

My Yoke Is Easy

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MORPHART CREATION / SHUTTERSTOCK

One of the groups of people that seem to be a favorite foil and often critical focus of the teaching of Jesus are the Pharisees. The Pharisees were one of the religious groups within Israel who influenced the daily life of the people of the time. From the time people got up in the morning until the time they went to bed at night, there were rules they needed to follow. The Pharisees constantly monitored faith practices and discipline to ensure that no one broke the rules.

Two thousand years ago, there was no separation of church and state—very different from what we have grown accustomed to today. Every facet of life was regulated, influenced, and, in a very real sense, controlled by religious authority. We can see something of what this might have been like in some of the Islamic

societies that we glimpse in our modern world. Culture, tradition, and custom are not options; rather, they form and animate the fundamental issues, choices, and practices that are a normal part of everyday life.

The Pharisee in the time of Jesus had more than 600 specific commandments to obey to live a life that was understood as pleasing to God. Some of these commandments were undoubtedly very useful, and Jesus left them intact and unchallenged. Other commandments, however, seemed to be a specific focus of his teaching—and occasionally of his frustration and even, at times, anger.

The big picture that emerges from the gospels is the general pronouncement that the teachers of the Law, including the Pharisees, had placed too many burdens and expectations on the people. Jesus offers a different way—a

new way—of living that gives praise and glory to God: “Come to me...for my yoke is easy, and my burden light” (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus presents an invitation to life, a life that we understand today is the life of the kingdom of God.

Notice, however, in the invitation, that there is an expectation, a seemingly essential first step: familiarity with what was once required, then an awareness of what is now possible. It is certainly not an invitation to ignorance. It is certainly not an invitation to a life with no expectations, rules, or requirements. It is an invitation to something more, not something less. The person who accepts the yoke of Jesus accepts a way of living, a perception, and an understanding that ultimately can lead to freedom and the fullness of life—what we today might understand as everlasting life. Nevertheless, while the burden and the yoke may be easy and light, this way has challenges, struggles, and difficulties that are part and parcel of the invitation.

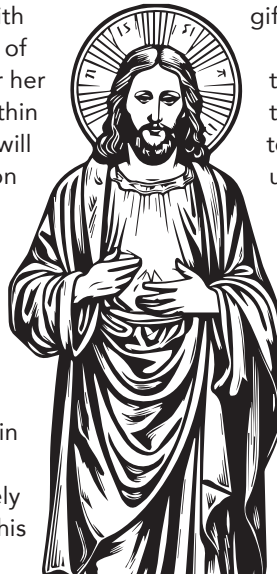
St. Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Redemptorists, teaches that if a person loves God, that person can do what he or she pleases. At first glance, this teaching might be understood as a kind of “carte blanche,” but it most certainly is not. Saint Alphonsus understands that when a person enters into a relationship with the Lord and comes to an awareness of the presence of God at work in his or her life, a fundamental change occurs within the person. A relationship with God will so fill, change, and capture the person that it is impossible for him or her to choose anything, do anything, or hope for anything that ultimately does not give glory and honor to God. This does not eliminate the possibility of weakness, failure, and sin, but it places each of these realities of our human existence within a larger context and as part of the process of human living that ultimately pleases God. In St. Alphonsus’ day, this was a profound and revolutionary

spiritual insight, and it remains so for us today.

As human beings, like the Pharisees, it is easy for us to get caught up in and swept away by the details of life. It is tempting to take refuge in learning and obeying all the rules and regulations—in many instances, down to the most minute point—and be somehow assured that this is all that is required of us. At the same time, we might even fall into the temptation and, often, the sin of insisting that this is the only way to live life, to perceive reality, and, ultimately, to give glory to God. Those who assume positions of authority over us might often, despite their best intentions and desires, be prone to this kind of mistake unless they are particularly vigilant.

Jesus invites us to something more. His invitation calls us to a way of perceiving life that celebrates the presence of God not only in the details but also in the people, the events, and the circumstances that are part of God’s creation. If we can learn to see as Jesus sees, if we can learn to perceive life in the kingdom of God, then we will truly understand what it means to experience the yoke and the burden of the Lord. It will free us, not weigh us down. Our hearts and spirits will soar, and we will be able to believe and participate confidently in all that the Lord has gifted us with.

People with the scrupulous condition—think of your scrupulosity as the teaching of the Pharisees. Think of their unwillingness to lift the burden of obligation as their unwillingness to let the teaching of Jesus form them. Think of the Pharisees who are incapable of telling the truth and who represent a system that Jesus rejected. Read the gospels’ accounts of Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees when you seek inspiration and guidance. In this manner, you will discover that the yoke of Jesus does not weigh you down; it lifts you up. It is the path to life and freedom rather than the path of criticism, of never measuring up, and of always falling short. ⚙



Do You Love Someone Who Has Rejected the Church?

When someone says, “No thanks!” to something that is so much a part of our lives, we may find ourselves confused, hurt, or even angry. Such rejection may threaten us to our very core, challenge our values, even cause us to question our own faith.

Jesus understands how we feel when a loved one does not share our beliefs. He had the same experience. Remember the gospel story about Jesus and his family’s lack of faith?

[Jesus] came to his native place, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished. They said, “Where did this man get all this?... Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?... And they took offense at him.

Mark 6:1–3

They took offense at him! Even Jesus knew rejection by those close to him.

Where Did I Go Wrong?

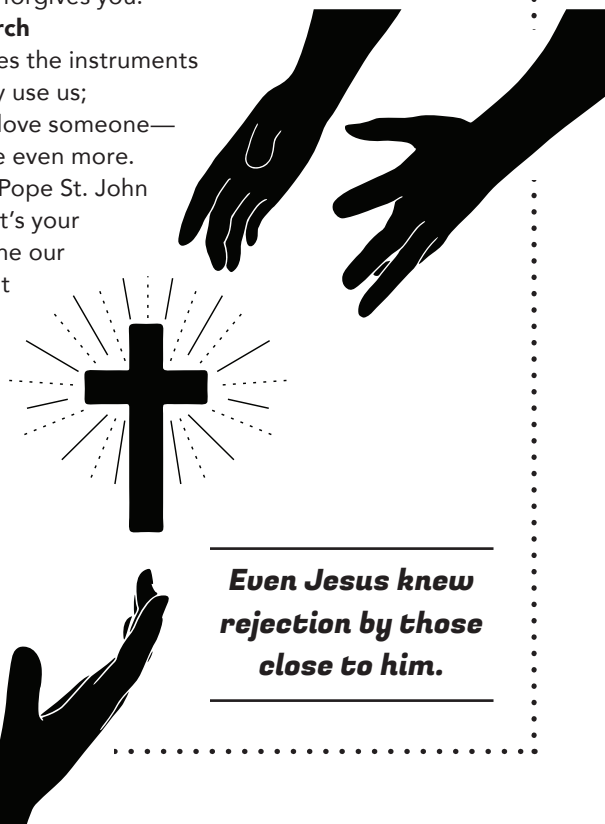
Sometimes we blame ourselves for the decisions of our loved ones, particularly our children. If you think you might be responsible for someone’s rejection of the Church, then talk to a confessor, spiritual director, or counselor. If you are guilty, confess your sin, ask for forgiveness, accept that forgiveness, and move on. Anything less is a lack of faith in the good God who knows you thoroughly and still loves and forgives you.

Our Duty to Those Who Have Rejected the Church

We are not God. We are not in charge. God chooses the instruments that will bring others to faith. Sometimes, God may use us; sometimes, not. Let God be God. As much as you love someone—even your precious child—God loves that someone even more.

There is a lovely story about the night prayer of Pope St. John XXIII. Every night, he would end his prayers with, “It’s your Church, God; I’m going to bed.” When we have done our duty and prayed for those about whom we are most concerned, perhaps we might end our prayers like good Pope John: “They are your children, God; I’m going to bed.” ✨

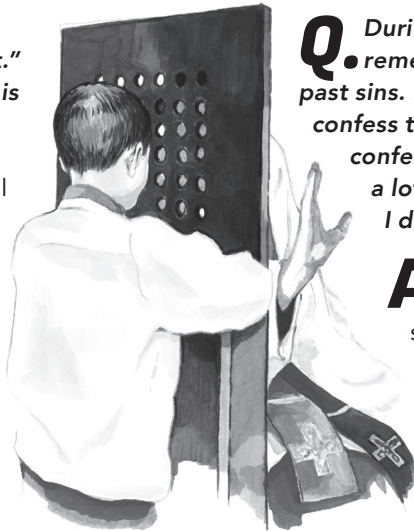
From “Restoring Hope: Healing When You’ve Been Hurt by the Church” by Paige Byrne Shortal (C2512A). The *Catholic Update* newsletter explores Church tradition and teaching on contemporary topics. Available as a subscription or as individual issues. For more information, call 800-325-9521, or visit Liguori.org.



Even Jesus knew rejection by those close to him.

Q. I recently heard a priest speak in his homily about paying the “marriage debt.” I have no idea what he was talking about. Is this something we need to pay attention to?

A. Were you attending a liturgy during a local Renaissance Fair or something depicting life in medieval times? That is the only reason you should have heard a homily about this subject. Frankly, it is ridiculous and so far outside the norm of a respectful and mutually beneficial understanding of marriage. I cannot imagine what the priest was thinking.



Q. During confession, I remember various past sins. I know one must confess the forgotten sins in confession, but I remember a lot of sins. What can I do?

A. Forget them all. Give them the same attention and the same remembrance that Jesus gives them. None.

ILLUSTRATIONS: SHUTTERSTOCK

Additional Resources Online for Those Seeking Help

Liguori Publications offers resources online that people with scrupulosity have found very helpful:

For helpful videos, please visit [YouTube/Catholic OCD](#).

For pastoral care and spiritual direction opportunities, please visit [managingscrupulosity.com](#).

For direct support and to access new helpful videos, please visit [Patreon.com/CatholicOCD](#). (Patreon offers a direct mail feature that can be used to answer your personal questions and concerns.)

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