

Daily Reflections



Sunday 18 March 2018
(Year B)

To

Saturday 24 March 2018

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Scripture: Jeremiah 31: 31-34; Psalm 50; Hebrews 5: 7-9; John 12: 20-33

Jesus said, 'Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.'

Jesus is again reminding his disciples – and would-be disciples that his mission is not just about making the world a better place – though, if people follow his ways, it will be. His aim is to open up the way to eternal life and knows that part of this is a willingness to let go of too tight a hold on this one. Very few people are able to do this easily – there is such a great fear of what we might lose. Jesus helps us by giving an example that is simple but powerful. We are called to be like grains of wheat. If they are kept in store they will survive a while but eventually the life within them will shrivel and die. But if the grain is planted, each seed will produce many more – which, in turn, can be planted and produce more... Not to mention those that serve as food for the hungry.

- How does Jesus' example of the grains of wheat help you to understand the nature of 'letting go'?
- What would you like some of the fruits of your life to be?

Spend some time today thinking about this relationship between death and life – of losing things in order to gain more. If you are a gardener, you may have seeds in stock – take a few minutes to plant some of those that can go in now and ponder Jesus' words as you do... these seeds will seem to die but will give you the beauty of flowers or great flavoured vegetables in just a few months.

Monday 19 March 2018 - St Joseph, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7: 4-5, 12-14, 16; Psalm 88; Romans 4: 13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1: 16, 18-21, 24 (or Luke 2: 41-51a)

Just when Joseph had resolved to do divorce Mary quietly, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, *'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'* When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

Saturday 24 March 2018

Scripture: Ezekiel 37: 21-28; Psalm: Jeremiah 31: 10-13; John 11: 45-56

Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to the council, *'You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.'* He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.

Caiaphas and other members of the council are aware that they are walking a tightrope. The Romans are fairly tolerant of their way of life but they have heard of cases of oppression and even cruelty elsewhere. They live in fear of any kind of unrest that will lead to a crack-down. Their fears are well-founded – in less than fifty years, the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed, including the temple itself. Whilst Caiaphas' first concern is the Jewish nation, he speaks a greater truth than he is aware of at the time. The Holy Spirit gives him an insight that Jesus' death is more than one man dying for his nation – his death is for all the children of God.

- Do you find it easy to think of Caiaphas as a prophet – inspired by the Holy Spirit (remembering he will go on to be one of those who demands Jesus' death)?
- Do you agree that it is better for one man to die than a nation to be destroyed? How does that work well – and how can it be abused?

Tomorrow we embark on Holy Week, when we will follow Jesus during his last days of earthly life. Give sometime today to look back over Lent – maybe re-reading your journal if you kept one. Are there themes or insights that keep coming up or new understandings? Give thanks for the time of Lent and pray for the grace to keep a good Holy Week.

This is a huge thing to take on trust. All the evidence is that Mary has been unfaithful to the betrothal to Joseph – her pregnancy seeming to prove this. Joseph's kindness extends to wishing to spare her disgrace – though in a small community, it will not be long before the gossip starts. Even having taken Mary as his wife, Joseph must have been wise enough to know that there would be speculation about who the child's father is long after the wedding. He is unlikely to have tried to explain about the involvement of the Holy Spirit – or of angels appearing in dreams. Even if he had, the neighbours would probably just have seen it as him trying to cover up his own embarrassment. Yet, even in the face of all of that, Joseph chose to make a home for Mary and her child.

- What do you think was going through Joseph's mind and heart as events unfolded?
- How do you think he dealt with the gossip and whispering at this time and as his young foster-son grew up?

Spend time today thinking about this gentle man who was entrusted with the greatest task a father has ever faced – to protect and educate the Son of God. Pray for his intercession and protection of fathers – especially those facing difficulties in living up to the responsibilities of fatherhood.

Tuesday 20 March – St Cuthbert, Patron of the Diocese

Scripture: Ezekiel 34: 11-16; Psalm 96; John 10: 11-16

Jesus said to them, *'I am the good shepherd and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.'*

St Cuthbert is a much-loved saint. He is honoured by Christians of all denominations as someone who did not choose positions of leadership but accepted them in order to help the Church of the north-east accept the decisions of the Synod of Whitby. His love of wild places is also well-known – and speaks across the generations of finding God in them and in the creatures who inhabit them. He was himself a shepherd and would have identified with Jesus' naming himself a good shepherd – and his concern that the flock should not be scattered but brought together as one, led by the one great shepherd.

- How might Cuthbert – who was a pre-Reformation saint – be a focus for unity for Christians of different denominations?
- Why does the unity of Christians matter?

Spend some time today thinking about how Cuthbert's early life as a shepherd might have given him good insights into Jesus as the good shepherd and the importance of trying to keep the Christian flock together. Pray for his intercession for unity and mutual respect and love between Christians.

Wednesday 21 March 2018

Scripture: Daniel 3:14-20,24-25,28; Canticle: Daniel 3: 52-56; John 8:31-42

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, *'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'* They answered him, *'We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, "You will be made free"?''*

The Jews in this extract are not being entirely accurate. Slavery makes an appearance at various points in the Old Testament. The Hebrews were slaves in Egypt and during the Exile many were taken to Babylon as slaves. The Jews of Jesus' time would have been very aware of the slaves owned by the Romans and some may have known people sold into such slavery and the shame it brought to them and their families. Some Jews were even, to an extent, slaves of a Law that greatly limited their lives. What Jesus offers is a freedom that goes beyond liberation from slavery – a freedom to be the person God created you to be.

- What kinds of slavery are you aware of in the world today?
- How does slavery diminish people? And how might you be called to help those caught up in it?

Pray today for those who are bound by slavery – in all its forms. Pray particularly for those whose lives are destroyed by being denied basic freedoms. Pray for the grace to speak the truth and to name slavery and evil when you encounter it.

Thursday 22 March 2018

Scripture: Genesis 17: 3-9; Ps 104; John 8: 51-59

The Jews said to him, *'Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never taste death." Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets also died.'*

The answer to the Jews' question *'are you greater than our father Abraham'* is, of course, yes – but we have the benefit of hindsight and knowledge of the resurrection. The Jews had none of this. We do not fully understand what Jesus

means when he says that his followers will never taste death – for we do die. The greatest difference is that dying as a believer is that we trust that it is a transition from one form of existence to a very different one – one that people like Abraham and the prophets may have longed for but may have dreamt would never be possible – at least, not until the Promised One comes to open the way for humanity to enter eternal life.

- Why do you think it was so hard to accept Jesus for who he was?
- What difference does faith in a life after death make to how we live our lives before death?

Ponder today the mystery of death and the fear that it can engender in us. Pray for trust in the One who opens the way to heaven and, maybe, think about who you would most like to meet when you get there.... Abraham? A prophet? Or?

Friday 23 March 2018 - St Turibius of Mongrovego

Scripture: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 17; John 10:31-42

Jesus went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, *'John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.'* And many believed in him there.

Jesus has had many arguments about who he is – and where he came from – and who sent him – and so on. It is hardly surprising that he takes himself off to a quiet place to reflect on it all. It may also be significant that he goes back to the Jordan – perhaps reliving the moment when the dove came down on him at his baptism and the voice spoke of God's favour resting on him. Perhaps those who join him there remember that moment too and realise that John's words are being fulfilled even if they do not always understand Jesus' own teachings.

- Why do you think Jesus chose to go back to the Jordan?
- How might the place have helped the Jews who followed him to put Jesus into context?

Think today about where you go when things get tough and you need that bit of space. Do you prefer countryside – or the sea – or a particular church? If you are able, think about taking time there over the weekend – or during Holy Week. If it is not possible, try to place yourself there in your imagination and savour the peace you find there.