

## **The Call to Sanctification on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart**

*A meditation given by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez*

*on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart to the*

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At that time Jesus said in reply, "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. 26 Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him. 28 "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." (Mat 11:25-30 NAB).

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. 8 Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. 10 In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. 13 This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit. 14 Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. 15 Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God. 16 We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. (1 John 4:7-16, NAB)

We have been reading at Mass the Book of Sirach. The last chapter 51 is particularly special in the context of this Solemnity. We can see the Eucharistic Lord as: the Embodiment of God's Wisdom," which I think is precisely what Mt 11:25-30 is about.

Sirach 51 is divided into two parts: the prayer of praise and thanks (51:1-12), and the personal account of Sirach's experience of "grappling with Wisdom" (51:13-30). Note in particular the concluding passage: Draw near to me, you who are untaught, and lodge in my school. Why do you say you are lacking in these things, and why are your souls so very thirsty? I opened my mouth and said, get these things for yourselves without money. Put your neck under the yoke, and let your souls receive instruction; it is to be found close by. See with your eyes that I have labored little and found for myself much rest. May your soul rejoice in his mercy, and may you not be put to shame when you praise him. Do your work before the appointed time, and in God's time he will give you your reward (51:23-27, 29-30, RSV).

Not only do we believe that Jesus fulfills all of God's promises in the OT historically, but in the Eucharist those fulfilled promises are not only historical but also personally, immediately, intimately present before us and in our midst. Only the Incarnate God can say: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest," and really mean it, in the sense that has the power and the love and the wisdom in fact to give the permanent "rest" and newness of life in Him that the invitation promises. And in the Eucharist the Incarnation of God, his real presence with us and in us, becomes ordinary, everyday Reality. It is so "ordinarily" that as St. John Paul II often insisted we need to enkindle awe and wonder, a permanent amazement at the gift of his extreme love (Jo 13, 1).

Now, the "rest" Jesus gives is inseparable from the "burden" that he shares with us. Our rest in him is laborious, because it shares in his own bliss in fulfilling the will of the Father, and the will of the Father is for Jesus to redeem the world through his death and resurrection (the paschal mystery). Paradoxically, we find rest in Jesus only by dying with him on the cross and so sharing in the work of redemption. But his burden is "light" precisely because it is the "yoke" he gives us to share with him. When he says "my yoke is easy and my burden light," he doesn't mean the specific yoke and burden that I have chosen just for you. No: he means my in a very literal sense: "the yoke that is already mine and the burden that is already mine; these are what I choose to share with you!" It makes all the difference in the world, I think, whether I look on the difficulties in my life (1) as my own private difficulties, which I then come to believe that God wills for me and in that sense has chosen for me, OR (2) as the difficulties of Jesus himself as redeemer, obedient to the Father, which Jesus asks me to share with him! My struggle will then be the GRACE of receiving the gift of participation in HIS STRUGGLE. And I will give thanks to be able to share in HIS BURDEN AND YOKE under whatever particular form HIS DIVINE SUFFERING may take in my life.

Jesus' own yoke and burden are wholly different from the burdens and yokes we invent for ourselves, put our necks under or allow the world to pile on our backs: the burdens of power-struggle, ambition, egotism, rivalry, one-upmanship, slavery to our vices, judgmentalism, mania for control, perfectionism, racism, competitiveness, over achieving, etc., as you know last Christmas, Pope Francis in meeting with the Curia listed with remarkable clarity the traps we can be induced as servants in the Church. We all know it well these are the burdens of death; but Jesus' burden makes us die to all this and rise to a new way of being in him. The Pauline discernment of the spirits enables us to make sure that the real and very demanding burdens that we carry are indeed the ones Jesus is putting on our shoulders, because he wants to share those burdens OF HIS with his appointed shepherds: we should carry ONLY those burdens, and not those manufactured by human respect, public opinion, secular dogmas, "the spirit of the age" or the deviousness of one's own heart. The test we face is: whether the burdens we are struggling to carry exist in me together with the experience of the REST that Jesus has promised if we COME TO HIM. In Jesus, bliss in the Father, spilling over continually into praise and

thanksgiving, always goes in hand in hand with suffering for the world's redemption. It is to this that he is inviting us as Church.

This new way of being is what 1 John 4:7-16 is all about. In the passage from Mt 11, Jesus is approaching us in person, extending the invitation of a lifetime to intimacy with him. "I do not call you servants but friends." Intimacy with Jesus means entering a deep process of purification so that we grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus by sharing his life. 1 John 4 then describes what living in Jesus consists in, what reflecting the vital reality of Jesus means in my concrete life.

The Wisdom that Jesus embodies, and invites us to embody with him, consists in allowing the absolute love of the Creator Father to invade us and take over our persons completely, so that we are motivated only by the Spirit of Father and Son. To be "wise," in the Christian sense, means to embody the Trinitarian life of love here and now, through my particular personality, life-story, hardships and joys.

According to St. John, the beloved disciple received from the Crucified Lord, his Mother. The Woman is the faithful disciple per excellence. The Mother of the Lord joins us in this journey with her motherly presence especially at the heart of the sacrament of the paschal mystery—the Eucharist. Her desire for each one of the shepherds here present is that our lives become a magnificent! A joyful, fruitful life as shepherds who are beloved by the Lamb with a sublime tenderness that the world does not know... God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.