

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Some of you may remember a commercial on television which is built around the question: How do you spell relief? An off-camera announcer approaches several individuals in various stress situations and makes the inquiry: How do you spell relief? Each in turn responds by writing in bold capital letters the name of a certain, well-known antacid tablet.

For some reason, I find myself thinking of that commercial in connection with today's gospel reading. Jesus, quite clearly, was talking to some people who needed relief. He addressed them as "all you who labor and are burdened." These were people who were fighting hard battles and felt that they were losing. They were carrying heavy burdens and were running out of strength.

Jesus could sense their weariness. Life was purely and simply wearing them out; they needed relief. To these he said: "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Those have to be some of the most appealing words that a weary world could ever hear, but are they true? Can Jesus actually refresh the human spirit? If he can, we need to know it, because life sometimes

wears us out. It is more than a tiredness of body; it is weariness deep in the soul that no amount of sleep can repair. In times such as that, we need an answer to the question: How do you spell relief?

There are several possible spellings. One of them is trust.

That is what Jesus meant when he said, “Come people to trust him, to share their problems and burdens with him, and quit trying to carry them all alone.”

One of the main reasons life wears us out is because we try to handle problems that we never were intended to handle. What we need to do is remind ourselves that some things are absolutely beyond our control. There is not one thing we can do about them, and these are the things we need to turn over to God. We are not in control of this world; he is. And however it may appear. He is not in trouble. God has not lost control. If we could only learn that, it would take half of our problems off our hands. One man said, “The greatest day of my life was the one when I resigned as general manager of the universe.”

I am not talking about a cop-out. I am just saying that there are some problems we were never intended to handle, and we had best leave those with God.

Also, we should stop carrying excess burdens. By that I mean we should not pile yesterday’s burdens and tomorrow’s burdens on top of today’s burdens. I am telling you, brothers and sisters, there is not a person in the world strong enough to carry that load. It will simply wear

you out, and the only possible answer is trust. Trust yesterday's failures to his forgiveness and tomorrow's fears to his providence. Then take on today's burden and know that he will be there to help. It is a simple answer, but nothing else will work. One way to spell relief is trust.

Another way is humility.

Jesus said of himself, "I am meek and humble of heart." Both of those words are hard to define, but they mean at least this much: Jesus had no ego problems. He wasn't trying to make a good impression. He did not need to appear important. He wasn't guarding his reputation or polishing his halo. He had grown way past that kind of littleness and had lost himself in a deep commitment to the will of God.

I know of few things more exhausting than preoccupation with self. If you walk into a room, trying to make a good impression, then leave that room wondering what kind of impression you made, you are going to wear yourself out. That is a tough way to live.

The only answer to that kind of foolishness is to lose yourself in something bigger than yourself. And that's where Jesus comes in. One of the finest things he will do for you is take you off your own hands. That has been his business across these centuries, giving people a cause and a purpose that enables them to forget themselves and get on with the business of living.

You call that humility, which also spells relief. Then there is one other spelling, service.

Jesus invited the people to share his yoke. A yoke, of course, was a piece of equipment that joined two oxen and enabled them to pull a load together. So Jesus was saying, share my yoke; get in the harness with me; help me do my work, and your souls will find rest. What was he doing that he was asking these weary people to help him do? - Helping people, loving them, serving them.

There is no better medicine in the world than the stimulating tonic of service. Forget what it means to those who are served; think of what it means to those who serve. It is a healing experience. It opens up channels for the grace of God to flow into your own life. The best way up is to help some other person up. Loving service is one of the main keys to whole and healthy living.

Dr. James Tucker Fisher was one of the early psychiatrists in America. In student days, he studied under Freud. When he was old, he wrote a book entitled “Few Buttons Missing”, near the close of which he makes this confession: “At one time I believed that what was needed was some new and enlightened recipe for living. I dreamed of writing a handbook that would be simple, practical, and easy to understand. It would tell people how to live. And then, quite by accident, I discovered that such a work had already been written. It is called “The Sermon on the Mount.” For nearly 2,000 years the Christian world has been holding in its hands the complete answer to its restless and fruitless longing.”

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

How do you spell relief? We can reduce it to one six-letter word:
Christ, the one who said “Come to me, and I will give you rest.” **Amen.**