Sunday 23 July – Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19; Psalm 85; Romans 8: 26-27; Matthew 13: 24-43

*Jesus told the crowds another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’*

Jesus had an uncanny knack of taking perfectly ordinary things and using them to give people pause for thought. Everyone in the crowd would have either used yeast to leaven bread – or seen it used. Nothing at all mysterious – until you think about it. Every day (almost), women would take yeast, knead it into flour, water and salt and, somewhat miraculously, the blob of dough would increase in size and, when baked, the bread would be lighter and tastier. No-one would give it much thought but here was Jesus using it to speak of the mystery of the kingdom of heaven being alive and active in the dough that is humanity.

* Have you made bread – or seen it made – and seen yeast at work?
* Why do you think Jesus used everyday things to teach the crowds?

If the mood takes you and time permits, think about making bread today! As you mix and knead the dough, think about how you are “awakening” the yeast – and how this simple activity speaks of the kingdom of heaven at work. If you do not have time or inclination, simply contemplate Jesus’ words and his way of taking the everyday and making it extraordinary.

*KT*

Monday 20 July – The Martyrs of the Diocese

Scripture: Wisdom 3: 1-9; Psalm 33; John 15: 18-21 (Note: All readings chosen from selection offered)

*Jesus said, ‘If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.’*

Very few of us in the diocese would expect to be faced with the prospect of martyrdom – at least, in the sense of being someone called upon to die for their faith. One original meaning of the word *martyr* was witness – and to bear witness and then suffer death because of that testimony made it an incredibly powerful and courageous thing to do. We are unlikely to suffer death for our faith in this country any more – but we are still called to witness to it… even if it makes our lives that bit more difficult.

* How can you witness to your faith in your everyday life?
* What frightens or bothers you about the idea of doing this?

Reflect today on the witness of the martyrs who walked our lands and our streets – ordinary people just like us going about their daily lives until they were faced with a choice. Spend time thinking about where the courage and strength came from – and pray for some of that in your own life too.

*KT*

Tuesday 25 July – St James, Apostle

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4: 7-15; Psalm 125; Matthew 20: 20-28

*The mother of James and John said to Jesus, ‘Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.’ But Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking.’*

Most of us have met ambitious parents and it is clear from today’s gospel that this is nothing new. Jesus does not criticise her but simply points out that she does not know what she is asking for. She sees the joy and hope in following Jesus and wants that to extend that into eternal status for her boys. Jesus knows that the price of following him will be high – higher than this mother can possibly imagine. Had she known what this price would be, would she have asked this favour of Jesus?

* Do you think this mother would have asked Jesus this favour if she had really understood that it would lead to the torture and death of her sons?
* How do you think she felt after Jesus’ death? And after his resurrection?

Spend some time thinking about this mother’s request and what she was hoping for her sons. Think about the future she saw for them – and how it was fulfilled, even though it was through a very different route to the one she expected.

*KT*

Wednesday 26 July (St Joachim and St Anne)

Scripture: Exodus 16: 1-5, 9-15; Psalm 77; Matthew 13: 1-9

*Jesus said. ‘As the sower sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.’*

A longer extract today as each of the outcomes for the seeds has something to say to us – particularly at times of change. What is interesting to note is that the sower does not stop sowing – even when he knows that not all the seeds will bear fruit. At one level, he seems to be being very careless but Jesus is again using something people would see everyday to make a point. Yes, the sower would do his best – but despite his best efforts some seed will not land on the carefully prepared soil. In a similar way, God is similarly “careless” – and does not sowing seeds of grace even knowing that many will not flourish.

* Which outcome for the seeds in the parable seems to strike you today?
* How might it apply to you – your family or friends – your parish or partnership?

Spend time today pondering God’s generosity and how the seeds of grace do not always bear fruit. Think also about how you might prepare ‘good soil’ in yourself so that God’s gifts can bear fruit in you… and how you might be able to help to prepare good soil in others so that they can be more receptive to God’s love and grace.

*KT*

Thursday 27 July

Scriptures: Exodus 19: 1-2, 9-11, 16-20; Daniel 3: 52-56; Matthew 13: 10-17

*Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah and said,*

*‘This people’s heart has grown dull,*

 *and their ears are hard of hearing,*

 *and they have shut their eyes;*

 *so that they might not look with their eyes,*

 *and listen with their ears,*

*and understand with their heart and turn—*

 *and I would heal them.’*

These words have been around over 3000 years and yet, we can still see them applying to our own day as well. It is, though, too easy to see them applying to others – especially those outside the Church. It is true that we wonder why others do not see faith as we do – but it is also the case that we too can sometimes close our eyes and ears to the word of God – or to promptings in prayer. Sometimes, we sense that we might be being asked to change – to open up to God’s healing and invitation – and decide that we would rather not see or hear anything that might challenge us.

* When have you been inclined to keep your eyes and ears shut to the word of God or other invitations to grow and change?
* What causes people to prefer to ignore God’s invitation rather than be open to accepting it?

You might like to try this simple prayer today:

Open my eyes that I might see your will for me.

Open my ears to the invitation you offer to me.

Open my heart to your healing and love.

*KT*

Friday 24 July – The Martyrs of the Diocese

Scripture: Exodus 20: 1-17; Psalm 18; Matthew 13: 18-23

*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.’*

The parable of the sower is linked most closely with hearing and understanding God’s word. This is not the kind of understanding that gets you exam marks! It is actually much deeper than that – and, sometimes, even beyond words. It is the kind of understanding that comes from your heart – where the word of God speaks directly to the core of your being. This is where our attitudes and behaviour start. If these are fed on the word of God – inspiring or comforting or challenging – then gradually they bear more and more fruit in actions of love and witness to God.

* When have you understood the word of God in ways that go deeper than being able to explain it?
* How does the word of God bear fruit in your own life?

Spend some time today thinking about words in scripture that have spoken to you particularly in your lifetime. Reflect on why they seemed particularly meaningful – and what fruit they might have borne in your life.

*KT*

Saturday 29 July – (St Martha)

Scriptures: Exodus 24: 3-8; Psalm 49; John 11: 18-27

*Martha said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’*

It is interesting to note that when Peter says very similar words to Jesus, his faith is acclaimed and Jesus sees his potential as leader of his church. What is also noteworthy are the circumstances in which Martha is saying them. She has not yet seen Jesus raise her brother from the dead. She clearly expects it to happen – but not until the end of time. At this moment, she is a woman grieving the loss of her brother – and yet, within that loss and pain, she finds the faith to declare her friend as the Messiah – the Son of God.

* Where do you think Martha found the faith to make her declaration about Jesus?
* When have you found unexpected faith in the face of very difficult circumstances – either your own or that of someone else?

You might like to read the gospel and follow Martha’s journey from sending the message to Jesus and not getting a response – to the death of Lazarus – to his burial – to the coming of Jesus – her declaration – and then the raising of Lazarus. Simply allow the account to unfold – and notice anything that strikes you afresh today.

*KT*