

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, July 5, 2020

Weighted Down

Written by Br. John Marmion Villa

Zechariah 9:9-10

Romans 8:9, 11-13

Matthew 11:25-30



There's a Christian drama called *Baggage*. In the course of this monologue, the main character carries more and more (empty) luggage, slings, and backpacks, explaining how, through this and that scene, he collects baggage. You can see the actor start to be weighed down by what he's carrying, but it's so understandable why he does it: we all do the same. He tries unsuccessfully to unload that baggage onto others, but to no avail. In the climax of the script, the actor drops all of the bags with a huge sigh of relief. This image, while slightly kitschy, can be a helpful image for us as we consider this all too familiar Gospel text.

A myriad of scenarios can explain the weight that we hold deep within: it can be the confusion and anxiety about the current events we see on the news and social media; it can be discouragement about being furloughed; it can be the frustration from our children making poor life choices; it can be the shame from our secret, hidden addictive behaviors; it can be a powerlessness in confronting a tense relationship with a family member; it can be the regret we bear for failures or unresolved conflict from our past. The older we get it seems as though the more baggage we tend to collect. I think that's normal, but I also think that we have yet to learn how to let the baggage go ... just like the actor in the skit.

I remember distinctly a time when it seemed as though my heart was suffocated by the full weight of my sin history. I remember distinctly a weight on my chest that made it difficult to take a deep breath of fresh air that morning. I also remember walking into the Confessional with sweat beads coming down the side of my face. That morning, in Alma,

Michigan, I made what seems to have been the confession of a lifetime! Ten minutes later, I walked out of that room, and I remember noticing that the pressure on my chest was gone! There was a lightness in my heart that I had long forgotten. I knelt in a pew to say my penance, but I had to hold my giggles back because a joy was erupting from my heart and I didn't want to disturb the other people in the chapel.

So, when Jesus says, "Come to me ... I will give you rest," I learned to take him at his word. I took a leap of faith and laid my heart bare that morning ... and the rest that Jesus talks about was not threatening to me; it was actually inviting. The burdens that I was carrying ... he took them off my shoulders and emptied them on his cross. He replaced my burdens with the yoke of discipleship; in essence he said to me, "You've tried it your way; now try mine ... it will work out better for you in the long run." He has been true to his word ever since.

Maybe you've seen the picture on social media too ... it's a cartoon sketch of Jesus kneeling in front of a young kid. The young kid is holding his teddy bear tightly, and Jesus is hiding a much bigger teddy bear behind his back. Jesus is gesturing with his hand outstretched,

but the response of kid is so poignant: "But I like mine"

Again, the same is true for us.

Our baggage has become our comfort and definition. We don't experience what Jesus promised because we fear, or we doubt. But Jesus is patient as he is persistent. The invitation will always be there. Grace is always available to us ... but it is "hidden" (cf v 26) because we have hidden our faults, thinking that Jesus isn't "God enough" to know about them, let alone to forgive us for them. So, we go on living our lives of quiet desperation, hoping for relief, lacking the gumption to grasp for it. Weighted down, we lose our balance often, blaming this person or that scenario. We'd like to "rejoice heartily," but we think erroneously we are condemned to "labor and burdens." But just maybe, right before inconsolable despair envelops us when faced with our mountains of impossibilities, we can utter seven words — if even sheepishly — "I can't anymore; you can; please do."

Then just watch what Jesus will do ...

Br. John Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Lord Jesus,
I'm tired of the same struggle in my life.
I feel distant from you.
My choices have not let me into the right places.
I've listened to the whispers of my enemy
instead of your words in Scripture,
and the result has been disastrous.

So today I'm confessing my desperate need for you.
Lord, I truly need your forgiveness.
I want to turn around and head another direction...
Back to you.
But I need your help.

Root out the darkness and light up my life
with your holy presence.
Help me to understand what went wrong.
Show me how my destructive patterns first began.
With your restoration, Lord, perhaps I can help others
find their way back to you also.
I will not give my enemy the victory.
Instead, I will except yours.
Instead of a meltdown, with your help and grace
I will allow your spirit to give me your heart
and to live for you the rest of my life.
Thank you, Jesus, for your sweet forgiveness
and promised restoration.