

GOD FIRST

Radical spirituality for a struggling society

*“Come to me, all you who labor and 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.”*

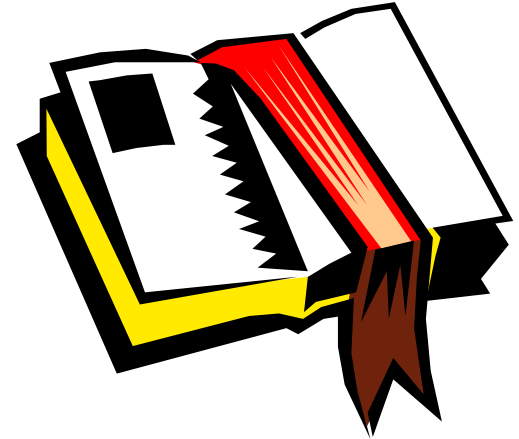
The Gospel of Matthew 11:28-30

These verses are peculiar to this gospel.

“Who labor and are burdened,” in verse 28 are taken to mean ‘burdened by the law as expounded by the scribes and Pharisees.’

In verse 29, in place of the yoke of the law, complicated by scribal interpretation, Jesus invites the burdened to take the yoke of obedience to his word, under which they “will find rest.”

— Footnotes from the Catholic Study Bible,
New American Bible, Oxford Press.



Radical? For Jesus’ hearers it was very radical. Not to listen to how the scribes taught the law, not to live as instructed by those who interpreted the law and those who used the law for their advantage, risked expulsion from the synagogue. It was public ridicule, and it was a complete loss of hope. So the people followed as best they could. Jesus saw the harshness in which God’s law was interpreted and enforced. He took a radical stand that would have been considered defiant.

But Jesus did not defy the law.

Jesus gave the law new and greater meaning.

Jesus did not abandon the law.

Jesus came to fulfill the law and the prophets. As the footnote from the bible indicates, removing self from the burden attached to the law by the scribes means one must take on obedience to the Word of Jesus himself. It is not free interpretation. One is invited to see now as Jesus sees, to live in fulfillment of the law.

The invitation of Jesus is a repeat from Sirach (51:23, 26) and Jeremiah (6:16) to a way that God has prepared for those who continue to seek the fulfillment of the covenant. It is a promise renewed in and through Jesus. It is a new invitation for the people to live.

It is radical as it calls the hearer, today as then, to a new law — “obedience to the Word of Jesus.” His “yoke” is the fulfillment of all the laws and prophets. Jesus is the word of God. It is our acceptance to live that which comes to us as divine revelation through the gospel accounts.

For us, it now means that **GOD FIRST** is not an option. Scripture — in both the Old and New Testaments — is filled with the teachings that call every creature to live in righteousness, holiness, all that is of God, above all that may be offered through the distortion of society. **GOD FIRST**, is then, a *radical spirituality for a struggling society*. **GOD FIRST** is meant to be radical in that it invites us to live as Jesus invited his hearers to live — choosing to go against the standard, the oppressive expectations of a society filled with allurements that can easily move us away from obedience to the word of God, Jesus.

GOD FIRST is an initiative being undertaken at St. John the Baptist Parish. It is open for all who seek a closer relationship with the Lord through adherence to his word. It is meant to bring us to a greater awareness of how the word of our Lord speaks to us today, how we are called to a confident obedience to the “yoke, the word” in our living of the gospel, and, how it can be so freeing for us, leading us to the very joys that Jesus prayed for us to receive, even as he neared the cross.

Each of us is invited to experience the lifting of society’s burden by taking on the “yoke” of Jesus’ word, obedience to the word of our Lord and Savior. Each of us is invited to feel the joy that is desired for those choosing to live the word of God. Each of us is invited, as were the hearers of Jesus, to recognize the freedom that is desired for us by God through the “word made flesh” which dwelt among us. All this is the purpose of **GOD FIRST**. Invite a friend.

GOD FIRST is meant to help the true believer, the one who takes on obedience to our Lord’s words, to transform the world, as it is meant to be. In doing so, a struggling society finds peace within its members and itself.

How is this initiative to take shape this Fall?

1) Prayer Development and Spiritual Formation

Seminars are scheduled to assist us in understanding prayer development and strengthen our prayer as couples, parents and families, as elderly, single adults, teens, and young people that form the Body of Christ. Others are scheduled to assist the separated or divorced and those who will for the first time face the holidays alone, the widowed. With a proper commitment, spiritual formation will occur in and through these opportunities, although other seminars meant to assist us will be held in the spring semester.

2. Scripture

The word of our Lord will be included in the Sunday bulletin each week. These passages will focus on our acceptance of the directives of the gospels to place **GOD FIRST** in all that we do. Here, we learn to live what we say we believe. Members of the parish have accepted an invitation to share a reflection on these passages and how they attempt to apply them in their own lives, or how they challenge them each day. The witness of our brothers and sisters in faith should be an encouragement for each of us.

3. Homilies

Weekend and weekday homilies will allude to our **GOD FIRST** initiative, providing an understanding of just how all of scripture is to inspire us to grow more and more in our oneness with God and all God’s people.



4. Parish Mission

This is scheduled in November. The purpose of a Parish Mission is just that, allow the teaching of Christ to move us to seek **GOD FIRST**. The full development of the Parish Mission is being finalized at this time. Nationally known directors will be at St. John’s for this Parish Mission.

5. Spiritual Reading

A Book Fair is scheduled for Saturday/Sunday, September 16/17. An adult reading library is being established. At the same time, catalogs and examples of books will be available for those desiring to specifically order new books.



6. Monthly Mailings

These may be generated from within the parish, or may be part of a published series. Each mailing will include what is being planned for the next month, as well as suggestions for individual formation.



8. Parish Website

Our parish website, www.stjohnthebaptistparish.net, will include as much of the above as possible, including a full schedule of events.

7. Religious Education

Incorporation into our religious education programs — CCD and School, as well as our Rite of Christian Initiation Program, and our Youth Ministry Program for Senior High students — will be an essential element of this initiative if we are to properly prepare our young people to live as mature Catholic Christians.