words and do just that: climb on his lap, curl up and have a good cry. There have been so much suffering in this country these past weeks, so much loss, destruction and heartbreak. I guess that even though we probably aren't among the victims of the tragedies or even among their families, the context is such that we may have a sense of moral and even spiritual exhaustion.

And I think it's okay you know, to be sad and discouraged. We may have to be strong and act like adults during the week, if we want to have a good cry, well, the church on Sunday is the perfect place to be. Jesus does not expect people to be positive all the time. Jesus knows what's going on inside of us, and that indeed we are weary and carry heavy burdens. Otherwise, he would not make such an invitation. He knows the world is tough.

This week, as we remember Saint Francis, we may feel even more moved by the suffering going on in this country and in our world, because we open up to compassion. What we love about Francis is that he never thought of himself as standing alone before God. He felt a deep connection with that all other human beings, and all living creatures. He called the sun, the moon and the stars his brothers and sisters, he preached to the birds. A legend has it that he tamed a wolf. He gave his clothes to the poor, kissed the lepers and he would go and meet the Sultan at a time where the Christian world was fighting the Muslims. Early on, Francis had a sense that the world is indeed a village, we all belong to Christ and therefore we are all connected. For us, maybe we are not always aware of this connection, but when something really bad happens, shootings, natural disasters, and as we strive to be loving and compassionate people, the pain of this world becomes our pain as well. I had a teacher at the seminary who called global warming *the global suffering*, well I think he was right you know.

The psalms and hymns we use for St Francis remind us today that the whole world is made to sing God's praise. We believe that Creation knows God and rejoice in him. I've learned recently that the eyes of the spiders are so sophisticated that they can see the stars... And so, the *infants* Jesus mentions, the *infants* who have a better knowledge of God than the savants, are not only children but all those who cannot speak *the wisdom of the wise*, *in-fant* literally means *those who have no language*: babies but also forests and oceans, turtles and fish...An so we should feel joyful when we read those psalms, sing those hymns of praise on behalf of the Creation. Yet today our hearts ache if we have in mind the recent hurricanes that brought so many disasters upon innocents. And we know ecological problems are not limited to Climate change. We can think of the oceans suffocating under tons of plastic. We can think of the forests that are erased and animals who lose their homes. How can the *infants* sing God's praise when they can't live the life God has intended for them to live? The cattle industrially raised and slaughtered certainly do not live the life God has intended for them, taken away from their mothers at birth, never seeing the light of the day, spending their short lives in cages being overfed and stuffed with antibiotics. Some of the problems the natural world face may be inevitable, but we also know a lot of those problems are due to this world's greediness, indifference and selfishness: Our insatiable need to fly planes, buy new phones, drive big cars, live in big houses where we eat meat everyday and use disposable silverware when we entertain because we don't want to have to clean. And it's not only creation that suffers because of us, many men and women do too. The *infants* Jesus mentions are also all the *voiceless* of our society. If our hearts ache when we read Creation's songs, how badly they should ache as well when we hear Jeremiah asking us to pay a living wage to our artisans. Every week in this church we have workers who drop by to ask for help because their salary is not enough to pay their rent. There are people right there in this neighborhood who are so desperate they want to take their own lives because they cannot pay their bills. How can they sing their praises to God and give thanks for their lives, if nobody enables them to make a living?

And so, as we open ourselves to compassion, we start feeling the pain of the whole world. But we soon find out as well that this pain is often loaded with a sense of guilt, or at least with a sense of our own responsibility.

We have heard again this week about "evil people" doing "evil things", as we always hear when someone commit atrocities. Well, if we don't fool ourselves, we know that, as surely a teenager can start acting out when the family is dysfunctional, in the same way some human beings become criminals because the whole of society carries hidden diseases. Dostoevsky put it in a very simple way. He said: "We are all guilty of everything in front of everybody". Yes, some crazy individuals, sectarian groups or big companies commit crimes, but how many of them are committed on our behalf or at least a little because of us? And so today, we may want to have a good cry for all the suffering in the world, but as our compassion leads us also to acknowledge our sin, or at least our own responsibility, what we want to do is to come up with the means to repair. After all, if we are part of the problem, it probably means as well that we can be part of the solution. And that's where we meet again our companion Francis.

You may know that Francis' vocation all began when he entered the chapel of San Damiano, just outside Assisi, as he heard Christ saying to him: "Francis, go and repair My house which is falling into ruins." The story has it that Francis took this to mean the ruined church in which he was praying, and so he sold some cloth from his father's store to assist the priest. It took him time to realize that, of course, repairing Christ's house was much more than to fix the roof, and that Christ's house was much more than the church. It was the whole creation.

Yes as Francis, we want to come up with solutions in front of sufferings and despair, and we need concrete, practical and if possible quick solutions. Yet as a disciple, we may come to understand that they are not enough to fix the world. As for me, because I want to be a "good person", I always try to "buy smart", to find produces respectful of the environment and the lives of the animals but also fair to human workers. Well, as you can imagine, I spend a lot of time trying to "buy smart", when a little voice inside of me tells me that maybe I should just not buy so much. Technical solutions exist but they are always limited if we are not willing to make some sacrifices. And I think this is what Francis ended up finding: he could not fix the world, he could not repair God's house with a few coins, but he could choose to live a simple life.

Francis chose to use less, to need less, he chose to occupy less place in the world so others creatures could exist, he chose to embrace poverty. We have to renounce to ourselves, you see. We have to forsake our privileges. The reading from Galatians reminds us that there is no way around the cross. As surely as there is sin in this world, there is no way around suffering, and if we want to repair, there is no way around giving up ourselves. Maybe we cannot live in a brown cloak as Francis, but we can all give up something, and give up a little more each day as we learn how to follow Jesus. Living a simple life with simple needs, a life that gives praise to God but also that enables others to give their praises as well.

Now maybe you're wondering: How is any of this comforting? Well, I think the response comes from the mouth of Jesus himself in the second part of his invitation, when he says: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus invites us to take upon his yoke. His cross.

Our sense of compassion brings us heartbreaks for the suffering of this world, but it can also lead us to despair because it is so overwhelming, and we know deep down that we are also partially to blame for this suffering. Yet we find hope when we stop, as Francis did, to try to find a way around it, by fleeing it or by finding cheap solutions. The pain brought by our sense of compassion can only be healed by a desire for reparation, not by "fixing" but by sharing in the suffering in self sacrifice. Jesus promises today that we will *learn from him*, and he teaches us the only solution to the world's suffering: The cross. The giving up of ourselves. Yet, it's not a painful sacrifice, it's a joyful, loving offering. Instead of loving superficially, reacting emotionally, with Christ we will learn to love more deeply, more meaningfully. The pain brought by love can only be healed by loving more deeply. As the beautiful prayer attributed to St Francis goes: *May we don't seek so much to be consoled as to console*. If we take upon us the yoke of Christ, we will learn how to console, and consoling others will be our own consolation. Amen.