

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

26th February – 4th March 2023

Saints this Week

St David

1st March

Reading

1 Peter 1:10-16 (RSV)

A Call to Holy Living

¹⁰ The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; ¹¹ they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

¹³ Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶ since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

Reflection

THE OPENING verses of today's reading ground the resurrection faith in the work of the prophets, themselves inspired by the Spirit of Christ working within them. Suffering leads to glory, they attest, and this pattern is the hallmark of the Christian vocation. The ability to proclaim the Gospel is itself a grace and those who share in the Christian life have received something which angels long to have. The author cannot conceal his pride and joy in being a Christian. The consequence of discipleship is that demands are made on us. We need to gird up the loins of our minds:

'girding the loins' comes from Exodus 12, eating the Passover dressed for action, and Luke 12, waiting with lighted lamps for the master to come home from the marriage feast. Self-control and holiness are the watchwords for those whose hope is set fully upon the grace which comes with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

First Week of Lent

Collect

GRANT, almighty God, through the yearly observance of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Monday in the First Week of Lent

Reading

Matthew 25:31-46 (RSV)

The Judgment of the Nations

³¹ 'When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them,

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' ⁴⁶ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Reflection

WE HAVE here a judgment scene: the King is judging the nations, that is, the Gentile world. The passage comes after three parables about preparing for the coming of the Son of Man, but this judgment scene, though it is phrased rather like a parable, is different. As commonly understood, it is thought to be about what happens to everyone when they come before the Judgment Seat of God, the importance of good works for the poor and needy. In this interpretation, the poor and needy are everyone poor and in need. The story then becomes an endorsement of the Golden Rule: 'And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them' (Luke 6:31) Useful though this interpretation is for trying to live well, it is almost certainly not what is meant in Matt 25.

Jesus is speaking to a Jewish audience but he is speaking about what judgment awaits the Gentiles. They will be judged by how they have treated the *adelphoi*, the disciples of Jesus. This is on the basis of Matt 10:40 where Jesus tells his disciples 'He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me.' It is a strange idea that Jews and Gentiles will be judged differently and on different occasions but this seems to be implied not only by St Matthew but also in the Old Testament (Ezek 39:21, Joel 3) and commonly in the apocalyptic tradition (1 Enoch 91:14, Psalms of Solomon 17:29, 4 Ezra 13:33-49 &c). This second interpretation – most probably the correct one – does not prevent us from drawing conclusions about how not only non-Jews and non-Christians behave but how Christians should behave. Hence we have what are commonly referred to as the 'Seven Corporal Works of Mercy', acts based on the injunctions in this bible passage.

Tuesday in the First Week of Lent

Reading

Matthew 6:7-15 (RSV)

You should pray like this

Jesus said to his disciples: ⁷ 'And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
¹⁰ Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread;
¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Reflection

ON ASH Wednesday we listened to the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus teaching his disciples the duties of Almsgiving, Praying, and Fasting. We were reading Matthew 6 but omitted – and set aside for further consideration – the Lord's Prayer, verses 7-15 of the chapter. That further consideration happens now, when the verses form today's Gospel. Given as a model for all prayer, the Our Father has been treated line by line by quite a few theologians, most famously by St Cyril of Jerusalem, St Augustine of Hippo, and St Cyril of Alexandria. Though there is not time or space here for a line-by-line reflection, Let's look briefly at the basis structure. I am always fascinated by the fact that the Lord's Prayer is for Christians what the *Shema* is for Jews. The *Shema* draws on three texts (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41) and is prescribed for recitation evening and morning. From early times, Christians similarly have recited the Lord's Prayer at Morning and Evening Prayer and at the

daily Mass. When Jesus quotes the *Shema*, Mark 12:28-34, he puts alongside the duty to love God the duty to love one's neighbour. Thus he brings alongside the *Shema* commandment the no less ancient commandment of love of one's neighbour, found in Leviticus 19:18. The importance of this – putting love of God and love of neighbour together, though preserving the primacy of the first – is that it is also the organising principle of the Lord's Prayer. In St Matthew's account, Jesus bids his disciples to pray to God as a Father, praying for the coming of the Kingdom, the fulfilment on earth of the divine will. It is in the light of this that petitioners ask for their 'daily bread' – all that they need – and for forgiveness, a forgiveness which is contingent upon learning to forgive others. The culmination of the prayer is a prayer for delivery from the terrible trials which can face Christians and will face the Church before the end of time. We pray to be delivered from evil itself.

Wednesday in the First Week of Lent

Reading

Jonah 3:1-10 (RSV)

The people of Nineveh repent

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² 'Arise, go to Nin'evah, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nin'evah, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nin'evah was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he cried, 'Yet forty days, and Nin'evah shall be overthrown!' ⁵ And the people of Nin'evah believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

⁶ Then tidings reached the king of Nin'evah, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, and covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he made proclamation and published through Nin'evah, 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, or drink water, ⁸ but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them cry mightily to God; yea, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence which is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows, God may yet repent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we perish not?'

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it.

Reflection

THE BOOK of Jonah relates to the activities of a prophet in the eighth century BC, from the time of King Jeroboam II of Israel. Some scholars, old and new, are convinced that here is a historical account, notwithstanding such fanciful features as being swallowed by a great fish – and surviving to tell the tale. There is also the quick-growing vine to protect Jonah from the scorching sun, and its equally quick withering. Finally, the fulsome repentance of the people of the city of Nineveh seems like a tall story. After all it was not long after Jonah's time that the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria. Whether the book of Jonah is based on history or is a morality tale matters little. What is important for us is that it the background to references made by Jesus. In Matthew 12:38-40 Jesus mentions 'the sign of Jonah' and in today's Gospel, Luke 11:29-32, Jesus refers to Jonah as a sign to the Ninevites. In a similar fashion, the Son of Man is a sign to the generation to whom he was speaking. The particular relevance of the sign of Jonah was that, just as Jonah spent three days in the belly of the great fish, so Jesus was to spend three days in the tomb. We should notice, in both cases, that, though there was much activity during the three days – Jonah praying and praising, Jesus harrowing hell and setting free those locked in death – in both cases, Jonah and Jesus, there was actual death and, in figure and then in reality, resurrection and new life. Such was the new life experienced by Jonah that he was able to preach repentance fruitfully to a great pagan city.

Thursday in the First Week of Lent

Reading

Matthew 7:7-12 (RSV)

Ask, Seek, Knock

Jesus said to his disciples, ⁷ Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father

who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! ¹² So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

Reflection

AN EXTRACT from the Catechism of the Catholic Church will help us make sense of Jesus' teaching about the Prayer of Petition, Ask, Seek, and Knock.

2629 The vocabulary of supplication in the New Testament is rich in shades of meaning: ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat, cry out, even 'struggle in prayer.' Its most usual form, because the most spontaneous, is petition: by prayer of petition we express awareness of our relationship with God. We are creatures who are not our own beginning, not the masters of adversity, not our own last end. We are sinners who as Christians know that we have turned away from our Father. Our petition is already a turning back to him.

2630 The New Testament contains scarcely any prayers of lamentation, so frequent in the Old Testament. In the risen Christ the Church's petition is buoyed by hope, even if we still wait in a state of expectation and must be converted anew every day. Christian petition, what St. Paul calls 'groaning,' arises from another depth, that of creation 'in labour pains' and that of our selves 'as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.' In the end, however, 'with sighs too deep for words' the Holy Spirit 'helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.'

2631 The first movement of the prayer of petition is asking forgiveness, like the tax collector in the parable: 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' It is a prerequisite for righteous and pure prayer. A trusting humility brings us back into the light of communion between the Father and his Son Jesus Christ and with one another, so that 'we receive from him whatever we ask.' Asking forgiveness is the prerequisite for both the Eucharistic liturgy and personal prayer.

2632 Christian petition is centred on the desire and search for the Kingdom to come, in keeping with the teaching of Christ. There is a hierarchy in these petitions: we pray first for the Kingdom, then for

what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming. This collaboration with the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit, which is now that of the Church, is the object of the prayer of the apostolic community. It is the prayer of Paul, the apostle par excellence, which reveals to us how the divine solicitude for all the churches ought to inspire Christian prayer. By prayer every baptized person works for the coming of the Kingdom.

2633 When we share in God's saving love, we understand that every need can become the object of petition. Christ, who assumed all things in order to redeem all things, is glorified by what we ask the Father in his name. It is with this confidence that St. James and St. Paul exhort us to pray at all times.

Friday in the First Week of Lent

Reading

Matthew 5:20-26 (RSV)

Go and be reconciled to your brother

Jesus said to his disciples: ²⁰For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.; ²² But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; ²⁶ truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

Reflection

IN THE Sermon on the Mount, chapter five of St Matthew's Gospel, Jesus presents his listeners with a set of six antitheses. There's this and there's that. Today we heard the first of these antitheses:

²¹ You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' **²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.**

As a teacher – a new Rabbi – Jesus is well-within the Rabbinic tradition of explaining and extrapolating from the Jewish Law. Oh, and that word 'Law'. What is referred to is not a rigid set of offences and punishments – like our 'criminal law' – but the *Torah*, effectively an instruction manual. How to live within the Love of God. Following the antithesis as stated, Jesus continues with practical suggestions on reconciliation. First, if you are about to make a gift offering and are estranged from another, put the gift aside and go and be reconciled. Second, if you find yourself in a legal challenge, make friends on the way to court. Reconciliation before making an offering is highlighted by the exchange of the Sign of Peace at Mass. The suggestion is that if one cannot exchange the Peace – not just with those around you but with anyone in the community – then one should not proceed to Holy Communion but instead effect the necessary reconciliation. In the Ambrosian Rite and in the modern Church of England Communion Order, the Peace takes place before the Offertory. More than that, the Anglicans often use the text about leaving the gift in front of the altar as a sentence at the Peace.