Sunday 29 October –Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture: Exodus 22: 20-26; Psalm 17; 1 Thessalonians 1: 5-10; Matthew 22: 34-40

*The Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’*

As a test, the question of which commandment is greatest does not seem to be particularly challenging. Admittedly, the Law by this time in Jewish history was immensely complex and rich and it may be that this is why it is a lawyer who asks the question. It is likely that he has given a lot of time to considering which are the essential laws and which are important but not quite so significant – and the odd few that are marginal but still need to be there. As so often, Jesus goes straight to the heart of the matter. There is not just one law that is the greatest – but two great pillars on which all the others rest: love of God and love of neighbour.

* What question would you like to ask Jesus?
* What answer might the lawyer have expected?

Spend time today reflecting on the difference between asking questions to learn more and asking them to make people look stupid or just for the sake of showing off. Think about questions of faith that you carry with you – and, in your own words, put them to the Lord in a time of prayer. The answers may not come quickly but trust that, in time, they will.

*KT*

Monday 30 October (The Blessed Martyrs of Douai College)

Scripture: Romans 8: 12-17; Psalm 67; Luke 13: 10-17

*Jesus said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?’*

The Sabbath was often a source of disagreement between Jesus and the leaders of the people. Today gives a very stark contrast between words and actions – and attitudes. Clearly the Law had to have some exclusions or easing of restrictions about doing absolutely no work – and ensuring that animals were looked after would clearly be an essential part of that. What is interesting is that Jesus is pointing out a serious attitude problem where someone would be happy to ensure that his ox or donkey would be looked after but would also be shocked about a woman being cured on that same Sabbath.

* Why do you think people sometimes have double-standards about what they think is acceptable or not?
* Are you as shocked as Jesus was by the attitudes of those around him?

Spend time today praying for God to show you your blind spots – the things you accept because “everyone does” – but which, actually, need challenging. Ask for the courage to make any changes in your attitudes and behaviour.

*KT*

Tuesday 31 October

Scripture: Romans 8: 18-25; Psalm 125; Luke 13: 18-21

*Jesus said, ‘It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.’*

Jesus has an amazing gift for taking things that are deeply mysterious and giving a way of thinking about them that does not explain them but gives a glimpse of their rich meaning. Most people have seen or felt a seed – and have seen a tree – and have seen or heard birds. And yet of these three everyday things Jesus gives an image of the Kingdom. It speaks of something that starts very small but which grows unimaginably large from such small beginnings. This then becomes a place where birds can build nests and raise their young in safety.

* How does this image of a seed becoming a tree becoming a place where birds can safely lay eggs and raise nestlings help you think about the Kingdom of God?
* Which part of the image do you personally find most appealing?

Use some prayer time today simply contemplating this image that Jesus offers us. Do not try to explain it or rationalise it – just allow the ideas to play in your mind and heart and offer their own wisdom.

*KT*

Wednesday 1 November – All Saints

Scripture: Apocalypse 7: 2-4, 9-14; Psalm 23; 1 John 3: 1-3; Matthew 5: 1-12a

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them…*

It is interesting to notice how the extract from Matthew’s gospel chosen for today opens: Jesus saw the crowds… He then goes into the Beatitudes highlighting the ways in which people are blessed in the Kingdom of God. Perhaps it is looking at all these people – the poor – the peacemakers – the mourners: a mix of all the kinds of people he grew up with and would mix with throughout his earthly life. He knew the great goodness of ordinary people – and it is appropriate that this is the gospel for the day on which we celebrate the lives of people who will never be canonised saints but whose lives contributed so much to the sum of good in the world.

* Who are the people you know who have died but whose lives made the world a better place?
* How can you live your life in such a way that you will eventually come into the warm and joyous company of all the saints?

Read the gospel for today and look at how the various sections apply to your own life. Pray for the grace to live your life so that you contribute to the sum of good – and come at last to join those you have identified as saints.

*KT*

Thursday 2 November – All Souls

Scriptures: Wisdom 3: 1-9 or Isaiah 25: 6-9; Psalm 22 or 26; Romans 5: 5-11 (or alternative from Lectionary); Matthew 11: 25-30

*Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.’*

Today we honour those who have died and who are on a journey to heaven. We have no idea what this looks or feels like but most of know that, when we die, there will be unfinished business. There will be relationship problems that we did not resolve – or guilts from our past – or shame that we could not face in our earthly life. it is Catholic tradition that God gives us a transition – sometimes called Purgatory – which allows us to deal with these things before we are brought into the glory of heaven. Some people find it a frightening prospect but perhaps these words from Jesus remind us of the one who will lead us through it and offer comfort and encouragement.

* How do Jesus’ words help you look ahead to your own time as part of the “all souls”?
* What could do in this life to be better prepared for the next?

Keep your prayer very simple today – repeating Jesus’ words to yourself – especially if you are facing a terminal or life-limiting illness. Allow the words to feed your soul so that you begin to lose the fear of the time of transition from this life to the fullness of the next and grow in confidence in the love of God who created you and will lead you on that last journey.

*KT*

Friday 3 November (St Martin de Porres or St Winefride)

Scripture: Romans 9: 1-5; Psalm 147; Luke 14: 1-6

*Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, ‘Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?’*

The meal that Jesus went to eat would have been prepared the day before as the Sabbath was kept as a strict day of rest. Jesus would have seen Mary doing something similar and known that, barring emergencies, everyone took the day to pray and rest. Jesus also knew that his interpretation of the Sabbath was one of the bones of contention with the Pharisees – and risks being seen as rude by asking if it would be acceptable to cure the man with dropsy there and then – or should he make him wait.

* Do you think Jesus was being bad mannered by asking such a question of his host? Or was it a challenging conversation opener?
* How do you think the Pharisee host felt – when questioned – and when he saw the man going to celebrate the Sabbath whole and well?

Try different ways of posing the question Jesus asked – challenging – genuinely seeking an answer – and so on. Which one sounds most like Jesus to you? Pray for the grace to know when – and how – to ask difficult questions so that you learn more – as do those you are asking questions of.

*KT*

Saturday 4 November (St Charles Borromeo)

Scriptures: Romans 11: 1-2, 11-12, 25-29; Psalm 93; Luke 14: 1, 7-11

*Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. ‘When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, “Give this person your place”, and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place...’*

This is the same meal that we heard about yesterday and it is clearly quite an event. Jesus was a great observer of people and then reflecting back to them what he sees. It is likely that some of them were, in fact, vying to sit closer to him – but, perhaps, less to hear what he has to say (unless to check out how orthodox he is being) than to be seen to be close to the local celebrity. We do not know whether the host had, in fact, had to ask people to move – but we can assume that everyone there had had some experience of positions at tables being shifted as more important people arrived later and were offered the best places despite them already being taken.

* Have you ever had the experience of sitting in the wrong place and having to move? And how did it feel?
* When have you – or someone you know – been in a position to be close to a celebrity and enjoyed some reflected glory?

Think today about seat placings and how they can speak of importance or seniority. Spend a few moments thinking about your own parish – your own church – and consider where Jesus might sit if he came to it… and what he would teach you by where he chooses.

*KT*