Sunday 20 August – 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time 2017

Scripture: Isaiah 56: 1, 6-7; Psalm 66; Romans 11: 13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15: 21-28

*Jesus said,*

*‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the house-dogs.’*

*The Canaanite woman retorted,*

*‘Ah yes, sir, but even the house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master’s table.’*

When we read this account of an encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman we could be struck by Jesus’ incredible rudeness towards her! Here she is begging for his assistance and he seems to be looking down his nose at her and referring to her and her daughter not as children of the living God but as house-dogs – a great insult then as now in parts of the Middle East. The woman, though, refuses to be cowed into silence – and has an answer ready… An answer that seems to take Jesus aback – and make him recognise the great faith of someone who is most definitely an outsider.

* How do you feel about Jesus’ apparent rudeness?
* Why do you think he is so impressed with the woman’s response – and the faith that goes with it?

Take some time today to read the account in full and try to picture the way the conversation unfolds. This foreign woman approaching Jesus – Jesus’ response – and how the account unfolds. Ask the Lord to show you where *you* might find faith in unexpected places – and to give you the grace to respond with courtesy!

*KT*

Monday 21 August - Dedication of St Mary’s Cathedral

Scripture: 1 Kings 8: 22-23, 27-30; Psalm 83; John 4: 19-24

*Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.’*

This is part of the much longer gospel account of Jesus’ meeting with the woman at the well. She was a Samaritan who had been in long and bitter dispute about the Temple and who could and could not worship there and whether some places were holier than others – and so on. It is something we can still come across – whose buildings are holiest and what kind of worship is acceptable where. A cathedral church has the challenge of offering a spiritual home to all kinds of people. Some may live locally – many will travel in. Some love traditional music and liturgy – others find more contemporary forms of music and prayer more powerful in their worship. It is a challenge but a great blessing when a cathedral serves as a sign of unity whilst being open to the rich diversity of God’s people.

* What kind of liturgy and worship feeds you most?
* When have you been to a service that has not been your preferred form of worship but has surprised you by how it has helped you to pray and praise God?

Pray today for the clergy and parishioners of the cathedral (either St Mary’s in Newcastle or your own). Pray for those who work to serve a diverse and, often, very mobile community. And, if you are able to pop into the cathedral – say thank-you!

*KT*

Tuesday 22 August (Our Lady, Mother and Queen)

Scripture: Judges 6: 11-24; Psalm 84; Matthew 19: 23-30

*Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life.’*

Jesus is talking to the disciples who are still working out who he is – and struggling with the realisation that following Jesus does not seem to be leading to great wealth and status. His very first disciple was, of course his mother. Mary was called even before Jesus was conceived – and risked everything by saying yes to becoming the mother of a child before she was married. Not only risking her home and family but even her life. Some of the things said to Jesus later in life suggest that even years later, some of the stigma still stuck. Eventually, Mary would reap the abundant reward for her faith – but was to live long years as a mother of dubious reputation before entering into the eternal life that awaited her.

* What did Mary risk losing when she agreed to be the mother of Jesus?
* How does her example help us when we are misunderstood – or live with the guilt or shame of things we actually did do wrong and still try to be good followers of Jesus?

Spend a little while today thinking of Mary as an example of someone willing to give up everything for the sake of being a disciple of Jesus. If you are feeling that you have to let something go – or give something up in order to be more faithful in your own discipleship and following Jesus, ask Mary to pray for you today.

*KT*

Wednesday 23 August (St Rose of Lima)

Scripture: Judges 9: 6-15; Psalm 20; Matthew 20: 1-16

*When the first workers came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, “These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.” But he replied to one of them, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? I choose to pay the last comer as much as pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?’*

A denarius was the usual day wage – a kind of minimum or, perhaps more appropriately, a living wage for the time. It ensured that the worker could support his or her family for another day. The landowner would have known this and was perhaps aware that those who were brought in at the end were those less likely to be readily hired. Or, maybe, he was anxious to get the crop in before the end of that day. We do not know his thinking – and that is part of the power of parables – there is always something in there to think about. What the landowner makes absolutely clear is that it is his wealth – and his generosity that is important here… and that his choice is to be generous.

* Why might the landowner have been recruiting workers right up until the end of the day?
* Why do you think Jesus told a story that seems so unfair to many of the characters in it?

Give some time today to thinking about the generosity of God – the God who gives so much to everyone in the world. Think also of how un-generous many of us are when it comes to sharing what God has given – feeling that we have more right to things than others. Ask God to give you a heart as generous as his own.

*KT*

Thursday 24 August - St Bartholomew

Scriptures: Apocalypse 21: 9-14; Psalm 144; John 1: 45-51

*Nathanael said, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel,’*

*Jesus replied, ‘You say that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.’*

This short extract tells us quite a bit about Jesus and someone who is going to be one of his closest disciples. For one thing, we have another example of someone who is going to have a name-change – from Nathanael to Bartholomew (though we do not know when or when this took place). We know from earlier in the account that Nathanael is somewhat sceptical about Jesus – but very quickly changes his mind. And why? Because Jesus says he saw him under a fig tree! It is quite easy to imagine Jesus’ smile as he turns to Nathanael and points out that he has changed his tune with very little reason – but equally, that he knows that he will be open to all the signs and wonders that will accompany him as he follows Jesus – and continue to grow and be transformed by his faith in him.

* What does this account tell us about Nathanael?
* What does it tell us about Jesus and how he related to these early disciples?

Spend some time today thinking about people like Nathanael. They still exist! People who are sceptical about Jesus – the Church – and faith. Think of those who have a sudden understanding of what faith means – and are completely fired up by it. Pray for them – that those who are sceptical will have an experience of faith that will inspire and enthuse them… and that those who come to a sudden embracing of faith will be nurtured and their faith deepened and strengthened.

*KT*

Friday 25 August (St Louis or St Joseph of Calasanz)

Scripture: Ruth 1: 1, 3-6, 14-16, 22; Psalm 145; Matthew 22: 34-40

*Jesus said ’You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.’*

This, Jesus tells us, is the first and greatest of the commandments. In some ways, it is obvious – but it also very hard to carry out. If we love God with all our heart – where do others fit in? If our soul is totally wrapped up in God – how can we function in the everyday world? And if our minds are thinking about God all the time – when do we think of other things essential to our existence? And the beauty is that, if God is at the centre of our living and our loving, we are, in turn, caught up in God’s own life and love – and this is infinite…

* How easy – or otherwise – do you feel it is to love God so utterly?
* How might loving God as fully as you can help you in loving others – and all the things that make up daily life?

You may like to use this commandment as a prayer today – allowing it to teach your heart as well as your head.

Simply pray slowly and allow the words to sink into your heart. Pause between each phrase – and repeat if it helps… Take it slowly.

Lord – I want to love you with all my heart… show me how.

Lord – I want to love you with all my soul… show me how.

Lord – I want to love you with all my mind… show me how.

If any thoughts or ideas come to mind, give thanks… and, if they do not during the prayer, be open to them popping to mind as the day progresses.

*KT*

Saturday 26 August (St Ninian, or Blessed Dominic Barberi)

Scriptures: Ruth 2: 1-3, 8-11, 4: 13-17; Psalm 127; Matthew 23: 1-12

*Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ‘Everything the scribes and Pharisees do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi.’*

All religions have customs and clothing that are distinctive – but Jesus is warning against taking something that marks us out as being of a certain tradition and making it a status symbol. He recognises that this is especially a concern for people who are leaders in the community. Clearly, they need to stand out and for people to know that they have an authority to teach and to lead – but Jesus is concerned that it does not make them puffed up and proud rather than remembering that their primary role is to serve and bring people closer to God.

* Can you think of people who use the outward signs of faith or authority in ways that seem to say more about them than about the service of God?
* Are you ever tempted to “make your presence felt” in terms of what you wear or how you behave?

Pray today for those in positions of leadership within the Church – and the fine line they must tread in being true leaders and being overly concerned about their status.

*KT*