

Prayer Guidelines **5th Week of Lent 2009**

Monday: Daniel 13: 1-62 **Psalm 22(23) John 8:1-11**

The theme of today's readings is about the mercy of God. The first reading is rather long and elaborate, but comes more or less to the same point as the Gospel. Both deal with our own tendency to judge others. The subject of the Gospel is the woman caught in adultery.

Jesus teaches us that we shouldn't condemn others as in the Gospel 'he who is without sin, cast the first stone', but pray for healing for ourselves and others. The Pharisees try to trap Jesus. If he says to stone her he will oppose Roman law and if he says not to stone her he is accused of being lax morally and approving of her immorality, and be against the Jewish laws. By saying 'he who is without sin cast the first stone, he frees her from all sin and defeats the harsh stares and judgments of the Pharisees. He releases her from their devious grip and shows loving mercy. We too need to have a forgiving attitude towards others; maybe we can pray for someone in condemnation of themselves or being condemned by others.

Lord, let me always have a non condemning attitude towards others, ready to show mercy

towards others, and when other people are in condemnation of me and my faith, help me accept your mercy, Your healing in my life.

Tuesday: Numbers 21:4-9 **Psalm 101(102):2-3 John 8:21-30**

In the Gospel reading we are invited to put ourselves into the position of the Pharisees. We are invited to hear the same words as spoken to the Pharisees, 'I am from above you are from below'. This can seem such a crazy statement, and it must have seemed much crazier to the Pharisees who had no knowledge of who Jesus was. But it is important for us to hear him say these words to us, because he is the only way to God, our life line to our eternal life. Our Parish deacon Andy Philpott (Totton and Ashurst, part of Waterside Parish) told us a true story to illustrate what Jesus was saying. Someone was visiting NASA in the United States, and was being given a guided tour of the facility. When his tour came to the space suits worn by the astronauts, he learned that the parts of the suit were numbered. The oxygen tube to the suits was numbered J316 and J317. They refer to the two scriptures John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have

everlasting life." John 3:17 says "For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." The astronauts who depended on J316 and J317 would have died in minutes in space whilst spacewalking or performing repairs to the spacecraft if the oxygen tube failed. How cut off are we if we don't meditate on those scriptures, and take in the life giving breath of his love. We like the astronauts will die too spiritually. They are quite literally our spiritual lifeline.

Lord Jesus, help me realise how dependant I am on You, without the daily breathing in of your word I am dead! Help me realise how important it is to pray scripture, without that I am dead! Thank you for this wonderful gift of life which I am able to celebrate at Easter. Help me to learn to depend on you more.

Wednesday:

"Fast and Feast"

"Fast from bitterness, feast on forgiveness"

*The unforgiving debtor – Matthew
18:21-35*

*The woman who was a sinner Luke
7:36-50*

In this reading Peter asks Jesus how much he should forgive his brother who sins against

him. In this day and age we are inclined to think of our brother as someone we are blood related to. Here we are invited to think of those around us as a brother or sister. This suggests a loving relationship and attitude to those around us. Peter, however questions how far this love should go “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” According to Jewish law a person only had to forgive someone for an offence four times, so Peter was feeling generous when he said “Up to seven times.” Jesus’ response “but up to seventy times seven” revealed total unconditional love without limits. Fasting from bitterness means not placing any limit on our love for other people, even those who hurt us, and upset us. It is what we are called to live unconditionally, without limits. In the second reading Jesus has been invited to Simon the Pharisee’s house, with whom Jews did not normally associate. This shows Jesus going beyond normal social boundaries, to reach out to others, Simon, in tradition, does not anoint Jesus’ head with oil to soothe it from the burning sun, or wash his feet. In those days, people would walk around barefoot or in sandals and it was a courtesy to wash someone’s feet which would be dirty from all the walking they had to do. Simon would not but the woman showed great love, great devotion. A parallel can be drawn with our lives. Do we have the unconditional love for Jesus of the woman or are we more reserved

like Simon? We need to *fast* from the bitterness towards others and have unconditional love like the woman towards Jesus. In *feasting* on God’s love in prayer with scripture we can achieve this.

Holy Spirit, give me the ability in my life to love you unreservedly in my life like the sinful woman and not be harsh and begrudging like the unforgiving debtor, or with a lack of spontaneity like Simon.

Thursday: Genesis 17:3-9
Psalm 104(105): 4-9 John 8:51-59

In today’s Gospel Jesus is in controversy yet again, this time with the Jews. The first reading sets the scene for today’s Gospel. Abram becoming Abraham as he gave his life to God, was seen as the greatest person who ever lived, seen as the father of the Jewish nation and as far as the Jews were concerned there was no one greater than Abraham other than God himself. For Jesus to put himself above Abraham was for them a heresy. We are so familiar with the New Testament story, that we forget how radical Jesus message was, so much so that they nearly had Him stoned to death, and it ultimately led to His death on The Cross. I think we are being asked to look on Jesus story with new eyes to be ‘radicalised’ ourselves, to realise just

how revolutionary his message is. The radical nature of Christ is that he showed us how to live, free from being bound by rules or institutions, just to live to love God, to love ourselves as God loves us, and to love others as we love ourselves. Jesus banished death for good, if we can simply believe in Jesus and His message. We are invited not to keep this truth to ourselves, but to share it with others.

Lord, help me re-discover the amazing life you lived, help me to live the triumph of the cross over certain death, help me to witness this life to others.

Friday:

“Fast and Feast”

“Fast from self-concern, feast on compassion for others”

The parable of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10: 29-37

The parable of the lost sheep

Matthew 18: 11-14

In today’s readings we are invited to consider the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus is approached by a lawyer. We are not told anything about him. The lawyer was asking Jesus in the previous passage (Luke 10:25-28) what he must do to inherit eternal life. The reality was that the lawyer was curious about

Jesus but did not have any sincerity in him only curiosity and had no intention of following what Jesus instructed him to do. Jesus uses the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate the difference between curiosity and sincerity and sincerity means action. We are put in the position of the lawyer and asked if we are acting like the priest and Levite, or like the Samaritan, who was considered an outcast and an unlikely person to help the wounded man. It is a big challenge and prompts us to move beyond our own curiosity and complacency and move into a real relationship which involves action, not words. The Samaritan indicates his unconditional care by giving the money to the innkeeper, a sign of his unconditional care for the injured man.

The parable of the lost sheep shows God's attitude towards us, that when we are lost, feel alone isolated, not sure where to turn he will come and find us. We are invited ourselves to seek out those who are depressed, are suicidal, drug addicts, those in prison, those in real need, to offer them real hope that there is a God who really cares. Without action our faith is pointless meaningless, and without purpose. The effect of God's word is to change and transform your life, my life. It's a hard pill to swallow, but if I don't change I have turned my back on Jesus, so I need to be that person who reaches out every day, even if only in prayer, because sometimes prayer is

the only way to help someone in need and sometimes it needs to be practical action.

Lord, you are prompting me to care as you did, help me to keep on loving through the hardships and difficulties of life; you are there to help me to change when I ask you. Show me how I can reach out to others and how to move from self-concern to compassion for my brother, my sister.

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