

Saturday 10 December

Scripture: Ecclesiasticus 48: 1-4, 9-11; Psalm 79; Matthew 17: 10-13

Jesus said, 'Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands.'

It is unlikely that Jesus is saying that the great prophet Elijah had been resurrected or reincarnated. The disciples come to the conclusion that he is talking about John the Baptist since he was recognised by many people as a great prophet. One of the strange things about people and prophets is that people often think they want them – until they start telling a few home truths – or noticing things that they would rather keep hidden. At that point, they decide that they can live without them and many prophets have suffered the consequences of speaking hard truths – a fate Jesus is all too aware is awaiting him.

- Who are the prophets in our day?
- Why do people resent prophets and others speaking the truth?

Spend some time today praying for those whose calling is to speak out – particularly in the face of injustice or cruelty.



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Daily Reflections



Week Beginning Sunday 4 December 2016
(Second Sunday of Advent Year A)
to
Saturday 10 December 2016

Sunday 4 December – Second Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 11: 1-10, Psalm 71, Romans 15: 4-9, Matthew 3: 1-12

The one who is to come will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

This is an image which would have been more easily understood by the people of Jesus' day than it is now. In those days, people had to thresh the wheat in order to separate the grains of wheat from the stems and the husks – the chaff. It was an essential task – and part of it was to lift up the stems and husks on forks and allow the wind to carry the light materials away and then put the rest to one side – to put back onto the land or to be burned. It is a good image though for our own lives when the grains of good in us get lost in the chaff of everything else. It is quite a liberating thought – to let go of the things that are dry and dead in order to let what is life-giving grow.

- Where do you feel stifled by things that are dead and dry?
- How might you open yourself up to Christ with his winnowing fork to clear your heart and mind and soul so that you can serve him more fully?

Spend time today thinking about the things that clutter your life. You might even take yourself out for a walk if the weather permits – ideally to somewhere open with a bit of breeze (hopefully not a winter storm!) Imagine the Lord in the wind blowing the chaff away – or, as we tend to say, blow the cobwebs away.



Friday 9 December (St Juan Diego Cuauhtlatotzin)

Scripture: Isaiah 48: 17-19, Psalm 1, Matthew 11: 16-19

Jesus said, 'John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!".'

It would be interesting to know how Jesus said this. Was he angry? Exasperated? Amused? Whichever it was he is making the very valid point that some people are never satisfied. We may experience similar things in living out our faith these days. We may criticise something (justifiably) and be told we are being "unchristian". Or we may go out for a meal and enjoy good food and a drink and be told that this wasn't how people thought Catholics behaved. Or we may say that we are fasting or abstaining and get the look that tells us we are now officially a kill-joy. In these circumstances it is good to know that Jesus had the same thing happen to him.

- When have you found that something you do because of your faith has attracted criticism?
- How do you decide when it is worth trying to explain something – or simply letting things go?

Pray today for wisdom and patience... Wisdom to know when it is worth trying to explain why you are doing or not doing something because you are a Catholic and patience to put up with the criticism (well-founded or not!)



Thursday 8 December –

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Scripture: Genesis 3: 9-15, 20; Psalm 97; Ephesians 1: 3-6, 11-12; Luke 1: 26-38

The angel Gabriel came to Mary and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

Although this is the moment Mary was born for, it is clear that until this point she has lived as an ordinary young woman in an ordinary village in a rural part of a country occupied by the Roman Empire. She has not been made to feel special but has been educated in the stories and prayers of her Jewish ancestry and during the conversation with Gabriel, tries to put what is happening to her into that great history. In some ways, it is reassuring to know that even a great soul struggles when faced with the majesty and wonder of what God is doing. And that the whole of human history comes to depend on a very simple "Yes".

- What do you think was going through Mary's mind and heart as the conversation with Gabriel unfolds?
- What do you imagine Mary's childhood would have been like?

This is a beautiful gospel which has been illustrated in many ways. For images search the internet or refer to a book for a selection of pictures of the Annunciation. Choose one to pray with today, thinking about what God had already done for this young woman in preparing her for the destiny that awaits her.



Monday 5 December

Scripture: Isaiah 35: 1-10; Psalm 84; Luke 5: 17-26

The scribes and the Pharisees began to question, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

Although we might see the scribes and Pharisees as being awkward, in fact they are being perfectly orthodox. At that time, it was understood that only God could forgive sins so for a man – as they saw Jesus – to say that he could forgive sin was almost scandalous. Jesus is aware of their doubt but would probably have understood it and recognised their need for proof of his authority. By curing the paralysed man, he makes it clear that it is not just a physical cure but a spiritual one too. The Pharisees and scribes then have a choice – to allow what they have seen and heard to change their views or to close their minds to the possibility that God has indeed raised up someone to whom he has given authority to forgive sin.

- How much sympathy do you have for the position of the scribes and Pharisees?
- Why is the forgiveness of sins so important?

Spend some time today thinking about sin – forgiveness – and the difference it can make to someone's life. If you are aware of something on your own conscience – particularly something that is getting in the way of your living life to the full – make a decision to visit a priest and receive the forgiveness he is authorised to offer in Jesus' name.



Tuesday 6 December (St Nicholas)

Scripture: Isaiah 40: 1-11; Psalm 95; Matthew 18: 12-14

Jesus said, 'What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?'

Jesus asked over 200 questions – and gave very few answers. This question, in particular, is challenging. 'What do you think?' followed by a story that does not seem sensible – certainly to anyone who cares for sheep. To leave ninety-nine sheep at risk to find the one who was lost seems foolhardy. And yet there is something in the image that is appealing. Many of us would identify ourselves with that lost sheep and rejoice that the good shepherd would come in search of us. What might be worth remembering is the risk the shepherd takes in finding us – the loss of the other ninety-nine.

- What do you think? Why would a shepherd leave ninety-nine sheep to go in search of one?
- What do you think? What does the parable suggest about the value of every human soul?

Today might be a good day to pray Psalm 22/23 – the Lord is my Shepherd (the numbering varies according to the version of the bible you are using – in Catholic bibles it is 22. You might like to pray it by reading it slowly and letting the words sink deep into your soul. Or find a musical version and listen to it in a time of quiet prayer.



Wednesday 7 December (St Ambrose)

Scripture: Isaiah 40: 25-31, Psalm 102, Matthew 11: 28-30

Jesus said, 'I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'

Looking ahead to the coming of the Messiah, the Jewish people were by and large expecting a great warrior – a king – someone with great power to establish his rule over the world. Jesus comes and really does not fit the job description. He has authority and he has power – but he does not lord it over anyone. As he says, his rule is founded on his humility – knowing that he has come from God to save and to serve – and his gentleness with those in need. This is not a power that delights in keeping people on their toes or cowed and afraid. This is a power in which people can feel safe and at peace.

- What different ways of using power can you see around the world today?
- How does Jesus' way of wielding his authority help you in your Christian life?

Spend time today reflecting on Jesus' gentleness and humility – and how it offers a way of leadership that can help us to thrive. If you are in a position of authority, think about how you might model your work or ministry on that of Jesus.

