Sunday 9 July – Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Zechariah 9: 9-10; Psalm 144; Romans 8: 9, 11-13; Matthew 11: 25-30

*Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.’*

It is interesting that Jesus does not specify what “these things” are. He has just spoken of how some places will not repent despite the great things he has done there so, perhaps, he is speaking of those – but how are they revealed to mere infants and not the clever and wise. Is it the case that he is aware that, sometimes, the wise and intelligent can find ways to explain things away and that children and the less obviously intelligent can have a deeper sense of what is real?

* When have you been in a situation where people have tried to explain things away using find words which have hidden the real truth – or falsity of a situation?
* When have you found children and others seeing more clearly than the people with power?

Reflect today on the capacity of people without power or vested interests to see things that seem to be hidden from those with positions to keep up – or statuses to protect. Think about what you want to pray for… do you want to have the clear sight of a child – with the responsibility of an adult to act on what you see and understand? And why might that be a challenge?

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Monday 10 July – Monday of 14th Week in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Genesis 28: 10-22; Psalm 90; Matthew 9: 18-26

*While Jesus was speaking, a leader of the synagogue suddenly came in and knelt before him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.’*

This encounter says a lot about how Jesus is regarded by the local people at this point. Here is a recognised leader of the community coming and not demanding that Jesus come to his home but kneeling before him. He also demonstrates a great trust in Jesus – asking him to come to what seems like a hopeless situation and to change it. It also speaks of great love – showing us that, though women and girls had lower status in the society of the time, this man was willing to risk public humiliation if his own daughter could be restored to health.

* What does this encounter tell you about Jesus – and the leader of the synagogue?
* When have you felt such love for another that you would do anything to help them?

If you are in a situation of needing to bring the Lord into a difficult situation of someone you love, use today’s prayer time to kneel before him and ask for his help. If you are not – but can remember a time when you were – give thanks for the help you received. Or, if you know someone who needs your prayer support, offer it open-heartedly on their behalf.

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Tuesday 11 July – St Benedict

Scripture: Proverbs 2: 1-9; Psalm 33; Matthew 19: 27-29

*Jesus said, ‘Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.’*

Very few people are called to leave everything behind in the way they follow Jesus. Some do – and it is likely that, just like Peter, they will have times when they wonder if it is worth it. St Benedict was one who sensed the call to leave behind the trappings of his old life – living in isolation for a time – and then setting up monasteries around Europe. There can be no doubt that he worked hard to establish a way of life that continues to this day – but, equally, had times when he wondered what life could have been like if he had not heeded the call.

* What do you think sustains someone who is called to leave everything behind to follow Jesus whole-heartedly?
* Is it a sign of weakness or strength to ask if what you give up to follow Jesus is worth it?

Reflect today on the vocation some people have to give up everything to follow Jesus and serve the world in a single-minded way. Pray for them.

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Wednesday 12 July

Scripture: Genesis 41: 55-57, 42: 5-7, 17-24; Psalm 32; Matthew 10: 1-7

*Jesus sent the Twelve out with the following instructions: ‘Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

Given that Jesus would later tell the disciples to take the good news out to the far corners of the world, we might wonder why he is so explicit in telling the apostles here to limit themselves just to the “lost sheep of Israel”. We might remember that they have not long been called and are not very experienced in the ways of talking about Jesus. They have seen and heard things that have convinced them – but how would they convince someone who does not have the background of Jewish history or teaching? Perhaps Jesus is giving them a chance to hone their skills with people who might understand before embarking on a much more challenging mission.

* Who are our equivalent of the “lost sheep of Israel”?
* How does it help to have some ideas and teachings in common when sharing your own faith with others?

Spend some time today thinking about those who have drifted away from the practice of their faith and who might just need a bit of help to find their way back. In a time of prayer, ask the Lord to show you words and actions that might help you to help them.

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Thursday 13 July (St Henry)

Scriptures: Genesis 44: 18-21, 23-29, 45: 1-5; Psalm 104; Matthew 10: 7-15

*Jesus said, ‘As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.’*

Jesus is giving his disciples some sound advice – and some which we might find helpful. He is sending the disciples out to share his good news but he is wise enough to know that not everyone is going to welcome it. He offers a simple strategy – where we are made welcome, we offer peace in our turn. However, where we find hostility and rejection, Jesus gives us permission to take our peace back with us. It does not mean rudeness or dislike – but simply, protecting ourselves so that our hurt and disappointment does not get in the way of our trying again with others – or, in time, with those who rejected us the first time round,

* When have you been welcomed by others – either when you spoke about your faith or visited them for other reasons?
* When have you felt rejected by others? And how might Jesus’ words offer comfort and strength?

Reflect today on the giving and taking of peace when you visit or meet someone. As you go out and about today, be conscious of when you are comfortable about sharing your peace – and when you feel more wary and concerned to protect it. Ask the Lord to help you to discern which is the appropriate response in given situations.

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Friday 10 July (St Camillus of Lellis)

Scripture: Genesis 46: 1-7, 28-30; Psalm 36; Matthew 10: 16-33

*Jesus said, ‘‘See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.’*

Jesus is continuing to give advice to the disciples he is sending out on their first mission. He does not wrap the task up in easy words but offers a realistic assessment of what to expect as they try to take the message out to the towns and villages. These are not professional preachers but people who are likely to be nervous and quite vulnerable to exploitation. And so, he advises them to hold things in balance – knowing that they are like sheep going into the midst of predatory wolves – and so to be wise enough to see things as they really are – but not to allow this worldly wisdom to lead them to become cynical or untrusting.

* What does the image of sheep among wolves bring to mind for you?
* How can you balance the cunning of serpents and the openness and innocence of doves?

In a time of quiet prayer, ask the Lord to give you the skills you will need if you are to share your faith with others and help them to grow in faith themselves.

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Saturday 15 July – (St Bonaventure)

Scriptures: Genesis 49: 29-33, 50: 1, 5-26; Psalm 104; Matthew 10: 24-33

*Jesus said, ‘Have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.*

Jesus is talking about people who will seek to persecute those who bring the truth about him and about God to the people but some of what he says can apply to people in our day. It is a sad fact of life that people with power often keep things hidden – and, even more sadly, the same can happen with the Church. We have lived through a time when disclosures about abuse covered up for decades has come to light and shaken the faith of many people. It is a reminder that, eventually, the “truth will out”. It leaves us with a choice – to hold to the truth and rebuild trust in the Church or to turn away in sorrow and dismay,

* How have revelations of abuse and cover-up affected you?
* How can we respond in ways that bring life and hope to the situations people find themselves in?

Spend time today for those affected by abuse and the cover-ups often associated with them. Pray for grace and guidance as to ways in which you – and the Church at large – could help people to regain trust in the People of God.

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