

- What difference might it make if you head out to the shops trying to see the crowds as Jesus does?
- What can you do practically to bring kindness and compassion into the turmoil of Christmas shopping?

If you have shopping to do today, make a conscious effort bring patience and compassion into your dealings with others. If you do not, think about going to a shopping centre and finding a spot to sit and pray for the crowds of people around you.



# Daily Reflections



Week Beginning Sunday 27 November 2016  
(First Sunday of Advent Year A)  
to  
Saturday 3 December 2016

## Sunday 27 November 2016 – First Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Isaiah 2:1-5, Psalm 121; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24: 37-44

*Jesus said, 'Two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.'*

The process Jesus describes here has become known, mainly in the USA, as “The Rapture” and describes what some people expect to happen – the Last Day when the righteous will be taken directly up from the earth into heaven. The early Christians expected something similar but it is clear that it has not yet happened. Jesus is not suggesting that people give up work and spend their lives gazing to the skies – in another gospel he praises those who are found about the Lord’s business which is not just the obvious religious things we do. What he may be suggesting is that we do our daily work with (when we can) an awareness that, however mundane, it is part of preparing us for the time when we will, hopefully, be “taken up” into the Kingdom of heaven.

- How might you see your daily work as part of the preparation for the coming of the Lord?
- And what difference might it make to how you do it?

As we begin Advent – and a new Church Year – think about having an Advent candle to light each day to mark your time of prayer. Reflect today on how you spend your time and how the various things you do help you to improve as a person – helping you to become the person God called you to be. Think also about how they help to build the Kingdom of God in the world.



blind men are open to the grace he is to offer them and, perhaps, to use their good fortune in bringing light and life to other people.

- Why do you think Jesus asks about the blind men’s faith?
- How do you see this cure – as a kind of transaction – “you believe in me – so I will cure you” – or a healing that builds on faith that is already there – or simple free gift?

Spend some time today thinking about things in your own life that are difficult or painful. Imagine Jesus asking you whether you believe he can help you – and see what your response would be. Do not worry if it is “no” – simply acknowledge that to the Lord and pray “Lord, I believe – help my unbelief”. Try to trust that God will intervene – though perhaps not in the way you would prefer.



## Saturday 3 December

Scripture: Isaiah 30:19-21.23-26, Psalm 146, Matthew 9: 35-10: 1, 5, 6-8

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

We are still some way away from Christmas but the shops will undoubtedly be busy with crowds of people getting caught up in the hectic preparation for what has become a very materialistic festival. It is easy to get a bit judgemental but, perhaps, we can try to look at the crowds as Jesus might – people who are harassed and feel helpless in the face of the demands of advertising and expectations. Perhaps we are among them! There may be little we can do – other than try to be kind to fellow-shoppers and to the assistants working often long hours on low pay to serve them.

## Monday 28 November 2016

Living in a hot, dry country Jesus would have been aware of the difference between building on sand and rock and the dangers of sudden flooding after rain. Perhaps he had witnessed scenes of buildings made largely of clay falling under a sudden surge of floodwater and seeing others survive. However the image was born, it is a powerful one that applies to faith as much as to houses. If our foundations of faith are not secure then it is all too easy for it to collapse when the storms of life swirl around us.

- How can we ensure that our faith is 'built on rock' rather than on sand?
- What sort of things make a good foundations for faith?

Think about your faith and what you do to ensure that it stays on strong foundations. Reflect on whether there are other things you might usefully do to strengthen your faith.



## Friday 2 December

Scripture: Isaiah 29:17-24, Psalm 26, Matthew 9:27-31

*Jesus said to the blind men, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?'*

*They said to him, 'Yes, Lord.'*

We do not know whether the blind men had ever met Jesus before, but they had surely heard of him. We might wonder what Jesus would have done had their response to his question been 'no' – but would guess that Jesus knew that it would be affirmative – that, yes, they did believe that Jesus could cure them. This faith obviously laid the foundations for what was to come but it would be wrong to see their cure as a reward for it. Jesus recognises that the

Scripture: Isaiah 4:2-6; Psalm 121; Matthew 8:5-11

*When Jesus heard the centurion, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,'*

As a devout Jew, Jesus' relations with people of other nationalities and races would have had to be carefully managed. As a carpenter in Roman-occupied Galilee, it is likely that some of his work would have come from the Romans and would probably have met people from other countries trading in the cities he visited and worked. Most of the people he knew though were Jews and he knew that salvation would come through them. What he seems to have wanted his followers to understand was that salvation would not come only for the Jews but through them for the whole world.

- How do you feel about eating with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and people of all the nations in the kingdom of heaven?
- How do you think the people hearing this for the first time might have felt about it?

In a time of prayer today imagine what this kingdom of heaven will look like – a place open to people of many races – nations – cultures – and, Jesus suggests, religions. Who do you think you will feel most comfortable? Or most challenged? And who would you really like to meet there?



## Tuesday 29 November

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 71; Luke 10:21-24

*Turning to the disciples, Jesus said to them privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.'*

Jesus says this to the disciples who were with him at the time but he could equally well say them to us – we are his disciples in the twenty-first century. They may even apply more to us than to the original hearers. We are post-Resurrection disciples. We are post-the first Pentecost disciples. We have seen the difference the life of Jesus has made to the world in the 2000 years since he first spoke these words.

- What are the things inspired by Christianity that we can see and hear that those first disciples could never even have imagined?
- What are you adding to the sum of good things that Christianity gives to the world?

Reflect today on our Christian heritage – the words, images and music that people have used to express their faith. You might like to spend time prayerfully using a poem – a picture – a piece of music to celebrate what Christianity has given to the world.



## Wednesday 30 November – Feast of St Andrew

Scripture: Romans 10: 9-18; Psalm 18; Matthew 4: 18-22

*Jesus said to the disciples, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him.'*

We are inclined to see this call to the disciples to follow Jesus as something physical – and it is certainly described in those terms. It is easy to imagine the scene with the disciples laying down their nets and walking after him. But Jesus was actually calling them to much more than just walking along the road with him on a journey. It could be seen as more of an invitation to “follow my example” which is going to be far more demanding than the longest road or highest hill that lies ahead. It will be challenging – but ultimately the most rewarding thing they will ever decide to do.

- What is the difference between following someone along a road or following their example?
- Do you think the disciples had a clear idea of who they were going to follow and what might be asked of them?

You might like to pray this passage imaginatively – the physical action helps with this. Place yourself in the scene – as a potential disciple or as a bystander and notice what you hear – and see – and feel as the event unfolds. At the end, you might ask yourself about your reaction – did you follow – or would you have followed – or not? And reflect on why you make that particular choice.



## Thursday 1 December

Scripture: Isaiah 26:1-6, Psalm 117, Matthew 7:21.24-27

*Jesus said, 'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.'*