Sunday 16 July – Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Isaiah 55: 10-11; Psalm 64; Romans 8: 18-23; Matthew 13: 1-23

*Jesus said, ‘The seed that was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.’*

Whilst Jesus shows us what happens when the word of God falls on good soil, it’s also salutary to remember that not all the seed was so fortunate. Jesus does not suggest that the sower be more careful so that seed will only fall where it is likely to produce a good crop which would surely be more efficient. He seems to suggest that, if we see God as the sower, God is not very careful either. What might this mean for us? Is Jesus suggesting that we share our own love and faith with other people without worrying too much about whether it will bear fruit or not.

* What does this story tell you about God’s generosity?
* How can you be like God in “sowing” love and faith?

Spend time today reflecting on the generosity of God. If you can, get outside and look at the abundance of creation – in quantity and in diversity. Look at the life God has given to so many people – most of whom will not find him in religion – and some who will not even acknowledge his existence – and yet, they have life. Ponder – and give thanks – for God’s abundant graces.

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Monday 17 July – Monday of 15th Week in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Exodus 1: 8-14, 22; Psalm 123; Matthew 10: 34-11: 1

*Jesus said, ‘Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.’*

This is not a gospel that speaks of a ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild’ – this is a very challenging Jesus. How can someone brought up in a loving Jewish family home suggest that anyone who puts family first is unworthy of him? One thought to bring into this might be where the choice might lie. For example, in a loving family, most of the choices and experiences would be positive and bringing people closer to each other and to God. In other families, the situation can be very different. The parents do not offer the love and guidance that children need – children grow up with no understanding of love or respect for others. For them, encountering Christ can be challenging – and making choices to follow him and his way of living very difficult.

* How does a loving family offer a good foundation for following Jesus?
* What problems face some people in choosing between family and Christ?

Pray today for families which do not offer a good foundation for faith – or hope – or love. Ask the Lord to send his Spirit among – to inspire changes of heart and the courage and strength to live as God wants them to.

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Tuesday 18 July

Scripture: Exodus 2: 1-15; Psalm 68; Matthew 11: 20-24

*Jesus began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent.*

Jesus travelled far and wide around his native Galilee – performing miracles and speaking words of power and wisdom. Knowing what we do about his later resurrection – the ascension – and being people living in the power of the Spirit – it can be very hard to understand why everyone did not automatically believe everything he said and did. We know that much of what he said seemed very new to his listeners – but would expect his miracles to speak for themselves. The fact that, even with Jesus physically present, people could not bring them to change their thinking – which can be very reassuring when we have problems persuading them too.

* Why do you think people find it so hard to change their thinking and their way of life?
* What might convince people of the truth of the Gospel – and the blessings it will bring them?

Pray today for those who find it very hard to believe in God – in Jesus. Pray that their minds and hearts will open to the good news of Jesus and will become convinced of what new life in Christ offers them –and become willing to change.

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Wednesday 19 July

Scripture: Exodus 3: 1-6, 9-12; Psalm 102; Matthew 11: 25-27

*Jesus said, ‘All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.’*

Despite all we know from the gospels and all the teaching about Jesus in the 2000 years since his earthly life, there is a huge amount of mystery about who he is and the relationship with God the Father. This is not a “who dun it” kind of mystery but a “here we stand at the interface between the human and the divine and there is an awful lot that the human mind simply cannot see or absorb”. Jesus revealed a lot about what the relationship he has with the Father – but, often, it is not when we think complex thoughts about it but when we open our hearts to simple trust that what Jesus says is true.

* What is the difference between simple trust – and being simplistic?
* Are you alarmed or excited about how much you cannot know about God because God is utterly beyond anything you can comprehend?

Give time today to pondering “mystery” – the vast amount of God-ness that is beyond human understanding. Note how you feel as you contemplate this – and whether it seems to stretch your faith in a good way – or makes it less comforting and assuring. Bring any thoughts into a conversation with the Lord.

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Thursday 20 July (St Apollinaris)

Scriptures: Exodus 3: 13-20; Psalm 104; Matthew 11: 28-30

*Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.’*

There are some passages in the bible that we read and dismiss as having heard them just too many times. This one, though, seems never to lose its power. True, there will be times when we just nod in the general direction of its being reassuring and life-giving and move on – and other times when we are just so bowed down with concerns that we cannot bring ourselves to believe it. Often, though, the words speak directly to our hearts – and assure us that the Lord is with us and calls us to him so that he can give us rest.

* When have you found these words unbelievable or even irritating?
* When have you found these words comforting and helpful?

You might like to try a simple mantra-type prayer using some of the words in this extract. On an in-breath, say slowly (in your head and heart) “Come to me” – and on the out-breath “and I will give your rest”. Do this for a few minutes and experience the calm that comes with gently breathing in and out the words of Scripture.

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Friday 21 July (St Laurence of Brindisi)

Scripture: Exodus 11: 10-12, 14; Psalm 115; Matthew 12: 1-8

*Jesus said, ‘If you had known what this means, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice”, you would not have condemned the guiltless.’*

Every society and organisation needs rules in order to function well. From time to time, though, people forget that the rules are there to ensure things run smoothly and work well for the members and begin to give them more priority than they deserve. It becomes more important to “obey the rules” than to enjoy being part of a group with shared values and goals. At this point, the group tends to splinter or lose focus. As people start looking over their shoulders for the person who is just waiting for the smallest infringement to report to superiors, so they lose sight of the thing – the vision – they were all called to strive for.

* When has obeying the rules to the letter been important to you?
* When has obeying rules led to you feeling diminished or afraid of stepping out of line?

Spend time today reflecting on the place of rules in your life – when they help – and when they hinder. Pray for the capacity to discern when rules are helping to draw you closer to God – and when they take your focus away from him and draw it towards the rules and those who enforce them. Pray for wisdom to guide your conscience.

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Saturday 22 July – St Mary Magdalene

Scriptures: Song of Songs 3: 1-4 or 1 Corinthians 5: 14-17; Psalm 62; John 20: 1-2, 11-18

*Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.’*

The options for the First Reading today both speak of love: in the Song of Songs – of a love that draws the bride from her bed to search for her beloved: in the letter to the Corinthians, the love that makes us new creations. These give us insights into the extract today. Mary has got up before dawn to go and perform the last offices for Jesus that she did not have time to do straight after his death. She knew what her life had been like before Jesus had delivered her from seven devils – we do not know what that was like but can imagine the turmoil and agony of mind she endured. And now the one she loves is dead – and she weeps. Others have seen the empty tomb and gone away. Her love is so strong that she cannot bear to leave. Her reward will be to be the first human being to witness the Risen Lord.

* What does love impel you to do… what is your equivalent of getting up in order to find your beloved?
* When have you been at the receiving end of such great love? And if never – what do you imagine it feels like?

Spend time today reflecting on Mary Magdalene. Think about the “journey” she makes that first Easter morning – from utter loss and bereavement – to the certain knowledge that her Beloved is risen and will never leave her again – not because she has clung to his physical body but in a new, spiritual way that she will come to understand. Ask for her intercession and the desire to feel something of her great love for Jesus.

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