Sunday 22 October –Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6; Psalm 95; 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-5; Matthew 22: 15-21

*The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?’*

Things are beginning to hot up in earnest for Jesus now and the plots to bring him down are increasing. A couple of details are noteworthy here. The Pharisees are determined to entrap Jesus but do not go to him themselves, preferring to send their disciples and some of Herod’s followers. And then there is the “soft-soaping” – buttering up to Jesus about his sincerity and truthfulness and lack of fear or partiality. Jesus sees straight through it of course and knows it for what it is – but the truth remains that these continue to be favourite methods of those working to undermine other people.

* When have you been at the receiving end of a “plot” – knowing that other people have been out to undermine you but, maybe, not knowing quite who?
* When have you been involved in something like this yourself? And how do you feel about it now?

People in leadership are often the targets of smear and dirty tricks campaigns. They are often aware of muttering and grumblings from people who will not say anything directly but who undermine them behind the scenes. Pray for those in positions of leadership and responsibility – especially those under such an attack against their personal integrity.

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Monday 23 October (St John of Capistrano)

Scripture: Romans 4: 20-25; Psalm/Canticle Luke 1: 69-75; Luke 12: 13-21

*Jesus said, ‘The rich man will say to his soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be then?”*

This is a small passage but suggests that, as a story-teller, Jesus may often have had a twinkle in his eye as he told his parables. It is easy to imagine the rich person having a conversation with his soul as if it is something quite separate from him. And then God coming into the conversation – quite possibly highlighting the rich person’s greatest fear – someone else getting their money!

* Do you think Jesus had a sense of humour?
* Why does Jesus have the rich man talking to his soul as if it is not part of himself?

Play this gospel out in your imagination – almost as a mini-melodrama. See if you (and the Lord) can make yourself smile (or even laugh). Reflect on how adding a bit of humour actually makes the parable that bit more powerful.

*KT*

Tuesday 24 October (St Antony Mary Claret)

Scripture: Romans 5: 12, 15, 17-21; Psalm 39; Luke 12: 36-38

*Jesus said, ‘Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.’*

If we think of rich and powerful people today acting as Jesus says the master in this parable does, we get a glimpse of just how radical what Jesus is suggesting is. Pretty realistically, we can say it just would not happen! But if we read it as telling us something about God, then it could give us a new insight into the kind of “master” God is. It is clear that the servants have their tasks and that the master – God – expects them to get on with them. But they are not just servitude – or about people knowing their place. For the master sees no shame or embarrassment in taking the same tasks on and letting his servants experience how it feels to be served and looked after.

* Do you find it easier to serve or be served?
* How would you feel if, on your arrival in heaven, Jesus himself sits you down and serves you with the heavenly banquet?

Reflect today on the God who serves – not physically coming and setting a meal before us but providing the earth on which we have our home – the weather that (on the whole) is good for growing and harvesting – and more… In whatever way feels right to you, thank God for his abundant and loving service of you and the world.

*KT*

Wednesday 25 October

Scripture: Romans 6: 12-18 Psalm 123; Luke 12: 39-48

*Jesus said, ‘If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.’*

From the number of CCTV cameras and other security devices, the fear of being broken into and robbed has not gone away. In fact, it could be said to be even greater now than when Jesus said this. Those of us who have been broken into can testify to the shock and dismay – and horror even – at finding their sanctuary invaded. The loss of possessions and precious things can cause deep distress and it is easy to think – “oh, if only we had known…” We hope that Jesus’ coming would not have such a devastating effect on us but, as he implies, part of ensuring that is being prepared and ready for whenever or however that moment comes.

* Have you or someone you know suffered a break-in? And how did it feel?
* Why would Jesus have used such an unpleasant event to illustrate how his return to the world might feel?

Think about Jesus’ imagery – and ponder how helpful or otherwise you find it. What does it stir up within you? Bring any thoughts or questions or concerns into a time of prayer asking for guidance or reassurance – or simply a sense of prepared-ness.

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Thursday 26 October – Ss Chad and Cedd

Scriptures: Romans 12: 3-13; Psalm 15; Luke 12: 49-53

*The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.*

Chad and Cedd were brothers who lived and studied under St Aidan on Lindisfarne and so were in at the beginning of the revitalising of Christianity in the North East. One characteristic of the time was that men who had been educated on the Island were noted for their knowledge and scholarship but also for their holiness and many took what they have learnt on this far outpost of Christianity out to the world. Chad went as bishop to Lichfield and Cedd to Bradwell in Essex. They clearly did not travel together as in the gospel but may well have kept in touch and supported each other in their missions.

* What do you think it might have felt like on Lindisfarne when Aidan was there and so much new energy was around?
* How did what they had learnt on Lindisfarne prepare Chad and Cedd for the work God was going to call them to undertake?

Spend time today in prayer for those who educate our young people – that they may inspire them and give them the knowledge and skills they will need to help in the re-evangelisation of our land – and others.

*KT*

Friday 27 October (St John of Capistrano)

Scripture: Romans 7: 18-25; Psalm 118; Luke 10: 1-9

*Jesus said to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, “It is going to rain”; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, “There will be scorching heat”; and it happens.’*

Clearly Jesus is using local weather lore here – but all around the world, people have proverbs or sayings to try to predict the weather. Some are pretty accurate – others much less so – but they are all born of the desire of human beings to work out what to expect so that they can be prepared. The signs are a result of a shared wisdom built up over centuries of observation of the signs that indicate good or bad weather. Interestingly, we have a common wisdom about the things that lead to a happy and fulfilled life – but people feel less willing to take notice of them than whether the sky is red at night.

* What weather lore do you know – and how reliable do you find it?
* What common wisdom about behaviour and life-style can you think of – and how reliable do you find that?

Spend time today thinking about the weather lore you know – from red skies at night to wet seaweed. Then think about proverbs or sayings about human behaviour or attitudes – if stuck, scroll through some of [these](http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/proverbs.html) and see which strike you. Bring any thoughts into a time of prayer about what messages are concealed in some of them for your growth as a follower of Jesus.

*KT*

Saturday 28 October – Ss Simon and Jude

Scriptures: Ephesians 2: 19-22; Psalm 18; Luke 6: 12-16

*Jesus went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them… Simon called the Zealot and Judas son of James.*

When you read the list of Jesus’ apostles, Simon and Judas come at the end – just before Judas Iscariot. Luke tells us that the choices came after Jesus had spent a whole night in prayer and yet, if you look at the list, these apostles leave much to be desired. It is as if Jesus is having to make the best of a not very strong field of candidates. We know very little about these apostles. Simon may have been one of the Zealots who fought against Roman rule and this Judas or Jude) suffers much from sharing a name with the one who was to betray Jesus. And yet, here they are – listed among the closest followers of Jesus and privy to his most intense teaching.

* Why do you think Jesus chose to spend a night in prayer before choosing these Twelve?
* What does it teach you about praying about difficult issues and possibly less than perfect outcomes?

If you are wrestling with a difficult issue, think about following Jesus’ example and spend time praying about it – overnight might be pushing it but can be a very powerful experience. Like Jesus, do not expect easy or straightforward answers to your prayer. If you are not ins such a situation, give some of your prayer-time to spiritually supporting those who are.

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