Sunday 13 August – Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: 1 Kings 19: 9, 11-13; Psalm 84; Romans 9: 1-5; Matthew 14: 22-33

*After Jesus had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’*

Here we have a contrast between Jesus taking time out – presumably in an atmosphere of calm – and the disciples out in the middle of the lake being battered by wind and waves. We can often feel like the disciples – beset by so many problems and finding ourselves wondering just where God is in it all. It can feel as if God is on holiday or just uninterested. This is not the case, of course, but it can be how it seems to us in the midst of the storms of life. As such times, we can remember this gospel – and how Jesus comes to the disciples from his place of stillness into their storms and bids them not to be afraid.

* When have felt overwhelmed by the storms of life and wondered where God was?
* When have you found that a holiday or time away (especially in a quiet place) has helped you to cope with difficulties in your life?

If time permits, try to take yourself off to somewhere quiet and peaceful – even for a very short time! Simply enjoy the stillness and allow it to seep deeply into you. If this is not possible, how might you find time to make it happen in the near future?

*KT*

Monday 14 August – St Maximilian Kolbe

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10: 12-22; Psalm 147; Matthew 17: 22-27

*Jesus spoke of it first, asking, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their children or from others?’ When Peter said, ‘From others’, Jesus said to him, ‘Then the children are free. However, so that we do not give offence to them, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a coin; take that and give it to them for you and me.’*

The question of taxes was as hotly debated in Jesus’ time as it is in our own. In those days, it seems that there was something of a divide – the taxes being seen as tribute to a temple elite rather than money given centrally for the well-being of the whole population. Jesus seems to be “choosing his battle” – and making it clear that, if he pays the tax, it is because he *chooses* to not because he has to. It is almost as if he is doing it as a favour to the tax collectors! And his solution – to send his fisherman friend to go and catch just one fish seems almost to be a gentle piece of point-making.

* Why do you think taxes cause so much controversy?
* How would you define a fair tax?

Think today about taxes – why they are needed and what counts as wise and good use of them. Pray for those who have to collect them – those who decide how to spend them – and those who benefit from them.

*KT*

Tuesday 15 August – The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Scripture: Apocalypse 11: 19, 12: 1-6, 10; Psalm 44; 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26; Luke 1: 39-56

*Mary said,*

*‘My soul magnifies the Lord,*

 *and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,*

*for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.*

 *Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*

*for the Mighty One has done great things for me,*

 *and holy is his name.*

For most of her early life, it is unlikely that Mary and those around her would have been aware of just how blessed she was. She may well have been an exceptionally good child – absorbing the stories and prayers of her Jewish roots and allowing them to form the woman she would grow up to be. Few of her words are recorded in the scriptures but these show us the power of what God can do. Mary is, indeed humble and lowly – but the Almighty does great things for her and she is confident in proclaiming this. This is not pride in the negative sense – but pride and joy in being so richly blessed that she wants to share this with others.

* How does this part of Mary’s Magnificat touch you?
* How could this be your own song of praise?

Spend some time today bringing to mind aspects of Mary’s life and her role in the life of Jesus. You may like to pray the whole of the Magnificat as part of your prayer today (you may, of course, be praying it in any case as part of Evening Prayer)

Mary said,

‘My soul magnifies the Lord,

 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,

for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

 Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

 and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him

 from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

 he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

 and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,

 and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,

 in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

 to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.’

*KT*

Wednesday 16 August (St Stephen)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 34: 1-12; Psalm 65; Matthew 18: 15-20

*Jesus said, ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’*

There is always a temptation to see big events and large numbers as evidence of success. They are, of course, pretty clear indicators

* When have you found it helpful to talk things through with someone who took a different point of view but brought you both to a common understanding?
* What difference does it make to a conversation if you remember that Jesus is there with you?

It may be that you have some conversations coming up that you are not looking forward to – or decisions that you need to make for your own good or the good of a group or community. Spend time today thinking about how you might ensure that people remember that the Lord is present during those converations.

*KT*

Thursday 13 August (St Pontian and St Hippolytus

Scriptures: Joshua 3: 7-11, 13-17; Psalm 113A; Matthew 18: 21-19: 1

*Peter came and said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if another member of the church 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.’*

In this translation (the New Revised Standard Version), we have Peter asking about a “member of the church” – in other translations, it is “my brother”. Jesus has just been talking about dealing with wrong-doing in the church so this may be where this comes from. He has been talking about trying to regain someone who has fallen away. Though he acknowledges that some will continue along the wrong path, his aim seems to be towards reconciliation between the person and the church. What shocks Peter is quite how often this Jesus envisage this happening.

* Why do you think Jesus seems so excessive in the number of times individuals and the church can be reconciled (and remembering that seventy-seven is unlikely to be the actual number but indicative of “as often as it takes”)?
* What hope – and what difficulties – does this pose for the church and individuals within it?

This would have been a challenging gospel for the early church – baptism was to forgive sins and who would go on to commit more having experienced such forgiveness. But people did – as people do in our own day. Spend time today reflecting on how often you have been forgiven – and how it has felt to know that you can keep picking yourself up and starting again. How would you feel if you only had one chance? Bring thoughts before the Lord and be open to insights.

*KT*

Friday 14 August (St Maximilian Kolbe)

Scripture: Joshua 24: 1-13; Psalm 135; Matthew 19: 3-12

*Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?’ He answered, ‘Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning “made them male and female”, and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”?*

This gospel is one that is exercising the minds of many people in the light of the Synod later this year. What is clear from the outset here is that the Pharisees are putting the question to test Jesus. This usually alerts us to something that was contentious at the time and, no matter what he said, Jesus was likely to get it wrong. Instead, Jesus takes them back to the writings on marriage early in the Torah –and in turn asks a question back. If God’s ideal is that a man puts his wife before all else and becomes one with her, then is it just that he should then be given the right to cast her aside “for any cause”?

* What are your feelings about Church teaching on marriage and family – and why it teaches as it does?
* Are you or someone in your family affected by this teaching – positively or negatively?

Spend some time meditating on Jesus’ teaching and the Jewish tradition from which it is drawn. Reflect on how this teaching might speak of the dignity of the man and the woman and the dream God has for them. In your own words, talk to the Lord about how this teaching encourages you – or challenges you – and affects you or others you know. Pray for his wisdom and insight.

*KT*

Saturday 15 August (the Feast of the Annunciation is transferred to Sunday)

Scriptures: Joshua 24: 14-29; Psalm 15; Matthew 19: 13-15

*Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’*

Jesus did not have children of his own but was obviously very good with them. He was probably the perfect favourite uncle and, given his love of telling stories and pointing things out to adults, was likely to have been equally good at taking children out and doing the same with them. However, as his reputation grew, those around him could not imagine that he could enjoy being with these annoying little creatures – even though they probably had children of their own! Jesus puts them right in no uncertain terms!

* What do you think Jesus was like with his nephews and nieces and the children in his village or the homes he worked in as a carpenter?
* Why do you think the disciples thought he should send them away?

Think about your own attitude towards children – particularly children in church. You might like to spend some time bringing your own children or grandchildren –children in your class or Children’s Liturgy of the Word group – or other children you know – before the Lord, asking him to bless them.

*KT*