

Saturday 6 April 2019

Scripture: Jeremiah 11: 18-20; Psalm 7; John 7: 40-52

Jeremiah writes:

*'It was the Lord who made it known to me, and I knew;
then you showed me their evil deeds.*

*But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.*

*And I did not know it was against me
that they devised schemes, saying,*

*'Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the living,
so that his name will no longer be remembered!'*

Before his death, Jesus spoke of the way in which prophets were usually treated and indicated that he expected the same. He was right. One person he may well have been thinking of was Jeremiah. Although Jeremiah spoke many words of comfort and encouragement, he was often seen as a prophet of doom because he also spoke words of warning. As is often the case, those who opposed him did not speak to him face-to-face but plotted behind his back. They were determined not only to kill him but also to ensure his name would be forgotten – a kind of second death. Of course, as it turns out, we remember Jeremiah's name – but not those of those who plotted against him.

- When have you experienced people talking behind your back?
- When have you been one of those doing the talking and plotting?

If you are currently a person who is being spoken about or plotted against, read the Reading and remember that you are not alone. Bring your case to the Lord and see if any way forward is offered- even as simple as finding the right person to talk to. If you realise that you are being caught up in "plots" and gossip, bring that to your prayer and ask for guidance as to how to get yourself out of the situation – and how to put right any wrongs you have already been part of.

GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE AND MERCY:

Cause to Celebrate



4th Sunday of Lent Sunday 31 March 2019

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Scripture: Joshua 5: 9-12; Psalm 33(34); 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21; Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

On the day after the passover, on that very day, the Israelites ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

For decades, God had provided the Israelites with manna in the desert. They had moaned about how unsatisfying it was but it had sustained them throughout their long wanderings in the wilderness. At last, the people have arrived at the Promised Land and have been able to harvest some of the crops there. They are now ready to be more self-sufficient and so God withdraws the support and lets them get on with establishing a way of life that depends on the work of their own hands rather than his constant miraculous support.

- Why was it important that the Israelites stopped depending on the miraculous manna and turned their hands to agriculture?
- What does this teach us about why God is not constantly intervening miraculously for us?

Think today about how God gives support when people need it but does not encourage them to become dependent on it. If there is something you need pray about it and be open to how God might offer you the help you need.

Friday 5 April 2019 (St Vincent Ferrer)

Scripture: Wisdom 2:1, 12-22; Psalm 33(34); John 7: 1-2, 10, 25-30

The ungodly say:

'Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training.

...

Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance.

Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.'

As we look at today's First Reading, we might find ourselves looking ahead a couple of weeks – to Holy Week. This is a very accurate description of the situation around Jesus. He was someone who told it like it was and this certainly made him unpopular with some of the powers-that-be. His challenges to those in power led ultimately to his torture and death – and people were watching closely to see how he conducted himself. It is ironic that, at the moment of Jesus' death, it was someone who would have been widely considered ungodly who recognised him as the Son of God when others saw him as a troublemaker.

- How does today's Reading foretell what was to happen to Jesus?
- Are there situations in today's world which show that little has changed in the centuries since this was written?

Read through today's Reading and note any words or phrases that speak to you particularly. Stay with them and ponder why it might have stood out for you today.

Thursday 4 April 2019 (St Isidore)

Scripture: Exodus 32: 7-14; Psalm 105(106); John 5: 31-47

Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ... Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, "I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever."' And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

What has caused the Lord's anger is the fact that, almost as soon as Moses' back was turned, the people created a golden calf and decided that this was their god. Having brought them out of Egypt and away from such idols, God is understandably furious. Moses' reaction is not to run away and leave God to his destruction of the people – even though God has promised that his own household will survive and become a great nation. Such is Moses' confidence in God that he has no qualms about begging God to relent. He reminds God of the promises made to the ancestors and this clearly speaks to the heart of God who changes his mind and does not visit disaster on the calf-worshippers.

- What do you make of God being willing to change his mind?
- When have you asked God to relent or show mercy to yourself or to others?

In your imagination, play out the scenes described in the First Reading: the people making the golden calf – God telling Moses to go straight down to sort it out before he wreaks vengeance – then the conversation that proves so effective. Simply notice what emerges – insights about why the people do what they do – and how Moses sounds as he pleads with God. Bring anything unexpected or surprising into a time of prayer.

Monday 1 April 2019

Scripture: Isaiah 65: 17-21; Psalm 29(30); John 4: 43-54

*The Lord said:
For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind. '*

Lent is a penitential season when we look at our lives and acknowledge our weakness and failings. This could be a pretty depressing exercise as the more we look for things the more we find! Isaiah gives us an insight into how God tackles things. God sees it all – God *has* seen it all – and God *will* see it all. There is very little that we could do that would shock God. But God is open to our capacity to change. He knows that, when we want to change our lives, one of the biggest obstacles is our memory of what we have done. We are haunted by the past and this impacts our present and our future. These words from God remind us of his power. The God who creates new heavens and earth is perfectly capable of putting our sins into oblivion. It does not mean that we have not sinned – or should carry on doing so – but to be assured that, when we repent in all honesty, God does not bring our former things to mind.

- Why is it so important to know that God can put our past into the past and can make us new?
- Why is it important for us to have some memory of our sin – but not to be bound up by it?

Reflect today on God's powers of creativity and capacity to forgive. Place any sin you have found impossible to forget into your prayer and ask God's grace to receive the forgiveness you need to move forward. Take the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation – many places will be holding services – keep an eye out for one near you.

Tuesday 2 April 2019

Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; Psalm 45(46); John 5:1-3,5-16

As I came back, I saw on the bank of the river a great many trees on one side and on the other. The Lord said to me, 'This water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the sea, the sea of stagnant waters, the water will become fresh. Wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish, once these waters reach there. It will become fresh; and everything will live where the river goes. On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.'

Occasionally as we reflect on the Old Testament Readings, we will come across some that are less easy to understand – and today we have one such... at least at first. Ezekiel is a prophet who has many visions and records them in great detail as he ponders their meaning. Most of us will have had experiences of being in spiritually dry or stagnant places – where life seems to be stifled out of us. This extract from our Reading might give us hope... the river might represent the living water of Christ, flowing through that wilderness and bringing new life along its course. This life might take time to grow – but it is there and the waters of this river, once we tap into them, never run dry.

- When have you experienced dryness or stagnation in your spiritual life?
- How did you find refreshment and renewal?

Reflect today on times of dryness or stagnation in your prayer or spiritual life – especially if you are going through one just now. If this is the case, one possibly helpful way forward is to try a different form of prayer. The Lent pack has a list of possibilities – there are many more but this gives you a start. It does not matter if you try it and it does not work – or you just try it for the rest of Lent – sometimes, it opens a new channel for the living water of Christ to refresh you.

Wednesday 3 March 2019

Scripture: Isaiah 49: 8-15; Psalm 144(145); John 5: 17-30

*Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the Lord has comforted his people,
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.*

*But Zion said, 'The Lord has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me.'
Can a woman forget her nursing-child,
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you.'*

Here we have another example of Isaiah offering hope to his people during their Exile. The passage that precedes our extract is well worth reading but the part we have chosen shows how the promise is sometimes received. There is news of great joy and of God's compassion for those who suffer. But Zion – the people of the Promise – are jaded and weary and speak only of feeling abandoned. Isaiah gives us a beautiful and powerful image of God's enduring love – even if the most loving mother on the planet should forget her baby, God can never forget the People of his heart.

- When have you felt like Zion – that God has forgotten or abandoned you?
- How does the image of the mother and baby – and your name being written on God's hand touch you?

A very simple prayer exercise for today might be to print off – or draw a picture of a hand. There are no points for making it a super-looking hand though as this will be God's you might like to take time over it. Re-read the extract above – and then put yourself in God's place and write your name on his hand as he might. Keep the hand in a pocket or bag and look at it – or touch it – from time to time to remind you of God's powerful love for you.