Sunday 3 September –Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Jeremiah 20: 7-9; Psalm 62; Romans 12: 1-2; Matthew 16: 21-27

*Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’*

Suffering is one of the greatest mysteries of human existence – especially when it is the innocent suffering at the hands of cruel people. Sometimes, suffering comes as part of life – illness or the trials of aging. There are times when someone is aware that they embarked on a path that is going to lead to their death and trying to prepare for this but, sometimes, those around them try to deny it. This can make life incredibly hard for the one who is ill who may wish to face up to what lies ahead – to start looking towards their eternal life – but feels they cannot because they will upset those around them. Jesus’ words to Peter may be too harsh for our usage – but remind us that there comes a stage in most lives when the focus moves from the earthly to the eternal.

* When have you been aware of someone needing to tackle a difficult issue and been reluctant to admit it to yourself?
* When might you have been in such a situation yourself?

If you are in these difficult circumstances, pray for strength and guidance. If you are not – pray for those who are facing them – and, if appropriate, for insights into how you might help and support them.

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Monday 4 September – (Translation of St Cuthbert)

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; Psalm 95; Luke 4: 16-30

*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth*

*...*

*All in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.*

These two extracts are just a few lines apart in today’s gospel. How is it possible for attitudes to change so rapidly – from near adulation to a rage strong enough to kill someone? Jesus has read words from Isaiah which speak of wonderful things about to happen – but Jesus somehow knows that there it is not just for those he has grown up with. He tells them that his message is not just for God’s Chosen People – but for everyone. It is, it seems, one thing to be the recipients of something special – quite another to be willing to share it with the rest of the world.

* How do you think it felt to listen to Jesus setting out what was, in effect, his manifesto?
* Why do you think the local people got so angry when Jesus said that others would also receive this good news – and probably even welcome it more?

Give thought today to your own attitude to sharing Jesus’ good news – whether you feel that it is just for good people who belong to the Church or welcome the idea of sharing it with others. Read the words of Jesus’ manifesto – and ponder how he might be inviting you to be part of the mission… and the blessings and difficulties that might go with that.

*KT*

Tuesday 5 September

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-6, 9-11; Psalm 26; Luke 4: 31-37

*In the synagogue in Capernaum, there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.’*

Jesus has left his home village and travelled to a town not too far away. Again he goes into the synagogue to preach and share the good news with the people there. We do not know the nature of the “unclean demon” but it is clear that it does not exclude him from the religious community. In fact, it seems to give him a clearer understanding of who Jesus is. Whereas his own people got stuck with the fact that Jesus appeared to be the son of Joseph, this man recognises him as the Holy One of God. It fills him with fear at first – fearing destruction – but Jesus goes on to set him free of what has held him bound.

* When have you sensed great goodness in someone else?
* Why do you think the man with the unclean spirit thought Jesus would destroy him rather than heal him?

Think today about the different ways people reacted to Jesus – and how he reacted to them. You might like to put yourself into the shoes of people seeing and hearing these events unfold and try to imagine how you would have felt if you had witnessed them.

*KT*

Wednesday 6 September

Scripture: Colossians 1: 1-8; Psalm 51; Luke 4: 38-44

*As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them…*

*At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place…*

In today’s gospel, we have a good example of how Jesus achieved what we would now call a work/life balance. He has clearly spent the evening fully occupied with caring for those who have been brought to him with a whole variety of illnesses. We do not know what time he got to bed, but it is clear that he knows that he needs to take time away from the busyness and to re-centre – to tune into his relationship with God – and to reflect on what has happened and what might be to come.

* When have given a lot of time and energy to doing “good works” – maybe to the point of weariness or even exhaustion?
* How do you build in time – possibly at daybreak but other times of day work too – to be still and re-tune your mind, heart and soul to God?

Spend some time today reflecting on your own work/ life/ prayer balance. Try to make time to pray in whatever way you find helpful – or simply spend time in stillness and openness to the love of God.

*KT*

Thursday 7 September

Scriptures: Colossians 1: 9-14; Psalm 97; Luke 5: 1-11

*Jesus said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.’ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.*

There is a sub-text to today’s gospel. Simon is an expert fisherman and knows that, if the fish were not around during the cool of the night, the chances are that they would have gone lower in the heat of the day – and probably too far to catch. As a friend of Simon, Jesus probably knows this but seems to see it as a way of teaching him something important. Yes, the fish have gone lower – but they are not entirely out of reach. In fact, by putting out into the deeper water, Simon finds his catch greatly increased – almost too much to bring in.

* What do you think the sub-text is here?
* How does Jesus use something Simon does every day (or night) to start preparing him for what lies ahead?

Ponder the gospel and what it might say to you – about not giving up but maybe taking a bit of a risk when doing what God seems to be asking.

*KT*

Friday 8 September – The Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Scripture: Micah 5: 1-4 or Romans 8: 28-30; Psalm 12; Matthew 1: 1-16, 18-23

*The birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.*

It seems strange that the gospel for the birthday of Mary focuses on the ancestry of Joseph and the birth of Jesus. And yet, it is this ancestry and the fact that Mary was a very human mother that makes the incarnation more “real”. Mary’s birth to ordinary parents emphasises the human nature of Jesus. The fact that she then married into Joseph’s family with its long history increased the understanding of Jesus’ Jewish heritage. On this day, we celebrate the birth of a baby girl over 2000 years ago – and marvel that God’s plan would do such extraordinary things in the life of this tiny child.

* Why do you think it is so important to set Jesus’ birth in the context of the families of Mary and Joseph?
* Do you think Mary’s parents had any inkling of the destiny of their baby daughter?

Spend some time today thinking about the birth of this baby girl who would grow up to be the Mother of God. You may also like to pray the Rosary to honour the day. (Friday is traditionally the day for the Sorrowful Mysteries – but you may like to consider using the Annunciation – the Nativity – the Assumption – the Crowning of Mary – as key events in the life of the woman Mary was to become).

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Saturday 9 September (St Peter Claver)

Scriptures: Colossians 1: 21-23; Psalm 53; Luke 6: 1-5

*One sabbath while Jesus was going through the cornfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why are you doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?’*

Today is the Jewish Sabbath and Jews will be following the ancient traditions around this day of rest. Some of the rules around this are quite strict – and, certainly, in Jesus’ day, people like the Pharisees observed them to the letter. What Jesus and his disciples were doing was, strictly speaking, “work” – harvesting grain and processing it in order to eat it. Of course, they were doing this because they were hungry and so could have been faced with a dilemma… to go hungry on the day set aside for rest and relaxation or do a small amount of work to feed themselves.

* Do you think Jesus is saying we should not have a day of rest – or something else?
* What work do you do on our own Sabbaths – the essentials (to allow you to eat and relax) or rather more than is strictly necessary?

Tomorrow is the Christian day of rest. How might you live it doing only what is essential so that you can relax and enjoy spending time with God, your family, your friends – or the natural world?

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