

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Indiana Jones and the Yoke of Jesus”

Bishop Frank Schuster

I grew up with Indiana Jones, and so it was fun to see the latest movie. I won't spoil it for you, so I'll stick with what I think most movie critics missed about the film. The movie teases out a common human experience, namely, we all wonder sometimes what our life would have been like if we made different decisions. We all must cope at times with the consequences of our past mistakes in the present. There are good and bad ways to do that. And as an aside, there are worse ways than watching a movie and eating popcorn. However, I found it playful that this movie also asks itself these same questions on behalf of the whole franchise. An eighty-year-old Indiana Jones has a lot of history to think about. As the movie progresses, a common spiritual pitfall is revealed of wanting to live too much in the past. That theme shows up with almost every character development as well as the other pitfall of dwelling too much on the future. It is important to not lose sight on the present. I believe the moral of this movie, which I enjoyed: If we want a better tomorrow and reconcile with the past, let's fix our broken relationships today, and not wait. I believe the movie left us a satisfying answer to the question of what that can look like.

For us, I think we can find ourselves living too much in the past or dwelling too much on the future because we are uneasy with how things are going in the present. Whether it is a broken relationship, or whether we struggle with our health or the health of a loved one, or if we are unsatisfied with our job, or if we feel life feels lifeless, we all have burdens that we carry. How do we live in the present when our present reality is burdensome. Enter in our Gospel reading for this weekend and Jesus' invitation to take on his yoke.

Sometimes people can get lost by Jesus' words and so it is good to remind ourselves of what a yoke is. I visited a child in the hospital a few years back and read him this Gospel reading. I asked him what he thought a yoke was. He looked at me seriously and said, “Sometimes people refer to the center of an egg as a yoke”. I thought that was funny. A yoke in this instance is something that you put on an animal, such as an ox, to help till the field. Typically, a yoke would have two openings in it, as it was easier for two oxen to till the field rather than just one. We know this is the type of yoke Jesus was talking about because he says, take my yoke upon you, learn from me, and the yoke will be easier and the burden lighter. What Jesus is saying is, “I am the other ox”.

Whatever burden we are carrying in our lives, whatever it is we are currently struggling with, be it a death of a loved one, the loss of a job, the move into a new house, trouble in a marriage, an addiction, whatever it is that is weighing us down, God reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ, as an ox willing to carry most of our load for us. Now notice that Jesus doesn't say that he will take the yoke and burden from us altogether. No, Jesus only says that with him, the yoke will be easier and the burden lighter. Jesus won't carry all our burdens because we must put in some work as well if we are to grow spiritually in life. Christ, however, will carry most of our burdens if we let him. Indeed, he already has by carrying the wood of the cross. As disciples, however, we too must also carry our cross, whatever it is, and follow Jesus. The good news is,

we never have to carry our cross alone. Or, as St. Paul put it, “Brothers and sisters: You are not in the flesh; on the contrary, you are in the spirit. If only the Spirit of God dwells in you...If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through his Spirit that dwells in you.” That, my friends, is how Christ can help us carry our crosses. If we only accept Christ’s Holy Spirit within us and ask that Holy Spirit to help us make good decisions, in good times and in bad, the yoke will be easier and the burden lighter.

I won’t tell you what it is; however, in the opening moments of the film, Indiana Jones is hunting for, yet again, another relic associated with Jesus, like he did before with the Holy Grail. It makes me excited to think that the next movie could be, “Indiana Jones and the Yoke of Jesus.” What do you think? Clearly, I won’t quit my day job. However, considering everything Indiana Jones had seen throughout this franchise, like the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Grail, if he isn’t a believer by now...well, he really should be. I say this because faith in God and faith in Jesus would have made his life’s burdens far easier to carry. The mercy Jesus shows us also helps us to become more merciful with others. And, like we have been saying, faith also gives us permission to not dwell too much on the past or too much with the future. This is because we can have a personal relationship with Jesus, his Church, and with each other in the present, right now. What does that look like? For me, it looks like what we are presently doing at this very moment, and the communion we celebrate as one Body of Christ.