

Advent 2: Wednesday

The Door Is Open

13 December 2017

Dear Father Rudy, Father Joseph, Deacon Simon, dear Sisters, staff, and volunteers of the Door is Open; and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

This morning we are celebrating the Eucharist together before our Annual Christmas Party which is the occasion to thank all of those who lend their hand to the great work of the Door Is Open, a remarkable place of caring where the face of Jesus in the Downtown Eastside is manifested and respected. Here street people can socialize and have a nutritious meal served by the many dedicated volunteers. The Door Is Open is a place where the patrons are always welcome and their dignity is honoured. Together the staff and volunteers work hard to show that here the door is truly open to everyone.

Dear staff and volunteers: I would like to emphasize that all of you here are intimately involved in the Church's evangelizing mission of bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to others. You do this, not by programs aimed at catechesis, but in obedience to Jesus' command that we see and help him in those suffering from social alienation: the poor, the homeless, the lonely and those who are often forgotten. By providing this place where people can socialize in safety and trust and where they can have access to various services, the Door Is Open provides an invaluable service to the community and is a blessing for the Church.

Indeed, the Door is Open embodies in its outreach and ministry what the Lord says in today's Gospel. Like him, those who work and volunteer here say to everyone, without exception: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). Indeed, you reach out to those who are burdened and give rest to their bodies and spirits. Thank you for your marvellous witness of sharing not just your time and resources but your very selves with your neighbour whom you serve but also from whom you learn so much.

Today's Gospel

As Jesus went along the roads of Galilee proclaiming the Kingdom of God and healing those in distress, "he had compassion on the crowds, for they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (cf. Mt 9:35-36).

Likewise today, Jesus' gaze extends to our world, to this very world of ours in Vancouver, to this particular section of our City. His gaze rests on so many people oppressed by difficult living conditions, harshly tried by poverty and often afflicted with illness, addiction and depression.

To each one, he repeats, "Come to me, all of you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens" (Mt 11:28). Let me switch gears for just a moment, away from the most oppressive burdens that affect far too many of our brothers and sisters.

Today we speak of another kind of burden. Let's call it "compassion fatigue." Through the media we are aware almost instantly of devastating floods, out-of-control wildfires, terrorist attacks and uprisings, starving and orphaned children. As a result, we sometimes become a little callous to new, and seemingly endless, requests for help. And when we do help, we might be tempted to think that so little good comes from our efforts.

In both of our Scripture readings today we are promised some refreshment, a renewal of strength in carrying our day-to-day duties. What do we have to do? As the popular evangelists put it, we first have to "come to Jesus." We have to allow ourselves to be carried along on the energy of God's life within us. If we surrender to him, taking his "yoke" upon ourselves, we will be filled with a new vitality – the vitality of grace, of God's presence.

His yoke is lighter and more truly adapted to us than any burdens we might have, especially those burdens which hold us down, and can stifle the joy of the Gospel within us.

Jesus himself is bearing the yoke that he speaks of since he is yoked to the Father, doing only what he sees the Father doing. Jesus is, in his innermost nature, the one who listens and obeys. What he is saying, therefore, is to stand next to him, just as one ox stands next to the other as they pull together. Just as Jesus is yoked to the Father, so we

should be yoked to him, obeying him as he obeys the Father.

Surrender to the power and grace of God and allowing him more space within our lives – putting on his “yoke” – is the way to tranquillity of soul.

The beautiful image from the Prophet Isaias proclaimed in today’s First Reading captures what happens to us when we learn from Jesus and put on *his* yoke of love: “Those who wait for the Lord – as we are doing this Advent and even now in our daily lives – shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Is 40:31).

Conclusion

And this strength does not come from us, but from the Lord. Right now, as we continue this celebration of the Eucharist, once again he says to us, “Come to me” – and he refreshes us with the gift of his very self.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver