

Daily Reflections



Sunday 4 March 2018
(Year B)

To

Saturday 10 March 2018

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Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 18; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25; John 2:13-25

Jesus poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, *'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'*

Jesus has probably visited the temple many times as a child and as an adult. We might wonder what was different this time. He had presumably seen the money-changers before – and, of course, his own parents had probably bought the doves used at his own presentation from one of the dove-sellers. Perhaps this time, he saw how some people were excluded from the temple because they had no money for the money-changers or to buy even the doves which were the sacrifices of the poor. Perhaps he saw that those whose stalls were supposed to provide help for people's worship were actually getting in the way of it.

- Why do you think Jesus was so angry this time?
- What things do you offer to help people to pray and worship in your church? And what might be obstacles to them?

Spend today reflecting on your own church and the things that are on offer to help people to pray and worship – and the things that might confuse or make them feel uncomfortable as newcomers or *'beginners'*. If something strikes you as particularly troubling spend time praying about it – and, if necessary, bring it – tactfully! – to the attention of your parish priest or those who care for the church and worship environment.

Monday 5 March 2018

Scripture: 2 Kings 5:1-15; Psalm 41; Luke 4:24-30

Jesus said, *'There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.'* When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.

It is pretty understandable that people would be offended by Jesus pointing out that their ancestors did not welcome prophets – with the implication that they were not doing a very good job of it either. The story would probably cause similar upset today – and not just to people in Israel. The possibility that God might choose to heal a Syrian in preference to a British person – or an American – or an Israeli can feel very uncomfortable. The possibility that God might choose the *'other'* rather than people we like and feel we belong to can be a challenge to us today too.

Saturday 10 March 2018

Scripture: Hosea 5: 15—6:6; Psalm 50; Luke 18: 9-14

The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, *“God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.”* But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”*

It is right to thank God but if we look at the Pharisee’s ‘prayer’, we see that he is not actually thanking God – he is actually congratulating himself. He is not saying, *“thank-you for the grace and strength not to fall into sin – for the food I have on five days that I savour more because I fast on two – and that I have income from which to give a tenth to the temple and charity”*. His focus is not on God but on himself. By contrast, the tax-collector places his focus on God and on God’s mercy – and sets his own life into the context of that undeserved love.

- What is the difference between the Pharisee’s and the tax-collector’s style of praying?
- Which is actually prayer – and how can you tell?

The tax-collector’s prayer was adapted by the early Christians to become a mantra – a simple repeated prayer that allows the words to drip deeper into the soul.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Try using it as your prayer today – perhaps a sustained period of 15-20 minutes (more if you can manage it) with repetitions at odd moments during the day.

- Why do you think the people in the synagogue were so angry with Jesus reminding them about Elisha’s cure of the Syrian?
- Who are the people or nations or races who would cause a similar response in you?

Spend time today praying honestly about your own prejudices. Ask the Lord to open your eyes and heart to the all-embracing love of God – for all nations and races – for all people.

Tuesday 6 March 2018

Scripture: Daniel 3: 25, 34-43; Psalm 24; Matthew 18: 21-35

Peter came and said to Jesus, *‘Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’* Jesus said to him, *‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.’*

Peter might be coming with a hypothetical question – but it is also possible that something else is going on. Perhaps he has had one too many rows with a fellow-disciple. Or maybe a family member was giving him grief about following Jesus and neglecting his responsibilities. And, perhaps, he has tried to say the right things and accepted apologies and offered forgiveness as he knows Jesus wants but this time someone has gone too far – so just how many times is he supposed to forgive someone? Jesus is probably well aware of what lies behind Peter’s question and takes the opportunity to stretch his capacity to love and offer forgiveness that bit further.

- What might have been behind Peter’s exasperation?
- When have you reached the end of your own tether with someone?

Spend some time today reflecting on the day to day irritations that lead us to questions like Peter’s. What are your ‘favourites’ – the things guaranteed to ‘push your buttons’? And what are the things you do or say that do the same to those around you. Pray today for the capacity to keep forgiving and letting things go – and for the grace to get through a day without doing or saying the things you know irritate others!

Wednesday 7 March 2018 - Ss Perpetua and Felicity

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4: 1, 5-9; Psalm 147; Matthew 5: 17-19

Jesus said, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.”*

There is a temptation among Christians to focus only on the New Testament. This is understandable as it contains the key accounts about Jesus and the early teachings of the apostles – particularly Paul. But, although Jesus’s life, death and resurrection marked a new beginning in the history of the world, he did not discard the scriptures of his own people – his own heritage. Instead, he delved deep into them – something his own disciples did as they sought to understand his mission after his resurrection. They found in them rich foundations and inspiration for the way of life they were developing as Christians, rooted in the wisdom of centuries of Jewish teaching.

- How much of the Old Testament do you know?
- Why is it important for Christians to know something about the Hebrew scriptures – the Old Testament?

If time permits, browse through some of the Hebrew texts. Some will seem strange – written as they were for people in a different era. Try Isaiah – Jeremiah – stories from Genesis – the psalms or proverbs. Simply dip in and stay with something that attracts you. Remember that Jesus, his family and his disciples and friends read and found meaning and purpose from these words.

Thursday 8 March 2018 - St John of God

Scripture: Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalm 94; Luke 11:14-23

Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, *‘He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.’*

It is interesting that Jesus gives someone their power of speech back – and in the next sentence, those who have had it for years use it to cast aspersions on what Jesus has done. Why they think that Jesus would do good on behalf of Beelzebul is hard to fathom. It seems that they would prefer to question Jesus’ motives rather than accept that he acts purely out of love. This is a temptation even today. We meet people who seem unable to believe in goodness – who prefer to believe ill of people rather than acknowledge the love out of which they are acting.

- When have you found it hard to believe in goodness?
- Do you use your power of speech to praise and celebrate goodness or to undermine?

Spend some time today thinking about how you use your own gift of speech – to raise people up or to pose doubts that undermine those who are doing their best. Bring your thoughts to a time of prayer. If you are inclined to *‘put down’* ask for the grace to *‘raise up’* – to rejoice in the good rather than focus on the negative.

Friday 9 March 2018 - St Frances of Rome

Scripture: Hosea: 14-2-10; Psalm 80; Mark 12: 28-34

The scribe said to Jesus, *‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that “God is one, and besides him there is no other”; and “to love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’*

It is interesting that Mark includes someone telling Jesus that he has done well in his answers. At one level, it could look patronising but actually tells us something about the question and answer sessions that Jesus was so often involved in. What is crucial is how well people listen to Jesus’ responses. It is clear that the scribe has listened to what Jesus has said and has made connections with his own knowledge. This is not just head knowledge but the result of reflection on the Word of God and coming to an understanding of how different parts link together to give a deeper appreciation of what God asks of his people.

- How comfortable are you with asking – or hearing – questions about faith?
- How do such questions – and answers – help to deepen and strengthen our faith?

Reflect on the scribe’s words today – the results of his knowledge and reflection being placed into a conversation with the Lord. Stay with any words or phrases that speak particularly to you and bring them into your own conversation with Jesus.