Sunday 24 September –Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Isaiah 55: 6-9; Psalm 144; Philippians 1: 20-24, 27; Matthew 20: 1-16

*When the first labourers came, they thought they would receive more than those who came later; 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.”*

It has to be admitted that the labourers who had worked all day had a point. They had been working long hours in the heat of a Middle Eastern day and, during the course of it, have seen others arriving in the vineyard including a whole bunch of people who arrive an hour before the end of the working day. No matter how hard they then worked, they would not have done as much as those from earlier in the day – and the conditions would have been much more comfortable. The landowner had not said anything but we can understand how the first labourers might have started to think that they deserved more in recompense for their work.

* Do you think the labourers who worked for the whole day had a point about deserving more for their longer hours in the heat of the day?
* How do you think this parable applies to situations in our own day?

This is a parable with several layers and ways of thinking about it. Read it through a few times and let the questions and thoughts about it emerge. Bring anything that particularly strikes you into a time of prayerful conversation with the Lord.

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Monday 25 September

Scripture: Ezra 1: 1-6, 14-20; Psalm 125; Luke 8: 16-18

*Jesus said, ‘No one after lighting a lamp hides it under a jar, or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light.’*

This is so obvious we do not think about it. When we put a light on, we do not immediately put a cover on it. We put lights on so that we can see to read, to cook, to work on projects. We have lights in the streets to help us to avoid stumbling and to feel safer. In the days of electric lighting this has never been easier. In Jesus’ day, wicks had to be trimmed and lamps had to be filled with oil, so lighting a lamp was not a matter of flicking on a switch – there was even less of an incentive to go to all that trouble and then hide the light.

* When do you put lights on?
* What do you think Jesus is trying to suggest when he talks about not hiding a light under a bed?

Notice today how often you switch lights on – and what you use them for. Think about what having light enables you to do – and what difference it would make if you had to take time to use oil lamps.

Think about how you can make best use of the blessing of ready lighting and give thanks for those who make it possible for you.

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Tuesday 26 September (Ss Cosmas and Damian)

Scripture: Ezra 6: 7-8, 12, 14-20; Psalm 121; Luke 8: 19-21

*Jesus said to them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.’*

At first reading, this might sound as if Jesus is rejecting his family. He has been incredibly busy and the crowds are taking up a lot of his time. His family are seriously concerned for him – clearly his behaviour has changed as he leaves the life of a carpenter behind and enters his new life as preacher, teacher and healer. They want to see for themselves that he is well but cannot get close. What Jesus might be pointing out to them could actually be an affirmation of his family! Yes, those around him are his wider family – but his mother and brothers are those who have and continue to listen to the word of God and act on it. This is what is required of his brothers and sisters in his wider family too.

* What do you think Jesus’ family thought of his change in behaviour?
* What responsibilities do we have as part of Jesus’ wider family?

Spend some time today thinking about your place in Jesus’ wider family – about your responsibility as his brother or sister. Reflect particularly on how you might hear Jesus’ words and act on them more faithfully.

*KT*

Wednesday 27 September (St Vincent de Paul)

Scripture: Ezra 9: 5-9; Tobit 13: 2, 4, 6-8; Luke 9: 1-6

*Jesus said to the disciples, ‘Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic.’*

This is a very challenging mission that Jesus places on his disciples. Very few people in our day could envisage taking on such a task and we can wonder how even those closest to Jesus could undertake it. Perhaps, what Jesus was aware of was the human temptation to prevaricate. He would realise that the disciples could be tempted to decide which tunic they would take – how much money they would need – and how many loaves would be enough… and so on. It may be that Jesus was trying to say – if you are going to undertake mission on my behalf, sometimes you just have to get on with it!

* If you are embarking on a task do you just get on with it – or do you plan to the nth degree just what you need?
* Do you think Jesus was deliberately making the task hard – or being realistic?

Very few people are asked to undertake a mission with so little – but all of us have little missions to undertake every day. Think about the day ahead and what you might do and where you might go – and pray for the grace to live the day eagerly – not getting bogged down in all the reasons for putting things off but being open to the possibilities God will put your way.

*KT*

Thursday 28 September (St Wenceslaus or Ss Laurence and his Companions)

Scriptures: Haggai 1: 1-8; Psalm 149; Luke 9: 7-9

*Herod said, ‘John I beheaded; but who is this about whom I hear such things?’ And he tried to see Jesus.*

Jesus’ time was – rather like our own – a time of rumour and speculation. There was a keen sense that the coming of the Messiah was imminent. The Roman Occupation of Israel and Judah was resulting in pockets of resistance and tensions between religion and compliance with imperial rule. People like Herod were also terrified of losing their power and status. He had already managed to get rid of one thorn in the flesh – and now he hears of another beginning to grow. It cannot be John coming back from the dead (one reason for beheading was the belief that it prevented the soul returning to the body) – so who is this person and what threat does he pose to Herod’s rule?

* Where do you see rumour and fear of losing power in the world today?
* Why do some leaders fear others – especially those who, at first sight, seem powerless but determined to fight justice?

Spend some time thinking of places around the world where leaders fight to keep power – even at the cost of death, disease and hunger for those in their country.

*KT*

Friday 29 September - Ss Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, Archangels

Scripture: Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14 or Apocalypse 12: 7-12; Psalm 137; John 1: 47-51

*Jesus said to Nathanael, ‘Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.’*

This is very early in John’s gospel but he has already set out his vision that the natural and supernatural worlds are much closer than most of us sense most of the time. As our culture has grown more rooted in the material side of life, many people have lost faith in the supernatural. Others have an interest in it that is not always healthy or wholesome – though, significantly today, some have developed greater interest in angels. The archangels we honour today are among the most powerful creatures in creation. Over the centuries they have travelled between this realm and the heavenly one, conveying messages that have changed the world. People have tried to describe or depict what they might look like – but are always influenced by our human understanding and imagination. As supernatural creatures of great power, they are beyond both.

* What do you believe about angels and archangels?
* How do you feel about Creation having beings more powerful than human beings in it?

Reflect on the mystery of great spiritual creatures being intimately concerned in the life of humanity. Ask the archangels for their intercession and the Lord to continue to allow them to protect and guide his frailer but nonetheless precious human creatures.

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Saturday 30 September (St Jerome)

Scriptures: Zechariah 2: 5-9, 14-15; Jeremiah 31: 10-12, 13; Luke 9: 43-45

*While everyone was amazed at all that he was doing, he said to his disciples, ‘Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.’*

Jesus is in the middle of a very powerful stage of his ministry – with miracles and parables. It is no wonder that the disciples and others are being carried away on a wave of enthusiasm. Jesus is adamant that they realise that this stage will not last. As we can imagine, people hear his words but are not in a state to hear them – or at least not to take them in. Who would want to hear that this wonderful person will one day be betrayed – arrested – tortured and killed?

* Why do you think Jesus felt the need to insist that the disciples did not lose sight of the betrayal and suffering to come?
* When have you struggled to let things “sink in to your ears” – to hear things that you would rather not have done?

Spend time today thinking about the great things happening in Jesus’ life at this point in the gospel – and the great –but awful –things that lie ahead. Pray for the grace to be open to all aspects of Jesus’ life and ministry – feeling the joy – the sorrow – the delight and the pain – of the earthly life of the man who changed the world.

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