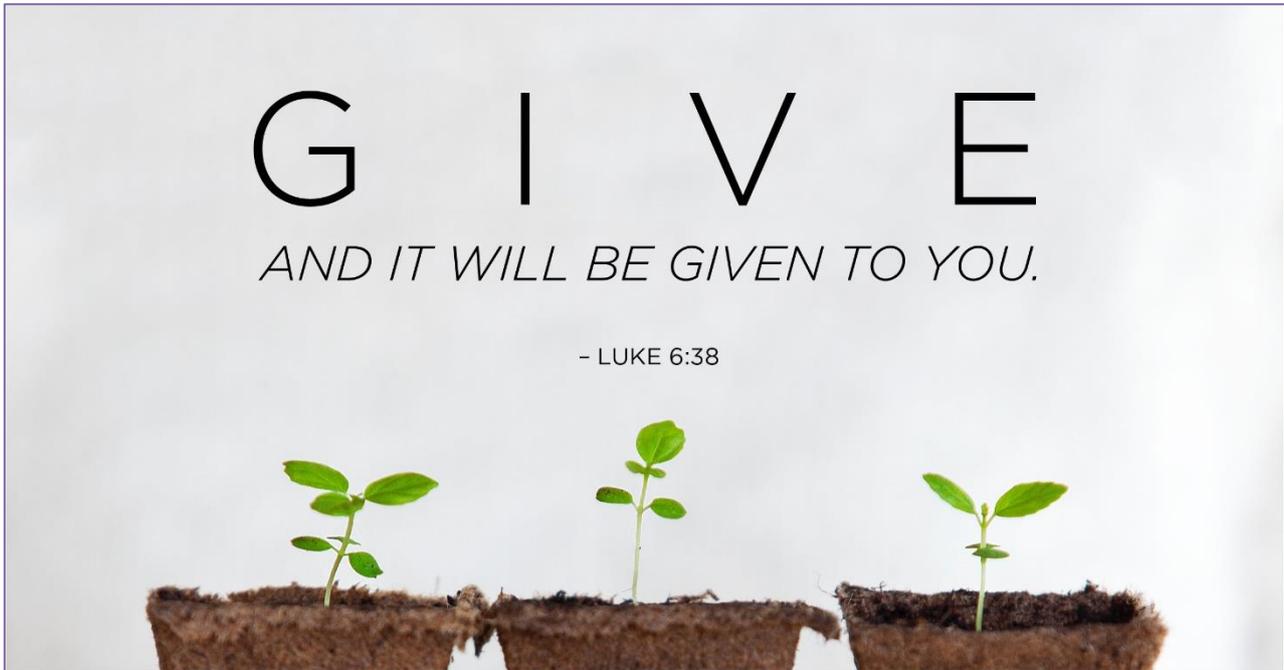


Monday 6 March 2023

The God of compassion

Readings: Daniel 9:4-10; Luke 6:36-38



"Give, and there will be gifts for you." (Luke 6:38)

If you look at the agony columns of newspapers and magazines, where people write in with their problems, seeking advice, you'll notice that many of them are about family feuds. It might start over something petty and then escalates, with brothers and sisters, cousins, parents and children all judging one another, refusing to apologise, and always seeing the other person as in the wrong. They refuse to give ground and there is deadlock.

In today's Gospel, Jesus shows deep wisdom about human nature. He recognises that our negative behaviour may lead to similar negativity on the part of another person. But this is not God's way, as the reading from Daniel also highlights. Mercy and pardon belong to God, we are told. And when we lack mercy and pardon ourselves, we offend the Lord.

It is easy to be judgemental but, as you will know if you read those agony columns, blame and animosity lead to the same from others too. We end up in a downward spiral. Jesus teaches that the Father, the God of compassion, requires us to be compassionate, like him. It can be hard to do, especially if we have been genuinely wronged. But the alternative is not just ongoing enmity but deeply damaging bitterness. What we offer others, without price, we will reap, Jesus promises. Or, as he said in the prayer he gave us, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us".

Prayer

Father, we see in Jesus' life what true compassion means. Help us to follow him in how we respond to others, even when we feel greatly offended. Just as you offer us mercy, may we find the courage to reject anger and reach out to others. Amen.

Tuesday 7 March 2023

Putting on a show

Readings: Isaiah 1:10. 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12



“They do not practise what they preach.” (Matthew 23:3)

We’re living in a social media world. People constantly access digital platforms like Twitter, TikTok and Instagram to see what celebrities are up to. It’s all about image, conjuring up a perfect world of grand houses, the latest fashions, luxury holidays, and sometimes telling the world about a good cause a celebrity supports. There’s an obsession with saying: “Look at me.”

Attention-seeking is as old as humanity, and Jesus warns against it in today’s Gospel reading. The trouble with the Pharisees is not just how they present themselves but what is in their hearts. They expect a considerable amount from others but little from themselves; “they do not practise what they preach,” Jesus says. Rather than focusing on how long their tassels are, they need to heed what the Lord expects of us, highlighted in the reading from Isaiah: to work for the common good and for justice and to help those in need. It is Jesus’ constant message too – to place others first.

Social media can be an enormous asset. There are many organisations and individuals, including the Pope, who spread the Gospel and help others through platforms such as Twitter. But they are all too often used as a form of self-promotion and elevation – the antithesis of Jesus’ teaching. All of us are called to serve the Lord and others; but, just as happened with the Pharisees, are we are often tempted to be self-serving instead?

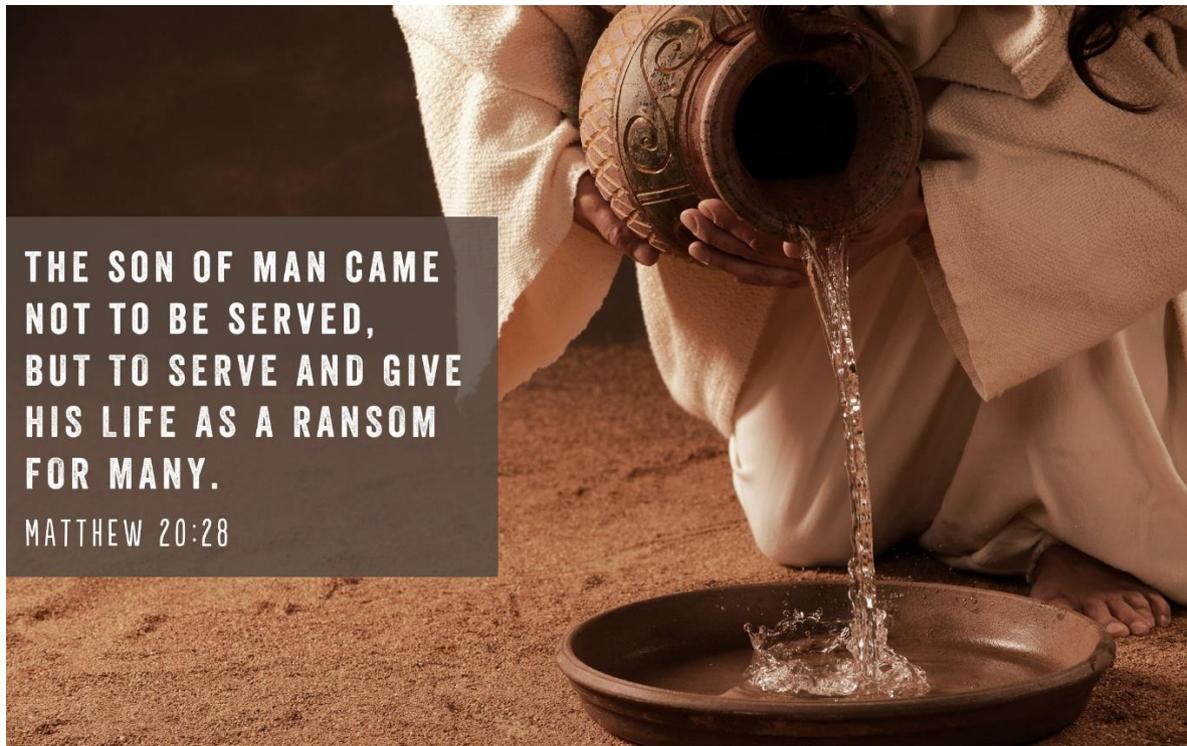
Prayer

Lord, let us not give in to temptation to put ourselves first and focus on the material things of this world, not heeding your word. Help us to follow you quietly and gently, without show and ostentation, serving others as you did. Amen.

Wednesday 8 March 2023

Looking for reward

Readings: Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28



THE SON OF MAN CAME
NOT TO BE SERVED,
BUT TO SERVE AND GIVE
HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM
FOR MANY.

MATTHEW 20:28

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” (Matthew 20:28)

Different people respond to success in different ways, and not always well. The best of us will have enough generosity of spirit to be pleased for someone if they succeed, but others will be jealous and bitter. But there's another way, too: to think, what's in it for me? Can I benefit, or maybe my family?

There's something of that approach in the mother of James and John, who is full of ambition for her sons, as we hear in today's Gospel reading. She's wanting them to have some of the action, to gain by being alongside Jesus in his kingdom. She clearly believes in Jesus in some way, but she has misunderstood his message completely. He is not offering triumph, or for his disciples to be acclaimed and to bask in his reflected glory. Greatness in Jesus' kingdom is based not on power and reputation but on service.

This fundamental value of Christian teaching is often ignored or even rejected by society. The business and political worlds are filled with ambition and people plotting against others, as people plotted against Jeremiah in the first reading. Jesus' approach is different. If we want to follow him, he explains, then we must serve others. This does not mean that Christians cannot be in positions of leadership, but it requires a different interpretation of leadership, not as power, but as a way of serving others with humility. Jesus, the servant king, shows us what this means.

Prayer

God our Father, we ask for courage as we seek to follow Jesus' path. May we seek the right way ahead and learn to serve with humility. May we always learn from the example of the servant king, Christ our Lord. Amen.

Thursday 9 March 2023

Uncomfortable truths

Readings: Jeremiah 17:5-10; Luke 16:19-31

“They will not listen either to Moses or the prophets.” (Luke 16:31)

Most of us like to avoid situations that make us feel uncomfortable. If there's a row going on in the street between two people, many of us would avoid it. Some people switch off the television news because they find it depressing. Charities have to judge their adverts finely – nowadays some people say they suffer from charity fatigue and don't respond to misery any more.

The parable in today's Gospel might make us feel uncomfortable. We know it would be right for the rich man to respond to the plight of Lazarus, but we can probably also think of moments when we ourselves have failed someone who is living in dire conditions.

And we certainly don't want to end up like the rich man, however wealthy he was in this life, in torment for eternity. This discomfort is, of course, due to Jesus' talent as a storyteller: he is powerfully evoking a terrible situation for Lazarus in this life, but an even worse future for the rich man.

We are called to respond to people in need.

But, we might ask, can we respond constantly, every day? What if we sold everything we had and gave all the money away? What would happen to our own families and responsibilities?

What we are called to do is to respond responsibly and effectively to people who need our help, and that means that we have a responsibility to work for social justice. In that way, we work towards the kingdom of God.

Prayer

*Father, at times we may be tempted to cross the road rather than help someone in need.
May we remember that we are called to build your kingdom here.
Give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear those who suffer. Amen.*



Friday 10 March 2023

Violence in the vineyard

Readings: Genesis 37:3-4. 12-13. 17-28; Matthew 21:33-43. 45-46

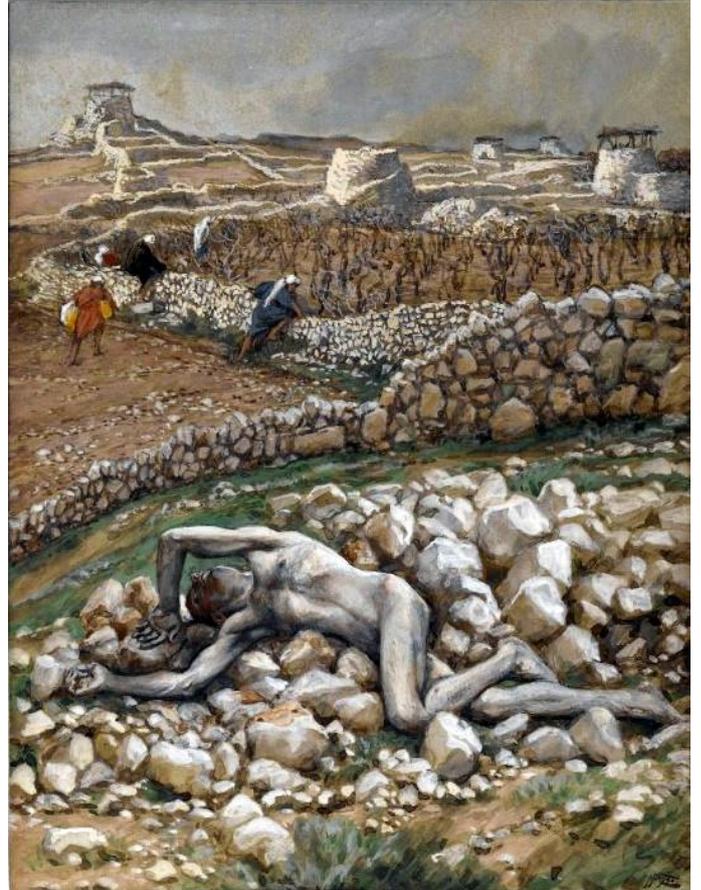
“So they seized him... and killed him.”
(Matthew 21:39)

Gardening has become highly popular, especially since the start of the Covid pandemic. People appreciate open space more since the lockdowns and there is something very meditative about a garden.

What all gardeners have to learn – especially if they are growing fruit or vegetables – is that it takes great patience. Crops have to be nurtured and carefully tended if they are to bear fruit.

In today’s Gospel parable, Jesus recounts a story of violence. The peace of a place of potentially great fruitfulness is destroyed. Even when the vineyard owner sends his son, the tenants reject him. Jesus is really telling a story about himself: first God the Father sent prophets, rejected by the people, and now he has sent his Son.

But Jesus is well aware that he in turn will be rejected – and indeed killed. He adds to the parable another metaphor – that he is like a stone rejected by builders, but that will prove to be the most important stone of all.



It is all too easy for us to conclude that we are different from those people who rejected Jesus and put him to death. But we need to ask ourselves whether we, too, have failed to recognise Jesus in our lives. Have we failed to work to produce the fruit that he wants us to bear? Is he really the cornerstone of how we live our lives, the foundation on which we build everything else?

Prayer

*Father, you sent us your Son to redeem us through his loving sacrifice.
We pray that he may become the cornerstone of our lives,
that we may make him the sure foundation on which all else depends,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Saturday 11 March 2023

Coming home

Readings: Micah 7:14-15. 18-20; Luke 15:1-3. 11-32



“This son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.”
(Luke 15:24)

We may have known siblings who are great rivals, or we may have read about them in classic fiction, from the three daughters of Shakespeare’s King Lear, to Sherlock Holmes and his brother Mycroft. At the heart of many such tensions is rivalry over a parent’s affections.

Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son is a classic tale of rivalry. One brother is dutiful: the other profligate. But once the wayward son returns, the father is overjoyed. Even before his boy has apologised, he has rushed out to greet him. There is no moralising, no admonishment, just delight.

This parable is full of hope and compassion for those who stray; but, in telling it, Jesus recognises the mindset of those who are always dutiful. They can become grudging and resentful when someone else is not pulling their weight; they don’t want someone that they believe has left the family down to be welcomed back with open arms. But those open arms are just the point: Jesus is telling us that God our Father is always ready to celebrate a homecoming. It is not just the younger son who is prodigal; the father is prodigal in his extravagant love. And there is a warning, too: perhaps the parable reminds us that those of us who think we have remained loyal to the practice of our faith can be in danger of becoming self-righteous. Our arms must be open to welcome back those who have gone away and now wish to return.

Prayer

Father, we are filled with hope by the promise of your love, a love that is full of mercy for those who stray and long to return. Give us the grace to know our own need of your mercy, and to rejoice when others return to your open arms. Amen.