

e-Good News

The Gospel of Matthew



“There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter of Christ”

Welcome to our February edition of e-Good News.

Welcome to our February edition of e-Good News. Our weekly reading of the Sunday Gospel can be enhanced by reflecting more on the Word of God. Sacred reading of the Gospel can be dynamic. As we read more of the words of St. Matthew, we can enter into a deeper understanding of Jesus in the Gospel. During February we take time to hear the challenge to be people of salt and light. We hear the magnificent words of the Sermon on the Mount.

Our goal is to meet the Lord as we read his Word and allow him to transform our lives more. Invite others to read and pray scripture using this e-Good News. The Gospel is to be shared with others and lived by everyone. Pope Benedict XVI has said, “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter of Christ.” Our challenge this February is to let others discover this beauty by encountering Christ.



Sunday 6th February

Matthew 5:13-16

Sunday Reflection

- ¹³ The word "you" is emphatic at the start. The move to the second person (you) has been facilitated by the change in the last Beatitude to "blessed are you" and in general by the address to the disciples in verses 11-12. The verse is both realistic and threatening. In reality, it is possible for disciples to lose their sense of mission; in that case, having become useless, they too will be thrown out. Positively, disciples are to carry in our world God's covenant loyalty and desire to hold or preserve. They are also to purify the world.
- ¹⁴ A striking image which tends to clash with passages in the Fourth Gospel: Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12) "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9:5). However, like Jesus in Matthew 4:12-17, disciples are to be light to the world. This extraordinary "status" of the believer lies behind the last sentences of this Gospel (28:19-20). The clash with the Roman Empire is also present because Cicero called Rome "light to the whole world."
- ¹⁵ Christians have received light in order to give light, or better, to be light.
- ¹⁶ There can also be inappropriate motives for witnessing: "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:1) While bearing witness, disciples are also not to draw attention to themselves.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- ¹ Jesus uses the image of salt as something that makes food tasty. Without it food can be tasteless. Who are the people who give zest to your life and make it enjoyable? For whom have you done this? When have you been particularly aware of your potential in this regard?
- ² The second image is that of light. Who have been the people who have been a light for you, particularly in moments of darkness? For whom have you been a light? Recall these experiences and give thanks.
- ³ The images of salt and light can also be applied to communities to which we belong, a family, a parish, or other group. Thinking of the groups of which you are a member, how can the potential be enhanced to enrich the lives of members and offer them a guiding light?



Prayer

HEAVENLY Father,
you have called your Church
to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.
Give us vigorous faith and a love that is genuine,
so that all may see our works
and give you the glory.
We make our prayer through Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.



Sunday 13th February

Matthew 5:17-37

Sunday Reflection

17-20 The fulfillment of the prophecies in Jesus is noted regularly in this Gospel (Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9), usually in the *past tense*. All *has been* accomplished and this relativises the apparently absolute “heaven and earth”.

21-26 Disparate sayings are intended to insist on the interior attitude as heart of the matter. The link between worship and ethics is firmly made. As often in Matthew, the final argument is really a threat.

27-30 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to *desire her* (Matthew 5:28) Involuntary attraction is precisely involuntary; the problem is the movement to *desire her*. In the subsequent teaching, expressed with typical Jewish hyperbole, self-mutilation is not what is at stake but rather going beyond the symptoms to the root cause. The root cause is always the human heart, which it would be tricky to “tear out and throw away”.

31-32 The meaning of “unchastity” is disputed. It may refer to prohibited degrees of consanguinity. A standard dictionary offers these interpretations: 1. *unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication*, 2. *participation in prohibited degrees of marriage, fornication* 3. *immorality of a transcendent nature, fornication*.


33-34 Also see Exodus 20:7; Numbers 30:3; Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “Yes” be yes and your “No” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. (James 5:12)



POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1** In this section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus proposes standards that go beyond external ways of behaviour but challenges how we feel in our hearts. When have you found that living out of inner conviction is more life-giving than keeping up appearances?
- 2** Jesus applies his teaching to feelings of anger and sexual desire. He suggests that if we do not keep an eye on our feelings and thoughts we will not be able to control our actions. Perhaps you have experienced the truth of this. What has helped you to integrate your feelings so that you were able to live in right relationship with yourself and others?
- 3** For Jesus persons with genuine authenticity do not need to swear an oath to be convincing. Their ‘yes’ or ‘no’ suffices. Recall people who had this kind of credibility for you. When have you found that your simple, direct and honest communication had a positive persuasive force?

Prayer



ALL-SEEING God,
you alone judge rightly our inmost thoughts.
Teach us to observe your law from the heart
even as we keep it outwardly.
Purify our desires,
calm every anger,
and reconcile us to one another.
Then will our worship at your altar
render you perfect praise.

Sunday 20th February

Matthew 5:38-48

Sunday Reflection

- 38 The Bible does not command revenge. The *lex talionis* was an attempt to restrict vendettas. See Genesis 4:23-24.
- 39 Jesus forbids retaliation of any kind. This needs to be carefully read. The vision of the Kingdom includes a *refusal to enter into the cycle of violence*, illustrated dramatically by the cases which follow. The first illustration - to turn the other cheek - is a clear invitation to resist the natural reaction of equal retaliation. We should, of course, resist *evil* but we must not resist evil violently.
- 40 Here again, the person involved is being somehow victimized. It may be noted that it was forbidden, in Biblical law, to deprive the poor man of his cloak (see Exodus 22:25-26 and Deuteronomy 12-13). In this case, the victim would be left standing naked. Thus the unjust creditor may in turn be shamed, as the victim takes power to him/herself.
- 41 This example is a reminder of the military occupation of the Holy Land by Roman soldiers. Roman soldiers and officials could oblige natives to carry things for them a certain distance. Once more, the victim takes power and destabilises the oppressor (cf. Paul's surely humorous versions: No, "*if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.*" Romans 12:20). So far, the antitheses feature an imbalance of power. The next two show the disciple in the role of "giver".
- 42 These almost impossible impractical illustrations are demanding, demanding because it is the attitude within the giver which is being challenged. Letting the good of others guide us is the mark of the true disciple.
- 43 This is the climax, the sixth and final antithesis. The only place in the Bible it says "hate your enemy" is actually in this very verse (also see Psalm 139:19-22). However, it is clear from the Old Testament, that when it is commanded to love your neighbour, this really means your Israelite neighbour, not anyone in need. (See Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14 and James 2:8).
- 44 The deepening of the motivation continues radically here: you must love your enemies.
- 45 God himself shows no discrimination in giving his gifts: the sun shines and the rain falls on the evil and the good. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9).
- 46 This is a kind of *fortiori* argument: to love those who love you is no particular achievement. Rather, it is natural and spontaneous and *costs nothing*. Reward is a theme in Matthew: see 5:12, 19 and 6:1-18.
- 47 The same instruction in different words.
- 48 Again, an impossible requirement but a constant ideal. The high demands of discipleship come from Matthew's understanding of God's kindness and also from Matthew's clear teaching on God's rewards to all who respond (Matthew 5:12, 46; 6:1-2, 5, 16; 10:41-42; 20:8). Perfect is used one other time in this Gospel: Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Matthew 19:21). The meaning is mature or complete, full-grown or fully developed.

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1 Jesus tells us to act out of love and says that acting out of love is better than acting out of revenge. What does your experience tell you?
- 2 Perhaps you have at times hit back in revenge when you have been hurt or offended. What effect did this have on you, on others, and on your relationship with them? Contrast this with the times when you resisted the urge to retaliate. What effect did this have on you, on others, and on your relationship with them... at the time, and in the long-term?
- 3 From other passages in the Gospels it is clear that Jesus did not mean that we should ignore injustices, and never make a stand against others. What lessons have you learned in life on when and how to make a stand? What wisdom would you share with others from your experience?

Prayer

HEAVENLY Father,
in Christ Jesus

you challenge us to renounce violence
and to forsake revenge.

Teach us to recognise as your children
even our enemies and persecutors
and to love them without measure or discrimination.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.



Sunday 27th February

Matthew 6:24-34

Sunday Reflection

24 The original text has the word *Mammon* for "wealth". The personification of Mammon is implied by the 24a and illustrated in 24bc. The illustration implies two *masters* and one *slave*. Thus Mammon is a controlling, enslaving master from whom we need to be free. See Matthew 4:18-22 (they left everything).

25 Worry is found in various New Testament documents (Matthew 6:25, 27–28, 31, 34; 10:19; Luke 10:41; 12:11, 22, 25–26; 1 Corinthians 7:32–34; 12:25;). Verse 32 is really the key here: your heavenly father knows you *need* these things (and so do we!). A distorted desire or warped concentration on material things is the issue. There are traces here of the cynic doctrine of radical detachment.

26 The affirmation of God's care leads to the *fortiori* argument as noted above.

Only one answer is possible and so worrying can simply be wasteful.

27 A second illustration, staying with nature.

29 Solomon's wealth and consequent glory were proverbial.

30 Once more an *fortiori* argument from the lesser (the lilies) to the greater (those who trust in God). "Little faith" is an expression almost confined to Matthew in the Gospels (Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Luke 12:28).

31 This resumes the whole argument from v.25 onwards.

32 This is an argument against worry—it is the mark of those who do *not believe in God*. V. 32b is a key: it is not that material things are not needed.

33 The Jewish milieu of Matthew comes to kind: righteousness, the covenant value of living the Law in faithfulness and love, is to be our first focus. And then, just as Solomon, having asked only for Wisdom was also given material security, likewise the believer in Jesus, seeking only the righteousness of the Kingdom, will be received as well as the material security which God himself knows we need.



POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1** This passage has many beautiful images and encouraging words. Read it slowly and let the words and images speak to you.
- 2** We all worry, and possibly spend a lot of energy on needless worry. Often the things we worry about never happen. Behind much worry lies a lack of trust in ourselves, in others, and in God. What has helped you to develop the kind of trust that helps you to avoid excessive worrying?
- 3** One of the situations that can cause anxiety is when we have divided loyalties. "No one can be the slave of two masters". A clear set of priorities can help us avoid this dilemma. What has helped you be clear in your own mind on where your priorities lie?
- 4** "Set your hearts on God's Kingdom first". Has your faith in God helped you in times of anxiety? Your faith will not take away the problems but knowing that God is with you no matter what can make a difference. What is your experience of this?

Prayer

LORD God,
your care for us surpasses
even a mother's tender love.

Through this word and sacrament
renew our trust in your provident care,
that we may abandon all anxiety
and seek first your Kingdom.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.



Sunday 6th March

Matthew 7:21-27

Sunday Reflection

- 21 "Lord" is a perfectly good way to address God - see Matthew 14:30-33. The problem is not the mode of address, but the detachment of prayer and life. Father *in heaven* is typical of Matthew.
- 22 "That day" means the day of final judgment. It is not that the deeds done are bad. On the contrary - see Matthew 10:5-15. "In your name" means with the authority of Jesus.
- 23 These are immensely harsh words; however, they are not unique. The end of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins is just as decisive. Likewise, the end of the final parable of the Great Assize puts before us the consequences of our choices.
- 24 The contrast between hearing and acting may reflect a wider discussion in the early Church. Matthew and James (1:22-25) could be seen as a corrective to an abuse of Paul's teaching that faith alone counts and we are free from the Law. Paul himself seems aware of this: *And why not say (as some people slander us by saying that we say), "Let us do evil so that good may come"? Their condemnation is deserved!* (Romans 3:8) At this point the image of the rock evokes the local geography of the *wadi*.
- 25 This is what happens when the flash floods take place.
- 26 A foundation on sand cannot withstand the pressure. But it is really stupid to build there in the first place.
- 27 There is no satisfaction in the fall - just a terrible warning that prayer, piety and faith alone (an expression *not* from Paul but from Luther) are actually not enough. Living the gospel to a level of personal transformation is what the Lord has in mind.



Archdiocese of Dublin

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

- 1 Some people have no difficulty in speaking fine words but may not be so ready to back these up with action. What difference has it made to you when fine words were followed with sharing time, energy, or talents? What benefits have you received when you meet people like this? What difference has it made when you have been able to act in a similar way?
- 2 Jesus says that his teaching offers us a sure and solid foundation for life. When we hear the words of Jesus and act on them we will have built our house on rock. Have you found the truth of this in your life?

Prayer

GOD OF JUSTICE,
rock of our salvation,
open our minds and hearts to Jesus your Son.
Let us hold fast to his words
and express them in deeds,
that our faith may be built on a sure foundation
and our lives be judged worthy of you.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.

