

July 5, 2020 Lean On Me Homily: What can we possibly say of the one who “carries the weight of the world on his shoulders”? At the very least, he is to be pitied. Beset with troubles and fears, he finds his life excessively burdensome and joyless. He’s brought low, beaten down and at the end of his rope.

That evocative phrase, “carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders” may have been inspired by one of the great figures of Greek mythology, Atlas. According to this well known tale, the Greek god Zeus condemned Atlas to hold up the heavens with his bare hands and bear their weight on his broad shoulders forever.

Across the street from Saint Patrick’s Cathedral on Fifth Avenue in New York City is a bronze statue of Atlas in front of Rockefeller Plaza. The sight of one carrying the world on his shoulders is impressive, indeed. Like Atlas, Jesus carries a heavy weight on his shoulders, and even heavier than the heavens. What he carries is not the globe, but the Cross.

In today’s gospel Jesus extends a generous invitation to all his listeners. He said to them, “Come to me”. He calls everyone to approach him in faith. He is especially sensitive to those who are weary and no longer find pleasure in life. Many responded enthusiastically to his words of compassion. They came to him in large numbers: the lepers, the blind, lame and the mute, tax collectors, prostitutes, refugees and the poor. He is the first to carry the heavy burden of others. He does all the heavy lifting for us. Unlike the religious leaders of his day, the so-called wise and the clever who carried nothing but made life difficult for common folks by making religious observance tedious and joyless, Jesus, who is meek and humble of heart, promises rest for their weary souls. Recall our Lord’s biting criticism of them later in Matthew’s gospel: “They bind heavy burdens hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders”.(Mt. 23:4)

The rest He promises is a foreshadowing of our heavenly rest at the end of our earthly pilgrimage.

In the year I graduated from high school, 1972, an African-American songwriter and recording artist, Bill Withers, wrote a song that reached the top of the billboard charts. Perhaps you may recall it. The title of the song is “*Lean on me*”. The words of this song speak to me of Christ and his gracious invitation to come to him. Below are just some of the lyrics of a truly remarkable song:

“Lean on me, when you’re not strong
And I’ll be your friend
I’ll help you carry on.
For it won’t be long
till I am going to need somebody to lean on.
You just call me brother when you need a hand
We all need somebody to lean on
I just might have a problem that you’ll understand
We all need someone to lean on.”

In Jesus Christ, we indeed have someone to lean on. He is truly our Savior. Each time we approach God in prayer as the beggars we truly are, we respond, without hesitation, to the one who said, “Come to Me.”

What a relief.

Amen!