“Come to me, all you who labor and find life burdensome, and I will give you rest.”

We have heard this gospel many times, yes? The first time this gospel penetrated my heart was when I was a young priest, and my father was dying. I was not celebrating Sunday Mass that weekend. I was sitting in the pews in my home parish church with my mother and some siblings. My father lay in the local hospital, and very fine doctors had told the family that my dad had less than one week before he would die. Most all of us know that when somebody in the family is very sick in the hospital that the healthy members of the family spend all their time rushing back and forth to the hospital. We don’t eat right. We don’t sleep right. We don’t feel right. Life gets out of sync.

Standing at my pew, and hearing the words, “Come to me, all you who labor and find life burdensome, and I will give you rest,” I felt a great peace enveloping me. My mind, heart and soul felt more and more at rest. Upon reflection now, I think that I simply accepted that my dad’s life lay in the hands of very good doctors and medical staff, and in the hands of God. Our Christian faith teaches us that God created us. Jesus instructs us, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he shall die shall come to life.” (Jn. 11.26) And the Preface for the Mass of the Resurrection proclaims, “For those who believe, life is not ended, life is changed.” This gospel brought me great peace.

In the midst of whatever troubles and sufferings currently burden your heart, I hope and pray that these words of Jesus might console you also in your suffering.

Since that time when I was a young priest, my mother too has died. I look forward to seeing in heaven both my dad and my mother. My dad was very gregarious and was the life of the party. My mother was a wise, learned, and very reflective salt-of-the-earth type of person. At every Mass where the priest prays for the deceased, I always pause and pray for my mom and dad first of all, and then other people.

For all of us, our Christian faith received well and lived well, or lived as well as possible because perfection does not exist on earth, provides us here on earth with vision of the afterlife, hope here on earth for the afterlife, and Jesus’ example and power of love here on earth inspires and empowers us to enjoy everlasting life and love here and hereafter. The gospel phrase, “and I will give you rest,” is very consoling now and for eternity. ... From what do you want rest? ... From what suffering, whether physical, emotional or spiritual, do you seek rest?

I think that “rest” results from letting go of our worries/concerns, placing them in God’s hands so to speak, and letting God’s console us. Just as we naturally breathe out, and in; perhaps we might try to let out our anxieties, and let in God’s spirit. Instead of focusing our mind, heart and soul on ourselves and our issues, perhaps we could focus more on receiving and enjoying God’s consoling spirit. This experience of “letting out” our concerns and placing them, metaphorically, in God’s hands, and “letting in” God’s spirit is very soothing/calming. Isn’t this what today’s gospel promises, “Come to me, all you who labor and find life burdensome, and I will give you rest.”