

Reflection on the Gospel-Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A
(Matthew 11:25-30)

-Veronica Lawson RSM

Some people have little appreciation of the depth of their own wisdom. Others seem to think they have the monopoly on wisdom. Jesus contrasts the latter, those who consider themselves wise and intelligent, with the truly wise ones, the 'little ones' to whom the secrets of God's empire have been revealed. The first part of today's gospel is his prayer of gratitude for God's choice of the 'little ones'. God's ways turn human expectations upside down.

The final verses of today's gospel are among the best known and best loved in all of the gospel tradition. 'Come to me...and I will give you rest' is a lovely invitation. It is issued to those who are weary and burdened, and that includes most of us at some or another. The 'rest' that Jesus offers is God's rest. It is not just relief from drudgery and hard work. In the biblical tradition, rest is '*shabbat*'. It is freedom from any sort of enslavement, freedom to remember God's goodness in creation. Rest time or '*shabbat*' is about making a space to contemplate the wonder of the galaxies, the wonder of life in all its forms and all its potentialities. God's rest restores life to our wearied spirits. It frees us to open ourselves to ever new possibilities and to be there for others.

'Take my yoke upon you...' is Jesus' further invitation. Later in this gospel, the same verb will be used when Jesus tells his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' The 'yoke' of Jesus, the cross that he will take up, and the cross that his disciples are invited to bear are all of a piece. A yoke is a cross-beam or cross-bar. Jesus will carry his cross-beam to execution. Disciples, in their turn, will carry their cross-beams, figuratively if not literally. They will not be weighed down or burdened by this prospect for the 'yoke' of which Jesus speaks is easy and the burden is light. How can this be? The answer lies in the final invitation: 'Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart....' In Matthew's beatitudes, the gentle are those who inherit the earth. There is nothing weak about the gentle ('meek' is not a helpful translation). The non-violent methods of the gentle are infinitely more effective in restoring creation than the violence of so many who present themselves as 'wise and intelligent'. God's 'rest' is the source of their power-and of ours.