

Saturday 17 December

Scripture: Genesis 49: 2, 8-19; Psalm 71; Matthew 1: 1-17

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew opens his Gospel by placing Jesus firmly into the history of the Jewish people. He is described as son of David, the greatest king in their history – and the son of Abraham, the first person to whom God revealed himself and, through whom, began to form his people. He also claims Jesus as the Messiah – the one the Jewish people had waited long years for. Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience and so this was vital – that Jesus was one of them and the fulfilment of all they had been longing for. It may seem a long, tedious list but within it are prophets, kings, founders of families, prostitutes and many more people who are only mentioned here. Jesus is descended not only from God but from all kinds of human being.

- Are you interested in your own genealogy – and how far can you take your family history back?
- How many names do you recognise in the list – and can identify what they did?

If you know some of your family tree, spend some time praying with it – remembering the lives of those whose genes you have inherited. If you do not have such a thing, pray for your parents and grandparents and reflect on the times in which they lived – how it differs from your own – and how their lives and experience have contributed to yours. Thank God for the past – and ask God's blessing on the future.



Daily Reflections



Week Beginning Sunday 11 December 2016
(Third Sunday of Advent Year A)
to
Saturday 17 December 2016

Sunday 11 December – Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 35: 1-6, 10; Psalm 145; James 5: 7-10; Matthew 11: 2-11

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.”

Jesus knows the popularity of John but is conscious that they do not fully understand his mission. He poses a series of questions to push them towards a deeper awareness of what may have drawn them to him. They did not go into the desert for any natural phenomenon and were looking in totally the wrong places for someone grand and well-dressed. They went looking for a prophet – someone who could teach them more about God. John could certainly do this but his greater task was to open minds and hearts to the one who was to come after him – Jesus.

- What kinds of thing attract people to celebrities in our own day?
- Who might the equivalent of John the Baptist be today – someone who points people in the direction of the Lord?

Spend some time today thinking about what attracts you to people – particularly people who influence you in your faith. Reflect too on the qualities you have – or could develop – to attract people towards Jesus through the things you say and do.



Friday 16 December

Scripture: Isaiah 56: 1-3, 6-8, Psalm 66, John 5: 33-36

Jesus said, ‘John was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But I have a testimony greater than John’s.’

The image of light was very important to the John who wrote today’s gospel. He refers to Jesus as the light come into the world but here is reminding us that John the Baptist was also someone who brought light to the world. The subtle difference is that he refers to John as a lamp – something that carries the light but is not the light itself. John’s lamp burned strong and bright and illuminated the path for many – a path that was to lead them to a still brighter light. If they rejoiced in the testimony of John, they were now ready to receive something even greater.

- What is the difference between a lamp and pure light?
- How do these images of lamps and light speak to you about what John and Jesus brought to the world?

Today would be a good day to light your Advent candle if you have one – or a lamp if you do not. Jesus refers to John as a lamp –and might refer to you as one too. Not as great a one as John – but someone who shines before others to bring them to him. Ponder this for a while and pray for the grace to be faithful to the trust placed in you.



Thursday 15 December

Scripture: Isaiah 54: 1-10; Psalm 29; Luke 7: 24-30

Jesus said, 'Among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.' (And all the people who heard this, including the tax-collectors, acknowledged the justice of God, because they had been baptized with John's baptism. But by refusing to be baptized by him, the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves.)

This is another extract from the gospel we heard on Sunday. Jesus is talking to a mixed crowd of people – the Pharisees and lawyers who had heard John but not accepted his authenticity – and another group whose lives had been turned around by his baptism. This baptism was for repentance – a turning away from old ways towards a new life. It seems clear that tax-collectors and others on the margins of Jewish respectability of the day found this easier than those who should have, perhaps, found it easier.

- Why do you think the sinners found it easier to repent than the more righteous people?
- How does this affect how they then hear what Jesus says about John?

Think today about what repentance means for us – especially those of us who know we need it most. Pray for the grace to be willing to repent of things in your own life that take you away from God – and the joy of knowing the merciful justice of God when you do.



Monday 16 December (Our Lady of Guadalupe)

Scripture: Numbers 24: 2-7, 15-17; Psalm 24; Matthew 21: 23-27

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?'

Jesus was subjected to all sorts of questions – many of which he answered with a question. He was not being awkward but aware that giving easy answers was not going to get him anywhere. Those who asked complex questions expected thought-through answers. In fact, discussions about matters of faith were part of the training of young Jews and continued into adulthood. By reflecting their question back to them, Jesus is following the pattern he had grown up with and forcing the elders to extend their thinking – even if, at this stage, they are unable to come to an answer.

- Do you enjoy asking questions about faith – or do you find it difficult or worrying?
- How do you feel about coming across questions that seem to have no answer – or where the answer is difficult to understand?

In your prayer time today, think about some of the questions you have about your faith and what you might do about finding some of the answers. The internet is a reasonable source – though some Catholic sites are not always reliable. The most authoritative source of answers is the Catechism – though it is not always easy to understand on a first reading. For interest, you might like to take a look at one of the most significant works on theology, the *Summa Theologica* by St Thomas Aquinas. This is not bedtime reading, but what is noteworthy for us today is the fact that St Thomas starts each section with a series of questions – following the honoured tradition of which Jesus was a part.

Tuesday 13 December (St Lucy)

Scripture: Zephaniah 3: 1-2, 9-13; Psalm 33; Matthew 21: 28-32

Jesus said, 'What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, "I go, sir"; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?'

As on several days recently, we find Jesus posing questions – and have today left the answer open for us to answer ourselves. Of course, if you read the rest you know where Jesus is going with his thinking. The next question to pose ourselves is which group do we belong to? It is easy to say that we will do the will of God but not actually follow it through. Others may initially be reluctant or even reject Christian teaching but, later, come round to accepting it – and, even more important, acting upon it.

- How would you answer Jesus' question about who did the will of the father?
- If you are honest, which "camp" would you put yourself in – the say-ers or the do-ers?

Think today about the difference between doing and talking about doing the will of God. Remember that the will of God for you goes beyond the confines of what you do in church or in your prayer times (though these are important). How does adding that to the mix help you to answer the question about whether you are a say-er or do-er of God's will? In a time of prayer, bring any thoughts to the Lord.



Wednesday 14 December (St John of the Cross)

Scripture: Isaiah 45: 6-8, 18, 21-25; Psalm 84; Luke 7: 19-23

Jesus answered John's disciples, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.'

As devout Jews both Jesus and John would have known their scriptures and, particularly, the prophecies about the Messiah. When John's disciples come to find out if Jesus is the person John has been preparing for, Jesus does not give a simple yes. He knows that John needs more than that – both of them know that there are many people who would claim that title – either because they truly believe they are the Messiah or because they seek to gain status from it. Instead, Jesus gives them concrete examples to take back to reassure John that his work is coming to fruition in him.

- Where have you heard someone prophesy the things that Jesus is doing in today's gospel?
- How do you think John felt when his friends reported back what they had seen and heard?

Reflect on John's plight – a ministry cut short – the threat of death hanging over him – other people claiming him to be the Messiah – and one person, in particular, who seems to be the person – but how to be sure? Ponder the emotional and spiritual journey he makes from the dark of the prison cell to the realisation that his work has not been in vain but truly preparing for the Christ – the Messiah.

