

Monday 1 June

Mark 12:1-12 • St Justin (Martyr)

Yesterday we celebrated the great solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. The feast came as a climax to the two great seasons of the Church's year, during which time we entered once again into the events of the paschal mystery of Jesus – his saving death and resurrection, his ascension and glorification at the Father's right hand, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, forming the Church as the Body of Christ.

Through the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, the Church continues, through time and in every place, to make present the saving mission of Christ for the benefit of the whole human race. The sending of his Son to earth to accomplish his plan of salvation, followed by the sending of the Spirit to extend the work of salvation to the world, is the work and masterplan of God the Father. It is the manifestation of the Father's love overcoming the power of sin and of the evil one and drawing humanity back into a covenant relationship with himself. The goal of God's saving plan was to restore every human being to an intimate relationship with the Father.

In the light of our celebration of the Trinity, we can read the parable of Jesus in today's Scripture reading as a profound revelation of the Father. In the parable we can clearly see an allegory of God's plan of salvation – God's choice of Israel as his vineyard placed in the care of the religious leaders. God sent a succession of prophets who often were not listened to and sometimes mistreated. Finally, God sent his beloved Son, Jesus, but he was rejected and put to death on the cross.

Perhaps the somewhat strange element of the parable appears in the vineyard owner's words, 'They will respect my son' (v. 6). We could think that God expected his Son to be welcomed and that things went wrong. However, even in the Old Testament we can see that the Saviour was to be a Suffering Servant. Jesus himself explained the Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, showing that it was central to God's plan that the Messiah would bring salvation through his sacrificial death. The parable seems to emphasize the vineyard owner's perseverance even in the face of continual rejection. In this we see the Father's persevering love which is ultimately stronger than human sin and mysteriously uses human sin and rejection as the very means of salvation.

Tobit 1:3; 2:1-8 • Psalm 111(112):1-6

Mark 12:1-12

Tuesday 2 June

Mark 12:13-17

Jesus clearly saw through the deceitful flattery of the Pharisees and Herodians who were trying to trap him. Pharisees and Herodians had opposite views about paying Roman taxes. They thought that however Jesus answered, one or other group would have a reason to condemn him. But Jesus ingeniously side-stepped the question by asking whose image was imprinted on the coins. By eliciting from them their clear knowledge that the coins bore the image of Caesar, Jesus justified the paying of the taxes and perhaps also disarmed the Pharisees who must have possessed such coins – hinting that they were paying the tax even if they objected. So they were all caught out in their trickery.

But Jesus' words contain a deeper teaching. 'Give back to Caesar', he said, 'what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's' (v. 17 NIV). But what is it that belongs to God? Or what is it that we should give back to God? Jesus surely means us to understand that what belongs to God is whatever bears the image of God – just as the coins issued by Caesar for tax-paying belong to Caesar.

Now we have reached the heart of the teaching contained in this little interaction between Jesus and his opponents. Every Israelite would know that every human being created by God bears the image of God. Think back to the account of creation in the opening chapters of Genesis. God said: 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness' (Gen. 1:26). There is a profound truth here. What belongs to God is our whole life and very self. God created us and gave us life: we belong to him. Not in the sense of a servile slavery, but in the sense of our ultimate purpose. God made us to be in an intimate covenant relationship with him. The relationship is one of love, and our real purpose is to give ourselves to God in love, as husbands and wives give themselves to one another in marriage. Whatever our marital situation might be, whatever our career path or circumstances, the Father calls us to give our lives to him and, in union with Jesus, to live as his children.

Father, you have rescued me through the death and resurrection of your Son and the gift of your Spirit. In love, I give my life to you today. I belong to you. Amen.

Tobit 2:9-14 • Psalm 111(112):1-2, 7-9

Mark 12:13-17

Wednesday 3 June

Mark 12:18-27 • St Charles Lwanga & Companions (Memorial)

Today's Gospel reading records the last in a series of encounters in which Jesus was faced with an attempt at entrapment. This time it was by the Sadducees, a priestly class who only accepted part of the Old Testament. In particular, they rejected some of the later books of the Jewish Scriptures in which the doctrines concerning the resurrection of the dead, angels and eternal life began to be expressed. The conundrum they presented to Jesus was designed to show the absurdity of the idea of resurrection. It is rather similar to a situation in the book of Tobit in which a woman successively married seven men, all of whom died in strange circumstances (ch. 3). The Sadducees, however, did not accept the book of Tobit as part of Scripture.

Jesus was forthright in his reply to them, declaring that they were wrong and that they knew neither Scripture nor the power of God. Enlightening them first about the transforming power of God, he explained that when human beings rise from the dead, they are like the angels who do not marry. The resurrection life is not simply a resuscitation, but a whole new creation. We will not be like the angels in the sense of being pure spirits – rather we shall be like them in living the heavenly life. Our bodies will be glorified. The only image we have to help us imagine what this will be like is that of Jesus after his resurrection.

Although in heaven there will be no more marriage, this is not to say that married people will no longer know their earthly spouse. While on earth they were sacramental signs of the covenant love between Christ and the Church and, as Paul said, even though other things will pass away, love will endure (see 1 Cor. 13).

Jesus also chastised the Sadducees for their lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, which testify to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It could hardly be the case that God would reveal himself as the God of patriarchs who had simply ceased to exist! Soon, however, the Sadducees would have still greater evidence of the resurrection, because Jesus himself passed through the boundary of death to a new resurrection life. In this event the whole of Scripture is fulfilled and the power of God fully manifested.

Lord Jesus, you are the Resurrection and the Life. In you is our hope.

Tobit 3:1-11, 16-17 • Psalm 24(25):2-9

Mark 12:18-27

Thursday 4 June

Mark 12:28-34

In today's Gospel Mark describes another encounter with a Jewish leader. This time it is with one of the scribes. At that time a scribe was not so much one of the official authorities in Israel as a professional scholar, who studied the Torah, the Law of God found in the first five books of the Bible. This meeting between Jesus and the scribe is entirely different from the preceding encounters in that the scribe came to Jesus with an open heart and mind. He wanted to learn from Jesus.

His question was one much debated by the scholars of the Law. Could the whole Law of God be summarized in a single formula? It seems that Jesus was the first person to give a clear answer to that question. To begin with he quoted a passage of Scripture well known to the Jews: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one..." (v. 29 NIV, quoting Deut. 6:4-5). These words and those that follow are known as the Shema. They were written down and placed in a little box, which was attached to the doorpost of Jewish homes. These words express the heart of Jewish faith, that God is one and is Lord of all things. As the Creator, all of our lives belong to him.

As we saw in Tuesday's meditation, our responsibility is to give back to God what belongs to him. Essentially, we are called to give ourselves to God in love. 'Love the Lord your God', Jesus declared, 'with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' (v. 30 NIV). The reference to heart, soul, mind and strength implies making the love of God arise from the very centre of our being, and letting it shape our very thoughts. There is also the implication that it does require some effort: we need to exert ourselves actively to keep love of God as the governing factor in our lives.

Jesus went on to add to this the extra sentence: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' To place our neighbour's well-being on the same level as our own is an exacting call. It is perhaps impossible without the grace of Christ transforming us into his own likeness. Maybe this is why Jesus told the scribe that he was close to the kingdom of God. He needed Jesus Christ in his life – as do we all.

Tobit 6:10-11; 7:1, 9-14; 8:4-9 • Psalm 127(128):1-5

Mark 12:28-34

Friday 5 June

Mark 12:35-37 • St Boniface (Memorial)

After a series of incidents in which Jesus is challenged and questioned by others, the short passage in today's reading turns things around. Jesus himself asks a rhetorical question. It probably seems a little strange to us and seems to come out of nowhere: 'How can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David?'

Why would Jesus even ask the question? He seems to imply a denial of this Old Testament tradition when he quotes Psalm 110 in which David is speaking of the Messiah (the Christ), who is being addressed by God: 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand...' Jesus suggests that there is an apparent problem here. Why would David refer to the Christ as 'my Lord' if the Christ is the son of David? All of this seems rather remote for us – a bit of technical discussion about the Jewish interpretation of the Psalms.

What is Jesus doing? And why does the Gospel writer tell us that 'the great throng heard him gladly'? Were they just enjoying the fact that Jesus was turning the tables on the experts, some of whom had just been deceitfully trying to trick and trap him? This seems likely.

What Jesus' hearers could not have realized was that he was revealing something of the mystery of his own true identity. We can appreciate from our later perspective that Jesus was speaking about the mystery of the incarnation. Jesus was, in fact, both the son of Mary, who belonged to the line of David, and the Son of God. The anomalies and strangeness of some of the Old Testament language is only resolved by the incarnation and the paschal mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. Who could have guessed that the Messiah would be God's own beloved Son? The Old Testament faith had almost no concept of a relationship of persons in the Godhead – no concept indeed of the Trinity of persons. Even in these few verses this mystery is only hinted at. Yet perhaps the great throng had a sense that Jesus was revealing something far beyond what even the Scripture experts could grasp. The hint about the Father/Son relationship in God and the further revelation that God would come in person to enter the line of David in order to accomplish salvation touched their hearts and gave them joy. Someone greater than even David had come among them. It touches our hearts too.

Tobit 11:5-17 • Psalm 145(146):2, 7-10

Mark 12:35-37

Saturday 6 June

Mark 12:38-44

Our Gospel reading today seems to bring together two apparently unrelated teachings of Jesus: his warning to beware of the scribes and their ostentatious behaviour, and his observation of the poor widow's contribution to the temple treasury and his praise of her behaviour. In fact, the two passages are related, but the relationship lies in the great contrast between them. There is a contrast first of all between the persons themselves: the scribes were among the leading citizens in Jewish society, while a widow was almost on the bottom rung. But the contrast is even greater when we consider the difference in their behaviour.

Jesus had observed that the scribes consistently acted in a way that drew attention to themselves. We describe it today as the celebrity culture. What made this scandalous was the fact that they were seen as religious leaders interpreting the Scriptures for the people. Their behaviour was inconsistent with their teaching and really undermined their authority.

The widow, on the other hand, actually lived out her faith in God in a way that might have been expected from the scribes. While the scribes took care of themselves first and only then gave to God out of their surplus, the widow gave to God what she herself really needed to be able to procure the basic essentials of life. Her generous gift meant that she had to rely on God to supply her vital needs. This is true faith indeed.

Is Jesus here praising the widow for her poverty? Certainly, in Scripture (the Old Testament) the poor (in Hebrew, the *anawim*) have a special relationship to God – due not so much to their poverty per se, but the attitude of total dependency on God that it can inspire.

Pope Francis has consistently invited us to have a special regard and care for the poor – in the first place to recognize our responsibility to help and serve them, but also to see them as models for our own dependency on God. Even in our relative wealth, the model of the poor could engender in us a spirit of generosity rather than a desperate desire to hold on to what we have. It may appear to be irresponsible but it reflects the generosity of Jesus himself who emptied himself but was then raised up by the Father. Father, teach me to trust you for what I need and respond to the cry of the poor.

Tobit 12:1, 5-15, 20 • Tobit 13:2-8

Mark 12:38-44

Sunday 7 June

Mark 14:12-16, 22-26 • The Body and Blood of Christ (B) (Solemnity)

Today we celebrate the great feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (traditionally known as Corpus Christi). Our reading today from Mark's Gospel seems like a purely descriptive passage, but it is packed with great significance and leads us into the depths of the mystery of the Eucharist.

The reading divides into the preparations for the Passover meal and then the meal itself. Strangely, the central element of the Passover meal, the roasted lamb, is mentioned in the first part of the reading, but not at all in the second. The head of each household took the sacrificial lamb to the temple where it was inspected to ensure it was without spot or blemish and offered in sacrifice to God, after which its blood was drained and sprinkled on the altar. It was then taken back home to be roasted for the Passover. In addition to being an act of worship of God, the sacrifice of the lamb and the sprinkling of its blood represented the renewing of the covenant relationship between those offering the sacrifice and God. Blood was seen as something sacred – containing the very life of a being. Nothing more valuable could be offered to God. These amazing realities celebrated in the temple and shared in through eating the Passover meal turn out, however, to be mere shadows or signs of an even more amazing reality.

The fact that, in Mark's account, the lamb is not mentioned or seemingly not even eaten might appear strange. Yet Mark's purpose is to focus on Jesus, who is now himself the Lamb of sacrifice. Jesus and his disciples are celebrating his last Passover supper, but it is also a new kind of Passover – the first of many that will be celebrated in the life of the Church, and one which we will probably share in ourselves today. In this new Passover, Jesus is the true Lamb whose blood is to be drained in sacrificial worship of his Father.

All other Passover lambs were signs or shadows awaiting the manifestation of Jesus. It is his sacrificed life and blood that establishes a new covenant relationship with the Father. We all share in this relationship by eating and drinking not a roasted lamb but what has become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, present for us in the sacramental signs of bread and wine.

O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment thine.

Exodus 24:3-8 • Psalm 115(116):12-18
Hebrews 9:11-15 • Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Monday 8 June

Matthew 5:1-12

According to a diarist, during a long talk with Harry Hopkins and others in 1941, Winston Churchill discussed the task of rebuilding the world when the war would finally end. During this conversation, Churchill said, ‘we could find nothing better than Christian Ethics on which to build and the more closely we followed the Sermon on the Mount, the more likely we were to succeed in our endeavours’ (Martin Gilbert, *Finest Hour*). For Churchill, and for many others, the Sermon on the Mount is ‘the last great word in ethics’ (Martin Gilbert, *Never Despair*).

In today’s reading, we read the part of the sermon in which we are given the Beatitudes. Together, the Beatitudes present a new set of Christian ideals that focus on a spirit of love and humility, expressing the essence of the teachings of Jesus on mercy, spirituality and compassion. The word ‘beatitude’ comes from the Latin noun *beātītūdō* which means ‘happiness’. Pope Francis, who has chosen the Beatitudes as the theme for the next three World Youth Days, tells us that ‘To be blessed means to be happy’. The Gospel of St Luke also includes the Beatitudes, and here they are the ‘happys’: ‘Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh’ (6:21 JB). The Beatitudes are blessings. It sounds odd to say that we are blessed to be sad, but we are, because if we are sad or sorry, it means we love and care. ‘In proclaiming the Beatitudes, Jesus asks us to follow him and to travel with him along the path of love, that leads to eternal life. It is not an easy journey, but he promises to always be with us,’ says Pope Francis.

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven...’ (vv. 3-12)

2 Corinthians 1:1-7 • Psalm 33(34):2-9

Matthew 5:1-12

Tuesday 9 June
Matthew 5:13-16

Evangelization is synonymous with missionary efforts. Often when we think about being a missionary, we have in mind the idea of introducing Christ to non-Christians and proclaiming the Good News. We think about early Christians travelling from community to community to preach and about the work of religious today in places like Africa. But in today's reading Jesus is telling us how we can all be missionaries. Not necessarily by preaching in the traditional sense, but by being a shining example.

Evangelization isn't just about getting new people to come to church and drawing them deeper into the life of faith: it also means reaching out to baptized Catholics who have become distant from their faith and helping practising Catholics to grow in their faith and spiritual understanding. We are evangelizing when we invite a member of our family or a friend to come to Mass or to a prayer group with us.

In living out the Beatitudes we have the opportunity to be everyday evangelists, showing what we believe through our actions. We can do this in our families and workplaces, arousing the curiosity of others by placing our light on a stand where 'it gives light to all in the house' (v. 15). This is something which Pope Francis would encourage: 'An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.'

On the need for joy in evangelizing, Pope Francis has written, 'There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter...An evangelizer must never look like someone who has just come back from a funeral!' (*Evangelii gaudium*). The Pope's words are reminiscent of those of Jesus: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything' (v. 13 NIV). 'Good salt' smiles and shares a personal greeting with those that they meet.

'Star of the new evangelization, help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world. Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God's little ones, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia!' (From Pope Francis' Prayer to Mary, star of the new evangelization)

2 Corinthians 1:18-22 • Psalm 118(119):129-135
Matthew 5:13-16

Wednesday 10 June

Matthew 5:17-19

Sometimes we are so familiar with a Bible passage that we miss the radical nature of what it says. Matthew's is the most Jewish of the Gospels, insisting on every page that Jesus fulfils the promises of the Old Law. In the passages from the Sermon on the Mount that we have been reading this week, Jesus gives a whole new Law. As is made clear in today's reading, this perfects the Old Law. Jesus declares, 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them' (v. 17). Indeed, Pope Francis has said that 'The Beatitudes are the path that God indicates as the answer to man's innate desire for happiness, and they perfect the Commandments of the Old Covenant.'

The Sermon on the Mount is the Old Law perfected and read in a new way. Jesus didn't come with a list of rules to obey, through living out the Beatitudes: he invites people into a personal relationship with God. Being a Christian is about metanoia – a complete change of heart. We are changed on the inside, not controlled from the outside.

Matthew is deeply Jewish in his thinking. So why is he so keen to present Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Law? The Jews who were listening to his Sermon on the Mount must have been shaken up by what they had heard. Perhaps they were beginning to think, 'Well, what about the Old Covenant?' Jesus pre-empts this question by his declaration that he is the fulfilment of the Covenant – a point that Matthew underlines throughout his Gospel. Those Jews who do not accept Jesus as the Christ need to think again.

In this Gospel account there is a suggestion of a background of persecution of Christian Jews by Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Christ (11:21-24). The verse immediately before this reference is thought-provoking: 'Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent' (11:20 NIV). 'Repent' is an interesting word. In his study *The Great Meaning of the Word Metanoia*, Treadwell Walden says that metanoia – a change of heart – conveys the essence of the gospel. When Matthew talks about repentance, he is talking about metanoia.

Lord, make my life a window for your light to shine through, and a mirror to reflect your love to all I meet. Amen.

2 Corinthians 3:4-11 • Psalm 98(99):5-9

Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday 11 June

Matthew 5:20-26 • St Barnabas (Memorial)

That Jesus comes to make the Law perfect is clear in today's Gospel. Jesus cites the Law, and then says, in effect, that it is not good enough. Not only should people not kill, they should not be angry. The passage goes on in the same vein: not only should people avoid adultery, they should not look at others with lust in their hearts (5:27-30). Not only should they not swear falsely, they should take no oaths at all (5:33-37). Instead of retaliating when injured, they should 'turn the other cheek' (5:38-42). And, finally, people should not only love their neighbours but their enemies as well (5:43-47). Then they will be perfect as God is perfect (5:48). Our whole understanding of Jesus and the gospel message depends very heavily on the rigorous ethics of the Sermon on the Mount.

And these are rigorous ethics. This section of the Sermon on the Mount is demanding. The language is harsh in today's reading, but actually Jesus' message is always one of compassion. What Jesus is saying is that we should all look at ourselves and our relationships with each other (and with God): 'So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift' (5:23-24). The sacrifice here is probably a guilt offering, brought to atone for a wrong done to another person. But the sacrifice doesn't count if the wrong isn't put right first.

Our closing prayer today understands the deep connection between self-awareness and God-awareness. In the same vein St Bernard of Clairvaux said, 'Know yourself and you will have a wholesome fear of God... Without knowledge of self, we have no knowledge of God.' The words in today's Gospel may sound harsh, but the message is one of invitation into a personal relationship with God. If we treat each other right, we are obeying the one and only commandment that Jesus gave us: 'love one another as I have loved you' .

Taken as a whole, the message contained within the Sermon on the Mount is that people should be perfect, but God is merciful.

'Grant, Lord, that I may know myself that I may know thee. Amen.' (St Augustine)

Proper of Saints: Acts 11:21-26; 13:1-3 • Psalm 97(98):1-6

Proper of Season: Matthew 5:20-26

Friday 12 June

John 19:31-37 • The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus (B) (Solemnity)

The theology of the Sacred Heart is overwhelmingly visual. It is a spiritual devotion which recalls and represents God's love for us; a meditation on the living heart of Jesus, which loves us and has suffered for us and with us. It is not a theology that suits everyone. The German Catholic theologian Richard Egenter wrote in 1958 that 'the representation of a realistic heart on top of our Lord's clothes is immediately repugnant'. But as Pope Benedict XVI has said, the theology of the Sacred Heart captures the essence of Christ's love 'in a simple and authentic way'.

The Gospel of St John emphasizes both the divinity and humanity of Christ. In today's Gospel reading and elsewhere in his Gospel, John gives examples of the physicality of Christ. He recounts the showing of Christ's hands and his side to the disciples (20:20), and his invitation to Thomas to put his hand into his side (20:27).

The Sacred Heart belongs to the physical person of Christ, but is a symbol both of his humanity and his divinity: the Word made flesh. At the sanctuary of the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Karen, a suburb of Nairobi, a life-sized bronze statue shows Jesus without a visible heart on his chest and with the stigmata removed from his hands. One Kenyan, reflecting on the statue, said that 'African Catholics see the image of Jesus in totality, they don't separate the heart from the person of Jesus'. Here the devotion has shifted, says Fr Callisto Locheng, to 'feeling close to Jesus, an emphasis on his kindness, his love for his neighbour. The Sacred Heart means trust in God and how to live with suffering. The message is that Jesus suffers with you.' This is a theme which builds very much on what we have been reflecting upon this week.

'O most holy heart of Jesus, fountain of every blessing, I adore you, I love you, and with lively sorrow for my sins I offer you this poor heart of mine. Make me humble, patient, pure and wholly obedient to your will. Grant, Good Jesus, that I may live in you and for you. Protect me in the midst of danger. Comfort me in my afflictions. Give me health of body, assistance in my temporal needs, your blessing on all that I do, and the grace of a holy death. Amen.'

Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8-9 • Isaiah 12:2-6

Ephesians 3:8-19 • John 19:31-37

Saturday 13 June

Luke 2:41-51 • Immaculate Heart of Mary (Memorial)

We don't know very much about Jesus' early life. But this account from the Gospel of St Luke is revealing.

When Mary and Joseph discover Jesus in the temple, he is listening to the teachers and asking them questions: 'and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies' (v. 47). The twelve-year-old Jesus demonstrates a number of qualities which point to the person he is: he's bright, has social confidence, and is eager to engage with the teachers in the temple and to learn. Luke tells us that when Mary and Joseph find Jesus they are overcome, as any parent would be. Mary reacts like any mother, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you' (v. 48 NIV). Jesus himself is unfazed, basically saying, 'Well, where did you think I would be?'

This account reveals not only something about Jesus' intelligence but also the sensitivity he showed to those around him. Because, having been told off by his parents for worrying them, Luke tells us that he returned with them to Nazareth and 'was obedient to them' (v. 51). He must have grown up quietly in Nazareth, respectful of his mother's feelings, because there is no other account of his early years. For Mary's part, she 'treasured all these things in her heart' (v. 51 NIV). Was she already aware that one day she would have to watch her son tortured and slowly killed before her eyes? Mary never flinched from her destiny; she had faith and contained her feelings within her heart.

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour;
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.
Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,
for the Almighty has done great things for me.
Holy is his name,
and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.
He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart.
He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he
has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of
Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy
– according to the promise he made to our ancestors –
of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.' (Luke 1:46-55 JB)

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 • Psalm 102(103):1-4, 8-12

Proper of Saint: Luke 2:41-51

Sunday 14 June

Mark 4:26-34 • (B) Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

All of the readings during this past week have had a theme of relationship running through them, specifically our relationship with God. The same is true of today's reading, which is about the kingdom of God. Jesus tried to explain the concept of the kingdom through parables. But what is the kingdom of God? It can be understood not as a place, but rather as a relationship, which exists wherever people live out the Sermon on the Mount and focus on their relationship with Jesus.

We are who we are because of our relationships. There is a saying that 'you can choose your friends, but not your family'. Although that is true, we are defined more by our relationships with our friends than our relations. According to the first of the parables recounted by Mark in today's reading, we get the idea that our relationship with Jesus can grow and develop even while we are sleeping. The seed grows by itself. This is our natural curiosity and longing for God. As it states in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 'The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for' (para. 27). St Augustine summed this up when he said, 'You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'

The parable of the mustard seed tells us that from very small seeds great faith can grow. The mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds, but it grows into one of the largest plants. Think about what would happen if a tiny mustard seed was planted in good soil where it could get all the water and sun it needed. This is what our faith – our relationship with God – is like. It may start small, it may stay small for a while, but if we give our faith what it needs, it grows and grows and becomes strong enough to get us through anything.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of faith, a gift meant to change our lives and lead us to heaven. Help us to know our faith more deeply, live our faith more fully and share our faith more freely with others. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Ezekiel 17:22-24 • Psalm 91(92):2-3, 13-16

2 Corinthians 5:6-10 • Mark 4:26-34

Monday 15th June

Matthew 5:38-42 • Ordinary Weekday

Discipleship is what the Christian life is all about. But what does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? The dictionary defines a disciple as ‘someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits themselves to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way’. Our Gospel reading today takes us back to the Sermon on the Mount. In the ‘antitheses’ (Matt. 5:21-48), Jesus appears to be demanding that we lead perfect lives.

The word ‘antithesis’ comes from the Greek for ‘setting opposite’, from ἀντί which means ‘against’. Today’s reading comes from the verses in the Sermon on the Mount that apparently contrast with the Beatitudes. But do they really? Jesus did not go around condemning people. He invites us into a personal relationship with God; he advises us on how we can be happy. In the ‘antitheses’ Jesus builds on his earlier teaching and suggests how we should live. But he doesn’t threaten to punish us if we don’t achieve perfection.

Elsewhere in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus makes clear that his teaching is not about adding to our burdens: ‘Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light’ (11:28-30 NJB). It is true that Jesus’ disciples would have found discipleship harder than these words imply, but Jesus was aware of this. His disciples had to be prepared to give up everything, but when they did that, the Gospels present Jesus as someone who was patient with their weaknesses and doubts. In the same way, if we try and live up to the ideal set out in the Sermon of the Mount, we will be forgiven and supported when we inevitably fall short. Our fundamental goal should be to grow in the likeness of Christ, to be his disciples. We can try to be perfect, but no one is perfect as God is perfect.

Dear Lord, help me to make the right decisions and to do the right things in life. Help me to live my life as you would want by being caring, loving and respectful to others, and to follow in Jesus’ footsteps by being kind and treating others as I would like to be treated. Amen.

2 Corinthians 6:1-10 • Psalm 97(98):1-4

Matthew 5:38-42

Tuesday 16 June

Matthew 5:43-48

In today's Gospel reading, Christ commands: 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'. This, he tells us, is how God behaves, that he 'makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'; that he loves all equally, without condition, and is therefore 'perfect'. If we also view everybody as beautifully lovable, then we too can be 'perfect', says Jesus.

This is no tiny task! Minnie Riperton sang 'Lovin' you is easy 'cause you're beautiful'. We all know people who are easy to love and sometimes that love lasts a lifetime. We may feel irritated by a child, spouse, pet or friend at times, but gradually we find ourselves loving those imperfections too.

Other folk are not so easy to love! Following the Minnie Riperton line, we might think to ourselves, 'Lovin' you is hard 'cause you're unkind' or 'Lovin' you is hard 'cause you're annoying!' How do we love the people who make us uncomfortable? Perhaps they've been cruel to someone we love; perhaps they are racist; perhaps they have committed criminal acts; or maybe, for reasons we cannot lay a finger on, they make our skin crawl.

But we must, says Jesus, find a way to love them. We must love everybody – no matter what. This, the second commandment, is his ambition for us. This is the chief way in which we demonstrate that we are 'sons [and daughters] of [our] Father who is in heaven'. Along with loving God, we must love one another.

There is not meant to be a prize for loving. If we love God or other people in order to gain a reward, it is not genuine love. Of course, loving brings its own reward: loving others makes us happy – scientific research has shown that when we love, we produce happy brainwaves and release feel-good chemicals. And in loving others, we make them feel good. As Minnie Riperton sings: 'Lovin' you, I see your soul come shinin' through'. Love is the best medicine; it makes other people blossom.

But real Love doesn't seek those rewards. Real love is a strong stirring in the heart, generated without motive or condition. And this love can only be born in our hearts when we truly understand how much God loves each one of us and the lengths to which he went to bring us back into relationship with him.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9 • Psalm 145(146):2, 5-9

Matthew 5:43-48

Wednesday 17 June
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

When we give money to the poor, when we pray and when we fast, we should not, says Christ, ‘sound a trumpet’ (NRSV). We should do these three things secretly, keeping them to ourselves. Blowing your own trumpet, ‘to be honoured by men’ (NIV), is not big or clever!

Of course, there are some circumstances in which talking about donating, prayer and fasting is fine or unavoidable. Perhaps somebody asks us about how much we give to (or do for) charity. Not to answer them might seem rude. When in the company of like-minded folk, it is sometimes nice to discuss prayer and fasting.

What Jesus wants us to avoid is bragging about these things for our own self-aggrandisement. Perhaps we worry what others think of us, or we have a low sense of self-worth that leads us to think that we must forge an impressive identity. Maybe we hope that by declaring how much we pray, donate or fast, others will view us with favour or even envy. They will think us ‘spiritual’, ‘kind’ and ‘generous’.

In our highly competitive society, this is understandable. We are taught to compete from a very early age. As we are growing up, we are compared by our performance in exams and on the sports field. In the adult world, politicians try to outdo one another; celebrities are lauded for their clothing and appearance; and material things, such as cars, become symbols of success. But just because holy acts, such as alms-giving, prayer and fasting, are good deeds does not make them immune to this mass air of competition. Jesus wants us to avoid doing these three things for external praise. He wants us to keep them secret, sharing them only with him.

Indeed, prayer in particular can feel so intensely precious and sacred that to be pressured to discuss it can feel like a violation. St Thérèse of Lisieux was highly distressed when she gave in to demands to speak of her experience of the Virgin Mary. Whenever we instinctively don’t want to talk about our inner life with God, perhaps we should keep shtum! And even if we don’t feel sensitive about it, we can respectfully remember that others might. To many mystics, interaction with God goes way beyond the erotic life of a couple in terms of intimacy and privacy: if we wouldn’t dream of quizzing people about their sex lives, maybe we shouldn’t quiz them about prayer!

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 • Psalm 111(112):1-4, 9
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday 18 June

Matthew 6:7-15

‘When you pray,’ Christ instructs us in today’s Gospel, ‘do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him’ (vv. 7-8 ESV). He tells us to say the Lord’s Prayer. However, this we patter off at each church service, often without contemplating the words and run the risk of making the same mistake.

Many language scholars and mystics have given different interpretations of the Lord’s Prayer to the standard King James Bible version. Reading it in one of these other versions for a period may help to restore its freshness and enable us to pray it with renewed vigour. For instance, the first line has been translated as meaning ‘Our Father who contains and pervades all’, and the second line as meaning ‘Purify and dwell within my heart’ or ‘Make hallowed our hearts’. This very beautiful, devout second line is arguably the most important part of the Lord’s Prayer, for it is the speaker giving themselves to God, asking God to take all the rubbish out of their heart, to make a temple of their heart. When we make this request to God, we come one step closer to fulfilling the promise we make to ‘Forgive those who trespass against us’.

When we say the Lord’s Prayer properly, acknowledging God’s beautiful omnipotence and asking God to make himself felt in our hearts, or when we engage in silent prayer, with a listening heart, we can experience the bottomless, endless, eternal Love that is God. And through this selfless experience, we are given a way to forgive and love others.

‘O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere!
Release a space to plant your Presence here.
Imagine your possibilities now
Embody your desire in every light and form.
Grow through us this moment’s bread and wisdom.
Untie the knots of failure binding us, as we release the strands we hold of others’ faults. Help us not forget our Source, Yet free us from not being in the Present.
From you arises every Vision, Power and Song from gathering to gathering.
Amen – May our future actions grow from here!’
(Retranslation of Lord’s Prayer from original Aramaic, published on www.orucc.org)

2 Corinthians 11:1-11 • Psalm 110(111):1-8

Matthew 6:7-15

Friday 19 June
Matthew 6:19-23

Today Jesus talks about the focus of the heart. What are we craving? What are we thinking of? What are we hoping for? 'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...where thieves break in and steal,' he says, 'but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...where thieves do not break in or steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (vv. 21-22).

A heist in Hatton Garden over the Easter weekend 2015 gives a rather vivid illustration of the truth of Jesus' statement! Armed with heavy-duty cutting tools, a gang of thieves raided 300 safety deposit boxes after apparently getting into the building via a lift shaft and disabling the alarm system from the inside. It is estimated that they got away with around £60 million of treasures from the vault. The highest security measures were not enough to keep these treasures safe.

The treasure Jesus is talking about in the verses quoted above is not only money or valuable jewels. It is anything the world has to offer which we set our heart on. What we deem as valuable shows us where our heart is. Maybe it is money and wealth; maybe it is power and the desire to be recognized; maybe it is popularity and acceptance through nice clothes, a home, or a flash car; maybe it is being part of a family we can be proud of.

Here, Jesus is calling us to turn our minds away from the temporary to the eternal, from the things that are passing by to the things that are permanent. We are literally to accumulate treasure in a heavenly bank! When we set our hearts on the things of this earth and succumb to the temptation of being worldly in our ways, we are no longer serving God. Rather, we have put our riches above God, and we are serving them. They have become our god and our life.

Jesus challenges us, as he challenged those he was talking to that day, to ask ourselves where our treasure is. If our treasure is on earth and the things of this world, our heart will be there as well. If our heart is focused on the Father and on laying up treasures in heaven, our heart will be there.

'It is the heart that makes a man rich. He is rich or poor according to what he is, not according to what he has.' (Henry Ward Beecher)

2 Corinthians 11:18, 21-30 • Psalm 33(34):2-7
Matthew 6:19-23

Saturday 20 June

Matthew 6:24-34

Do not waste time and energy in worry, says Jesus: ‘Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear’ (v. 25 NIV). God knows of all these cares, he assures us, and God will provide when we stay close to him.

If only we could heed Jesus’ advice! How wonderful to live in this way, liberated from every care, not worrying about where our next meal was going to come from or about keeping up with the latest fashions, and truly believing that our heavenly Father cared about this level of detail in our lives! We’d be free of our life-sapping worries. Every day would be an adventure. Our joy would be restored. What’s stopping us?

Perhaps part of the answer is that we grew up, and as adults we have been taught that our adult responsibilities include worrying about how to put a meal on the table for our families and clothes on our backs, and pay the mortgage. We perhaps look back nostalgically on the days when as children, if we were blessed with a secure, loving home, we were truly free of those worries and able to live in the moment and enjoy the simple pleasures and tasks of each day.

Are we willing to revert to the status of a child again – this time as a child of a heavenly Father who promises to concern himself with those things we spend a lot of our waking hours worrying about? Jesus reassures us that our heavenly Father knows that we need them (v. 22), and that we are more valuable than the birds for whom he daily provides. He has also taught us to pray, ‘Give us today our daily bread’ (v. 11).

To live as Jesus is urging us to live requires a huge shift in our mindset. The King James Version of verse 25 quoted above reads: ‘Take no thought for your life...’ We don’t even need to spend a moment of our time preoccupied with these concerns. With these burdens lifted from our shoulders, our minds will be liberated to think about the matters that Jesus really wants us to concern ourselves with: ‘seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness’. When we do that, he promises, ‘all these things will be given to you as well’ (v. 33 NIV).

‘Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 • Psalm 33(34):8-13

Matthew 6:24-34

Sunday 21 June

Mark 4:35-41 • Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

Being caught amid a storm at sea must be terrifying. The waves rise up, roaring, threatening to swallow the boat whole or smash it against the rocks. We feel helpless. In the Gospel of Mark, we hear the tale of Jesus and his disciples caught in a storm. The disciples, understandably afraid, awaken the sleeping Christ, who stills the wind with one command and then questions his disciples: 'Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?'

Such a situation is the moment most of us find our faith! Midwives report that many non-religious women call to Jesus for help during a traumatic labour, perhaps instinctively knowing that he can help, that they can rely upon him. Perhaps we discover this faith amid an emotional crisis or a life-threatening situation, such as the disciples thought they were facing at sea. In its truest sense, faith is at those moments a return to God, through reliance – a dependence that can bring deep relief, peace and humility. We give ourselves completely to God, acknowledging his might and our tiny size; God fills us and we feel a 'love divine, all loves excelling'.

'My moments of depression and despair turn out to be renewals, new beginnings,' writes the mystic Thomas Merton. Stuck or powerless, we turn to God for help, and so find him again. Is this why we sometimes suffer? Is suffering a reminder from God to come home?

Relying upon God gives us a feeling of being protected and supported in life. In tough times, we rely upon Christ. Rather than making us feel unpleasantly small, these moments of great need paired with great faith make us feel wonderfully small! It is a relief to 'let go and let God'. When she was just four years old, Sister Wendy Beckett had a profound experience of the constant closeness of God. 'Suddenly I became overwhelmed by the reality of God,' she recalls, '(by) the greatness and the power and the love and my own infinite smallness. And I knew that I was held in that greatness and protected and I would never ever have to feel anxious.'

'Lord, when there is no escape, be my Defender
When they crowd around me, Lord Be my Defender,
Steal me out of here,
Have mercy Lord, show your power.'
(From Thomas Merton's poem 'Be My Defender')

Job 38:1, 8-11 • Psalm 106(107):23-31
2 Corinthians 5:14-17 • Mark 4:35-41

Monday 22 June

Matthew 7:1-5 • SS John Fisher and Thomas More (Feast in England)

Pope Francis, man of God and man of the people that he is, recently confessed to having to work hard at resisting the sin of gossip. The thing about gossip is that it lays our heart bare and brings out into the open the sin which is at the heart of gossip, namely judging. The truth is, we all gossip and we all judge. It's not very clever, it's not very pretty, but it is very human.

Listen to what Pope Francis has to say about gossip:

It's so rotten, gossip and judging others. At the beginning, it seems to be something enjoyable and fun, like a piece of candy. But at the end, it fills the heart with bitterness and also poisons us. I am convinced that if each one of us would purposely avoid gossip, at the end, we would become a saint! It's a beautiful path! Do we want to become saints? Yes or no? Do we want to live attached to gossip as a habit? When it is said that someone has the 'tongue of a serpent', what does it mean? That his words kill.

Therefore, not only must one not make an attempt on the life of others, but one must not even pour on him the poison of anger and hit him with slander, nor speak ill of him. And here we arrive at gossip. Gossip can also kill, because it kills the reputation of the person. The perfection of love: a love in which the only measure is not to measure, but to go beyond all calculating. This Christian path of loving one's neighbour is so fundamental that Jesus comes to say that our relationship with God cannot be honest if we do not want to make peace with our neighbour. We are called to reconcile with our brothers prior to showing our devotion to the Lord in prayer. Good and honest behaviour does not come merely from 'juridical norms' but rather requires 'profound motivation, expressions of a hidden wisdom, the Wisdom of God, which can be received by the grace of the Holy Spirit'. It is Holy Spirit who renders us capable of living divine love and following the greatest commandment: love God with all your heart and love your neighbour as yourself.

Lord, teach me not to judge lest I be judged. Teach me that according to the measure I give, will be the measure that I receive in return.

Proper of Season: Gen 12:1-9 • Ps 32(33):12-13, 18-22 • Mt 7:1-5

(In England only: 2 Macc 6:18, 21, 24-31 • Ps 30(31) • Mt 24:4-13)

Tuesday 23 June
Matthew 7:6, 12-14

When asked to repeat Jesus' 'Golden Rule' a young child in Catechism class gave the answer, 'Do one to others before they do one to you'! Of course, the Golden Rule, which is at the very heart of the ethical and moral life is, 'Do unto others as you would have done unto you.' In other words, treat others with the same respect and dignity that you would want to be afforded to you. Great idea, fantastic teaching, a wonderful way to live. But so much more difficult than we realize! Even a cursory look into our own hearts and drives informs us that deep down we resonate more with the little child's misapprehension than the actual teaching of Christ.

How, then, do we put the Golden Rule into practice? The key is for us to seek a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ. We can also ask the Spirit to give us a grace of revelation, a fresh and new insight, into our baptism. For baptism is the bath of water in which we are cleansed and filled with the Holy Spirit, allowing the imperishable seed of the word of God to produce its life in us. Our dignity rests above all in the fact that we are called to live in communion with God, and the measure with which we grasp hold of this truth will determine the measure with which we can love.

We can be daunted by our call to love and this is, in fact, a good thing. We should be overwhelmed by this mammoth task. How can we love the person who has hurt or wounded us? How can we forgive? How can we love those who do not love us in return?

The answer to this is that we can love in the power of God's Spirit when we hear the Spirit say to us, 'Do not be afraid, because I am the Lord of consolation, the Lord of tenderness. Receive my grace and love in the power of the Spirit.' With God's Spirit we can do all things – even love those we have no energy or desire to love. With Jesus life becomes richer. We can only climb into heaven by means of the ladder of the cross, and the cross of Jesus always invites us to love and not hate, to forgive and not hate, to serve and not to be served – in short, to live out the Golden Rule.

Genesis 13:2, 5-18 • Psalm 14(15):2-5
Matthew 7:6, 12-14

Wednesday 24 June

Luke 1:57-66, 80 • (Solemnity) The Nativity of St John the Baptist

Today we celebrate the feast day of a great son of the Church – St John the Baptist. He is a bridge, if you like, between the Old Testament and the New. He had one foot in Israel, looking back on centuries of history and tradition within God's chosen people, and another in the Church, in the coming of Christ, the promised Messiah. What is clear is that we owe him a great debt for his faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. His message of repentance and conversion, to prepare for the Lord's coming, is as relevant today as it was in the beginning. St John the Baptist was a prophetic witness of the work of the Spirit in his time. He had no magic wand, it wasn't easy, and he lived by faith and faith alone.

We are called to be forerunners of the Lord today. We like St John the Baptist are to be heralds of the gospel and proclaim the good news without fear or favour. To be a prophet and to live a prophetic life we need, like the prophets of old, to retreat into the desert and pray. This, of course, is easier said than done. We all live hectic lives and finding time to be alone with the Lord is challenging, to say the least. But this is the only way we can truly be prophetic witnesses because a prophet is first and foremost someone who hears the Lord's voice.

What does it mean to hear the Lord's voice? God speaks to us in many ways but especially in these three: in prayer, through reading his word in Scripture and through receiving the Eucharist. These are intimate moments of union and communion with God, when we experience God's love and learn to discern his gentle and loving presence in our lives.

God's message is always the same but forever new, fresh and dynamic. God's message is always one of love and grace and urging us to return to him. God's message is always the same because God's message is Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of the Living God.

Prepare the way of the Lord. Open up your heart and be baptized not just in the waters of baptism but in the waters of renewal with fire and the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 49:1-6 • Psalm 138(139):1-3, 13-15

Acts 13:22-26 • Luke 1:57-66, 80

Thursday 25 June

Matthew 7:21-29

Deep down, when we read Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders, it is likely that most of us identify with the man who built his life on a solid foundation. We like to think of ourselves as reliable, dependable, morally upright and, yes, if we must put our cards on the table, righteous. We don't tend to think of ourselves as unreliable, undependable, morally bankrupt and unrighteous!

With this parable Jesus brings his Sermon on the Mount to its concluding climax. This most beautiful and profound teaching, containing as it does the Beatitudes, is the Magna Carta of the Christian life, the blueprint, if you like, of the life we are called to live – a life lived in the power of the Spirit. A great thing to do, which to be fair does take a little bit of willpower, is to read Matthew 5–7 in one sitting. When we do this, we come into direct contact with the moral, ethical and spiritual teaching of Jesus Christ; we touch what it means to be a new creation. Jesus' first hearers must have thought that this was an impossible teaching – who can live like this? In truth, if we don't think the same as we progress through the Sermon on the Mount we are deluding ourselves.

So back to the foundation spoken about in today's Gospel. Here is a thought, an idea to explore. Imagine for a second that, in fact, we are not those who build our lives on the sure and solid foundation, but are those who build our lives on sand and our house comes crashing down. Of course, this definitely kicks against the goad, but just hold this thought and maybe take it to prayer. You see, perhaps the only One who has truly put into practice the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus himself. Perhaps the only way to build a sure and solid foundation for our lives is to accept that every day we build on sand but we are given the opportunity to build on Christ. Holiness isn't perhaps about succeeding but realizing that we are failing – because when we fall and fail we pray more openly and honestly:

Lord, I have fallen again today. I tried to put your teaching into practice but have fallen flat on my face. Please help me to pick myself up and try again.

Genesis 16:1-12, 15-16 • Psalm 105(106):1-5

Matthew 7:21-29

Friday 26 June

Matthew 8:1-4

Jesus' healing of the lepers in today's Gospel was a precursor of the miracle of the cross and the healing it would bring to us all, lepers that we all are, struck down with the disease of sin and rebellion against God.

The term 'leprosy' used in the Bible covered a range of skin diseases and probably does not refer to what we know as Hansen's disease today. It referred to any skin disease from which the sufferer would not recover and the diagnosis had far-reaching consequences for the individual, their family and their community. At that time exclusion was the only way of protecting others from the ravages of the disease.

While those suffering from leprosy were innocent victims, for us the affliction is a picture which points to the deeper and even more serious reality of sin. We are all afflicted and cast out because of the leprosy of sin. Jesus, however, transformed our understanding of both leprosy and sin. As the Suffering Servant, Jesus was 'struck' (leprosum) by God, and people turned away from him as they turn away from a leper. In Isaiah 53 the prophet looked towards the healing mystery of the cross.

Through the grace of our baptism we are washed and cleansed, our sins are forgiven, and we are justified, made righteous and reconciled with God. However, our full healing and restoration as children of God cannot be realized until after death and so we journey through life bearing the wound of sin. Holiness is to do with knowing and experiencing a deeper healing of this wound – some make better progress than others but we are all afflicted because no one is righteous.

Pope Francis is calling for a tender-hearted Church, made so by its tender-hearted believers. The Pope himself reached out to the poor man suffering from neurofibromatosis which severely disfigured his face. In a warm embrace Pope Francis touched his life with the love of God. We too must reach out to others and especially those who feel outside the Church's or God's embrace. We reach out as fellow beggars, grateful that we have received God's mercy and kindness and eager to pass this grace on to others.

Lord, you came to set us free from the leprosy of sin – teach me to reach out with love and compassion and to bring to others the healing grace of the gospel.

Genesis 17:1, 9-10, 15-22 • Psalm 127(128):1-5

Matthew 8:1-4

Saturday 27 June

Matthew 12:14-21

At an army camp twenty miles from the Iraqi border Lt Col Tim Collins speaks to the 800 soldiers gathered. They listen attentively and with respect – Collins is an experienced soldier and a leader of men. His words of valour and courage are tempered by words of integrity, compassion and concern.

‘We go to liberate not to conquer. We will not fly our flags in their country. We are entering Iraq to free a people and the only flag which will be flown in that ancient land is their own. Show respect for them. There are some who are alive at this moment who will not be alive shortly. Those who do not wish to go on that journey, we will not send. As for the others I expect you to rock their world. Wipe them out if that is what they choose. But if you are ferocious in battle remember to be magnanimous in victory. Iraq is steeped in history. It is the site of the Garden of Eden, of the Great Flood, and the birthplace of Abraham. Tread lightly there. You will see things that no man could pay to see and you will have to go a long way to find a more decent, generous and upright people than the Iraqis. You will be embarrassed by their hospitality even though they have nothing. Don’t treat them as refugees for they are in their own country. Their children will be poor, in years to come they will know that the light of liberation in their lives was brought by you.’

Men, experienced and trained for war, often display remarkable integrity, compassion, and faith. We encounter such a man in today’s Gospel reading.

A centurion was an officer in charge of 100 soldiers. He would have commanded respect and would have lived in a man’s world where ‘kill or be killed’ was the rule. His approach to Jesus, now immortalized so eloquently in our Eucharist liturgy, is poignant and brimming with faith and confidence. His protestation, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof,’ reveals a man of simple piety and profound faith. Jesus is clearly impressed: ‘Truly... not even in Israel have I found such faith.’ What an affirmation of faith! The centurion’s servant was healed, a miracle was performed and the kingdom advanced.

‘Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.’

Genesis 18:1-15 • Luke 1:46-50, 53-55

Matthew 8:5-17

Sunday 28 June

Matthew 16:13-19 • (Solemnity) SS Peter and Paul

Peter must have been very proud of himself when the Lord affirmed him for his answer to the question, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ (v. 14 NIV). He was certainly the most courageous of all the disciples that day and his courage was richly rewarded. We know, however, that this feeling of self-congratulation did not last long as moments later he received a stinging rebuke from the Lord for his rejection of the way of the cross (16:23). Indeed, it is rather sobering to reflect that the rock upon which the Church was built was the same man whom Jesus identified as being, unwittingly for sure, a vehicle for Satan: ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ (16:25 NIV).

The grace of revelation is required for any one of us to reach the conclusion that Jesus is God. Flesh and blood cannot reveal this. The human mind in and of itself is not equipped to bow before the revelation and truth that Jesus of Nazareth is God incarnate – the supreme Being who created the universe.

Of course, throughout history, many have recognized that Jesus is one of the most significant, if not the most significant, person in human history. Atheists, men and women of good will and believers of other faiths recognize Jesus’ greatness. But that is not the same as worshipping him as God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father. This grace, which even we may take for granted, is a special gift from God the Father.

There is a way in which the Holy Spirit daily asks us the same question that Jesus asked his disciples: who do you say Jesus of Nazareth is? Our prayer and reading of Scripture is underpinned by the quest to answer this question, asking the Holy Spirit to grant us the secrets of revelation, ‘the secret things [belonging] unto the Lord’ (Deut. 29:29), which we will spend the rest of our lives plumbing and quarrying. As we bow before this mystery, we will hear God say to us: ‘I am God, and there is no other. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come’ (Isa. 46:9-10 NIV).

‘No one has ever seen God, but God, the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.’ (John 1:18 NIV)

Acts 12:1-11 • Psalm 33(34):2-9

2 Timothy 4:6-8,17-18 • Matthew 16:13-19

Monday 29 June

Matthew 8:18-22

GK Chesterton had a way with words, as the following statement illustrates: ‘It is not so much a case of Christianity having been tried and found wanting, rather it has not been tried at all.’ The truth of his assertion hits hard: if we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship, the Church in the West would be transformed, and the impact on our culture and society would be staggering. Jesus called for radical life change from those who aspired to follow him.

Jesus never beat around the bush; he was always forthright and straightforward about the cost of discipleship. To follow Christ always involves sacrifice. A man or woman called to the religious life in the Catholic tradition is often invited to give up the hope of marriage. Married Christian couples are called to a life of fidelity and commitment. Young people who set out to follow Christ are often subject to ridicule and exclusion from their peers. In today’s Gospel passage, ‘would-be’ disciples are treated in rather a brusque, even rude fashion by the Lord: one aspiring disciple is instructed to ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead’ (v. 22).

Pope Francis has been critical of clerics who embrace the trappings of ecclesiastical position and wealth. He is a thorn in the side of any who see the religious life as a way of securing comfort, position and possessions. But the truth is Pope Francis’ words challenge us all, cleric and lay, to give up everything to follow Christ.

Of course, this is easier said than done. The very thought of renunciation of wealth, money and possessions can make us feel sad and dejected. However, the grace of revelation doesn’t replace earthly riches with heavenly poverty – no, in fact, the very opposite. God knows our hearts – earthly riches and wealth are replaced with heavenly riches and wealth. For where our hearts are, there will our treasure be, and a heart purified by God seeks the food that does not spoil but endures until eternal life. To give up everything for Christ is to long for the blessings of the kingdom in our lives and to hunger and thirst for righteousness, knowing that true joy and happiness come from being in God’s presence and doing his will.

Lord, give me a disciple’s ear that I may listen to your voice and do your will, and in so doing know joy deep in my heart.

Genesis 18:16-33 • Psalm 102(103):1-4, 8-11

Matthew 8:18-22

Tuesday 30 June

Matthew 8:23-27

It is good to be honest with ourselves when we read the Scriptures. Today's Gospel provides us with an example of honesty evoked in extreme danger. Who doesn't feel just a little sympathy for the disciples, caught up in a violent squall on the tumultuous waters of the Sea of Galilee – patently scared to death (literally). These experienced fishermen were clearly in desperate fear for their lives. Their cry was heartfelt and sincere: 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown' (v. 25 NIV).

Two things are perplexing and challenging about this reading. The first is that Jesus slept through the storm, and the second is that he rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith. How could Jesus sleep through such a storm? And his rebuke seems a little unfair considering they were about to drown! Perhaps the rebuke would settle on our ears more kindly if the Lord had expressed some understanding of the dread and pending doom the disciples were experiencing.

But maybe this is where the problem lies. This is an honest reaction and it is right to express it and get it out there, on the table, as it were. It is as if the Holy Spirit invites this reaction in us – we are supposed to think these things because the Spirit wants us to see and understand the situation differently. The truth is that sometimes, when we are caught up in our own storms, we too can feel as if we have no one to turn to, that even God is sleeping, oblivious to our suffering and plight. And we too can cry out, 'Lord, save me! I'm going to drown.' Of course, nothing is further from the truth – Jesus is in the boat with us. And because Jesus is with us, while we may still feel afraid, we are safe.

Every challenging or difficult situation we face invites us to hear the Lord say, 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' and so deepen our faith. Vincent van Gogh said: 'The fishermen know that the sea is dangerous and the storm terrible, but they have never found these dangers sufficient reason for remaining ashore.' We can face the challenges of our life with courage and dignity. Knowing that God is with us and his Spirit is in us, there is nothing we can't face or endure.

Lord, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Genesis 19:15-29 • Psalm 25(26):2-3, 9-12

Matthew 8:23-27