

Wednesday 1 June

Mark 12:18-27 • St Justin, Martyr (Memorial)

Jesus encountered quite a few ‘clever clogs’ who were intent on catching him out. Among them were some Sadducees, part of Israel’s ruling elite, who, as today’s Gospel records, presented him with the unlikely case of a woman who was successively the wife of seven brothers, asking him whose wife she would be after the resurrection. Jesus answered: ‘when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven’ (v. 25). With his reply Jesus is rejecting the caricature the Sadducees presented of heaven, as if it were going to be a simple continuation of the earthly relationship of the spouses. He does not exclude the possibility that they might rediscover in God the bond that united them on earth.

According to this vision, marriage does not come to a complete end at death but is transfigured, spiritualized, freed from the limits that mark life on earth, as also the ties between parents and children or between friends will not be forgotten. In a preface for the dead the liturgy proclaims: ‘Life is transformed, not taken away.’

But what about those who have had a negative experience of earthly marriage, an experience of misunderstanding and suffering? Should not this idea that the marital bond will not break at death be for them, rather than a consolation, a reason for fear? No, for in the passage from time to eternity the good remains and evil falls away. The love that united them, perhaps for only a brief time, remains; defects, misunderstandings, suffering will fall away. In God all will be understood, all will be excused, all will be forgiven.

Some will ask of course about those who have been legitimately married to different people, widowers and widows who have remarried. (This was the case presented to Jesus in today’s Gospel.) Even for them the same thing: that which was truly love and self-surrender between each of the husbands or wives, being objectively a good coming from God, will not be dissolved. In heaven there will not be rivalry in love or jealousy. These things do not belong to true love but to the intrinsic limits of the creature.

Lord, we pray today that all married couples and those who have known the pain of separation or divorce, will know that you are close to us in our joys and draw alongside us when we suffer.

2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12 • Psalm 122(123):1-2

Mark 12:18-27

Thursday 2 June

Mark 12:28-34

Yesterday the Sadducees were at it – trying to catch Jesus out, trip him up and win an argument. Today it's the turn of the teachers of the law. Brave (or foolish) were those who tried as Jesus always triumphed with his wise and cutting-edge responses – although, to be fair, this teacher of the law seemed more sincere and genuine than others. What we learn from this exchange is that when all is said and done, only two things really matter: love of God and love of neighbour.

Jesus compressed the entire Law and Prophets into two simple but profound commandments, which are the very essence of what it means to be a follower of God: 'The first is... "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."'

How do we put these two commandments into practice? The key is to appreciate that although they are commandments, they are also an invitation to examine ourselves. Loving God, rather like loving our neighbour, is a great idea until we get down to it. For then we discover that we don't love God as much as we think we do. The very nature of love is that you enjoy spending time with the beloved. When we examine our conscience, however, we discover that finding time to pray, to be still and be with the Lord, is something that does not come naturally – only supernaturally and by God's grace.

Prayer then is where we create the moment of grace to give praise and thanksgiving to God; where we open ourselves up to the hope of hearing God speak. Another way we express our love for God is by reading his Word. Taking time out to get to know the Bible better – developing a daily Scripture habit – draws us closer to the Father's heart of mercy.

As St Bernard of Clairvaux said: 'Whosoever loves God aright loves all God's creatures.' When we are rooted and established in loving God we can reach out in love to others. This love of God, which the Spirit pours into our hearts, enables us to love those we find difficult to love, forgive those we find it hard to forgive, and be merciful towards those we wouldn't naturally be merciful towards.

'Whoever loves God loves his neighbour.' (St Basil the Great)

2 Timothy 2:8-15 • Psalm 24(25):4-5, 8-10, 14

Mark 12:28-34

Friday 3 June

Luke 15:3-7 • Sacred Heart of Jesus (Solemnity)

The parable of the Prodigal Son could equally be called the parable of the Father's Merciful Heart. On this, the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we contemplate the merciful sacred heart of Jesus, which finds its source in the merciful heart of the Father and the Holy Spirit. God speaks to us heart to heart, person to person. Jesus loved each one of us to the core of his being, the depths of his heart.

The first feast of the Sacred Heart was celebrated on 31 August 1670 in Rennes, France, through the efforts of Fr Jean Eudes (1602–80). From Rennes the devotion spread, but it was as a result of the visions of St Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647–90) that the devotion became universal. In all of these visions, in which Jesus appeared to St Margaret Mary, the Sacred Heart of Jesus played a central role. The 'great apparition', which took place on 16 June 1675, during the octave of the feast of Corpus Christi, is the source of the modern feast of the Sacred Heart. In that vision, Christ asked St Margaret Mary to request that the feast of the Sacred Heart be celebrated on the Friday after the octave (or eighth day) of the feast of Corpus Christi, in reparation for the ingratitude of human beings towards the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The Sacred Heart of Jesus represents not simply his physical heart but his heart of love, compassion and mercy for all humankind.

The devotion became very popular after St Margaret Mary's death in 1690, but because the Church initially had doubts about the validity of her visions, it wasn't until 1765 that the feast was officially celebrated in France. Almost one hundred years later, in 1856, Pope Pius IX, at the request of the French bishops, extended the feast to the universal Church. It is celebrated on the day requested by our Lord – the Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi, or nineteen days after Pentecost Sunday. The Holy Spirit moves us to pray, 'Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in thee.'

'Be humble towards God and gentle with your neighbour. Judge and accuse no one but yourself, and ever excuse others. Speak of God always to praise and glorify him, speak of your neighbour only with respect – do not speak of yourself at all, either well or ill.' (St Mary Alacoque)

Ezekiel 34:11-16 • Psalm 22(23)

Romans 5:5-11 • Luke 15:3-7

Saturday 4 June

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

In this Year of Mercy our hearts turn today to the immaculate heart of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Mercy, who was chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God. We reflect on her interior life and learn from the way she treasured and pondered on the mystery of God's mercy (Luke 2:19).

Mary is the true contemplative. Her eyes turned to Christ at the moment of the Annunciation when she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Truly, through her pregnancy she pondered the face of Christ and began to sense his presence. When she gave birth to Christ in Bethlehem her eyes gazed tenderly on the face of her Son, as she 'wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger' (Luke 2:7). Mary's penetrating gaze, which was a hallmark of her interior life, caused her own soul to be pierced with adoration, wonder and worship.

We can be sure that on Easter morning Mary's gaze was radiant with the joy of the Risen Christ. We, like Mary, are called to fix our eyes on Christ and treasure his every word. This is at the heart of the rosary, which helps us to penetrate the deeper mystery of Christ through Mary to Jesus. As children of the Church our spirituality is to have something of Mary about it. In this Year of Mercy Pope Francis has urged us to pray with new fervour and intensity the Marian prayer *Salve Regina*. We will pray this prayer today filled with a sense that Mary's witness plays a key part in the way we live as believers. We look to her as a model of faith, learning from her obedience, her faithfulness, her perseverance and, most of all, her love of her Son. May she who entered the depths of the divine mercy intercede for us that we may obtain the grace of living and walking according to the mercy of God with an unwavering trust in his love.

'Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O merciful, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Amen.'

2 Timothy 4:1-8 • Psalm 70(71):8-9, 14-17, 22

Luke 2:41-51

Sunday 5 June

Luke 7:11-17 • Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Take a moment to reflect that throughout the world today, right now, many are suffering and weeping tears of anguish and despair. The reasons are legion: the loss of a loved one, the pain of sickness and disease, the evil of poverty and the tragedy of war. Grief, loss and bereavement melt hearts, both human and divine. God hears the cry of all the broken-hearted, the wounded and the abject, and says to them, ‘Don’t cry’ (v. 13 NIV). Faced with the overwhelming anguish of death, Jesus himself wept when he saw the deep grief of Mary and Martha (John 11:35). This is why we know that at the very heart of the Blessed Trinity is a tender mercy that knows no limits.

The raising of the widow of Nain’s son was an amazing revelation of Jesus’ power over our greatest enemy, death. However, like Lazarus, the widow’s son would die again. Life on earth is marred or marked by the sign of death. No matter who we are – rich or poor, famous, infamous or unknown – we all sooner or later are faced with the prospect of death. Into this greatest of all human tragedies God says, ‘Don’t cry’, because he is close to all those who grieve and has the remedy for death.

When Jesus raised the widow of Nain’s son, onlookers declared: ‘God has come to help his people’ (v. 16 NIV). God has indeed come to help his people, and through Jesus’ death and resurrection and the merciful love of the Father we need not fear death or any evil. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. This is one of the consoling messages of the gospel and one which we need to share with others who suffer and feel far from God and his mercy. Our living hope is that death is not the end but rather the beginning; death is not the door that shuts but rather the door that opens into the bliss of heaven and eternal life.

‘It is not death that will come to fetch me, it is the good God. Death has no phantom, no horrible spectre as represented in pictures. In the Catechism it states that death is the separation of soul and body, that is all. Well, I am not afraid of a separation which will unite me to the good God forever.’ (St Thérèse of Lisieux)

1 Kings 17:17-24 • Psalm 29(30):2, 4-6, 11-13

Galatians 1:11-19 • Luke 7:11-17

Monday 6 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 5:1-12

The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus' preaching and teaching. They can be best understood as depicting the face of Christ and revealing his mercy. However, they are also a kind of Magna Carta, a blueprint of the Christian life. They capture in the most beautiful prose the way we should live in word, deed and attitude. To live the Beatitudes, to put them into practice, is to live a happy and fulfilled life. Blessed are those who live the Beatitudes.

God has placed a desire deep in the human heart for happiness. The Beatitudes show us how to be happy. However, there is a snag, and the snag is this: the Beatitudes are impossible to put into practice. For to live the Beatitudes is to live like a saint, and to live like a saint is impossible, except by God's grace.

The good news is that God's grace is superabundant (Rom. 5:20) and lavishly poured out upon us. Setting out to live the Beatitudes begins with a sense of how truly impossible it is to do so without the gentle grace of God. When we call upon God's grace, however, something amazing happens: we begin to do the impossible and find ourselves living in harmony with the Beatitudes, which is nothing more than putting the new creation into practice.

We also discover a whole lot more beatitudes. Blessed are those who give the benefit of the doubt. Blessed are those who learn to control their tongues. Blessed are we when we are ridiculed and mocked for practising our faith. Blessed are we when prayer and reading the Scriptures seem a dry and arid land but we persevere in faith. Blessed are we when we go the extra mile. Blessed are we when we don't keep a record of wrongs. Blessed are we when we pray for prisoners and the despised of this world.

The Holy Spirit leads us to live a blessed life and, in order that we may do so, he blesses us with the fruits, gifts and graces of the Spirit. The sign or hallmark of a blessed life is joy deep down in our heart, and this is the blessing we receive when we set out each day to live the Beatitudes.

Lord, teach me to put on the garment of the Beatitudes every day, that I may be a living example of the blessed life – filled with joy, hope and love.

1 Kings 17:1-6 • Psalm 120(121):1-8

Matthew 5:1-12

Tuesday 7 June

Matthew 5:13-16 • Ordinary Weekday

It is significant and worthy of much reflection that Jesus chose the images of salt and light to express the role of a disciple. In Jesus' day salt was used not only to improve the taste of food but also to preserve fish and meat. Jesus is saying that his disciples through their witness improve the quality of life and preserve it from corruption and self-destruction. In an age without electricity the only light available was provided by small dish-like devices in which oil burnt through a wick. They did not give off much light but it was a great improvement on darkness. Jesus is teaching that our witness is like the light in the darkness, illuminating and radiating the shadows.

Our task, then, is to light up the world with our witness and preserve the goodness and taste of life. This can seem like a tall order when we feel that our light has become dim and our salt rather damp and tasteless. We can only truly be salt and light if we cultivate the habit of self-examination; we can only truly be living witnesses of God's grace if we learn to put the spotlight on ourselves not on others. The salt we could say is the salt of repentance. Salt is always bitter to taste and so is repentance. At least it is bitter at first and then come sweet tears of contrition.

However, our hearts easily harden and once this happens we resist the Holy Spirit. As disciples we are called to keep in step with the Spirit, and this means striving with all our heart, soul and strength to live in such a way that we witness to the fruits of the Holy Spirit – for these are salt and light to the world. The fruits of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). These are the new laws of the Spirit. We never love enough and so we need to repent; we never have enough joy and so we need to repent; we are never as kind and patient as we should be and so we need to repent.

Lord, pour out the grace of the Spirit, truly salt and light in my life. Preserve me from evil and illuminate my conscience with the light of your life that I may be a light to the world, a city on a hilltop.

1 Kings 17:7-16 • Psalm 4:2-5, 7-8

Matthew 5:13-16

Wednesday 8 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 5:17-19

The irony of Jesus' life was that he was perceived by the religious elite and rulers of the Jewish people as a threat not only to their national life but to the very core of their faith. In fact and in truth, he was not a threat to their faith: he was its very fulfilment. He did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets for he was the One to whom the Law and the Prophets pointed. Indeed, the writers of the Old Testament longed for the day of Christ.

Jesus of Nazareth was and is the living embodiment, the incarnation, of God's Word spoken through the long history of Israel. The Spirit wants to give us a profound love, respect, reverence and awe of the Old Testament. Balance is important in many aspects of life, and by and large we are out of balance when it comes to our appreciation of the Scriptures. By and large we lean more towards the New Testament than the Old. The Spirit always calls us to see Christ echoed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament reverberating in the New. Christ is forever latent in the Old but patent in the New. Christ is hidden in the Old but fully and finally revealed in the New.

It is understandable why we gravitate towards the New Testament rather than the Old. However, when we do this, we miss out on appreciating the treasure and riches of the Hebrew Scriptures – the very Scriptures Jesus read. It is true some parts of the Old Testament contain things that are difficult to understand, but they can be understood as part of the gradually unfolding revelation of God's plan. The Holy Spirit leads us to recognize in these writings a storehouse of sublime teaching and sound wisdom on human life. In the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), for example, we discover some of the most compelling wisdom stories in human history, in the Psalms some of the most beautiful prayers ever composed, and in the books of Proverbs and Job wisdom literature at its best, speaking directly into every human heart.

'Christians venerate the Old Testament as true Word of God. The Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void.' (Catechism of the Catholic Church 123)

1 Kings 18:20-39 • Psalm 15(16):1-5, 8, 11

Matthew 5:17-19

Thursday 9 June

Matthew 5:20-26 • St Columba (Feast in Ireland)

How we deal with anger says a lot about us. We are all prone to anger – true, some more than others and displayed in different ways. We experience irritation, frustration, being annoyed, fury, rage and full-blown temper tantrums. Anger and its sister emotions are part and parcel of being human – well, all too human. It is not surprising, then, that Jesus would address this issue in the Sermon on the Mount.

Many great philosophers and teachers have taught on anger. How true, for example, are the words of the Greek philosopher Aristotle: ‘Anybody can become angry – that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.’ Indeed. Our problem can be precisely that we are often angry with the wrong person and, truth be told, when we examine our hearts, the person we are most angry with is ourselves.

There is no shortage of advice on how to deal with anger. Counting to ten can help (but this doesn’t change our hearts). Avoiding people and situations we know will annoy and irritate us isn’t practical or even sensible – this is just an avoidance strategy. To understand how we deal with anger we need to re-visit what happened at our baptism. In baptism, we are immersed into the death and resurrection of Christ. We also receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, are born again and take on a new humanity. It is the immersion into Jesus’ death and resurrection and the new creation which is the source of our victory over the anger in our lives. To overcome anger, and indeed any sin, we need to ‘count [ourselves] dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 6:11 NIV). This is both a prayer and an attitude of heart, causing the anger which wells up in us to be quelled by the gentle grace of the Spirit.

Lord Jesus, there is anger in my heart and I cannot root it out. I know that I should calm down and offer the hurt and disappointment to you, but my emotion is running away with me. Help me to overcome this weakness and give me peace of heart as well as mind. Let me learn from this experience and grow into a better human being. Amen.

Proper of Season: 1 Kings 18:41-46 • Ps 64(65):10-13 • Mt 5:20-26

Proper of Saints: Col 1:24-29 • Ps 15:1-2, 5, 7-8, 11 • Mk 10:17-30

Friday 10 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 5:27-32

Human sexuality is a human good and great blessing. However, like many appetites, it can be abused and misused – rather like our appetite for food – so that our desire for it becomes inordinate and all-consuming. We can lust after many things – power, money, possessions, food and drink – but today we want to focus on sexual lust.

When our desire for sex is inordinate, illicit and all-consuming we are in the grip of lust. Of course, in the culture in which we live today we are swamped by sexual images which are used to market all manner of products – from shampoo to cars to holidays! Furthermore, all manner of pornography is available on the Internet, and we have access and opportunity to indulge sexual lust like never before in human history.

Sexual lust is a common problem to which no one is immune and the overcoming of which can be a constant battle. President Jimmy Carter caused a stir some years ago when he admitted in an interview: ‘I’ve looked on a lot of women with lust. I’ve committed adultery in my heart many times.’ President Carter’s sharing may well have been a case of too much information, but at least he revealed that he understood the act of adultery is committed first of all in the heart, rather as unchecked anger in the heart can be a prelude to murder.

Jesus’ remedy to lust was never intended to be taken literally – as in the case of the Scripture scholar Origen, who became so overwhelmed by his lust that he castrated himself. This rather extreme solution would have certainly reduced his levels of testosterone but whether it liberated him from the clutches of lust is hard to know.

The Spirit counsels a gentler approach in dealing with sexual lust and this is more interior than external. Certainly, through custody of our eyes and exercising wisdom in avoiding situations which could engender lust, we can overcome and have some victory. We learn to control our appetites through prayer, reading the Scriptures and receiving the Eucharist, but also by growing in our understanding that since every person is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26), we dehumanize the one desired and ourselves when he or she becomes the object of our lust. Also, in the sacrament of confession we receive the grace and strength we need to resist temptation and overcome the lusts of our heart.

1 Kings 19:9, 11-16 • Psalm 26(27):7-9, 13-14
Matthew 5:27-32

Saturday 11 June

Matthew 5:33-37 • St Barnabas (Memorial)

Nowadays people don't tend to swear on oath as much as they once did. Witnesses in court are still required to swear on oath: 'I swear by [according to religious belief] that the evidence I shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.' Lying in court, perjury, is taken so seriously that false witness or testimony can invite a severe punishment because of the way it fundamentally undermines the judicial process.

The Old Testament was very clear that false witness was deplorable and frequently warns against it (see, e.g., Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21). Jesus taught his disciples that they should be known for being honest and straightforward in their speech – their 'yes' should mean 'yes' and their 'no' should mean 'no'. Blasé oath-taking had the effect of undermining the sacred – no one has authority or ownership over the heavens, the earth, or the holy city of Jerusalem. Indeed, many invoked God when they swore, but God's name cannot be called upon in this way – it reflects a misunderstanding and abuse of God's power and authority.

James encouraged the believers in Jerusalem: 'Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No". Otherwise you will be condemned' (Jas. 5:12 NIV). Straightforwardness and honesty do not come as naturally as we might think. Our language can be revealing. We say things like 'as God is my witness' or 'on my mother's life'. How often, too, we hear people say, 'I'm not going to lie' or 'to be honest'! In the words of Shakespeare, we often 'protest too much' about our intended honesty so as to raise suspicion that this may not actually be the case.

At the heart of the child abuse scandal which engulfed the Church was a lack of honesty, obfuscation, deception and cover-up. We all feel the pain of this – not least the victims but all who love the Church also suffered through these revelations. As believers we are called to the highest standards of truthfulness and honesty. We do not need to swear oaths or promise the earth: we simply need to live in a straightforward way.

Lord, knowing that the truth sets me free, help me by your grace to say 'yes' when I mean 'yes', and 'no' when I mean 'no'.

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

Matthew 5:33-37

Sunday 12 June

(C) Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time • Luke 7:36–8:3

Jesus mixed with everyone – the poor and the rich. He was willing to dine with social outcasts (see, e.g., Mark 2:15) as well as the social elite. At this particular dinner party the Lord is approached by a woman known for her – how can we put it? – colourful life. To be fair, we don't know what her sin was, but there is an inference that it was of a sexual nature. She was probably a prostitute, although we cannot be absolutely sure. It has been posited that this woman was Mary Magdalene, although again this is only conjecture. What we can be sure of is that the woman displayed the most beautiful and moving repentance and contrition. Her grief for her sin was so real and overwhelming that she wept copious tears – enough to wash the Lord's feet. Her tears reflect a heart being melted by the love of God and is an experience we all should have and indeed seek – whoever we are, man or woman, bishop or priest, lay person or religious.

Pope Francis will surely be remembered as the Pope of Joy. Something that not many people know is that he is also the Pope of Tears. He implores us to seek the natural flow of tears, the fruit of understanding the cross of Christ: 'the cross can only be understood, a little bit, by kneeling, in prayer, but also through tears. They are the tears that bring us close to this mystery.'

Perhaps this is our problem: we don't weep enough. Our hearts can be hard and resistant even to tragedies unfolding before our very eyes; we can be indifferent to others' pain and suffering. The Spirit works in us so that tears flow and we weep naturally and easily at the misfortune and suffering of others.

'All of us have felt joy, sadness and sorrow in our lives, [but] have we wept during the darkest moment? Have we had that gift of tears that prepare the eyes to look, to see the Lord? We, too, can ask the Lord for the gift of tears. It is a beautiful grace...to weep praying for everything: for what is good, for our sins, for graces, for joy itself...[It] prepares us to see Jesus. And in Jesus, we see our brothers and sisters, especially those naked, hungry, sick or in prison (Matthew 25).' (Pope Francis)

2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13 • Psalm 31(32):1-2, 5, 7, 11

Galatians 2:16, 19-21 • Luke 7:36–8:3

Monday 13 June

Matthew 5:38-42 • St Anthony of Padua (Memorial)

It is said that revenge is a dish best served cold. Actually, revenge is a dish best not served at all because this toxic emotion hurts us as much as those on the receiving end of it. Jesus' teaching on revenge is deeply radical and revolutionary.

The Old Testament recognized that revenge was very much a fact of life, part and parcel of the human condition. The principle of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth' was intended to restrict vengeance and restrain resulting violence within certain limits. Jesus not only turned this idea on its head – he threw it out with the bath water. The Sermon on the Mount holds out what seems to be, on superficial reading, a kind of doctrine of passive resistance, but this is to misunderstand the teaching. Jesus isn't teaching passive resistance but rather active love.

What each of us knows in our hearts is that revenge is exhausting and wearisome. It drains us of all that is good. We plot, we scheme, we resent, we loathe and we drink deeply of this poisonous chalice. We nurse it, cultivate it and obsess about getting even. Of course, most of us don't resort to violence, but our thoughts and the intention of our hearts can be all-consuming and we can be bent on revenge. Jesus' teaching is counter-intuitive and kicks against our human nature.

The Holy Spirit shows us that resentment, revenge and recrimination imprison us in chains and rob us of joy. The Spirit replaces the fire of revenge with the fire of God's love in our hearts. The Spirit gives us the wisdom to pray for our enemies and ask for God's blessing upon those who wish us harm or who have hurt or wounded us. The Spirit helps us to put down the weapon of revenge and anger in our hearts: to bless and not curse, to love and not hate, to go the extra mile, offer the other cheek and love until it hurts. God understands our hurt and pain but as our Shepherd he leads us into the pastures of his love where we can rest and be restored, and can reach out to others with the mercy and love we have received.

Lord, teach me not to repay evil for evil but to live in peace with everyone. Grant that I may not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

1 Kings 21:1-16 • Psalm 5:2-7

Matthew 5:38-42

Tuesday 14 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 5:43-48

The ancient Greek philosophers taught that there are different kinds of love: there is familial or affectionate love (storge), friendship (philia), romantic love (eros) and spiritual love (agape). Agape is a uniquely Christian understanding of love. We all love our nearest and dearest, we have affection for our friends, and we are familiar with romantic and erotic love. Agape, though, is a different kind of love: it doesn't come naturally and kicks against the grain of our nature. It is a scandalous, outrageous love, which calls us to love our neighbour even when they aren't very nice to us, to go the extra mile for those who revile us, to turn the other cheek, to pray for our enemies and serve others in a spirit of humility.

This kind of love is impossible in and of ourselves – we just don't have the resources to love in this total and self-giving way. Agape love is a work of the Holy Spirit. If we want to know what love is, we need only read the Sermon on the Mount or study the Beatitudes. They show us the face of love, and in Jesus of Nazareth we see this love manifest. To witness agape love lived out we need only read the Gospels. Jesus lived a life of love and he shows us how we are to live and love.

The thing about agape love is it is a great idea until we have to put it into practice. Only then does it get hard and we have to face up to the lack of love in our hearts. It is this realization or revelation which compels us to seek the help and strength of the Spirit, and it is the singular grace the Spirit longs to give.

We show our love for God by our love for our neighbour. Following Christ means to follow the way of love, for he who is the Way, the Truth and the Life is this path of love. Every day, the Spirit helps us to learn more about agape love and to grow in agape love by opening our hearts wide to every person we encounter, for in loving them we love God and make progress along the way of holiness and perfection.

‘Therefore we ought to love one another warmly, for he who loves his neighbour loves God, and he who loves God loves his own soul.’ (St Anthony)

1 Kings 21:17-29 • Psalm 50(51):3-6, 11, 16

Matthew 5:43-48

Wednesday 15 June

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 • Ordinary Weekday

Ostentatious giving is the order of the day. Charities such as Comic Relief, Save the Children, CAFOD, Oxfam and Christian Aid are constantly encouraging us to donate to their noble causes. Generous giving is rewarded with generous praise and recognition. Companies like us to know that they give part of their pre-tax profits to charity and celebrities often make public that they donate to good causes in one way or another. On one level there is nothing wrong with that – God knows charities need our money in order to be able to carry out their good work.

Every year thousands of people take part in gruelling physical and mental challenges to raise money for their ‘favourite’ charity – marathons are run, hills are climbed and amazing feats of endurance undergone, all with great gusto, clamour and panache. Who could be critical of this kind of generosity? It brings out the best in us and reveals the remarkably generous nature of the human spirit.

Yet, in the Sermon on the Mount Christ encourages a different approach to not simply our generous giving but also our acts of righteousness. Identifying a desire in the human heart for praise, recognition and applause for our righteous acts, Jesus shows us another way – a way that is hidden and seen only by the Father. It isn’t that his teaching doesn’t recognize that we hanker for a reward: it’s just that the reward comes from the Father and not the world. Of course, this reveals something about the Father because he is moved by the nobility of selfless giving and service, for this is how he loves and serves us. When we give generously without hankering for reward or recognition, we are imitating the Father.

How does the Father reward us? With the gift of grace and the blessing of the Spirit. Anything which makes us proud of our own righteousness isn’t good for us because it is an illusion and a deception. When we give without thought of a reward, when we serve humbly without giving a second thought to a payback, we are being imitators of God, and this in itself is our reward.

Father, help me to love and not to count the cost, to give without wanting a reward, and to serve others in a generous and lavish way and, in so doing, receive the reward of your love and peace poured out into my heart.

2 Kings 2:1, 6-14 • Psalm 30(31):20, 21, 24

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday 16 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 6:7-15

Prayer is so important that there is a whole section of the Catechism of the Catholic Church devoted to it. In many ways this is the most beautiful part of the wonderful teaching document. When we think of prayer we tend to think of our thirst for God but this is to forget that, more than this, God thirsts for us. God longs for us to come into a relationship with him. St Augustine taught that we are restless and unsettled until our hearts rest in God. It is through prayer that we learn to rest and settle in Christ, and today's teaching on prayer from the Sermon on the Mount shows us the way.

At the very heart of all Christian prayer is an invitation by Jesus to us to participate in his prayer to the Father. The Our Father is both a summary and climax of Jesus' entire teaching. The problem with the Our Father, or, more accurately, our problem with the Our Father, is over-familiarity: we know it so well that we no longer pray it from the heart. And the Our Father is a prayer to the Father's heart. Just as Jesus' heart is sacred, so too is the Father's, and prayer is a journey ever closer to the merciful heart of the Father.

In the Our Father we don't pray 'My Father' but 'Our Father'. This is because when we say it, we join ourselves in love and solidarity to the worldwide communion of believers. We are his people, he is our God. Our faith, whilst deeply personal, at the same time invites us into fellowship with each other. The Our Father teaches us that we are our brother's and sister's keeper because we are united to them through faith and love. Despite our wounds, our hurts, our afflictions, struggles and divisions, we are united in faith. The Our Father is a prayer of mercy to the Father of Mercy, and in this year devoted to the theme of mercy we ask for the grace to pray this most ancient but ever new prayer with renewed fervour and joy.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Ecclesiasticus 48:1-14 • Psalm 96(97):1-7

Matthew 6:7-15

Friday 17 June

Matthew 6:19-23 • Ordinary Weekday

Answering the question ‘What would you do if you won the lottery?’ is a fun and harmless discussion many have from time to time. Charles Dickens said that the lottery was no more than a tax on the poor but, while that may be true, millions upon millions of people buy a ticket every week and someone wins. Indeed, in the US, three people won a share of the \$1.3 billion prize money, amounting to over \$300 million each. The chances of winning the lottery are millions to one – rather like the odds of being hit by lightning not once but several times in one day!

With profound prophetic insight Blessed John Henry Newman wrote: ‘All bow down before wealth. Wealth is that to which the multitude of men pay an instinctive homage. They measure happiness by wealth; and by wealth they measure respectability...It is a homage resulting from a profound faith...that with wealth he may do all things. Wealth is one idol of the day and notoriety is a second...Notoriety, or the making of a noise in the world – it may be called “newspaper fame” – has come to be considered a great good in itself, and a ground of veneration.’ Our own culture not only bows down to wealth but also celebrity, fame, possessions and consumerism. Of course, it’s one thing to say these things are shallow and fleeting, and totally another to truly believe it so that it impacts the way we live, think and act.

Jesus’ teaching whilst addressing our hearts also invites us to think in a new way about wealth, money and possessions. His teaching invites us to put on a new heart and a new mind and see things how God sees them. This new way of thinking desires riches and treasures as much as the old heart – it’s just a different kind of riches and treasure. Jesus counsels us to work for food that lasts and endures: ‘Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval’ (John 6:27 NIV). This is treasure which does not spoil or fade or corrupt.

‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.’ (Eph. 1:3 NIV)

Saturday 18 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 6:24-34

What do you worry about? What makes you anxious? Do you wake in the middle of the night fretful and in dread? Many of us do. Although we believe in God we are subject to the curse of fear, anguish and anxiety. We tend to console ourselves with the thought that we can't help it and it's only human. Indeed, it is only human but help it we can or, to be more precise, God can.

We don't tend to see worry and anxiety as sinful or wrong. We see it as simply just part and parcel of being human and caring – if we didn't care, we wouldn't worry, goes the refrain. There is some truth in this, of course. Who doesn't worry about their children or grandchildren? Who doesn't succumb to the anxieties of life? God knows we all do, but what if God didn't want us to? What if God wanted us to know a living sense of his presence and offer up all our worry and anxiety to him?

The truth is, freedom from worry and anxiety is a birthright of our baptism. Sir Winston Churchill said: 'When I look back on all these worries I remember the story of the old man who said on his death bed that he had had a lot of trouble in life, most of which never happened.' The Holy Spirit can help us write a book called How to stop worrying and start living. A life weighed down by worry is not really living.

So how do we set ourselves free from the tyranny of worry and start living in the power of the Spirit? The first thing we need to do is study and reflect on the Word of God. Try this verse for a starter: 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God' (Phil. 4:6 NIV). Here we have the first step towards not being weighed down by anxiety: offer it up to the Lord. Have you noticed how this instruction from Paul comes with a promise? 'And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4:7 NIV).

Lord, I repent for all of my worry and anxiety and turn to you, laying down all my burdens. By your grace fill me with the peace of Christ which will transcend and surpass my understanding.

2 Chronicles 24:17-25 • Psalm 88(89):4-5, 29-34

Matthew 6:24-34

Sunday 19 June

Luke 9:18-24 • Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Who do people say Jesus is? Muslims say he is one of the prophets, Jews remain divided, unbelievers maintain he never existed, and people of good will recognize him as one of the world's great moral and ethical teachers. How we answer this key question is crucial to our happiness both in this life and in the life to come.

St Luke's version of Peter's Confession of Christ is shorter, blunter and more to the point than St Matthew's account (16:13-28). In the latter the Lord unpacks how Peter's response that Jesus was the Christ could not have come about through reason alone. In other words (or Jesus' words), flesh and blood could not have revealed this truth to Peter: it required a special grace of revelation from the Father.

Many truths about God can be ascertained through reason: for example, God's very existence as Creator through the beauty of creation itself. However, there are many divine truths which are inaccessible to us except by a grace of revelation. To confess with our mouths, proclaim with our tongues and express with heartfelt conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is God made man, God from God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father and the Holy Spirit, can only occur as a result of an incredible movement of God's grace in our minds and hearts. Our problem is that we can grow dull to how incredible and what an amazing gift this revelation is.

This Year of Mercy is a wonderful opportunity to seek out the grace of revelation that we might receive fresh insight into God's teaching on mercy as found in the Scriptures. We could study the parables of mercy, or look at the many times the psalmists refer to God's mercy. The Spirit always leads us deeper and deeper into the mystery of God and especially into the mystery of the mercy of the cross. However, we have to desire this gift and invest time and energy seeking it out: in prayer, reading the Scriptures, our own study and reflection. God will richly reward and bless our efforts.

'If Christians knew the value of the cross, they would walk a hundred miles to obtain it, because enclosed in the beloved cross is true wisdom and that is what I am looking for night and day more eagerly than ever.' (St Louis de Montfort)

Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1 • Psalm 62(63):2-6, 8-9

Galatians 3:26-29 • Luke 9:18-24

Monday 20 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 7:1-5

Most of us are quick to judge, often in the first few seconds of meeting someone. We judge on all manner of externals: dress sense, accent, education and beauty, to mention only a few. We all do it, no one is immune. Some of our judgements are right, some are wrong. We have instincts about people and often act on these – sometimes this serves us well, but often we get it wrong. Being judgemental is an issue each one of us has to deal with, especially if we want to be a disciple. The Sermon on the Mount addresses this all-too-human propensity head on. Here we encounter another example of kingdom logic. This logic is very straightforward and reasonable: don't judge, but if you do judge, you will be judged in the same way you judge others.

Why are we so quick to judge others? Jesus sheds light on this by suggesting that we do so because we don't put the spotlight on ourselves. We are so concerned about removing the speck in our brother's (or sister's) eye that we fail to deal with the plank in our own. This doesn't mean that there may not be a speck in their eye, but before we attempt to remove it, we need to take a good, long look at ourselves.

This seems so logical, so straightforward, and yet it is so hard. The great rabbi Hillel said: 'Judge not thy friend until thou standest in his place.' The German writer Goethe said: 'I see no fault that I might not have committed myself.' There is an old Red Indian proverb (Sioux) which says, 'Before I judge my neighbour, let me walk a mile in his moccasins.' Blessed Mother Teresa said it perhaps best of all: 'If you judge people you have no time to love them.'

The key to being merciful is learning to cultivate the habit of judging ourselves first. If we achieve this, we have learnt something of the wisdom of Thomas à Kempis who wrote, 'Do not be angry that you cannot make others as you would wish them to be, since you cannot make yourself as you wish to be.' The Holy Spirit teaches us that to err is human, and therefore we forgive, because to forgive and show mercy is truly divine.

Lord, teach me to imitate the divine and be slow to anger and indignation, but quick to forgive and show mercy, sympathy and empathy.

2 Kings 17:5-8, 13-15, 18 • Psalm 59(60):3-5, 12-13
Matthew 7:1-5

Tuesday 21 June

Matthew 7:6, 12-14 • St Aloysius Gonzaga (Memorial)

The teaching expressed by Jesus in the Golden Rule is found in ancient cultures and is a rich theme in the Hebrew Scriptures. ‘And what you hate, do not do to anyone’ (Tobit 4:15); ‘Judge your neighbour’s feelings by your own, and in every matter be thoughtful’ (Sir. 31:15); ‘That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn’ (Talmud, Shabbat 31a). Jesus did not deviate from this tradition or teaching because it reflects God’s fundamental ethical and moral teaching. The Golden Rule could equally be referred to as the Golden Gate because it is the narrow gate through which we enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The story is told of a young lad who clearly misheard and misunderstood what he was being taught about the Golden Rule and, when asked to repeat it, came back with: ‘Do one unto others, before they do one to you.’ The misapprehension is amusing because it highlights that the Golden Rule is often drowned out by a range of different philosophies such as ‘dog eat dog’ and ‘winner takes all’. Our problem isn’t that we don’t regard the Golden Rule as an excellent moral and ethical standard, but that we find it hard to put into practice. If we went through our day truly treating people as we would like to be treated ourselves the world would be transformed. None of us likes to be treated rudely but we can be rude towards others. None of us likes to be the subject of gossip but we often succumb to gossip.

The Golden Rule is a law which we struggle to keep and this is part of the human condition. The good we want to do we often find we cannot because there is another law or power at work in us (Rom. 7:7ff.). The law of love moves us to look upon Christ crucified for here the love of God was fully and ultimately revealed. The cross has the power to set us free from the law of sin and death so that we can joyfully put into practice the Golden Rule.

Lord, grant me the grace to practise the Golden Rule every day and, when I fall short of the glory of God, to turn back through the grace of conversion and repentance.

2 Kings 19:9-11, 14-21, 31-36 • Psalm 47(48):2-4, 10-11

Matthew 7:6, 12-14

Wednesday 22 June

(Feast in England) SS John Fisher and Thomas More • Matthew 7:15-20

The media often portray Christians as rather weak, hapless and ineffectual. Think of Derek Nimmo's portrayal of a vicar in *O Brother and*, more recently, Tom Hollander in the BBC series *Rev. Richard Dawkins*, the militant atheist, puts it out there that believers are rather stupid, gullible people who base their lives on superstition and fairy stories as opposed to the hard rock of science. These are of course caricatures and meant to mock, ridicule and divert from the truth that faith in Jesus Christ is rooted in reason.

Rather than being gullible and stupid, we are called to be discerning and shrewd. Jesus warned of false prophets, wolves in sheep's clothing, and the need to be alert and awake to all manner of deception, illusion and lie. He gave us the rule of discernment: 'by their fruit you will recognize them' (v. 20 NIV). How fruitful are you? Have you been fruitful with your wealth? Have you been fruitful with your talent? Have you been fruitful with your time?

We can only produce fruit if we remain attached to the vine. Jesus is the vine and we produce fruit in our lives as we are nourished by the vine of Christ. What does it mean to remain in Christ? In communion with the Lord in prayer, reading the Scriptures, studying the teaching of the Church, reading the lives of saints, and serving our brothers and sisters: this is how we remain in Christ and produce fruit for the kingdom. Jesus said, 'Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me' (John 15:4 NIV). The fruit that lasts is the fruit of the Spirit, which Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23: 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law' (NIV).

In England we celebrate today the feast-day of St Thomas More and commemorate his witness as saint and martyr. His courageous witness of conscience won him the crown of martyrdom. He died the king's faithful servant but God's first.

St Thomas More, witness of conscience and bearer of truth, pray for us.

Proper of Season: 2 Kings 22:8-13; 23:1-3 • Ps 118(119):33-37, 40 • Mt 7:15-20

Proper of Saints: 2 Mac 6:18, 21, 24-31 • Ps 30(31) • Mt 24:4-13

Thursday 23 June

Matthew 7:21-29 • Ordinary Weekday

The problem with common sense is it isn't that common and what seems obvious isn't as obvious as we think. It makes complete sense (common and specialized) that a building should have a solid, deep and secure foundation, built on compacted and safe ground. The construction of the foundation, as any building engineer will tell you, is the most important part of the project. Get this right, all goes well; get this wrong and demolition looms. No builder worth his salt would construct a building on a foundation of sand – that seems obvious enough, but is it? The world is replete with examples, time and time again, of building firms who skimp and shave on due process, flouting building regulations. This can be especially the case in earthquake zones where buildings collapse resulting in huge loss of life.

The Sermon on the Mount reaches its poetic climax with the parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders. Its message is simple and clear: we have to build our lives on the solid foundation of Christ and not on the shifting sands of our own thinking. How do we do this? We need to pay attention to the building regulations and dig deep. How do we do this? By hearing and putting into practice the Sermon on the Mount. Hearing and practice is the way of the disciple.

Every master builder will tell you that the key to a solid foundation is the cornerstone. It is the basis of the structure's rock-solid stability. Christ is the Cornerstone. Many centuries before Christ, the prophet Isaiah pointed towards how God would provide us with this sure foundation: 'Therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed" (Isa. 28:16 New American Standard Bible). His prophecy captured the idea that this foundation was the most expensive and valuable part of the construction. Through prayer and practising the presence of Christ, through studying and meditating on God's Word, through receiving the Eucharist and drawing ever closer to the Father, and through devoting ourselves to living the Beatitudes and practising the Sermon on the Mount, we build our foundation on the solid rock of Christ and his Church.

Lord, teach me to keep on laying deep foundations so that rooted and established in you I may grow and mature in faith.

2 Kings 24:8-17 • Psalm 78(79):1-5, 8-9

Matthew 7:21-29

Friday 24 June

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

Today we remember and celebrate the birth of St John the Baptist. Just as the birth of Jesus divides time – before Christ and after Christ – the life of John the Baptist, as the last of the Old Testament prophets, divides the Old from the New Testament. He is a bridge over which we cross from the old dispensation into the new.

Jesus called the Baptist the greatest man who ever lived (Matt. 11:11). His mission was to point to the coming of Christ: ‘you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins’ (Luke 1:76-77). John the Baptist’s vocation was to point to Christ whereas since the beginning we human beings have always pointed the finger at others (cf. Gen. 3:12). While we tend to point at the sin of others, the Baptist pointed to the One who would forgive our sin: ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29).

John the Baptist’s message was primarily one of repentance and conversion to prepare the way for the Lord. This message remains ever fresh and ever new, tempered with the mercy and compassion of the Father. We have lost a sense of repentance because we have lost something of a sense of sin. The Holy Spirit always works in us to recover a lively sense of the ways that we sin against God so that we can experience the joy of conversion.

John offered a baptism of repentance, which even Jesus submitted himself to, but Jesus came to baptize in the Holy Spirit. We can be continually renewed in the grace of this baptism because God is continually pouring out his Holy Spirit. On this holy feast-day we can experience the fire of the Holy Spirit impacting our lives. His fire burns in us so that we have a burning love for the Scriptures, a burning desire to root out sin in our lives and a burning love to serve our neighbour. The Spirit is always at work so that we are continually preparing the way for the Lord.

Praise be to God for the birth of John the Baptist! Praise God for he pointed to our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who has taken away our sins.

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

Acts 13:22-26 • Luke 1:57-66, 80

Saturday 25 June

Matthew 8:5-17 • Ordinary Weekday

The name of the Roman centurion is lost to us. His faith, which so impressed the Lord, speaks to every generation of believer. It is remarkable that this professional soldier, a man of the world, a man accustomed to violence and brutality, stood out for his faith.

There is a notion that faith is a blind leap into the dark but the Catechism of the Catholic Church refutes this: ‘The assent of faith is by no means a blind impulse of the mind’ (para. 156). We can come to a knowledge of God as being the origin and end of the universe through a process within which the intelligent design and beauty of the created world is recognized. Paul taught that God’s existence and power can be discerned through the created order (Rom. 1:7). St Augustine taught that the earth, the sea and the sky say to us, ‘See, we are beautiful’, and reminded us that while these beauties are subject to change, the Beautiful One who created them is not. This movement of faith is a wonderful gift and reveals the desire in every human heart to know God.

However, the faith which comes through the grace of revelation is of a different order and is supernatural (i.e. flesh and blood could not reveal this). It is towards this profession and confession of faith that the Holy Spirit leads us. While truly an act of our will and understanding it is also simultaneously a gift and a grace. In order to make the free choice of mind and will to believe, we need the interior help of the Holy Spirit. Faith is therefore in this sense a mystery, a profound interior action of the Holy Spirit at the very core, the very depths, of our being.

This impulse of faith, truly a work of the Holy Spirit, enables us to say, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant will be healed’ (v. 8); or proclaim from the bottom of our heart, ‘Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father’, or ‘Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.’

Lord, thank you for the gift of faith which enables me to be sure of what I hope for and certain of what I do not see. Deepen my faith, cast away all doubt and let me walk in the light of faith.

Lamentations 2:2, 10-14, 18-19 • Psalm 73(74):1-7, 20-21

Matthew 8:5-17

Sunday 26 June

(C) Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time • Luke 9:51-62

Did you know that the prophet Elijah gave permission to his disciple Elisha to bid goodbye to his family (1 Kgs. 19:19-21)? That was then and this is now – Jesus doesn't afford his disciples the same luxury. One of the most sacred duties in any culture and certainly the Israel of Jesus' day was the burial of a parent. Even this sacred task must not precede the call of Christ. Today's Gospel, let's face it, can be hard to read; it is almost too radical. Jesus' accent is very much on the bitter and less on the sweet of being a disciple. There is a sense of urgency and imminence about this teaching.

The Lord describes himself as 'the Son of Man'. This phrase, which is found over seventy times in the New Testament, had two distinct meanings. The first meant simply a human being – we are all sons of Adam, sons of men and before God we all stand small (see Ps. 8:4). In the second sense, in which Jesus uses it on this occasion, the phrase points forward to the Lord's coming as the eternal King before whom all nations will one day bow – not just as saviour but as the heavenly Saviour (see Dan. 7:13-14).

Through a grace of revelation, the Holy Spirit convinces us that Jesus Christ is the Eternal God, God made man, God made flesh, the Word Among Us. Rooted and established in this firm conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord we understand that we are called to love God with every fibre of our being. This sweet knowledge of Christ means that we can choose to follow him whatever the cost, regardless of how bitter this may be.

There is always a cost to discipleship and God's grace, while free, is not cheap: there will always be a cost in following Christ. For some this may involve making difficult life choices, for others it may mean forsaking a chosen path or career, and for others it may involve renouncing marriage in order to follow Christ. We can be confident that, whatever challenges we face, the Holy Spirit will always bless us when we choose to follow God's will and not our own.

Lord, I have put my hand to the plough of discipleship. Teach me to labour in the harvest field and respond with all my heart to the radical call of discipleship.

1 Kings 19:16, 19-21 • Psalm 15(16):1-2, 5, 7-11

Galatians 5:1, 13-18 • Luke 9:51-62

Monday 27 June

Matthew 8:18-22 • Ordinary Weekday

How well do you know yourself? The older we get, the better we think we do. The younger we are, the less able we are to know ourselves. One of the reasons why it is hard ultimately to know ourselves is that our hearts are deceitful (Jer 17:9). There are deep and dark undercurrents within all of us. We have many desires, needs and wants and these drives are constantly at work in us. We want to do good but evil is right there, urging us in the opposite direction. Jesus knew what was in a human being (John 2:24). He knew the human heart; he was under no illusion about human weakness and sinfulness. We are by nature lacking in resolve and consistency. We say one thing and do another. We take our vows, make our promises, but not many of us stay the course. This did not make Jesus love us less but love us more.

Jesus challenges those who declare with flourish and aplomb their desire to follow him. To them grace seems cheap whereas in truth grace is costly. Grace seems cheap because the would-be disciples approach him with their own agendas. The first is pretentious and unrealistic. He says he will follow the Lord wherever he goes but this noble impulse will be tested in the fire of homelessness, discomfort and a nomadic life. Another disciple appears keen but says he needs to attend to a family burial first. Jesus' response can seem harsh but it is likely that the man's father had not just died – he was alluding rather to his responsibility as the oldest son for burying his father and administering his estate when the time came. Jesus is saying in effect that no time is right: there will always be something to prevent us from giving our life to him.

Jesus wanted his disciples to be realistic and courageous enough to face the reality of following him. However, the sweet blessings of grace outweigh the bitter cost of following the Lord. Perhaps if we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship and actually to become disciples, the church in the West would be transformed and the impact on society would be staggering. What is the cost of your discipleship? What are the blessings of your discipleship?

‘Happy are they who know that discipleship simply means the life which springs from grace, and that grace simply means discipleship.’ (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Amos 2:6-10, 13-16 • Psalm 49(50):16-23

Matthew 8:18-22

Tuesday 28 June

(Memorial) St Irenaeus • Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus' calming of the storm is found in all three synoptic Gospels (Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25). We know this squall was unusually treacherous as even the disciples who were seasoned and experienced fishermen thought their end had come! The Sea of Galilee was prone to these sudden storms and no doubt the terrified disciples were aware of others who had perished in similar circumstances. Matthew uses the Greek word *seismos* to describe the storm that rocked their boat, the same word that is used to describe the seismic upheaval which will mark the end of the world (Matt. 24:7).

We all live on the open seas of life, subject to all kinds of storms and squalls which threaten not only to rock our boat, but capsize it or sink it. Many know the raw emotion of being overwhelmed, fearful and desperate. We all face very real and difficult challenges in life: they can be relationships which have soured, financial hardship, work-related issues, family problems, sickness and illness. God knows that in our distress and anguish we have cried out, as the disciples cried out: 'Lord, save me, I'm going to drown.' This cry of the heart reflects the ancient liturgical prayer *Kyrie Eleison*, 'Lord, have mercy', and this truly is the prayer of the heart that calls upon God's grace and help.

Just as Jesus calmed the power and force of the storm, so too he calms the waves that threaten to overwhelm us. Like the disciples our faith can be easily shaken and immature but through praying, 'Lord, have mercy', we learn quickly of God's presence in our lives. One of the deepest fears of the human heart is of being alone in our anguish and distress, but we are never alone – as St Augustine taught, 'God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.' God is with us in whatever situation or predicament we face: comforting, consoling, encouraging, speaking words of wisdom and light. In the midst of our anxiety the Lord asks: 'You of little faith, why are you so afraid?' (v. 26 NIV). The answer, of course, is because our faith needs to deepen and grow, bit by bit, day by day – this can happen as we turn to the Lord.

Lord, help us to trust that you are sufficient for all our needs and that your grace is sufficient as your power is made perfect in and through our weakness and need.

Amos 3:1-8; 4:11-12 • Psalm 5:5-8

Matthew 8:23-27

Wednesday 29 June

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

God's ways are not our ways nor his choices our choices. We are a Church of St Peter and St Paul: Peter is the rock; Paul is the builder; Jesus is the Foundation Stone. Today we celebrate the feast of two of the greatest saints of the Church. Both were deeply flawed, deeply human, and both experienced the grace of conversion. They both bear eloquent witness to the power of the gospel to transform us. Peter, emotional, impulsive and cowardly, truly became the rock upon which the Church was built – the rock of martyrdom and devotion to Christ. Paul, once zealous, blinded and violent, following his powerful conversion on the road to Damascus became the great evangelist of the early Church. By any standard or stretch of the imagination they are both towering figures of church and human history. We stand on their shoulders; they are our brothers in faith and today we celebrate their life and commemorate their witness.

Little did these two men realize that their letters to the early Church would become sacred canon, teaching and guiding believers from the very beginning. We have two letters written by Peter (1 and 2 Peter) and many written by Paul. They both reveal that faith grows and matures through the grace of revelation. This is not something passive but rather an engagement with the mystery of faith which enables the Holy Spirit to bring us ever deeper into the riches and treasures of faith. Their message often encourages us to seek the revelation or insight which is not of flesh and blood but is from the Father. They both gave eloquent testimony that the Holy Spirit is the One who leads us ever more deeply into the mystery of God, the mystery of Christ. This grace is available to us today as we turn to the Father asking for the prayers and intercessions of these two great saints of the Church.

We pray then as St Peter and St Paul prayed:

‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’ (1 Pet. 1:3 NIV) ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.’ (Eph. 1:3 NIV)

Acts 12:1-11 • Psalm 33(34):2-9

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

Thursday 30 June

Ordinary Weekday • Matthew 9:1-8

Truly and surely among the most beautiful words ever spoken are: ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven’ (v. 2). Have you heard these words for yourself? Have you had a life-changing experience of the Father’s forgiveness? Have you committed a sin which you believed unforgiveable, of which you were deeply ashamed, and then experienced the warm embrace of God’s unconditional forgiveness? As wonderful as a physical miracle is – such as a person being set free from debilitating paralysis – the greatest miracle of all, we learn today, is the gift of forgiveness.

In today’s Gospel we learn that knowing the miracle of God’s forgiveness is our greatest need and most urgent want. Deep in the heart of every person is the thirst for forgiveness. Simply put, the reason we need forgiveness is because we sin and sinners need forgiveness in the same way a thirsty man craves water to quench his desperate thirst. God’s forgiveness is a fundamental need striking at the core of our being.

In baptism we received our first and fundamental conversion – in this grace we received the forgiveness of all our sins and the gift of new life. However, the call of conversion resounds throughout our entire lives – there will never be a time whilst we have breath that we don’t need the grace of conversion and forgiveness. This truly is a work of the Holy Spirit whose role is to soften our hearts because they easily become hardened and calloused. We resist the Holy Spirit, sometimes in overt and bold ways and at other times in subtle and deceptive ways. The prophet Jeremiah was right when he lamented, ‘The human heart is deceitful above all things’ (Jer. 17:9). When we sin we immediately begin to carry a burden, which becomes heavier and heavier – weighing us down, robbing us of joy, condemning and accusing us.

In this Year of Mercy we can be hopeful and confident of a new experience of God’s forgiveness. We seek this grace through the sacrament of mercy, where God meets us in the sacred space of the confessional. Here we encounter the gentle mercy of the Father who does not condemn us but sent his Son to carry the burden of our sins and who says to us, ‘Take heart; your sins are forgiven.’

‘There are waters and tears: the water of baptism and the tears of repentance, the fruit of the joy of forgiveness.’ (St Ambrose)

Amos 7:10-17 • Psalm 18(19):8-11

Matthew 9:1-8