

Third Sunday after Trinity
July 6, 2014
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Matthew 11:25-30

The collar I wear can't be seen at the moment, because clergy are required to cover them during the celebration of the Holy Mass. But I know you know what it looks like—it's white and goes all the way around my neck. A lot of other priests wear a simple white tab right beneath their throats. The meaning in either case is the same; we wear the yoke of Christ, to which Jesus makes reference in today's Gospel: "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." We go where he directs us, yet the yoke we wear is a joy rather than a burden.

Too many men today refuse to take Jesus at His word. We can be sure that the Lord is calling the right amount of men to be ordained to the holy priesthood, yet we find in many dioceses that too few priests are being ordained. In fact, in the Diocese of Scranton there were no priests ordained this year, and the Bishop of Scranton, Bishop Joseph Bambera, recently announced that lay administrators and deacons are being considered as an alternative to run parishes as a response to the vocation crisis.

Jesus understood that many people conceive of the fulfillment of their religious duty as a burden—not a light burden, but one that crushes them. They are so fearful of answering that burden that they avoid it. This is especially true among those who resist their call to the ordained ministry; they count the cost and draw back even before they've begun the race.

So what does Jesus mean when He says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light"? He wants us to contrast what he proposes with the wisdom of the world. Remember, our Gospel today began with Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving that our heavenly Father has revealed His truths to infants, yet "hidden those things from the wise and understanding." In other words, in which path will the yoke be easier and the burden be lighter, that of the wise and understanding or that of Christ?

The answer to the question can be found in the correct understanding of freedom. Jesus wants us to be free, free to serve Him and our fellow man without the constraints imposed by sin. That is, He desires liberty for us, the freedom to pursue that which is right, holy, good and true. The wise and understanding, on the other hand, believe that freedom is license; they desire the freedom to do as they please, with little or no consideration given to the negative impact their decisions have upon the lives of the vulnerable and needy. Where the world insists that freedom is license, Jesus teaches that true freedom is the freedom to serve.

These contrasting understandings of freedom were on display this week, after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down their decision in the Hobby Lobby case. The particulars of the case are easy to summarize. The Green family, which owns Hobby lobby, maintained that the state should not be able to compel them to purchase contraceptives for their employees, especially those that cause an abortion, because this violates their freedom of conscience. The government maintains that the freedom to behave irresponsibly will be limited unless employers pay for those immoral products. Naturally, this is not how the government would summarize their case, but this is in fact what they are promoting—freedom to do what is wrong, even as the Greens insisted they must have the freedom to do what is right. By a hair's breadth, justice prevailed, but nearly all the secular commentary, that of the wise and understanding,

concluded that five Catholics had foisted a grave injustice upon the people of our nation; and they weren't shy about implying this injustice originated in the Church.

Jesus told us to expect such hostility, and this past week demonstrated plainly that the wise and understanding in the world simply don't understand. We can see this if I simply point to where I began my homily today, with the vocation crisis that afflicts much of the Catholic Church in the western world. Why do we have a vocation crisis? Because parents by and large discourage their sons from answering their call to holy orders. Why do parents so often stand as an obstacle to the call to the priesthood? Because they don't have very many sons, and they want grandchildren and the perpetuation of the family name. Why don't they have many sons? Because a false understanding of freedom led to the widespread use of contraception among Catholics and the dramatic drop in our birthrate in the course of just one generation. Too many Catholics listened to the voices of the wise and understanding instead of the voice of Jesus, and the result is that many dioceses don't have enough priests.

Thanks be to God this has not been the case with the members of our parish, I think in large part because we chose the Faith and its easy yoke as adults. This false understanding of freedom is certainly not the case in the Sinkaus family, and the fruit of their faithfulness will be seen today at Mass, as we witness the baptism of their fourth son, the eldest of whom isn't yet six.

But Phil and Stephanie's witness can be seen in much more than the number of children they have. Their large family is a sign of their trust in the Lord's providence, in His great love for them, a love so profound that we can readily follow His commands, knowing that indeed His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The exuberance of their children is also a sign that their faithfulness has brought the Sinkaus family much joy.

In fairness, though, couples our age possess an advantage our parents did not, as the false conception of freedom began to grip our nation. We younger couples have seen the wreckage that results when we mistake license for liberty, the crushing burdens too many of our neighbors endure because they did not believe the Lord's yoke is an easier burden to bear than the lie that we can do as we please and not suffer any consequences.

This reality means that the shortage of priests we now endure is an aberration that before too long will be undone. More and more couples like Stephanie and Phil are embracing the faith of their fathers and trying as best they can to live it out. They are discovering that being wise and understanding is overrated, and they would rather be infants with a lighter burden. And when their sons come to them with their call to the priesthood, there will be much rejoicing. The fact that they want to wear this yoke will be an affirmation that we did our job well, at least well enough to inspire them to do theirs. Because we exercised freedom rightly today, they will be free to serve tomorrow.