Sunday 15 May – Pentecost Sunday

Scripture: Acts 2: 1-11; Psalm 103; 1 Corinthians 12: 3-7, 12-13; John 14:15-16,23-26

*Jesus said,
‘I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.’*

We do not know why the Risen Lord did not stay on the earth but he clearly recognised that his disciples and their followers would need something if they were to stay faithful. Like the Word, the Spirit was with God from before the beginning in that mystery of the Trinity. The Spirit had come upon people throughout human history – most notably, of course, Mary. These had been very special occasions with very specific purposes. What Jesus envisaged now was that the Spirit would be outpoured onto humanity and would stay alive and active throughout the rest of its history.

* When have you had an experience that seemed to come from the Holy Spirit?
* What difference do you think the presence of the Holy Spirit has made to human history?

Spend some time today reflecting on the work of the Holy Spirit in the world – and in individuals. Pray for a new outpouring into yourself – with the gifts you need at this stage in your life. Pray for a new outpouring on the Church – with the gifts that clergy and lay people will need for the Good News to be proclaimed ever more fully. And pray for an outpouring on the world – so that it grows closer to the dream God had for it when it was created.

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Monday 16 May – (Monday of Seventh Week in Ordinary Time, Cycle 2)

Scripture: James 3: 13-18; Psalm 18; Mark 9:14-29

*Jesus said, ‘You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring the child to me.’ And they brought the boy to him... Jesus asked the father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood… Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You spirit that keep this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!’ After crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, ‘He is dead.’ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.*

Jesus has just come down from the mountain after the Transfiguration where he had conversed with Moses and Elijah – and, maybe, tried to talk about his experience with the three disciples who had witnessed it. He comes down to an argument – so small wonder that he is irritated! We have a longer quote today because it shows how Jesus moves from annoyance through to compassion. He sees the bickering crowd and is infuriated – but then sees a child and a father who have suffered together for years as a spirit (or illness) has plagued both their lives. The anger gives way almost straightaway to compassion – and from his mercy comes a healing. It is so dramatic that many think the child is dead but, with tenderness and sharing his own strength, Jesus holds the child’s hand and raises him to his feet and to a new life.

* How easy do you find it to think of Jesus being angry or frustrated?
* What does Jesus’ compassion ‘winning’ teach you about how to deal with your own frustrations and irritations?

If time permits today, you might like to pray this gospel in your imagination – it is certainly dramatic. Create the scene and, rather like a director of a film, take the characters through the action. At some point, take off your director’s hat and enter the action yourself and allow yourself to become immersed in the scene. At the end, reflect back on the experience and how you felt as the account unfolded.

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Tuesday 17 May

Scripture: James 4: 1-10; Psalm 54; Mark 9:30-37

*When they were in the house, Jesus asked the disciples, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.*

Jesus is being a bit disingenuous when he asks the question about the argument on the road. He probably heard enough of it to know what it was about – and probably realised that the disciples were still at the stage of wanting to be the most important. If we are honest, similar arguments are around today. We are not often as blunt or as loud about it as the disciples seem to have been but the undercurrent is still there – in our families – work and leisure activities – and even in the Church.

* When have you wanted to be the greatest or most important in some aspect of your life?
* How much of an issue is this for your community?

Spend some time thinking about this need to feel important and “great” – trying not get judgemental. Ponder how such motivations could be channelled in positive ways – using the desire and the energy to make things happen. If you are aware of this tendency in yourself in a particular area, ask the Lord how you can use it to build up his Kingdom rather than your own ego.

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Wednesday 18 May (St John I)

Scripture: James 4: 13-17; Psalm 48; Mark 9:38-40

 *John said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.’*

It is interesting that John and the other disciples have decided that anyone not following them would not be capable of doing things in Jesus’ name. They seem already to be dividing the world into “us” and “them” with the “them”, naturally, being inferior. They do not seem to have thought that, perhaps, the one casting out the demons had met Jesus elsewhere and been taught by him. It could also be that this person has been asked not to follow Jesus at this point – but to use his gifts in his locality. It is even possible that Jesus has discerned that this person is not as ambitious as the other disciples and can be trusted to get on with things and to stay faithful to the Lord’s teaching without constant supervision.

* Why do you think we find it so easy to divide the world into “us” and “them”?
* Why is it important to restrict some ministries to people who are seen to have particular gifts and training?

Spend some time today thinking about the “us’s” you belong to – and the “thems” you do not. Reflect on how you might need to open up some of the “us-ness” in order to receive the gifts and skills of others – and, together, work to build up Jesus’ Kingdom.

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Thursday 19 May (St Dunstan)

Scriptures: James 5: 1-6; Psalm 48; Mark 9: 41-50

*Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.’*

One of the corporal works of mercy is giving water to the thirsty. Here, Jesus seems to see it as water being given because someone is a Christian – but he is not limiting it to that. He seems to be saying that even giving something as simple as a cup of water to someone in need is deserving reward. This is not why we do it, by and large. We give something to drink because someone needs it – but it is good to be reminded that the path to heaven is paved by acts of kindness that are within the reach of just about everyone.

* When have you given a cup of water – or cup of tea/ coffee – to someone who needed it?
* How easy do you find it to believe that simple acts of mercy are as significant as mighty ones?

Think today about how you might put Jesus’ suggestion into practice. The CAFOD Lent campaign this year was “Turn on the Taps” – this may not be high-profile but might be something you could still contribute to. Or could it be a cup of tea to someone on the streets? Or…? You may not do it because the person bears the name of Christ – but because *you* do.

*KT*

Friday 20 May (St Bernardine of Siena)

Scripture: James 5: 9-12; Ps 102; Mark 10:1-12

*Jesus said, ‘From the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female.” “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. '*

This is a beautiful teaching – and it is wonderful to see people whose lives together really do bear witness to the one-ness – a whole-ness – that comes from a happy (albeit hard-worked at) marriage. Children flourish in such an environment and it is lovely to see children looking joyfully at mum and dad being in love together (though this tends to diminish during the teenage years!). It does not deny the pain of those marriages which do not create a healthy and life-giving whole – where spouses feel a sense of failure and loss as the dream they embarked on fractures around them. Jesus reminds us of God’s dream for humanity – but, as in all his dealings with men and women, knows that it is not always possible to live up to it.

* Who do you know whose marriage bears witness to the beauty of this teaching?
* Who do you know who has been hurt by their inability to live up to it?

Pray in thanksgiving today for the many marriages that are “successful” and bring life to the spouses and to those around them. Pray for those in broken relationships – and the wider families and communities affected by them. Pray for those who prepare people for marriage and those who support them during difficult times.

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Saturday 25 May – St Godric of Finchale (St Christopher Magallanes and Companions)

Scriptures: James 5: 13-20; Psalm 140; Mark 10:13-16

*This (John) is the disciple who is testifying to these things and has written them, and we know that his testimony is true. But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

This is the end of John’s Gospel that we have been reading during Eastertime. It is a Gospel of deep reflection on what Jesus did and what it meant. John makes it clear that he has been selective – that Jesus said many more things than he has recorded – or even could record. The key point he is making – as he did at the end of the Passion in his Gospel – is that he was an eye-witness to the events he is telling his readers about … and that his testimony is true.

* As you look back over recent weeks, are there any particular phrases or images that stand out from John’s Gospel?
* What else would you like John to have recorded? And why do you think he might have chosen the things he did?

Tomorrow is Pentecost Sunday when we recall the Coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. It draws to a close the Seasons of Lent and Eastertime. You might like to find some quiet time today and reflect on the weeks – months – that have gone by and see whether any highlights emerge. Give thanks for any blessings you have received. And then, invite the Holy Spirit to come upon you and grace you with whatever you might need to build on what you have been given.

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