

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

GOSPEL

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Great crowds accompanied Jesus on his way and he turned and spoke to them. 'If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

'And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of him and saying, "Here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish." Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who advanced against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.'

(Luke 14:25-33)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The use of the term *hate* in this text should not be taken to mean hatred as such but rather should be understood as pointing to things that may hinder the single-mindedness needed to take up the call to discipleship.
- The Greek word *ekklesia*, used for the church, means being called out from or apart from others. This understanding is suggested by Jesus' words in this text.
- A recurrent theme in Luke's Gospel is that obsessive attachment to money or material wealth is a hindrance to a full and complete relationship with God. It distracts people from what is really important in life.

EXPLORING THE WORD

To be a disciple of Jesus involves radical choices! One must be single-minded in one's commitment to Christ and not put anything else in a place of greater importance. The use of the word *hate* is difficult in this passage. Is Jesus really calling his disciples to 'hate' those who love us? Surely we come to know something of the love of God through human love. The problem may lie in the Semitic languages, which lack some of the subtlety of modern idiom. In Hebrew, 'to hate' is the opposite of 'to prefer'. What Jesus is really saying is that we must prefer to seek God rather than to seek earthly love or relationship. It is our relationship with God that is of utmost value. Discipleship comes at a cost, and the cost is the cross! We must be prepared to go the whole way and not leave the task half done. Just as Jesus responded totally to the call of the Father, we too must give our total response to the call to follow him.

- How might putting Christ first change your relationships with others?
- Will choosing to follow Jesus cause difficulties in your relationship with family and friends? How will you deal with this?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What has your decision to follow Jesus cost you?
- Are there times when you feel that you may be unable to 'finish the work'? What is hindering your progress on your journey?
- How well do you plan ahead for your life in eternity?
- Are there 'crosses' that you carry?
- Have you ever made a great personal sacrifice for another, or do you know of someone who has? Tell the story. There are many people who 'carry their cross' daily. You may like to explore some stories of the burdens that people carry. How do they cope? In what ways do you find this inspirational?
- Do something that 'costs' you this week. Identify someone who has a cross to carry and try to assist them, even in a small way, to shoulder that burden.
- Use today's gospel acclamation as your prayer this week:

*Let your face shine on your servant,
and teach me your laws.*

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time *Year C*

GOSPEL

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The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man' they said 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them:

'What man among you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbours? "Rejoice with me," he would say "I have found my sheep that was lost." In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine virtuous men who have no need of repentance.

'Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbours? "Rejoice with me," she would say "I have found the drachma I lost." In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.'

He also said, 'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father.

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property—he and his women—you kill the calf we had been fattening."

'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

(Luke 15:1-32)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Tax-collectors were regarded as outcasts because they were employed by the Romans to collect taxes from the people. They also had a reputation for skimming a profit for themselves off the top.
- Pharisees were very concerned with ritual purity. Eating with sinners could lead one to becoming 'unclean' and thus defiled and unable to observe the Law and participate in the ritual life of Israel.
- A drachma was a Greek coin. Its name derives from the word for 'to grasp'. It was worth about the same as a Roman denarius.
- These parables are about God's search for us, rather than our search for God.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Today's gospel consists of three parables about that which was lost being found. The final one is the well-known story of the 'prodigal son' or, more correctly, 'the loving father'. The image of God presented in these parables challenges some popular notions of God being omnipotent and removed from his creation. Instead, Jesus tries to portray something of his own intimate relationship with a God whom he knows as Father. The images of a shepherd who is prepared to risk the safety of the flock in order to go to search out just one sheep, of a woman who puts a great deal of time and energy into the recovery of one small coin and the father who extravagantly welcomes back a son who has treated him very badly tell of the extravagance of God's love for all, especially those who are the lost ones of society. The great rejoicing at the culmination of each parable speaks to us of the unconditional love of God and his pleasure at our positive response to his invitation to the feast.

- In what ways do these three parables offer either comfort or challenge to you?
- What have been your own experiences of overwhelming joy?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you ever had the experience of being ‘lost’? If so, how were you found?
- Would you leave the ninety-nine to go in search of just one? What lengths are you prepared to go to in order to find what you search for?
- Share experiences of a time when something has happened in your life that was cause for great rejoicing or celebration. How did you mark the event or incident?
- Make an effort this week to seek out someone who may be feeling a little lost or alone. Help them to experience the love of God in the kindness you offer.
- Today’s collect is suitable for your prayer this week:

*Creator and ruler of all things ...
grant that I may serve you with all my heart.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

The gospels abound with instances of Jesus spending time with and showing special concern for those who were regarded as outcasts in the society of his time. This special concern for the poor and the disadvantaged has become a cornerstone of Catholic Social Teaching. The dignity of the human person is founded in the creation of humans in the image of God. Human dignity is not diminished by age, gender, economic circumstance, ethnicity or occupation. We are called to work for those in need ‘in ways that neither humiliate them nor reduce them to mere objects of assistance but which help them escape their precarious situation by promoting their dignity as persons’ (Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, §49). Similarly, in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis appeals ‘to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us.’ (See also CCC, §§1878–1896.)

- Who are the most distressed and excluded groups in Australian society?
- In what ways is the church responding to the needs of such groups?
- Speak about particular ministries that seek out the lost and work to enhance their human dignity—for example, Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda, St Mary’s House of Welcome in Fitzroy, Ozanam House or the Vinnies Youth food vans.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

The image of God as Father is often used in Scripture. It conveys both authority and deep love. Jesus uses the intimate term *Abba* (meaning ‘Papa’ or ‘Daddy’) when praying. These parables tell us something of the intimate love of the Father for all his children, especially the lost ones.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- In what ways does your community provide for those in need in the local area? Are there ways that catechumens can become involved in these ministries?
- As a focus for prayer, you could use images from newspapers or other publications that depict ‘the lost’ of our world. Pray for all those who are excluded or disadvantaged. Pray for each other as you journey towards Christian commitment. A suitable song could be ‘God has chosen me’ (GA 497). Conclude with the blessing in RCIA at §97I.

NOTES

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GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples:

‘There was a rich man and he had a steward who was denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, “What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer.” Then the steward said to himself, “Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes.”

Then he called his master’s debtors one by one. To the first he said, “How much do you owe my master?” “One hundred measures of oil” was the reply. The steward said, “Here, take your bond; sit down straight away and write fifty.” To another he said, “And you, sir, how much do you owe?” “One hundred measures of wheat” was the reply. The steward said, “Here, take your bond and write eighty.”

‘The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.

‘And so I tell you this: use money, tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into the tents of eternity. The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted in great; the man who is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in great. If then you cannot be trusted with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own? ‘No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.’

(Luke 16:1–13)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- One of the dominant themes in Luke’s Gospel is the right use of money and the need to beware of becoming distracted by it from the pursuit of God.
- A measure of oil was around 35 litres so 100 measures was a considerable debt.
- A measure of wheat was about 10 bushels so, again, a considerable debt.
- In Jesus’ time, wealth was seen as a reward for virtue so these words were a great challenge.

EXPLORING THE WORD

At first reading, this text is very puzzling. How can dishonesty be so rewarded? The action in the text is easier to understand when we know something of how commerce was conducted at the time. According to Jewish Law, it was not permissible to charge interest. To get around this, the practice developed of increasing the original debt to cover what would have been a normal interest rate. What the cunning steward has done is to reduce the debt to the level of the original loan. The Master will be paid his due according to the Law, but no more. If the Master complained of this action, his sin would come to light. The real criticism in this text is directed to those who have been entrusted with the riches of God’s kingdom and have not used them well. The point is that all who are called to share the riches of the kingdom must commit themselves to careful administration of those inestimable treasures. This is much more important than administering the riches of this world.

- In what ways can money be used in our world to create barriers between people or to break down barriers between people?
- Pope John Paul II often spoke of aspiring to ‘be more’ rather than to ‘have more’? Pope Francis has said, ‘Money has to serve, not to rule.’ What do you think they meant by these comments? Explore the implications.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Are you the sort of person on whom others can rely, whether it is for little things or great things?
- On what are your real friendships based?
- What is the single most important thing in your life?
- The steward was praised for being ‘astute’. Explore together what talents and gifts you can identify in members of the group. What talents or gifts would you like to have? How can you cultivate these talents?
- Use your talents for others this week. Be good stewards of creation and act in an ecologically sound way.
- This prayer is attributed to St Ignatius of Loyola. Use it daily this week.

*Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom,
my memory, my understanding, my will.
All that I have and cherish you have given me.
I surrender it all to be guided by your will.
Your grace and your love are wealth enough for me.
Give me these, Lord Jesus, I ask for nothing more.*

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GOSPEL

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Jesus said to the Pharisees: ‘There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs even came and licked his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

‘In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his bosom. So he cried out, “Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.” “My son,” Abraham replied “remember that during your life good things came your way, just as bad things came the way of Lazarus. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to stop anyone, if he wanted to, crossing from our side to yours, and to stop any crossing from your side to ours.”

‘The rich man replied, “Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father’s house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too.” “They have Moses and the prophets,” said Abraham “let them listen to them.” “Ah no, father Abraham,” said the rich man “but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent.” Then Abraham said to him, “If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.”’

(Luke 16:19–31)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The Law of Moses, the Torah, and the writings of the prophets both stress the need for justice and compassion.
- In the Hebrew Scriptures, God gives a preferential love to the poor, the outcast and the stranger.
- It is the poor man in this story whose name is given (Lazarus means ‘God helps’) while the rich man remains anonymous. Perhaps he represents us all.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This is another text about the unexpected reversals of the kingdom of God. The situation of the two characters is described in detail. The rich man no doubt saw his affluence as a blessing from God, a reward for his goodness. His only sin was his failure to see the poverty and desperate need that was at his doorstep. So many stories in Luke’s Gospel deal with our responsibility to use wealth for the good of all rather than to monopolise resources selfishly for our own benefit alone. When the reality of the situation dawns on the rich man, he is concerned that his brothers do not make the same mistake. But Jesus points out that they already have the teaching of Moses and the prophets who repeatedly call Israel to justice and mercy. If people are prepared to ignore that call, what difference will it make ‘even if someone should rise from the dead’. This phrase offers a challenge to Christians: do we too, like the rich man, fail to see and respond to the needs in our world? Christian faith is about more than Sunday worship. It is about living the message of Jesus every day.

- In what ways can our own comfort and wellbeing make us blind to the needs of others?
- What are the most urgent needs in your local community?
- What do you think are the most urgent needs of our global village?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- When have you closed your eyes to the plight of another?
- Have you ever failed to listen to good advice? What were the consequences?
- Share stories of a time when you were in desperate need and someone offered assistance to you. Alternatively, it may have been that your needs were not recognised because others were too absorbed in their own activities.
- Share what you have with someone who has less this week.
- Today’s alternative communion antiphon makes a suitable prayer this week:

*By this we came to know the love of God:
that Christ laid down his life for us;
so we ought to lay down our lives for one another.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God’s word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Just as the rich man failed to understand Moses and the prophets, today there are many who question the teaching authority of the church. This is often based on misunderstanding. The magisterium or teaching authority of

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The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' The Lord replied, 'Were your faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea," and it would obey you.

'Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, "Come and have your meal immediately"? Would he not be more likely to say, "Get my supper laid; make yourself tidy and wait on me while I eat and drink. You can eat and drink yourself afterwards"? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say, "We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty."

(Luke 17:5-10)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The mustard seed is one of the smallest of seeds. Even a little faith is able to achieve wondrous things.
- A mulberry tree has a complicated root system, which makes it very difficult to move.
- In the New Testament period, servants were totally reliant on the master to provide everything they needed in return for their labour. Their status was really that of a slave.
- Jesus always presents the call to discipleship and belief as a call to service of others.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text comes as Jesus is journeying towards Jerusalem, and he has already informed his disciples that he will suffer many things there (Luke 9:44-45). In the verses just prior to this text, Jesus has told the disciples that they must constantly forgive wrongs that are done to them. It is little wonder that the disciples are confused and beg Jesus to increase their faith. They want to believe in him, but some of the things he teaches are very difficult. Jesus explains that even a little faith can work miracles.

The second part of this text is confusing. The servant in question is probably very grateful that he has a field to plough or sheep to tend and a home to return to. He is utterly dependent on the master, and it would be a disorder if the master served the servant! We too are dependent on God, who provides for all our needs. Our task in return is to serve faithfully. When we have done our best in this, we have done our duty.

- Share stories of people you may have known who have been committed to their faith. What was it that inspired them? Has this been part of what inspires you in your journey to faith?
- Who are some of the great saints who showed commitment to their faith? Share their stories. What inspiration can we take from their witness?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- 'Lord, increase my faith.' What more can you do to nurture your faith?
- 'We are merely servants.' How is God calling you to serve?
- What do you see as your duty?
- Share stories of a time when you felt that you 'did your duty'. Are there times when 'duty' is tedious and becomes an unwelcome chore? Have there been times when performing your duty was joyous or stimulating? What is 'your duty' at this point in your life?
- Perform as many small acts of service as you can this week.
- Use today's entrance antiphon as your prayer this week:

Within your will, O Lord, all things are established, and there is none that can resist your will.

For you have made all things, the heaven and the earth, and all that is held within the circle of heaven, you are Lord of all.

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GOSPEL

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On the way to Jerusalem Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered one of the villages, ten lepers came to meet him. They stood some way off and called to him, 'Jesus! Master! Take pity on us.' When he saw them he said, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' Now as they were going away they were cleansed. Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. This made Jesus say, 'Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner.' And he said to the man, 'Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.'

(Luke 17:11-19)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In the biblical material, the term *leper* probably referred to people who were suffering from a variety of skin disorders.
- Under Jewish Law, lepers were ostracised and forced to live outside the city limits. It was thought that they would contaminate others in both a physical and religious sense.
- Leprosy was seen as a punishment for sin, so lepers were moral outcasts as well as physical outcasts.
- When a leper was 'cured', certain purification rites were performed by the priests (Leviticus 14). It was only after purification that lepers could again come into contact with friends and relations and once again take part in the religious life of Israel.
- There was an ancient animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans dating back to the period after the reign of King Solomon, when his death resulted in civil war and the splintering of the kingdom into two. The break-away northern kingdom of Samaria built a new temple on Mount Gerizim, rejecting the temple in Jerusalem. The Samaritans were considered apostates by those of the southern kingdom of Judah.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel is another of Jesus' teachings about what real faith entails. It is not simply another miracle story. The lepers begin by recognising their own need for healing. It is this recognition that prompts them to cry out to Jesus, imploring him for mercy. In their need, they turn to Jesus as their hope. He responds with compassion and sends them to the priests to fulfill Jewish Law. Nine assumedly complete that journey and re-enter the religious and social world of the Jews. One, however, does not go on to the priests and cultic life of Israel. Instead, he turns back towards Jesus after realising the true source of his wholeness. It is this recognition that his salvation has come through Jesus and not the fulfillment of Jewish Law that assures him of being saved. His response is appropriate: he falls to his knees, praising God loudly and giving thanks to Jesus for all that has been done for him. The fact that he is a Samaritan, a foreigner, may have spoken to Luke's community, which was made up primarily of non-Jewish believers in Christ.

- How do you respond to Jesus?
- How do you give praise to God?
- What needs healing in you?
- How do you offer thanks and praise?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you ever had the experience of being an 'outcast' through no fault of your own?
- 'Master! Take pity on us.' Have there been times when you have been moved by pity or compassion to do something for another?
- What reasons do you have to give thanks to God?
- The action of Jesus in this text would have completely turned around the lives of the lepers. Share stories of a time when your life reached a significant turning point. What was its impact on you and those close to you?
- Be inclusive of people who are sometimes treated as 'outcasts' in our society. Say thank you to someone who has done something for you.
- Use a part of the 'prayer' in the Epistle to Timothy that is today's second reading:

*If we have died with him, then we shall live with him.
If we hold firm, then we shall reign with him.*

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GOSPEL

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Jesus told his disciples a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. 'There was a judge in a certain town' he said 'who had neither fear of God nor respect for man. In the same town there was a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Maybe I have neither fear of God nor respect for man, but since she keeps pestering me I must give this widow her just rights, or she will persist in coming and worry me to death."'

And the Lord said 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them? I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?'

(Luke 18:1-8)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- In ancient Israel, according to the Law, justice should have been available to all who sought it, not only to the rich or powerful. Judges were appointed and they sat 'at the city gate' making themselves available to any who needed a judgment. The prophets often criticised the corruption that was sometimes associated with this office. Judgment would go in favour of those who could pay a bribe!
- Under Jewish Law, there was an especial requirement to look after the widow and the orphan, who did not have a man to speak for them.
- Luke's Gospel was written at a time when believers were suffering for their faith. They too may have been wondering if God heard their prayers.

EXPLORING THE WORD

It is unusual for an evangelist to be so explicit about the meaning of a parable, but here Luke tells us that this parable is 'about the need to pray continually and never lose heart'. It is quite likely that those who listened to Jesus tell this story were very familiar with judges who were a law unto themselves and who did not dispense justice according to the demands of God and of Jewish Law. Yet even these will be persuaded to act in the face of persistence. As ever with Luke, it is not the rich and powerful who prevail but the poor or the weak—in this case a widow. How much more, then, will God act? He is not like the wicked judge. He will hear the persistent cry, especially of the poor, and will not delay in answering. The real test of our faith in all this is to accept that God may answer our prayers in ways we do not expect or even desire. Prayer does not equate with making demands of God. Instead it is openness to the presence of God in our lives and a willingness to accept his demands of us, whatever they may be.

- What things are you persistent in?
- What does this indicate about what is important to you?
- Is prayer important to you? How do you pray?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How do you understand the 'need to pray continually and never lose heart'?
- What cries do you think go up to God day and night in our present age?
- What would our world look like if justice were done?
- Discuss the terms 'fear of God' and 'respect for people'. What do think they mean in this day and age? Discuss some examples of the lack of 'fear of God' and 'respect for people' that we may see around us. How are you being called to respond?
- Spend time contemplating what 'fear of God' and 'respect for people' means today. Practise 'fear of God' and 'respect for people' this week in as many ways as you can.
- Use the response from today's psalm as your prayer this week:

*Our help is from the Lord
who made heaven and earth.*

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GOSPEL

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Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else: 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get." The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'

(Luke 18:9-14)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- It is always important to look at who the characters are in the parables of Jesus.
- Pharisees were deeply religious laymen who observed the law very closely and met together regularly for prayer and table fellowship.
- Tax collectors were despised because their job gave them opportunity to cheat and defraud the people and also because they cooperated with the Roman oppressors. Their contact with the gentiles made them ritually unclean. No wonder this tax collector 'stood some distance away'. The Pharisees would have believed he had no right to be in the temple at all.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The purpose of this parable is to shake the complacency of those who think that all they have to do is follow the rules to the letter of the law and that that is enough to guarantee them salvation, regardless of their attitudes towards others or the way they speak and act. There is a timelessness to this parable. It is as true today as it was in the time of Jesus. The Pharisee asks nothing of God. He is under the mistaken impression that he can fulfill all that is required of him by his own actions. He believes that as long as he adheres to the letter of the Law, that is all that is required. The tax collector, on the other hand, is aware of his brokenness and opens himself to God, asking for God's mercy. He rightly recognises his own sinfulness and sees that God is the only one who can fill the void within him. Again, as is common in Luke's Gospel, it is the poor or the outcast who is on the right track and who will be exalted. The Pharisee, who should know better, will be the one who experiences God's dramatic reversal and will ultimately be humbled.

- In what ways do you find this parable comforting or challenging?
- With which character do you most identify?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Are there times when you pass judgment on others or consider yourself as 'better' than certain people?
- How difficult do you find it to recognise your own shortcomings?
- Do you find it challenging to look beyond the shortcomings of others?
- Have you ever been in a situation when you were made to feel small or embarrassed by someone who exulted themselves at your expense? Have you ever 'put someone down' by your actions or words? Share your reflections.
- Notice occasions this week when it may be easy to judge someone badly. Do something positive to favour someone to whom you may feel in some way superior.
- The humble prayer of the tax collector makes a suitable prayer for you this week:

God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

GOSPEL

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Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the town when a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance: he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him: 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.' And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost.'

(Luke 19:1-10)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The name Zacchaeus means 'pure' but the actions of this wealthy tax collector belied such a name and earned him the title of 'sinner'.
- Jesus addresses Zacchaeus as 'son of Abraham', a title usually reserved for the holy or pious ones. Jesus is clearly indicating that Zacchaeus is as good as anyone else.
- Jericho lies in the Jordan Valley, just 6 miles north of the Dead Sea, and so has a milder climate than the surrounding barren hills. Herod built a lavish winter palace here.
- The journey of Jesus to Jerusalem is almost complete. Jericho is the last town to be passed through before the steep ascent to Jerusalem.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text should be contrasted with the story of the rich official who is a righteous man that comes just before it (Luke 18:18-23) but that is not included in the Lectionary readings for this year. In that text, Jesus challenges the rich man to sell all he has and to distribute the proceeds to the poor, but the rich man is unable to give up his wealth. Here, Zacchaeus—also a rich man but considered a sinner—spontaneously offers to give half his wealth away and to make generous restitution to those he has cheated. The response to Jesus of these two characters is in stark contrast. In his undignified climbing of the tree, Zacchaeus is prepared to make himself look ridiculous in order to know Jesus. He has humbled himself in the eyes of the crowd just as the tax collector humbled himself in the temple in last week's gospel. Jesus not only tells parables but lives them in reality. He has searched out the lost, and the encounter leads to conversion and salvation.

- Have you experienced an element of personal embarrassment because of your decision to approach Jesus through the catechumenate?
- How might a sense of being accepted by God bring about change in your life?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Are you anxious to discover Jesus?
- To what lengths would you go?
- How do you welcome Jesus joyfully?
- Recall an experience of being overlooked or feeling left out. Alternatively, share an experience of being singled out or chosen for something very special.
- Identify someone with whom you are acquainted but whom you don't really know well. Try to move beyond superficial appearances and find out what sort of person they really are. Change your relationship with them.
- At each Eucharist we pray:

*Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.*

Pray this often this week.

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C**GOSPEL**

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Some Sadducees—those who say that there is no resurrection—approached Jesus and they put this question to him, ‘Master, we have it from Moses in writing, that if a man’s married brother dies childless, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Well then, there were seven brothers. The first, having married a wife, died childless. The second and then the third married the widow. And the same with all seven, they died leaving no children. Finally the woman herself died. Now, at the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife since she had been married to all seven?’

Jesus replied, ‘The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection they are sons of God. And Moses himself implies that the dead rise again, in the passage about the bush where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive.’

(Luke 20:27–38)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The rule about a brother marrying a childless widow is known as the ‘Levirate Law’, specified in Deuteronomy 25:5–10. It was really designed to protect the woman who, as a childless widow, had no social status and no one to provide for her needs.
- The Sadducees largely lived in Jerusalem around the temple precinct. They came from a relatively small number of wealthy and influential families. The high priest and chief priests often came from Sadducee families. They often controlled the necessary temple trade.
- The Sadducees were a priestly caste of conservative Jews who followed the written law of the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible. Resurrection of the dead is not mentioned in these books, so they did not adhere to this belief. This is in contrast to the Pharisees, who also adhered to the oral law and the writings and therefore did believe in resurrection of the dead.
- November is the month when the church remembers especially those who have died.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Now that Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem and his ministry is centred at the temple, he encounters the Sadducees, who dominate temple worship. The question posed by the Sadducees in this text was not asked to elicit his teaching on this point but rather in an attempt to ridicule Jesus and disconcert him. But Jesus turns the tide and gives two answers to their question. First, he points out that they have completely misunderstood what resurrection is. The transformation of life brought by death is incomprehensible to them because they are not open to the power of God. Second, he points out that even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have died, Moses is conscious that they must remain alive in a sense because Yahweh continues to be their God—a God of the living. Death is not the end of the story and Christian faith is marked by a joy and hope that ultimately resting in God will bring. This is the destiny of the human person.

- Explore the continuity between life as we know it now and life after death.
- How do the catechumens understand ‘life after death’?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- How do you understand the idea of the resurrection of the dead at this point in your journey?
- What emotions arise when you consider your own death?
- While death is not an easy subject to talk about, you may like to share some memories of the death of a loved one. Celebrate the good memories of such people and the positive side of their lives. What was it that gave you solace at such times?

If catechumens come from different cultures, you could ask them to speak of some of the rituals and beliefs associated with death or funerals in those cultures.

- Visit the graves for your loved ones at some stage during the month of November. Pray especially for friends and relatives who have passed away.
- Memorise and pray this prayer for the dead often this week, remembering your own loved ones:

*Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord.
May perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace. Amen.*

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time *Year C*

GOSPEL

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When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, 'All these things you are staring at now—the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed.' And they put to him this question: 'Master,' they said 'when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that this is about to take place?'

'Take care not to be deceived,' he said 'because many will come using my name and saying, "I am he" and, "The time is near at hand." Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen but the end is not so soon.' Then he said to them, 'Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

'But before all this happens, men will seize you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring you before kings and governors because of my name—and that will be your opportunity to bear witness. Keep this carefully in mind: you are not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your endurance will win you your lives.'

(Luke 21:5–19)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The temple in Jerusalem was totally destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Luke's Gospel was written after this event, so his readers would have known of its annihilation.
- Early Christian communities faced persecution both by the Jews, when they were expelled from the synagogues for their faith in Jesus as Messiah, and by the secular authorities for their refusal to worship the emperor as a god. Luke is clearly aware of the tribulations facing his community and seeks to allay their fears in this text.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text must be read from the viewpoint of Luke's community, who knew of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the so-called Jewish Wars that lead to this act. Christians were being persecuted by both Rome and the Jewish people. It must have seemed that the end was near. But Luke places these words on the lips of Jesus, words designed to comfort his community and give them hope. Jesus warns his followers not to place their trust in those who purport to know God's plan for the end of time. Rather they should know that God is with them no matter what happens. In the meantime, the church must journey on, just as Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem and to his ultimate fate. But God vindicated Jesus through the resurrection, and Christian believers will also be vindicated by God with the gift of eternal life. Their endurance will win their lives.

- If you knew that tomorrow would be your last day, what would you do?
- In the face of adversity, what is the source of your strength?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Have you had to bear any ridicule or derision because of your decision to seek baptism?
- Describe a time of chaos or turmoil in your life. What sustained you or gave you strength through this difficult time? Share your reflections with others.
- Have you had to face a great challenge that you feared you may not be able to endure?
- This week, accept those things that you cannot change and change for the better those things that you can.
- Use today's communion antiphon this week:

*To be near God is my happiness,
to place my hope in God the Lord.*

Christ the King

Year C

GOSPEL

The people stayed there before the cross watching Jesus. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. 'He saved others,' they said 'let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers mocked him too, and when they approached to offer vinegar they said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.' Above him there was an inscription: 'This is the King of the Jews.'

One of the criminals hanging there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said. 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus,' he said 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.' 'Indeed, I promise you,' he replied 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

(Luke 23:35-43)

DID YOU KNOW?*Points of interest and Catholic lore*

- Crucifixes often have the letters *INRI* inscribed on them. These are the Latin initials for *Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum*, which means 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews'. These are the words that Pilate had written on the cross above Jesus.
- All four gospels state that Jesus was crucified between two thieves, but Luke is the only one that recounts this story of one of the thieves recognising and believing in Jesus. This is consistent with Luke's theme of God's grace being granted to the lowly and the outcast.
- Today is the final Sunday of the church liturgical year. Next week is the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of a new church year, during which the Gospel of Matthew will be read.

EXPLORING THE WORD

It is fitting that this final text from the Gospel of Luke to be read in the liturgy brings together some dominant themes and proclaims the kingship of Jesus. Throughout this liturgical year, we have noted the radical reversal that is at the heart of the gospel. Christ is proclaimed a king, not in a scene of glorious enthronement, but as a broken man upon a cross. The kingship of Jesus is revealed, paradoxically, in the moment of his deepest humiliation. Throughout the gospel, Jesus seeks out and saves the lost, and here it is a common criminal, rightly condemned, who proclaims the kingdom that Jesus is to inhabit. True to form, the compassionate Jesus of Luke's Gospel assures him of salvation, just as he had prayed for forgiveness for those who had brought him to this point (Luke 23:34).

- How have you experienced the forgiveness offered by Jesus?
- Reflect on the words of the Our Father: 'Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.' What are the implications of this prayer for believers? How can we help build the kingdom of God on earth?

MAKING CONNECTIONS*Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer*

- What do you think and feel when you contemplate the image of Christ crucified?
- Have you ever been punished when you have done nothing wrong? How did you feel?
- Royalty and royal families seem to have a fascination for people and certainly achieve plenty of coverage in the media. Share your feelings about royalty and royal personages. How does this compare with the image of Christ as King?
- Place a crucifix in a place of honour in your home. Spend some time each day in prayer before the crucified Christ.
- The plea of the penitent thief makes a fine prayer this week:
Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

