Sunday 2 July – Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: 2 Kings 8-11, 1-16; Psalm 88; Romans 6: 3-4, 8-11; Matthew 10: 37-42

*Jesus said, ‘Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.’*

This is quite an amazing thought – that if people welcome us, they are welcoming Christ – and in welcoming Christ, they are welcoming God. At one level, this could lead to quite a bit of self-importance – when I visit people it is like being Jesus! Well, yes and no! We are members of the Body of Christ and so do take the Lord with us wherever we go. But we need also to remember what Jesus was like when he entered the houses of other people. True, he did sometimes criticise his hosts but usually because they needed something pointing out to them. More often, he enjoyed the hospitality and affirmed those who welcomed him – sharing stories and teaching – and bringing love and joy to their home.

* How might you live up to the idea that people welcoming you also welcome the Lord?
* How might this awareness affect how you welcome others as you would welcome Jesus?

Think today of the places you go – where you are welcomed. What effect does the welcome have on you – how does it make you feel? Then think about how you welcome other people… and what effect you would like to have on them. Reflect also on the welcome in church – or meetings – you and others offer… Do you welcome everyone who comes as you would welcome Jesus? Be open to Jesus’ honest opinion.

*KT*

Monday 3 July – St Thomas, Apostle

Scripture: Ephesians 2: 19-22; Psalm 116; John 20: 24-29

*Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’*

Thomas is one of those reassuring people who remind us that Jesus really did not choose ready-made perfect disciples. In fact, he got pretty exasperated with them sometimes! Not on this occasion, though. Here he re-encounters a disciple who has followed him for at least a year. They have eaten together – and spoken together – laughed together – and maybe wept together. He knows Thomas – and that here he has a realist… probably pretty blunt and not given to taking other people’s word for things, preferring to decide for himself. Jesus meets him “where he is” – in his doubts and fears and need to have this incredible truth absolutely proven. By allowing him to touch those wounds and know their reality, Jesus helps Thomas’ spiritual eyes and touch to open and recognise his Lord and his God.

* How much like Thomas would you say you are?
* What helps you believe even though you have not seen or touched Jesus?

Spend some time today looking through the gospel slowly and see how things unfold. Look at the words used – and try to picture the scene. Watch and listen to Thomas’ journey from doubt to faith.

*KT*

Tuesday 4 July (St Elizabeth of Portugal)

Scripture: Genesis 19: 15-29; Psalm 25; Matthew 8: 23-27

*Jesus said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, you of little faith?’ Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm.*

There are times in everyone’s life when the storms of events and emotions seem to threaten to overwhelm us. As we struggle to deal with each thing as it comes along – and things mount up and become increasingly unmanageable – we find it hard to find any kind of calm or still point where we can find the peace faith in God can bring. At the worst, we can even wonder whether we have any faith – or whether it is up to the task. This is the point at which we can turn to the Lord – even with the merest smidgeon of faith at our disposal. That is all can take – inviting the Lord to come into the mess and gently bring us to peace and renewed trust in him.

* When have you felt yourself overwhelmed by life’s events?
* Have you ever felt that your faith is almost non-existent in the face of what life is throwing at you?

If you are in the middle of difficult circumstances, try to find a few minutes during the day to get your faith-breath back. Find a place where you will not be disturbed. Light a candle if that helps. Or take a cup of tea out into the garden. Simply breathe – or look at something in nature or a favourite picture – or listen to some gentle music… Do not try to solve the problems – just allow the Lord into the situation and trust to his presence.

*KT*

Wednesday 5 July (St Antony Mary Zaccaria)

Scripture: Genesis 21: 5, 8-10; Psalm 33; Matthew 8: 28-34

*The swineherds ran off, and on going into the town, they told the whole story about what had happened to the demoniacs. Then the whole town came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighbourhood.*

It sounds as if the two demoniacs have terrorised the countryside near the town for some time – with their ferocity and bizarre behaviour. It would be reasonable to assume that the people of the town would have been glad of their healing – so why are they begging Jesus to leave? Perhaps it has something to do with where Jesus sent the demons… into pigs. As a Jew, Jesus would not have kept pigs or eaten pork. The chances are that this is a town that has embraced Roman ways – and do not want to be challenged for turning away from their Jewish roots.

* Why were the people in the town afraid of letting Jesus stay in the area?
* What do you think a modern equivalent might be?

Give some time to imagining Jesus coming to your town/ village/ city and doing something that would challenge the people there. What would it be – and how do you think people might react? Pray for a willingness to be challenged if you need to be – and a readiness to change.

*KT*

Thursday 6 July (St Maria Goretti)

Scriptures: Genesis 22: 1-19; Psalm 114; Matthew 9: 1-8

*Some people were carrying a paralysed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.’*

This is an interesting moment. Jesus sees the people carrying their friend who is paralysed – coming to him seeking healing. He does not seem to have spoken to the man himself – but sees the faith of his friends. Something about their faith – in him and in their friend – shows him that they know the underlying cause of the paralysis and want their friend to be released from it. It seems that not only have they been carrying him physically – but emotionally and spiritually as well. And so Jesus responds in love – and releases them all from the burden of the man’s sins.

* When have you carried someone else through difficult times?
* When have you been carried in difficult times in your own life?

Think today about times when you have been carried – or when you have carried someone else. Give thanks for those who carried you – and for the strength that enabled you to help others.

*KT*

Friday 7 July

Scripture: Genesis 23: 1-4, 19, 24: 1-8, 62-67; Psalm 105; 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.*

It seems strange in some ways that it takes until Chapter 9 of Matthew’s gospel to get to Matthew’s own call. We might have expected him to do it earlier – to add weight to the fact that he was an eye-witness to a lot of what he is about to tell us. Instead, we have heard about all sorts of amazing things that Jesus has said and done and then, one day, he walks past a tax booth and sees the collector – and, more importantly, sees someone beyond the collector – to the person within – to the person who will, in time, become an evangelist and sharer of Jesus’ story.

* Why do you think Matthew kept himself in the background up to this point?
* What do you think Jesus saw in Matthew as he walked past?

Spend a little time today pondering this account – trying to imagine the expressions on Jesus and Matthew’s faces – how the words were said and so on. Ask the Lord for an insight into what drew him to this unlikely disciple.

*KT*

Saturday 8 July

Scriptures: Genesis 27: 1-5, 15-29; Psalm 134; Matthew 9: 14-17

*Jesus said, ‘No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made.’*

Today’s gospel is a good reminder of how Jesus drew on the ordinary, everyday experiences of his listeners to explain his truths to them. Modern fabrics are less likely to shrink than the wools and cottons of not so very long ago and so this example may be less obvious to us. But we can imagine that, where clothes are made from materials that have to be spun – woven – and sewn, people will take extra care of them – and be more aware of what is likely to cause more damage than be helpful.

* How well do you look after the clothes you own?
* What example might you use to get the message of not mixing old and new things together without due care for both?

Reflect today on what Jesus is trying to convey about the new and the old. Neither is bad – or good – but sometimes difficult to hold together without harm. What might be a modern equivalents?

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