Among the sayings of Jesus in today’s gospel, the one that seems to stand out most of all is the last one. It reveals a key aspect of his person and mission. “Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens,” Jesus says, “and I will give you rest.”

The burdens of which he speaks embrace a host of things – health difficulties of our own or of loved ones, conflict within the family, overwork, struggles with addiction, isolation, and loneliness. The burdens we are called to bear in the course of our life are all but limitless.

The word “weary” here embraces both physical and spiritual forms of weariness. We are tired, tired above all with carrying burdens, especially when we have to do it without any sense of when and where we will find the rest we so clearly need.

Although Jesus, like the prophets of old, sometimes argued with, and, on occasion, condemned those who abused and took advantage of the poor and the vulnerable, that is but one of the defining features of his life. Today’s reading stresses a different one. “I am gentle and humble of heart” Jesus says. He has come, he tells us, not to scold and find fault but to encourage, inspire and call people to a deeper and richer human life in all its dimensions.

The words “gentle” and “humble” evoke the image Jesus paints of the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The man gives his son the freedom and the money he seeks even though he knows that what the son will do with it will turn out badly for him. The picture of the father waiting for, and then welcoming so generously his wayward son offers us a portrayal of extraordinary compassion, mercy, and forgiveness.

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,” Jesus says, “and you will find rest for your souls.” By “yoke” here Jesus seems to be referring to his teaching and his way of life. In a negative sense the yoke itself could be understood as a burden. What Jesus is talking about here is something more positive, something that will help us discern the path that in fact we would like to follow.

Sometimes the call to imitate the love of Jesus can be rather daunting. It seems to be beyond us. Central to what he is asking is that we learn from him what it means to embody gentleness and humility and other virtues as well. What he asks above all is that we turn to him and, reflect on his teaching and his example so that we might learn what it means to be gentle and humble of heart.

As we deepen our sense of what all this might mean for us and for our relationship to one another and to Jesus, we come to realize that we are also called to do for others what he does for us. “Bear one another’s burdens,” Paul urges us, “and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

In today’s reading from his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of the Spirit and of his role in our lives. As the Spirit of Jesus, he gradually transforms us so that we might become more like Jesus. Paul evokes what he calls the fruit of the Spirit - things like love, peace, patience, kindness and generosity, the kind of things that Jesus offers us in today’s gospel, the kind of things that he calls us to do in our relations with one another.

The yoke that Jesus encourages us to take on is based on his teaching as well as his way of life. “My yoke is easy,” he says, “and my burden is light.” What makes the yoke of which Jesus speaks possible is the presence in us of his Spirit. It is he who inspires us to do what is positive and good and to reach out to and help others. Whatever challenges we might have to face in dealing with our burdens can only become easy with the help of the Spirit.

What Jesus promises to those who turn to him and seek his help is rest, rest for your souls, as he puts it. His focus is less on physical and more on spiritual rest. The rest that Jesus promises might be thought of as the fruit of inner peace, peace with God, with ourselves, and with one another.