

The Gospel of Matthew has presented Jesus as a new and greater Moses. Yesterday we heard him speak of the intimacy between himself and the Father; Moses saw God in a limited way, and became known as one known by name to God, one who spoke with God face to face. This made Moses unique in the Old Testament; but Jesus goes beyond that in his claim to be known to the Father as his Son, and to know that Father in return as no-one else can.

Today Jesus takes up the Mosaic rôle even further. As Moses spoke to the people in God's name and gave them the Law on Mount Sinai, Jesus calls us to come and learn from him. As Moses put them under the "yoke" of the Law of God, Jesus puts them under a new yoke, which he calls *my yoke*; Moses could never have claimed that the Law was something which came from him. Moses was saluted by the book of Numbers as "the meekest person on the face of the earth" for his humility before the God of Israel; but Jesus offers us a law which comes from himself, even as he too claims to be "meek and humble of heart". As Moses promised that he would lead the people to the land of God's rest, so Jesus offers us "rest for our selves" because his yoke is easy, his burden light.

I've often felt that the burden of Jesus - the Cross - was enough to crush the life out of him; in what sense then can he say to us that we must learn from him to carry the Cross as his followers, to be with him where he goes, and then claim that his burden - which he will place on us like a yoke - will be light?

I believe we should take seriously the word *yoke*, which typically goes across the shoulders of a pair of animals. The yoke borne by Jesus cannot but be light for those who share it with him, and this is something we who pray every day often quite palpably feel. We unload our burdens onto him, and his risen life becomes real to us as we feel our step lightened by his company. Isaiah says today:

*Lord you are giving us peace,
since you treat us
as our deeds deserve.*

This is not to say that we earn our salvation, but that we dispose ourselves to accept the gift which God offers us, and find that he is true to his promise. Isaiah rightly reminds us that this is a gift of the resurrection, and gives us these wonderful words, which Jesus must have read with prayerful attention:

¹⁷ *As a pregnant woman near her time of delivery writhes and cries out in her pangs, so have we been, Yahweh, in your eyes:*

¹⁸ *we have been pregnant, we have writhed, but we have given birth only to wind: we have not given salvation to the earth, no inhabitants for the world have been brought to birth.*

¹⁹ *Your dead will come back to life, your corpses will rise again. Wake up and sing, you dwellers in the dust, for your dew will be a radiant dew, the land of ghosts will give birth.*