Sunday 10 September –Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Ezekiel 33: 7-9; Psalm 94; Romans 13: 8-10; Matthew 18: 15-20

*Jesus said, ‘If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

We do not know what triggered Jesus’ teaching on dealing with problems in the community but we know that there are several occasions when the gospels give us accounts of the disciples arguing. The fact that these are included in the scriptures can give us hope when we come against issues in our own communities. We know that we are followers of Jesus – we know that we are members of the Body of Christ – but even knowing this does not stop us getting irritated with each other and doing and saying things which disrupt the harmony we all want for our parishes and communities.

* When have you had a disagreement with someone in the parish or community – and how did you handle it?
* Why do you think differences of opinion in a parish or other Christian community seem to hit us harder than in other parts of life?

If you have been hurt by someone in the parish – or are aware that you may have hurt someone – give time today to praying about how to resolve it. If this seems impossible as one-to-one, who could you trust to help you both move forward and be reconciled? Bring it all into a prayerful conversation with the Lord.

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Monday 11 September

Scripture: Colossians 1: 24-2: 3; Psalm 61, Luke 6: 6-11

*Jesus said to them, ‘I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?’ After looking around at all of them, he said to the man with the withered arm, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He did so, and his hand was restored. But the scribes and Pharisees were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.’*

As so often in his earthly life, Jesus asks a question – and, as quite often, those who are asked do not answer – usually because a quick answer is not possible. The scribes and Pharisees know that the laws governing the Sabbath are quite clear – and many people have spent lifetimes refining just how much or little people are allowed to do. But they also know that the Sabbath is meant to be a time for the well-being of human beings. Jesus could have waited until the Monday to heal the man – but chose to “break the Sabbath” to do good.

* Why do you think Jesus chose to “break the Sabbath” rather than wait until the next day?
* How can laws meant for good get turned around and become restrictive and burdensome?

Reflect today on how you spend the Sabbath. If you are busy, is it for good or just filling time for more selfish end? Think about how you will spend next Sunday – and how you might ensure that any busy-ness in your day is restoring for you – and blessings for those around you.

*KT*

Tuesday 12 September (Most Holy Name of Mary)

Scripture: Colossians 2: 6-15; Psalm 144; Luke 6: 12-19

*During those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles.*

Depending on your view on prayer, you might find yourself wondering about why Jesus needed to pray. Many people see praying as about asking for something – or worshipping someone infinitely greater than ourselves – and so on. So why does the Son of God spend so much time in prayer – especially before making a big decision? Perhaps it is in part Jesus’ attempt to show us another dimension to prayer – coming into communion with God. This, incredibly, is a right of our baptism when we are baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. We too are drawn into that communion of eternal love – and our prayer, hard to believe though it may seem, brings us ever deeper into the that communion.

* Have you ever had the feeling that your prayer is taking you to a much higher or deeper place than usual?
* How might such a prayer in communion with God influence how you live your life – and the decisions you make along the way?

You may not be able to take yourself off to a mountain but try to find a quiet space. Do not force it but allow time to relax and be still in the presence of God who loves you and who called you into being because of that love. Gentle, controlled breathing can help – as can feeling that you are opening your mind and heart to God. Sometimes, a simple phrase repeated can focus us too – or music. Do not rush this kind of prayer – Jesus did not! But trust that any time spent in God’s presence will more than bear fruit in the rest of your day.

*KT*

Wednesday 13 September (St John Chrysostom)

Scripture: Colossians 3: 1-11; Psalm 144; Luke 6: 20-26

*Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:*

*woe to you who are rich,*

*for you have received your consolation.*

*‘Woe to you who are full now,*

*for you will be hungry.*

Unlike St Matthew in his account of the Beatitudes, St Luke also includes the opposite dimension. It is more comforting to think of being blessed – far less so to think of warnings and woe! And yet, if there is an element of the world being turned upside-down, those who are “on the top” now may well find themselves at the bottom. So, how might it apply to us? Does it mean that we should not enjoy our wealth such as we have – or forego good food when it is available? Or is as much about our attitude to these good things that influence what comes next?

* What is your attitude to all the good things you have?
* How would you feel if you lost them or they were taken away?

Reflect today on any riches you have and how you use them. Also what you do with food – if you have enough – or more than enough, to the extent, perhaps, of being wasteful? Bring your thoughts into a time of prayer and be open to what the Lord might say to you.

*KT*

Thursday 14 September – The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Scriptures: Numbers 21: 4-9 or Philippians 2: 6-11; Psalm 77; John 3: 13-17

*Jesus said,*

*‘God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,*

*but in order that the world might be saved through him.’*

For many people, the cross seems like a contradiction. How could a God of love demand such suffering from his Son? Some people were even told that every wrong action was like another blow on the nails through Jesus’ hands and feet – their simplest misdemeanour adding to the agony of his crucifixion. This is when it is good to come back to what Jesus himself actually said – that his being raised up was not to be to condemn people but to save them. It was a supreme act of love – that held nothing back, not even from a cruel and humiliating death to identify God utterly with the deepest pain of humanity – and, through Christ’s resurrection, to redeem us.

* How do you think about the cross and what it represents?
* How do you feel about Jesus longing to bring you life – even at the cost of his own?

You might like to spend some time today praying with a crucifix or icon of the cross. Simply hold it and gaze at it – and remember Jesus’ words: I did not come to condemn you – I came to save you…

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Friday 15 September – Our Lady of Sorrows

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1: 1-2, 12-14; Psalm 15; Luke 2: 33-35

*Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, ‘This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.’*

Simeon is a man of great wisdom. In seeing the destiny of the Child Jesus, he knows that he will endure opposition and hostility. He also knows about a mother’s love – a love that would cause her to seek to suffer herself rather than to see the suffering of her child. This is the suffering Simeon sees in Mary’s future. At this stage, she is very young and it is a long way off – but, perhaps, as she wished it were her on that cross rather than her beloved son, the words came back to her and she understood just what that sword was… and, in her suffering, identify with every mother whose heart has been broken by the suffering of their children.

* Why do you think Simeon saw suffering lying ahead for Jesus and his mother?
* How does Mary’s suffering help her to empathise with – and be a good intercessor – for others who suffer?

Pray today with this image – of Simeon and Mary – and the later one of Mary at the foot of the cross. This picture – which includes the Visitation – the meeting with Simeon – and Jesus being taken down from the cross might be useful for your contemplations: <https://uploads6.wikiart.org/images/peter-paul-rubens/descent-from-the-cross-1614.jpg>

*KT*

Saturday 16 September (Ss Cornelius and Cyprian)

Scriptures: 1 Timothy 1: 15-17; Psalm 112; Luke 6: 43-49

*Jesus said ‘The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.’*

We sometimes talk about people “speaking from the heart” –and, usually, we mean that they are speaking positively – of goodness and truth. Somehow, this kind of speaking touches us in a way that normal speech does not. It is as if their heart is connecting to our heart through what they say. Unfortunately, there is the opposite – which we do not always see as speaking from the heart but which sometimes can be. It is why when people speak words of hatred or violence or cruelty they can hurt us more than the words themselves seem to deserve.

* When have you been at the receiving end of positive “speaking from the heart”?
* And when have you been at the receiving end of hurtful or cruel “speaking from the heart”?

St Patrick’s Breastplate includes the lines:

Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me…

They follow quite a long sequence in which we invoke Christ to above, below, to the right and the left and so on… in fact Christ enfolding and encircling us. If you are in situations where you are on the receiving end of negative and undermining attitudes and words, you might like to use the prayer before for you go into difficult situations – placing yourself in the protective heart of Christ.

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