

July 5, 2020

As we celebrate our nation's independence, we could use a respite from the turmoil in the world. People want a break from the stress. They want a holiday of rest. The gospel proposes more than a weekend respite. Jesus invites us to experience a lifestyle of rest. He tells us, ***"Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."*** (Mt. 11:28-29)

Jesus' life should have been stressful. Wherever he went people flocked to him in droves, especially the sick. He was constantly on the go and responding to the needy. In addition, he faced constant criticism. People ridiculed him. Because he befriended sinners and ate with them, they called him ***"a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."*** (Mt. 11:18-19) At one point, the Jewish leaders even said that he was possessed by a demon (Jn. 8:48). Jesus had plenty of reasons to be frazzled, yet you never see him stressed out.

Instead, we picture him as a tranquil man emanating peace. Shortly before his passion and death, he comforted the disciples by saying, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."*** (Jn. 14:27) How could Jesus extend peace to others as he went to the cross? How could he sleep in the boat while a storm was raging on the sea?

Today he tells us the secret of his peace, ***"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves."*** For Jesus, being *"meek and humble of heart"* is the way to find rest. First of all, he was meek and humble before God. Humility before the Father was the deepest source of his peace. In the end, peaceful rest flows from being humble before God.

In the Old Testament, the meek and humble person is typically poor and afflicted. The Hebrew word is *anawim*; it means to be poor, afflicted, humble or meek before God. In their poverty, the *anawim* are noted for profound trust in God. They depend wholeheartedly on the Lord. They trust that the God has their back.

You can hear this humble trust in Psalm 149 which declares, ***"The Lord takes delight in his people; he adorns the humble with victory."*** (Ps. 149:4) That is, he adorns the *anawim* (עַנְוִים) with victory. Likewise, Psalm 34 states, ***"The poor man (עֲנִי) cried out and the Lord heard him and delivered him from all his afflictions."*** (Ps. 34:6) This is what Jesus has in mind as he says, ***"Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart."***

Humility before God is based on a keen awareness that without God I am nothing. The poor especially are in touch with their nothingness. They know that everything is gift – health, food and shelter, the beauty of nature, the blessings of family. Not only is everything a gift, but also they know God as the great gift giver.

That is how Jesus described the Father. In this gospel, he declares that the Father graciously gives him everything. He said, ***"All things have been handed over to me by my Father."*** (Mt. 11:27) When he was teaching his disciples how to pray, he urged them to see God in this way, to pray to the Father as a generous gift-giver. He said, ***"If you then . . . know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"*** (Lk. 11:13)

Jesus stood before God the Father as humble and meek, totally dependent. He was aware that the Father generously pours out all his gifts. He said, "The Father gives me everything, and he sent me to bring his gifts to you. He wants you to enter into his rest. Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you [his] rest."

Once a person realizes that everything is a gift, then they humbly help others. We observe this kind of humility in Jesus, especially in the foot-washing. He even called himself a servant or slave. He said, **"Anyone who wants to be first among you must be a slave to all. For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** (Mk. 10:44-45)

This is the second way to find rest. Have you ever noticed how serving others brings you peace? When we focus on humbly serving others, it relieves us of our troubles. One of the best antidotes to anxiety about my troubles is to reach out to the needy, to be other-centered. To focus outward, instead of inward. Jesus said, **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."** (Acts 20:35) He knew the blessing of peace from serving others. God fills our hearts with peace when we humbly serve others.

In our nation, we have a cherished tradition of helping the downtrodden. Countless soldiers sacrificed for the afflicted in other lands. In the pandemic, first responders and healthcare workers are generously tending to the sick. Over the years, many church or civic leaders alike have stood up for the dignity of every human person. They have modeled humble service to all: whether citizens or foreigners, rich or poor, believers or non-believers, irrespective of their sex, level of education or the color of their skin. Like Jesus, they brought others to a place of rest. This is our mission.

Nonetheless, we must admit that our church and nation have been wounded by leaders who used their authority to abuse, injure or even kill. Some clergy wounded others through sexual abuse, and for years, the bishops failed to deal with those horrific crimes. Now we are seeing a similar reality among the police. While most are honorable and dedicated public servants, some have used their authority to mistreat or even murder civilians, especially racial minorities. At times, their leaders failed to address these detestable crimes.

We cannot live under the illusion that we live in a perfect society, but one that is in a constant battle with good and evil. If we want the broken to experience the rest of God, then we must acknowledge these crimes and not pretend that everything is fine. The Church made that mistake for decades with sexual abuse. Our nation should not do the same with police brutality.

Be wary of proud leaders who defend the status quo. Their pride blinds them, and we should not follow them. They are blind guides. Instead support leaders who humbly acknowledge their poverty before God, who are big enough to admit their mistakes or our sins as a nation. The way to peaceful rest for our nation is through meek and humble leadership.

Do our nation's troubles make you weary? Are you worn down by covid-19? Then humbly and confidently pray to God. The Lord will provide. Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and your Father in heaven will open the door to his treasury of all good gifts. (Lk. 11:9) Next, humbly serve others and watch how your heart is filled with peace.

Jesus invites us to a lifestyle of rest, but that does not mean that we will have a life without crime, sin, evil, violence, corruption and turmoil. Rather, while living in a world wounded by sin, we can enjoy a

lifestyle of rest by being humble and meek before God. Left to ourselves we feel our nothingness, but with the Lord we are strengthened to bring others into the rest of God.

This is the way to peace for us as individuals, and it is the way to peace for our country experiencing so much turmoil. As the psalmist says, ***“The poor man cried out and the Lord heard him and delivered him from all his afflictions.”*** (Ps. 34:6) We are called to do the same.