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19 Thursday

THURSDAY 15<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 26: 7-9,12,16-19

Ps 101: 13-19, 21

Matthew 11: 28 - 30

Of all the rural and agricultural images that Jesus used, the most down-to-earth must be that of a cattle yoke. But there's something odd and contradictory about the way He used it. A yoke is a kind of framework put over the neck and shoulders of animals like buffalos or oxen so that their weight is used more efficiently and they're better controlled in their work of ploughing or pulling things. A yoke is also used to harness two animals together so they can share a load. Sometimes, even in olden days, yokes were used to tie together and humiliate prisoners captured in war. And the word continues to connote subjugation and oppression.

Jesus invites people who labour and are burdened to come to Him and find rest. But how can taking on a yoke and sharing a burden be restful? Calling his yoke 'easy' and his burden 'light' seems contradictory, especially when we think of the cross He carried to Calvary, and its weight. This hardly seems like a way to find rest for ourselves. As for His invitation to learn from Him because He's meek and humble of heart, how does this ease our burdens or remove the yokes we struggle under?

Maybe we need to contemplate a different aspect of what a yoke is. Not an oppressive constricting and manipulating weight on our shoulders, but a shared working together with Another who has already carried our burdens and ploughed a straight way for us. For His humbleness and being subjugated has given us freedom and life. We will find rest in being 'tied to' the One who loves us, whom we love.

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