Sunday 17 September –Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Ecclesiasticus 27: 33-28: 9; Psalm 102; Romans 14: 7-9; Matthew 18: 21-35

*Peter came and said to him, ‘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.’*

We might wonder whether Peter was speaking hypothetically here or was he coming to Jesus with a real grievance against someone. If it is a real issue, it is obviously causing him some angst – and, perhaps, Jesus’ talking so often about forgiveness is beginning to annoy him. He is presenting a very human face on this. We might long to be able to forgive as Jesus instructs but we know all too well that people annoy us – and hurt us – and irritate us – and make us angry – and so on. We might be able to forgive once or twice if we feel that the person is genuinely sorry – but, after a time, we get frustrated and feel our forgiveness is being abused and wonder if we really have it in us to be as forgiving as Jesus.

* What do you think might have triggered Peter’s annoyance – and his question?
* When have you struggled with the idea of repeatedly forgiving someone? And are there times when it could even be dangerous to do so?

Reflect today on Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness. Consider your own approach to forgiveness –and whether you are being challenged to be more forgiving. Think also of times when you may have forgiven too “easily” – when, in fact, you have not been really resolved a situation but covered it over. Ask the Lord for guidance about any situation currently troubling you and, of appropriate, seek the advice and support of someone you trust.

*KT*

Monday 18 September

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2: 1-8; Psalm 27; Luke 7: 1-10

*Jesus went with the Jewish elders, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.’*

The words of the centurion continue to speak to us down the centuries and we use them whenever we celebrate the Eucharist. In this account, the centurion and Jesus do not meet face to face. Despite the authority placed in him as a centurion, the Roman does not take advantage of it – he does not demand or order Jesus to come to him. Instead he sends Jewish elders in the first instance who speak very highly of him –and, when he hears that Jesus is actually coming, sends friends to tell him not to bother with the last part of the journey since he is not worthy to welcome him – knowing that, under Jewish Law, Jesus would be contaminating himself by entering his home. Jesus recognises and honours his faith – and heals the one whom he so values.

* Why do you think someone in a position of authority like the centurion would be so self-effacing when dealing with Jesus?
* How does Jesus’ response show us his willingness to overcome boundaries in his desire to heal and reconcile peoples?

Pray with this gospel for a while – imagining the scene and the many conversations that would have been taking place. Imagine how people would have spoken – and their expressions – as well as their emotions. Bring any thoughts into a time of prayerful conversation with the Lord.

*,KT*

Tuesday 19 September- (St Januarius or St Theodore of Tarsus)

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3: 1-13; Psalm 100; Luke 7: 11-17

*The dead man was his mother’s only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’*

This is a very short account and our focus could naturally be caught up with the miracle of this man being brought back to life that follows. However, this short extract encompasses quite a few things we might reflect upon. We have a dead man being brought out of the town to be buried. He is the only son of the grieving mother. She is a widow with no other sons to provide for her. And the Lord has compassion and asks her not to weep. We might wonder whether this was a moment of premonition for Jesus. Here is a situation he could perhaps see his own widowed mother in – grieving the loss of her only son. And perhaps, this deepens his natural compassion for her and his desire to help her.

* How does this situation reflect what will happen to Mary and Jesus in a few months’ time?
* How do you think Jesus felt as he got caught up in the experience on the edge of town of Nain?

Give time today praying for those who will today be taking someone they love into a church or crematorium for a Requiem or other funeral service. Pray particularly for those who are left particularly vulnerable by the death of their loved one.

*KT*

Wednesday 20 September (Ss Andrew Kin Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang and their Companions)

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3: 14-16; Psalm 110; Luke 7: 31-35

*Jesus said, ‘John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, “He has a demon”; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!”’*

One of the problems Christians have is other people’s expectations of us. If we go around solemnly and are strict with our observance of Sunday or other holy days – or ask hard questions about some of the moral issues of the day, we are accused of being kill-joys or too judgemental. If we go out and enjoy ourselves and clearly have fun, others condemn us for not taking our faith seriously and being too pleasure-seeking. Sometimes, we cannot win!

* When have people accused you of being a kill-joy – or prudish – or “un-cool” because of your faith?
* When have people been puzzled or even judgemental when you have clearly been having a good time?

Bring any concerns about how people see you to a time of prayer. Ask the Lord for guidance and encouragement as you balance the joys and demands of your Christian life.

*KT*

Thursday 21 September – St Matthew, Evangelist

Scriptures: Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-13; Psalm 18; Matthew 9: 9-13

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him.*

We do not know whether Jesus knew Matthew before he called him. It is quite possible that he often passed the tax booth and, perhaps, brought his own taxes from earnings and paid them over to Matthew. We might wonder what conversations they had had before this point. Whatever the background to this episode, it is clear that he has seen something in Matthew that needs to be brought out – some potential that, probably, even Matthew was not aware of. Out of all the people Matthew had met – and the difficult conversations – and possibly ridicule and hostility – suddenly this man Jesus offers him something new – something worth putting his livelihood – and, eventually, his life on the line for.

* What do you think people’s attitudes towards Matthew as a tax collector might have been up until the day of his call?
* What do you think Jesus saw in Matthew?

There are paintings of Matthew’s call on the internet that you might like to use for prayer today. Alternatively, read through the passage and take it slowly – imagining yourself in Matthew’s place as Jesus goes past and calls him. Think about how you might have responded in his place.

*KT*

Friday 22 September

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6: 2-12; Psalm 48; Luke 8: 1-3

*Jesus went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources’*

We often imagine Jesus walking the roads of Galilee with his twelve apostles but it is clear that the group around him was much bigger and more mixed. It is interesting that Luke notes that the women who follow Jesus have been healed of infirmities but, rather than return to their duties at home, have chosen a much more radical option of following Jesus. At a time when women’s roles were largely based around their homes and families, the fact that they accompanied this group and, more than that, supported them financially, shows the power of the call of Jesus.

* Why do you think Luke points out that Jesus had healed the women?
* What do you think gave the women the confidence and courage to follow Jesus?

Spend some time today thinking about this group of women and their influence on the disciples – as they journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem.

*KT*

Saturday 23 September (St Pius of Pietrelicina)

Scriptures: 1Timothy 6: 13-16; Psalm 99; Luke 8: 4-15

*Jesus said, ‘As for the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.’*

Seeds of plants sown in the ground depend on warmth and water in order to grow. For the seed of the word of God to grow it also needs good soil. Jesus is suggesting that these seeds grow in the hearts of those who are open – but who are also honest and good (or strive to be). They may not necessarily be scholars but they allow the word to take root and, over time, it deepens and strengthens and their whole lives begin to show the fruits of what has been planted with them.

* How does the word of God take root in your life and help you to grow and flourish as a human being?
* How might you give the word the openness and patience it needs to come to fruitfulness in you?

You might like to read the whole passage again – or focus on this short section. In your own words, ask God to help you to make your heart open and honest in receiving his word and trusting to its patient work in transforming your life.

*KT*