



Readings, Collect and Reflection for Sunday 26 July 2020
The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Psalm 128

- 1 Blessed are all those who fear the Lord, ◆
and walk in his ways.
- 2 You shall eat the fruit of the toil of your hands; ◆
it shall go well with you, and happy shall you be.
- 3 Your wife within your house shall be like a fruitful vine; ◆
your children round your table, like fresh olive branches.
- 4 Thus shall the one be blest ◆
who fears the Lord.
- 5 The Lord from out of Zion bless you, ◆
that you may see Jerusalem in prosperity
all the days of your life.
- 6 May you see your children's children, ◆
and may there be peace upon Israel.

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Creator God,
whose Son is the true vine and we the branches:
make us fruitful in your service,
sharing your love and joy and peace
with all your children,
in the power of the Spirit
of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Collect

Lord of all power and might,
the author and giver of all good things:
graft in our hearts the love of your name,
increase in us true religion,
nourish us with all goodness,
and of your great mercy keep us in the same;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Romans 8.26-39

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 13.31-33,44-52

Jesus put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Reflection by Peter

Years ago, when South Africa was in a very dark political place and apartheid was dividing the people and the country, one of the Mirfield fathers, Fr Timothy, was living in our priory in Johannesburg. He had befriended one of the young activists and when the young man was arrested and brought to trial Timothy was required to be a witness for the prosecution. He refused and was himself imprisoned for 6 months. Naturally, we all prayed energetically for him, day in and day out. When he came to Mirfield for a visit after his release he said, "Do you know, one of the worst things in prison was that I had no sense of anyone praying or caring at all."

Reality and perception – two very different things – and so often it is perception that dominates.

Today's Gospel reading does another cut and paste job on Matthew's Gospel. We are basically continuing our journey through the Gospel, but today we hear the bit we missed out last week – and add a bit at the end! Jesus gives us these colourful, brief pictures of the kingdom of heaven: like mustard seed, like yeast, like hidden treasure, like a merchant hunting for pearls... He uses images that still work. As we hear them, pictures form in our minds. They are richly suggestive and stimulate our imagination. But Jesus is talking about what is real, what is true.

No matter how hard we try, we can't quite get beyond slightly vague pictures, just perception, not the reality itself. No wonder then that Jesus asks at the end, "Have you understood all this?" – which always reminds me of my Greek teacher in the sixth form who used to read a page of Euripides in Greek and say, "Did you get that?" and we would nod and say yes, having not understood a word! And I rather suspect the same was true of the disciples. They could **feel** the truth of what Jesus was saying, but couldn't grasp it. In the same way, Fr Timothy knew at one level that people were praying for him, but it didn't translate into something real and comforting.

It is, then, real encouragement to read Paul in the letter to the Romans telling us that "the Spirit helps us in our weakness." Here is something right at the heart of the Christian mystery. We are not dependent on our own minds and imaginations. In the incarnation, God has 'made his home with us', as St John puts it; and, in baptism, God has made his home in each one of us. This enables Paul to end the great eighth chapter of his letter with those astonishing words, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." In the end, reality will win out, and the only lasting reality is God.