

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year "A"

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me"

"In October 2007, with a wildfire blazing in the hills nearby, the residents of Julian, California, were under orders to evacuate. But less than 24 hours after fleeing to safety, Christy Connell, 46, co-owner of the Julian Bakery and Cafe, raced back home. "I'd heard from one of the volunteers helping evacuees that the firefighters battling the blaze didn't have anything to eat," she says. "And feeding people is what I do best."

The power was out in town, so she and a few other residents who hadn't evacuated hauled over an industrial size propane grill from the firehouse a few blocks away. She set it up on the street in front of her restaurant and started pots of beef and beans cooking. The fire chief sent out official word to those battling the blaze that the Julian Cafe was the place to eat.

Soon the first group of famished firefighters rolled in on their trucks. Coming straight from the front lines, they shed their gear and dove into their first meal in 12 hours—showering Christy with hugs and spontaneous applause. "You get a group of men who haven't eaten for 12 hours and you'll see how grateful they can get," she laughs.

"The joy of just feeding them was enough for me."

For four days, Christy spent nearly 20 hours a day cooking burritos, chicken, steak sandwiches and other food from her restaurant, and serving slices of the cafe's signature apple pie. Every few hours one of the other locals who'd stayed in town took over grill duty, giving Christy a chance to go home and get a little sleep. (Luckily, the fire didn't spread.)

All told, she served 1,100 meals—at no charge. Steve Sheppard, battalion chief for the Julian Fire Department, says Christy provided much more than comfort food that week: "To have someone stay behind and say, 'I'm here for you guys'—that means a lot" (Christy Connell, Julian, California).

When Jesus says "take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart," Jesus implies that Christians should not face the challenges of life alone. Jesus has our back and will always be there for us especially during those critical moments of life.

We have sometimes been in situations that challenge us to ask "God where are you? Where are you when bad things happen to innocent people, defenseless children or when the poor, the widow and the orphans are oppressed and denied their rights?"

During those highly dreaded moments, we are tempted to call down fire and brimstone from heaven to destroy the unjust oppressor. It gets even worse when good things happen to the oppressors even as they oppress the innocent and poor ones.

Such moments challenge us to question even our core beliefs in God, justice, peace, love and the integrity of created things. We are prompted to question the principles that govern the world - if there is purpose and meaning in the world?

To such people with a deep sense of justice, whose consciences have not been wrapped in the darkness of error and who are burdened by the things that happen in our unjustly structured world, Jesus says to them "Take my yoke upon you." As the saying goes "when you run with people, it is called a race but when you run with God it is called grace." The grace of God has what it takes to transform our sorrow into joy.

It is one thing to feel pain and sorrow at the sight of injustice and oppression of the poor and the weak, it is another thing to do something to stop or prevent the reign of injustice in the world. In

today's gospel Jesus gives us a recipe for the construction of a just society. Jesus invites us to imitate the confidential trust we see in children in their dealings with the world.

Trust is needed because we live in an imperfect world. However, though imperfect our world may be, there is still enough goodness in it. To cultivate the goodness of the Lord, Jesus invites us to yoke with Him – “for my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Movement is important whenever two things are yoked together. Much energy will be wasted when two persons or animals yoked together do not synchronize their movements. If one is moving the left leg or hand while the other is moving the right leg or hand, due to lack of synchronization, movement will be difficult and disrupted thus lead to confusion.

It is like singing in the choir, if the notes are not in sync even the best song will be poorly rendered and people are disappointed. This is similar to what is happening in the world today. No matter the goodness in the world, if a world is far removed from God – if a man made world is not in sync with the plan of the creator, violence and disorder reigns as the spirit of competition and not cooperation becomes prevalent.

Take my yoke upon you is a clarion call to return to the original plan of the creator in creation. From time immemorial God made human beings co-creators with Him so that human beings could become partners with God in building a just world. Like Adam and Eve in the story of the Garden of Eden, by eating the forbidden fruit, we are no longer in sync with God, hence can no longer hear the voice of God.

Our sins and bad choices make us to abandon the original plan of God and now we are struggling to find solace and refuge in a purely human construct that can never lead to true peace and progress of humanity in the ways of goodness, justice and love.

What Jesus did for us on the cross is what He is inviting us to do for others. Like Julian's Café there are many homeless and hungry people in the world that need us to yoke with them so that they may live. It is not enough to sympathize with them, authentic empathy entails that we yoke with the oppressed and the needy in our midst so that their burden may be light.

Now is the appointed time to yoke with the God of love so that we may have life and have it in abundance. As we go through life this week, let us reflect deeply on our actions and the choices we make. Do I make choices that are in sync with God's plan for my life and the life of others? Does my action contribute to the reign of peace or the reign of violence? Do I speak up against forces of oppression and injustice whenever and wherever they occur? What can I do today to make this world a better place for all?