

“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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Mt 11:28-30). A yoke is placed on the shoulders of farm animals to help them work more efficiently combining the strength of several oxen to work more efficiently together than they could individually. When the weight of the world appears to be on your shoulders and you feel that you can handle no more, it is helpful to reflect on these words from Jesus.

Pharisees and scribes often placed a heavy burden on the faithful asking them to follow the law for the law’s sake rather than for the Lord’s sake. “For they preach but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them” (Mt 23:3-4). “In place of the yoke of the law ... Jesus invites the burdened to take the yoke of obedience to his word, under which they will find rest” (Note to 11:29).

In the Old Testament, the Lord heard the cries of the Israelites. Under slavery in Egypt, they were heavily burdened to work 7 days a week without rest or worship. To lighten their burden, God called upon Moses to speak truth to power. Moses was hesitant to accept the Lord’s yoke.

“If you please, my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and tongue.” The LORD said to him: “Who gives one person speech? Who makes another mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go, I will assist you in speaking and teach you what you are to say” (Ex 4:10-12).

Time and again, the Lord carried the yoke with Moses lightening the load and time and again Moses objected that he was not the right man. Moses, however, was handpicked by the Lord and given the strength to carry the yoke with the Lord for some 40 years.

I think we can all relate to Moses feeling in over our heads in certain tasks. All the more reason to ponder the words of Jesus. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29).

When a person is ill, we often pray these verses with them. At a point when my father was very ill, he asked for the Lord’s will to be done and accepted that the Lord might ask him to do something in return. With the skillful help of doctors, my father regained his strength, and the Lord fulfilled his part by asking my father to help others in return. My father did not have to lead anyone out of Egypt, but the Lord did ask him to use his gifts to help lighten the load of others when they were seriously ill or deeply mourning the loss of a loved one.

As you experience your own heavy burdens in life, turn to God in faith for guidance and strength and let him help you to carry your heavy burdens.