Sunday 30 July – Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: 1 Kings : 5, 7-12; Psalm 118; Romans 8: 28-30; Matthew 13: 44-52

*Jesus said, ‘Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’*

One thing about being part of an institution dating back 2000 years – as the Catholic Church – and even longer when you take into account our Jewish heritage – is that we have a lot of tradition. And one thing about being part of the world in the 21st century is that we have a lot of new ideas to take on board. Some of these would completely baffle our ancestors – a thing you wear on your wrist allowing you to talk to your grandchildren in Australia? (And just *where* is Australia?!) What they would share would be our scriptures (though concept of having them on an electronic devise would amaze them) – and many of our images – and the things we say about God. We are blessed in being in a situation of having an abundance of riches – old and new – with which to sustain our growth in faith,

* What do you treasure from our rich tradition?
* What do you find enriching in our contemporary culture?

Spend some time today thinking about the things from our tradition that have helped you to grow in faith – and which you have found challenging or unhelpful. Think also of the new ideas and resources available to us these days – and how they help – or hinder – your spiritual journey. What does the balance between them look like/

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Monday 31 July – Monday of 17th Week in Ordinary Time (St Ignatius of Loyola)

Scripture: Exodus 32: 15-24, 30-34; Psalm 105; Matthew 13: 31-35

*Jesus put before them a parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’’*

Jesus often used everyday examples to convey deep messages. All the people listening would have known about mustard seeds and the sowing of crops. Many of us are less familiar with this but most of us will have grown mustard and cress – and seen things like sunflower and poppy seeds even if they are more likely to be eaten than sown. And most of us will have seen plants – including trees – and, quite probably, rarely given much thought to the fact that most of them began life as a small, hard, dull seed.

* When have you sown seed – and what were the results?
* When have you thought about the origins of flowers – vegetables – and trees?

Take some time out today to walk in a park or in your garden and take stock of the life that is around you. Be conscious of the fact that all this great variety started life as small and unpromising seeds. Allow yourself a little awe at what God continues to do in the world.

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Tuesday 1 August (St Alphonsus Mary de Liguori)

Scripture: Exodus 33: 7-11, 34: 5-9, 28; Psalm 102; Matthew 13: 36-43

*Jesus said, ‘The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.’*

This could be an alarming gospel and we can struggle to think about what it says about God. Our desire is often that everyone will be saved but it is a tragic fact of life on earth that there are some people who do evil things. Sometimes there are mitigating circumstances – think of child soldiers forced to kill and maim – an evil is being done to them every bit as much as they have done to others. But some people, for reasons we can hardly fathom, seem to relish causing suffering to others. It is likely that Jesus is talking about such people – and his words could actually be a comfort to those who have long been at the receiving end of cruelty and torment from others.

* Where do you see people acting in ways that are evil and cruel?
* Do you find it satisfying or sad that evildoers will face the consequences of their actions?

Give some time today to this way of understanding God’s judgement and who might find it challenging – and who might find it a source of hope and vindication. Pray for those who are the receiving end of the cruelty of others… And pray for those who do evil – that they might have a change of heart and repent.

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Wednesday 2 August – (St Eusebius of Vercelli or St Peter Julian Eymard)

Scripture: Exodus 34: 29-35; Psalm 98; Matthew 13: 44-46

*Jesus said, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.’*

Every so often, we hear news reports about treasure hoards being found. There is a lot of excitement around as the treasure is valued – but also interest in what the various items originally looked like and, often, a sense of awe at the beauty and workmanship in what has been unearthed. So it is easy to understand the joy of the person who found this hidden treasure. Nowadays, finders do not have to buy the whole field – we have other methods for deciding who owns the treasure… but can understand the willingness of the person in the gospel in doing so.

* What treasure hoards can you think of being found and any excitement around them?
* Which is most important for you – the monetary value of the treasure or the link it has with the past – or the beauty of what has been found?

Imagine that you happen upon some treasure. Allow yourself to day-dream – what period in history would it come from? And what might it include? How much might it be worth? Then think about Jesus saying that this is what the treasure of the kingdom is like – and what new insights your day-dream brings to that.

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Thursday 3 August – St Oswald

Scriptures: James 1: 2-4, 12; Psalm 33; Luke 9: 23-26

*Jesus said, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.’*

As a young prince in exile, Oswald was educated on Iona but returned to Northumbria to reclaim the kingdom his father had lost. He would have been a skilful warrior and leader – the fact that so many people followed him into battle attests to this. But he himself followed a different kind of king. This king – Christ – did not promote warfare in his teaching but the culture of the time believed that battle was an honourable way to settle disputes and establish kingdoms. It would have been customary for armies to sacrifice to their gods but Oswald does something different. He brings forward the cross – the sign of ultimate defeat and ultimate victory – and places it where his army can see and pray before it. He attributes his victory to the intervention of God and re-established Christianity in Northumbria.

* What do you make of Oswald being a great warrior and seeing Christ as his leader?
* Is war ever justifiable?

Reflect back over 1500 years to the time of Oswald. It would have been a very different world – but Oswald’s loyalty to Jesus is something we can understand today. You might like to ask St Oswald – a wise and brave military leader – to intercede for those involved in battles to establish justice and peace in countries around the world.

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Friday 4 August (St John Mary Vianney)

Scripture: Leviticus 23: 1, 4-11, 15-16, 27, 34-37; Psalm 80; Matthew 13: 54-58

*Jesus came to his home town and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?’*

Jesus was clearly well-known in his home town – perhaps a little too well-known. It is clear that the people know his family – they know his family business and his mother and brothers are even named. But this knowledge seems to blind them to the fact that Jesus is more than a son – or a brother – or a carpenter. It is almost as if they are happier with Jesus in a kind of box that they can use to contain him rather than allow him to open up their minds and hearts to new possibilities.

* How might you react if someone came and seemed to have grown beyond what you knew or expected of them?
* Have you ever been on the receiving end of such questioning or confusion about who you are and what you might do?

Ponder the situation in which Jesus finds himself – loving his family but being held back by them. If you feel this about your own situation as for guidance as to how to take things forward. If you feel that you are actually holding someone back, ask the Lord to show you how to let them go and grow.

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Saturday 1 August (Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major)

Scriptures: Leviticus 25: 1, 8-17; Psalm 66; Matthew 14: 1-12

*John the Baptist’s disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went and told Jesus.*

John the Baptist has been honoured since the earliest days of Christianity. Jesus himself honoured him and named him the greatest of the prophets. However, we have no idea where John was buried – in the same way that we do not know where Abraham – Moses – even, King David are buried. It was a later tradition to build churches over the tombs of the martyrs – on the ground made holy by their sacrifice. We do not know what happened to the head of John and, though we do not know his burial site, it is comforting to know that his body was not further desecrated but taken and put in a place of rest by friends.

* Why do people honour the places of burial or laying to rest of ashes?
* Does it matter to you that future generations will know where you are laid to rest? Why? Why not?

Simply spend a short time reflecting on the importance of honouring our dead – and the love and respect it shows for them and their relationship with us in life. Think also about your own destiny and what you would hope for yourself.

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