

## Lent Reflections: Week 4

### **Wednesday March 11th: Mark 4,35-40**

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' <sup>36</sup> And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. <sup>37</sup> A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. <sup>38</sup> But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' <sup>39</sup> He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. <sup>40</sup> He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' <sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

One minute all was calm and peaceful, the next storm clouds had gathered, rain was falling heavily, strong winds were blowing and experienced fishermen feared for their lives!

The storm on the Sea of Galilee came out of nowhere. In just the same way troubles can hit us out of nowhere. One day our lives may seem perfect, health, career, home life, all we could hope for. Then, in a short space of time, everything changes. We or our loved ones are hit by illness, redundancy, relationship breakdown. Prayers seem to go unanswered and we ask, in desperation, "Where is God in this situation, and why isn't he doing anything about it?" Jesus, in the language of our Bible passage, is asleep! The fact that Jesus is asleep, though, should not be taken as indicating a lack of care on his part. The important thing is that he was there; when his disciples were in the midst of the storm, Jesus was there with them and at the appropriate time, he restored calm and peace.

Having a Christian faith is not a lucky charm against life's troubles. But it is an assurance that, though he won't keep them from us, God will be alongside us through them all and at some point, in some way, will bring us back to a state of calm and peace.

### **Prayer**

Loving Lord,

When the storms of life overwhelm us and faith is difficult to hold on to, speak your words of reassurance into our hearts and help us to trust in your loving presence with us. Amen.

### **Thursday March 12th: Mark 6,45-52**

Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup> After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

<sup>47</sup> When evening came, the boat was out on the lake, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup> When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake. He intended to pass them by. <sup>49</sup> But when they saw him walking

on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; <sup>50</sup> for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.' <sup>51</sup> Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, <sup>52</sup> for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Today we consider a second storm; less violent, perhaps, than that of yesterday, but still severe enough to have the disciples battling to make headway towards the shore. When they see Jesus walking towards them on the water, instead of being reassured, their fear increases as they think they are seeing a ghost.

Sometimes we too are slow to recognise the presence of God when he approaches us to guide, help or challenge us. We have our own, preconceived ideas of who and what God is and how and when he will intervene and these make us blind and deaf to his true self.

George Fox, founder of the Religious Society Of Friends (Quakers), encouraged his followers to seek out what is God in everyone. If we can be prepared to do this, we may find it easier to recognise God in those he sends to help, encourage and inspire us, and so save ourselves a great deal of stress as we battle, unnecessarily, against the tide.

### **Prayer.**

Heavenly Father,

Give us grace to recognise you when you come to us in expected ways. Help us to be open to receiving your comfort, guidance and love through the words and actions of others, as we hope to reflect the same to them. Amen.

### **Friday March 13th: Matthew 14,22-33**

<sup>22</sup> Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land,<sup>[d]</sup> for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. <sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

<sup>28</sup> Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' <sup>29</sup> He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he noticed the strong wind,<sup>[e]</sup> he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' <sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you

doubt?' <sup>32</sup> When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

This is the same story as we had yesterday, but this time told by Matthew instead of Mark. Unlike Mark, Matthew gives us an account of Peter's reaction to Jesus identifying himself as the "ghost" on the water. The impetuous Peter first challenges Jesus and then, faced with a counter-challenge, rises to that challenge and steps out of the boat. In doing that, Peter took what we might call "a leap of faith." He stepped out into the unknown, not completely trusting God ( he took his eyes off Christ and began to sink), but trusting enough to take a risk

### **For Reflection**

In matters of faith, where do I stand? Do I stay in the relative safety of the boat, or am I prepared to take a risk,; to step out onto the water and walk towards God?

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father,

In times of doubt, uncertainty or challenge, help us to keep our eyes fixed on you and in love and trust to walk towards you. Amen.

### **Saturday March 14th: Mark 5,1-20**

They came to the other side of the lake, to the country of the Gerasenes. <sup>[a]</sup> <sup>2</sup> And when he had stepped out of the boat, immediately a man out of the tombs with an unclean spirit met him. <sup>3</sup> He lived among the tombs; and no one could restrain him any more, even with a chain; <sup>4</sup> for he had often been restrained with shackles and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. <sup>5</sup> Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always howling and bruising himself with stones. <sup>6</sup> When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and bowed down before him; <sup>7</sup> and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' <sup>8</sup> For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus<sup>[b]</sup> asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' <sup>10</sup> He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. <sup>11</sup> Now there on the hillside a great herd of swine was feeding; <sup>12</sup> and the unclean spirits<sup>[c]</sup> begged him, 'Send us into the swine; let us enter them.' <sup>13</sup> So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the lake, and were drowned in the lake.

<sup>14</sup> The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. <sup>15</sup> They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the very man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. <sup>16</sup> Those who

had seen what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine reported it. **17** Then they began to beg Jesus<sup>[d]</sup> to leave their neighbourhood. **18** As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed by demons begged him that he might be with him. **19** But Jesus<sup>[e]</sup> refused, and said to him, 'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.' **20** And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and everyone was

In modern parlance, we might say that Legion's neighbours were suffering from compassion fatigue. They had helped the man as much as they felt they could, and now left him to his own devices. ill and in deep distress, by the time Jesus arrived on the scene the man was trapped in a living death.

In his encounter with Jesus, it seems that Legion faced an internal struggle; attracted by Jesus, he ran towards him (v6) but also expressed fear over how Jesus might treat him (v7).

At the end of the encounter, having healed Legion, Jesus denies the request to allow the man to go with him. Instead, Legion is to stay and tell his erstwhile friends and neighbours what God had done for him. Sometimes, witnessing amongst those who know us best - "warts and all" - is the most challenging form of Christian outreach.

### **For Reflection**

What attracts you to Jesus and what makes you fear to approach him?  
How easy/difficult do you find it to witness to those closest to you?

### **Prayer**

Compassionate God,  
You meet us in our distress and weakness and heal us. Take, we pray, our fears and doubts and replace them with faith and trust.  
May we always be ready to tell others of all that you have done for us. Amen.

### **Sunday March 15th: Matthew 12,46-50**

While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. **47** Someone told him, 'Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.'<sup>[c]</sup> **48** But to the one who had told him this, Jesus<sup>[d]</sup> replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' **49** And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!' **50** For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'

From a very early age I knew to search the shops for a card which wished my Mum "Happy Mothering Sunday", not "Mother's Day!" Usually a very flexible lady, on this Mum was unbending: Mothers Day was an Americanism, taken over by the retail industry. Mothering Sunday was the "real thing!" Mum was, of course, right. Or partly so! Mothering Sunday originally had nothing to do with mums. In the sixteenth century it was a mid-Lent relaxation of fasting and the

day on which people returned to their "mother" church for that day's services. By the seventeenth century, the day had become a public holiday on which servants and apprentices were allowed to go home, although the emphasis remained on "mother church" rather than on "mum."

Be that as it may, over the centuries, the day has evolved into one on which our focus is very much on mothers, and this makes it a very difficult day for many people: those who have recently lost their mother; those who are estranged from, or have difficult relationships with their mother; women who, through circumstance rather than choice have no children or whose child has died, and those who are estranged from their children or for whom distance makes it impossible for them to meet. The unrelenting promoting of this day - in shops, restaurants, junk mail and unsolicited emails - adds to the burden felt by all these groups of people. And the church can also do this. If our services are focused solely on giving thanks for mums and celebrating them, what does that say to those we've already considered? Are they any less valued because of their situations? Certainly not in God's eyes and we must be sensitive in how we deal with the day, finding a balance between acknowledging the love and joy which a mother can bring, whilst affirming those women who, through no fault of their own, cannot share this celebration. Above all, we must remember the original purpose of Mothering Sunday, giving thanks for our Mother Church and, above even that, giving thanks to God for his great, perfect and eternal love, the very reason for which our churches exist.

### **Challenge**

How much do you know about your Mother Church - its history and the saint to whom it is dedicated? If you can, go on a visit to it, or do some online research.

### **Prayer.**

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the gift of human love. We pray for all women, mothers and those who long to be mothers; for those whose relationship with their mother is strained and for those mourning the loss of their mother. Please draw close to them and comfort them.

Thank you for your Church throughout the world. May she be a beacon of hope, light and love in this troubled world. Amen.

### **Monday March 16th: Luke 9.12-17**

**12** The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.' **13** But he said to them, 'You give them something to eat.' They said, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.' **14** For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, 'Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.' **15** They did so and made them all sit down. **16** And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to

set before the crowd. **17** And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Intercessions are an important part of our church services and our private prayers. We bring to God the things that weigh on our hearts, concerns for ourselves, families and friends, events and troubles in our local communities and world affairs. All these we lay before God and trust him to act accordingly. But what do we do when God says, as Jesus did to his disciples, "You feed them!" Or, "You deal with this issue"? However hard we pray, it is unlikely that food will drop from heaven into the cupboards of a hungry family, that a despot will suddenly become an advocate for human rights or that the diary of an isolated and lonely person will, overnight, become full of social engagements!

What can happen, though, is that we might find ourselves prompted to give more generously to the foodbank or some other charity; to pick up the phone and call a housebound friend, relative or neighbour; to lobby our MPs on matters of social justice.

When God says to us "You feed them" he is not opting out or passing the buck. Rather, he is inviting us to share in the privilege and joy of serving the most in need amongst his children.

### **Prayer.**

Heavenly Father,

We thank you that you love and care for everything you have created. Thank you that you call us to join you in serving and caring for your children everywhere. Please give us hearts and ears open to your call and generous wills to respond to the needs of others. Amen.

### **Tuesday March 17th: Luke 17.11-19**

**11** On the way to Jerusalem Jesus<sup>[d]</sup> was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. **12** As he entered a village, ten lepers<sup>[e]</sup> approached him. Keeping their distance, **13** they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' **14** When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. **15** Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. **16** He prostrated himself at Jesus'<sup>[f]</sup> feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. **17** Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? **18** Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' **19** Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

In first century Palestine, to suffer from leprosy put you beyond the realm of normal society. Lepers had to stay out of towns and often formed colonies, living together, but away from "clean" people. There was a stigma attached to having the disease.

In the story of the ten lepers healed by Jesus, one of them bore a double stigma; not only did he have leprosy, but he was also a Samaritan! And yet it was this man who, alone of the ten, returned to thank Jesus when he found himself to be healed. Why was this man alone? It seems that while they were ill, the ten men stayed together, with differences of race set aside. Once healing had taken place, however, the old divisions may have reappeared and the Jewish men were unwilling to be seen in company with a Samaritan.

Commenting on the words of Jesus: "Your faith has made you well" Maggi Dawn suggests that he wasn't speaking of physical wellness, but of spiritual. "Maybe he meant that deep-seated human divisions are a much more serious melody than leprosy, that our souls can be far sicker than our bodies and yet most of us do nothing to heal them."

### **For Reflection**

Lepers were considered to be untouchable. Are there people who you regard as "untouchable"? What is your criteria: race/political views/lifestyle choices/ crimes committed?

Could finding out more about them help you to change your attitude and remember that even your "untouchables " are precious to God?

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you that nobody is untouchable to you, but all are precious.

Give us grace to look beyond the stigmas and divisions created by human society and to see all people in the light of your love. Amen.