

# DAILY BIBLE COMMENTARY

FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT 2010



WEEK 3

DECEMBER 13-18

## The idea of Scripture meditation

*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15:4*

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles . . . 2 Peter 3:1-2*

Growing up, most Friday nights were “pizza and movie night” in our house and my sisters and I got to take turns picking out the movie for the evening. When it was not my turn to choose, one of my sisters would invariably have us re-watch a movie that we had already seen. I always hated it when one of my sisters got to choose the movie. This was not just because the choice was almost always either the Sound of Music or Mary Poppins (though wasting a perfectly good Friday night in front of either of those movies would have been cause enough to be grieved). No, it was the repetition that really bothered me. It was my opinion that even a great movie, even a truly fantastic movie, is simply not worth watching ad infinitum. Once is enough and then it’s time to move on to new cinematic adventures. Repetition of the same old thing is boring.

I’m happy to report that I’ve grown up a little since those days. I’ve come to see that though repetition can be boring, this does not mean that all repetition necessarily is boring. Or rather, this does not mean that all repetition has to be boring. There is some repetition, for instance, that never gets old. I do not, for instance, ever anticipate watching a beautiful sunset over the Pacific Ocean to be a boring event, regardless of how many times I am privileged enough to see it.

The discipline of meditating on the Scriptures will necessitate a certain willingness to engage in repetition. We must be willing to not only do the same thing over and over again (i.e. pray, read, ponder, pray, read . . .) but we must be willing to do these repetitive actions with the same text(s) over and over again. The Scriptures do not always give up their riches easily. An entire lifetime spent visiting and revisiting the same passage does not threaten to exhaust the wealth which they contain. But in a sound bite world in which we are increasingly trained to want everything to travel at fiber optic speed (how can anyone survive with a dial-up connection?) and to be given to us in succinct and neatly packaged little bundles of information, you may find that you need some retraining before you can sit quietly and attentively enough to hear God. And hearing God speak is

## NOTES

**A Prayer for all in Civil Authority.** O Lord, our Governor, whose glory is in all the world; we commend this nation to your merciful care, that being guided by your providence, we may dwell secure in your peace. Grant to the President of the United States and to all in authority, wisdom and strength to know and to do your will. Fill them with the love of truth and righteousness; and make them always mindful of their calling to serve this nation in your fear; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

**A Prayer for the Clergy and People.** Imighty and everlasting God, from whom comes every good and perfect gift: send down upon our Bishops and other Clergy, and upon the congregations committed to their charge, your life-giving Spirit of grace; and, that they may truly please you, pour upon them the continual dew of your blessing. Grant this, O Lord, for the honor of our Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

**A Prayer for all Conditions of Men.** O God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech you for all sorts and conditions of men; that you would be pleased to make your ways know unto them, your saving grace unto all nations. Most especially, we pray for your holy catholic Church; that it may be so guided and governed by your good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. Finally, we commend to your fatherly goodness all those who are in any ways afflicted, or distressed, in mind, body, or estate [especially those for whom our prayers are desired]. Be pleased, holy Father, to comfort and relieve them according to their various needs; give them patience under their suffering, and a happy deliverance out of all their afflictions; for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

**A General Thanksgiving.** Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you most humble and heartfelt thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all men; We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but, above all, for your inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech you, give us that due sense of all your mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we might declare your praise not only with our lips, but also in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

**A Prayer of Saint Chrysostom.** Almighty God, who has given us grace at this time to bring before you with one mind our common supplications, and who has promised that when two or three are gathered together in your Name you will grant their requests: fulfill now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of your servants, as may be most expedient for them, granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. *Amen.*

**The Grace** (2 Corinthians 13:14). The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. *Amen.*

the point of our meditation upon Scripture, is it not? We are not interested merely in knowing the contents of the Bible (though we are interested in that), we are interested in knowing God and being known by Him. And the primary means by which God speaks to us about ourselves and about Himself is in and through the Holy Scriptures. But in order to hear Him thus speak, we will need to learn to meditate upon His Word.

This little booklet is offered as an aid in your Scripture meditation. It is not meant to replace your meditation but rather to provide some structure and direction in thinking about the Scriptures. This will be tough. If your life is not already characterized by daily prayer and daily Scripture meditation, it is most likely going to be very very tough.

It is unlikely that you will need to look very hard for an excuse to skip your prayers and Bible meditation – lots of very fine reasons to do anything other than do these things will continually assail you. You must resist these temptations for truly they are from the enemy of our souls. No matter how dry and unfruitful they may at times seem, do not neglect these disciplines for they are your lifeline. Just as surely as you find time each day to shower and to eat – find the time to pray and reflect upon God's Word written. If unusual circumstances arise and you truly have a limited amount of time, always forsake reading this booklet in favor of praying and reading the Biblical text.

The Reverend J. S. S. Patterson

*Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## THE THIRD WEEK IN ADVENT

### Monday, December 13 • Psalm 84; Isaiah 29:1-14; Mark 5:1-20

As if in answer to the question with which yesterday's passage concluded – “Who is this, that even wing and sea obey him?” – today we read of Jesus being identified as “the Son of the Most High God,” an identity then confirmed by a great miracle.

This is the 5th time that Mark has told us about Jesus' power over the demons (see 1:23-28, 32-34, 39; 3:7-12), though today's encounter stands out from the rest due to 3 reasons: (1) its emphasis upon the demoniac's strength (vv. 3-4), (2) the enormous number of demons exorcised (vv. 9, 13) and (3) the additional description of Jesus' interaction with the man after the healing. As elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus' power and authority are being put on display as he does what he said he was able to do, namely bind the strong man and plunder his house (see 3:27).

This passage also teaches us that Jesus' authority extends to the lives of men and women (not just demons!). At the very end of the passage we are treated to a description of how Jesus and the man interacted after the miracle had been accomplished, details which we are not commonly included in the Gospels. Let us consider what we learn about Jesus and the nature of discipleship from that final exchange (vv.18-20).

“. . . he begged him (Jesus) that he might be with him. And he did not permit it . . .” After the miracle, the healed man responded in a very understandable way – he wanted to be near the one who had done this powerful miracle in his life. Jesus, however, refuses to allow this and instead gives him other orders.

The exchange that they have allows us to witness evidence of the power of God at work within a human heart. He who formerly had been unable to control himself or to be controlled by others (see vv.3-5) is liberated by Jesus such that he gains the power to exercise control over his own will, which he in turn submits to Jesus'. Though he earnestly wanted to stay with the Lord – recall that the text says that he was “begging” Jesus to be with him (v.18) – he practiced self-denial and the obedience of faith by forsaking that desire in favor of what Jesus told him to do. He is an example of true discipleship, for as Jesus will shortly tell his disciples: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Furthermore, this man is an example of the good soil about which Jesus had been teaching in chapter 4. He heard Jesus' word, accepted it and bore fruit. The initial fruit that he bore came before anyone heard his

### The Apostles' Creed *(all remain standing)*

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth:  
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord:  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead and buried.  
He descended into hell;  
the third day he rose again from the dead:  
He ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:  
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit;  
the holy Catholic Church;  
the communion of saints;  
the forgiveness of sins;  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Minister: The Lord be with you.

People: And with your spirit.

Minister: Let us pray.

*The People kneel. The Lord's Prayer may here be said.*

Minister: O Lord, show us your mercy.

People: And grant us your salvation.

Minister: O God, make clean our hearts within us.

People: And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

### The Collect of the Day

#### A Collect for Peace

O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, whom to know is eternal life and to serve is perfect freedom; Defend us your humble servants against all assaults of our enemies, that we, surely trusting in your defense, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

#### A Collect for Grace

O Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, who has safely brought us to the beginning of this day; Defend us in the same with your mighty power, and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger; but that all our doings, being guided and governed by you, may be righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The following prayers shall be omitted here when the Litany is said, and may be omitted when the Holy Communion is to follow. And NOTE, That the Minister may here end Morning Prayer with such general intercessions taken out of the Book of Common Prayer, as he thinks fit, or with the Grace.*

## Psalm(s) of the Day

### The First Lesson *(all are seated)*

#### Te Deum laudamus *(all stand)*

We praise you, O God; we acknowledge you to be the Lord.

All creation worships you; the Father everlasting.

To you all angels cry aloud, the Heavens and all the powers therein;

To you Cherubim and Seraphim continually sing,

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts;

Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of your glory.

The glorious company of the Apostles praise you:

The noble fellowship of the Prophets praise you.

The victorious army of Martyrs praise you.

The holy Church throughout all the world acknowledges you;

The Father, of an infinite Majesty;

Your adorable, true and only Son;

And the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

You are the King of Glory, O Christ.

You are the everlasting Son of the Father.

When you became man to deliver us, you humbled yourself to be born of a Virgin.

When you had overcome the sting of death, you opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

You sit at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father.

We believe that you will come to be our Judge.

Therefore, we beseech you, help your servants, whom you have redeemed with your precious blood.

Make them to be numbered with your Saints, in glory everlasting.

O Lord, save your people, and bless your inheritance.

Govern them, and lift them up forever.

Day by day we magnify you;

And we worship your Name ever, world without end.

O Lord, by your grace, keep us this day from all sin.

O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us.

O Lord, let your mercy be upon us, as we put our trust in you.

O Lord, in you have I have trusted; let me not be abandoned at the last.

### The Second Lesson *(all are seated)*

#### Jubilate Deo *(Psalm 100) (all stand)*

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! \* Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; \* we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! \* Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, \* and his faithfulness to all generations.

story and “marveled,” it was simply the fruit of trusting Jesus and obeying him. We can see some important lessons in his example.

Even when we have the best of intentions, we must always be willing to accept that our desires for ourselves may not be God’s desires for us. The sacrifice of submitting our wills to God’s is a part of our daily prayers: “. . . thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” When we pray thus, what are we saying? Considerably more, let us hope, than simply saying: “Ok, God, you win. Your will be done.” The spirit of the petition “thy will be done” is one of submissive obedience, the voluntary sacrificing of one’s own will in favor of God’s. We set our wills aside in the hope that our wills will increasingly become like his, such that more and more often what we will is what he wills.

Praying for God’s will to be done should also entail our willingness to actively do his will. In other words, when we pray “thy will be done,” part of our intention must include a reaffirmation of our willingness both to accept whatever his will is (which will necessitate an exercise of faith) and a willingness to obediently do it.

“Go home to your friends and tell them . . .” Speaking to others about Jesus involves more than simply saying true things about him (i.e. knowing and communicating right doctrine). Disciples of Jesus should also be able to communicate how he has impacted and changed their life. Notice the simplicity of Jesus’ instructions – go and tell them about what I have done for you, tell them about the mercy of God (v.19). The calling to tell others about what God has done in our lives is found throughout the Scriptures. We see this same pattern, for instance, in the instructions Saint Peter gives to the Church: “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9b-10).

“. . . he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis.” The isolation which was a part of his life before meeting Jesus is replaced with the calling to re-enter the company of his family and tell the story of God’s power at work in his life. Though this newly minted disciple began at home with his own family, apparently he did not stop there. Mark says he went to the Decapolis was a geographical region comprised of Damascus, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippo, Dion, Pella, Galasa and Canatha.

✠ The Collect for Peace reads that God’s service is perfect freedom – Let us pray that God by his grace would so free us from self and sin that we might submit ourselves fully to serving him and his will. ✠

# AN ORDER FOR DAILY MORNING PRAYER

**Tuesday, December 14 • Psalm 90; Isaiah 30:8-17; Mark 5:21-43**

As we have already seen in Mark, Jesus is Lord over both the natural and the spiritual realm (see the calming of the storm in 4:35-43 and the exorcism of the demoniac in 5:1-20). In today's passage we see his power over disease and death. But the point of these passages is greater than simply showing us Jesus' power. We are also meant to learn something about the appropriate way(s) for us to respond to this knowledge of him.

How are we to respond? Let us contrast the ways in which people responded to Jesus in some of our previous readings with the response we see in today's reading. After Jesus calmed the storm he rebuked his disciples for their fear and their lack of faith in him (Mark 4:40). Yesterday we noticed that the healed man obeyed Jesus, presumably exercising faith in him though there is no explicit mention of faith in the passage. In those passages, those who saw Jesus' miracles responded in a number of different ways, they were: "filled with great fear" (4:41a), wondering about his identity (4:41b); begging him to depart (5:17) and "marveling" (5:20).

What is missing in all of these responses is an explicit confession of faith in Jesus. This conspicuous absence, however, changes with today's lesson in which faith plays a prominent role.

## **Jairus and his Daughter**

"My little daughter is at the point of death . . ." Jairus' daughter was grievously ill, even to the point of death. His desperation and powerlessness to help her drove him to seek Jesus, whose power to heal was becoming known even among the rulers of the synagogue. Jairus' request – "Come lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live" – does not necessarily indicate that he believed that he was the Messiah or the Son of God. He may simply have approached Jesus because of his reputation for being a holy man with powerful and efficacious prayers. In Jairus we see a father, desperate to do anything he can to help his ailing daughter. Some commentators speculate that she had likely been sick for some time and now that it seemed that all hope was lost, Jairus was desperate enough to appeal to this itinerate healer.

This is sometimes the way that God tests and purifies our faith: allowing circumstances to become such that we see our need for him in ways that we might not otherwise. Though we must not test God, he does test us – sometimes by allowing very trying circumstances to attend our lives.

## **The Opening Sentences**

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (St. Matthew 3:2)

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)

## **A General Confession** *(all kneel)*

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us. Have mercy on us, most miserable offenders. Spare those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore those who are penitent; According to your promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

## **The Declaration of Absolution, or Remission of Sins**

*In the absence of a priest, the following prayer may be said:*

Grant, we beseech you, merciful Lord, to your faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve you with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **The Lord's Prayer**

Minister: O Lord, open our lips.

People: And we shall declare your praise.

*All stand.*

Minister: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

People: As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be; world without end. Amen.

Minister: Let us praise the Lord.

People: The Lord's Name be praised.

## **The Venite, exultemus Domino** *(Psalm 95)*

O come, let us sing to the Lord; \* let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; \* let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

For the Lord is a great God, \* and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth; \* the heights of the mountains are his also.

The sea is his, for he made it, \* and his hands formed the dry land.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; \* let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

For he is our God, \* and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, \* as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,

When your fathers put me to the test \* and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

For forty years I loathed that generation and said, \* "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways."

Therefore I swore in my wrath, \* "They shall not enter my rest."

your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” In this, David was responding to God’s grace in the best way possible – giving his entire self to God, being willing to do God’s will. Likewise in today’s 2nd lesson Paul writes: “we make it our aim to please him (God)” and “he (Jesus) died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (vv. 9b, 15).

Thus we respond to God’s grace by seeking to live lives modeled after the manner in which Jesus taught us to pray, saying: “Thy will be done.” This giving of one’s self over to God is not an attempt to merit his grace but rather is in response to it. The obedience which God commands from his people is not the obedience of servants who are forced to do their master’s will but rather the obedience of servants (who are also adopted children in his household) motivated by gratitude and love from within.

There is, however, another important way in which we respond to the goodness of God. Notice David’s pattern in Psalm 40 – after praising and thanking God for his “wondrous deeds” and for his exceedingly excellent “thoughts” towards mankind (Psalm 40:1-5), David then writes about telling others about the marvelous deeds of God.

Within the context of Psalm 40 and 2 Corinthians 5:5-21 the specific way in which we show our “desire to do God’s will” (Psalm 40:8) and “make it our aim to please him” (2 Corinthians 5:9b) is by living as “ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” (2 Corinthians 5:20). As David wrote: “I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation” (Psalm 40:10).

✠ We are not our own, we have been bought with a price – therefore we are to glorify God with our lives. – Let us beseech God to “imprint upon our hearts such a dread of thy judgments, and such a grateful sense of thy goodness to us, as may make us both ashamed and afraid to offend thee. And, above all, keep in our minds a lively remembrance of that great day, in which we must give a strict account of our thoughts, words, and actions to him whom thou hast appointed the Judge of quick and dead, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” ✠

## The Woman with the Flow of Blood

“Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years . . . .” As Jesus travels on his way to see the daughter of Jarius, an unnamed woman exercises her faith in him and is healed of her chronic ailment.

The early fathers of the Church drew application from this passage by reading it allegorically. They taught that the woman stands for humanity and her ailment represents the constant suffering (even unto death) to which all men are subject. The physicians who could not heal her represent both the Old Testament law and the various religions of the world which are unable to give life to humanity. Christ alone is able to free mankind from sickness, suffering and death.

“She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’” It seems as though the woman was content to have an impersonal “encounter” with Jesus – simply getting what she wanted from him. The crowd was great and was pressing in around him, and hers was just one of many hands that touched his garment. What sets her apart is that she had faith in him. Was it a mature and fully informed faith? Probably not. Her desire to touch him so as to be healed was quite possibly nothing other than superstition. In the ancient world it was believed that a person’s garments carried the person’s power (see Acts 19:12). The woman’s comment seems to indicate that she believed this - “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.”

But though a physical miracle might have been all she dared hope for, Jesus desired something greater for her, namely, the perfecting of her faith. Though she began her encounter with Jesus cloaked in superstition and as a hidden and anonymous hand extending from the throng, the encounter ends with her kneeling before him, telling him “the whole truth.”

What do these passages teach us about the nature of true faith? One writer comments: “Parables, miracles and exorcisms do not ensure (faith). Religious education and background does not automatically discover it. Family ties are not enough to create it. Demons, in a curious way, know its basis and oppose it. People in deepest need and desperation seem to find it, by a variety of routes. The disciples are moving towards it, because they have responded to a call and are travelling close to Jesus . . . . true faith is self-risking trust in Jesus himself. For the moment Jesus is met by opposition from the authorities . . . by a shallow but willing following from the crowd, and by a tenuous commitment from his bewildered disciples. Yet some, out of their utter need, have grasped it – the demon-possessed now free, the diseased woman now well and at peace, the synagogue official

whose daughter has been raised from the dead. The secret, once hidden but now revealed, is that God's kingdom is being established in Jesus. The criterion for being in it or out of it is trust in him in a serious, personal continuing commitment" (English, 117).

✠In His providence, God allowed both Jairus and the woman to experience hardship in order that their faith might be perfected. – O God, give us grace to entrust ourselves to Jesus, especially in the midst of hardship in order both that our faith would be perfected and that His Name would be glorified in our lives. ✠

**Ember Wednesday, December 15 • Psalm 1, 15; Jeremiah 23:9-15; Luke 12:35-48**

### Living in light of the end

"Let your loins be girded and keep your lamps burning." In the ancient world men wore long garments which needed to be drawn up around the loins and tucked into a belt for quick movement. Jesus' command for his people to live with their loins girded means "prepare yourself for action" and (among other things) should bring to mind another time in which God instructed his people using this same phraseology, namely the Exodus from Egypt. At the Exodus the ancient Israelites were commanded to eat the Passover meal with their loins girded, pointing both to the fact that God had completed everything that needed to be done in order for them to depart and also that they were prepared to follow him at a moment's notice. Their instructions were: "And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD's Passover" (Exodus 12:11, KJV).



As we read this passage in Mark, we should also keep in mind the original context of the passage – Jesus was drawing on Exodus imagery to make a point about himself to his contemporaries. He was, in effect, saying: the Messiah has returned to his house (Israel) – are any ready to receive him? Are any waiting for his visitation?

These are questions that Jesus asks us as well. Just as the Israelites were called to show their readiness for the Exodus and Jesus' contemporaries were challenged to consider their readiness to receive him at his first advent – this text also challenges us to examine our own readiness for Jesus' next coming (when he will come in glory to judge all flesh). The Christian's faith in the promised return of Christ must be allowed to shape the manner in which he lives in the present day. "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Luke 12:40).

for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." From this we learn: (a) that the death of Jesus was in order to redeem man and (b) that there is a response required of us. Let us consider each of these points, in turn.

### In order to save sinners

As St. Paul tells us elsewhere, Jesus "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). The means by which Jesus came was the incarnation – "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). What was this poverty that Christ embraced? It was his condescension to become a human being – to make "himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). Jesus did this in order to satisfy the just wrath of God against sin. He became incarnate so as to be able to die a sacrificial death for us. "By a single offering (i.e. his own life) he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

In Psalm 40, David writes prophetically about the purpose of the incarnation, as we can see from reading Hebrews 10 where we are told that "when Christ came into the world he said 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me . . . Behold, I have come to do your will O God' (see Hebrews 10:5, which quotes from Psalm 40:6-8).

The "body prepared for the Son was the body he assumed in the incarnation" (P. E. Hughes, Hebrews, 395). The incarnation was a great act of salvation, for apart from becoming incarnate the Son could not have died and apart from dying he could not have atoned for the sin of the world and apart from his atonement we would have no hope of being forgiven for our sins and raised to life and communion with God. As St. Athanasius wrote: "As the Word who is immortal and the Father's Son it was not possible for him to die and this is the reason why he assumed a body capable of dying, so that, belonging to the Word who is above all, in dying it might become a sufficient exchange for all . . . When he offered his own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all he fulfilled in death all that was required. [. . .] He put on a body so that in the body he might find death and blot it out."

### Our Response

". . . he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves." In response to God's grace David said "I desire to do

*to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then he touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it done to you.' And their eyes were opened. (Matthew 9:27-30a)*

Furthermore, to the Centurion he said: "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed" (Matthew 8:13); To the Canaanite Woman he said: "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire" (Matthew 15:28a); To the woman with chronic bleeding he said: "Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well" (Matthew 9:22b; Mk 5:34; Luke 8:48); To blind Bartimaeus: "Go your way your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:52) and To the Leper: "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19).

✠ In this passage we do not see Jesus rendered powerless due to the people's unbelief, rather we see another example of the fact that what he did – everything that he did – was for the purpose of accomplishing the salvation of the world. – Let us pray for such faith to see the mighty works of God and give him the honor which he alone is due. ✠

### **Ember Friday, December 17 • Psalm 40; Jeremiah 23:23-32; 2 Corinthians 5:5-21**

Today and tomorrow are the only weekday mornings in Advent in which the 2nd lesson is not taken from either the Gospel of Mark or Luke. Today's lesson has the added distinction of being the only lesson from one of St. Paul's epistles. And thus, in our continued observance of the Ember Days, we turn to this passage which speaks so powerfully about the Church's calling to gratefully receive and faithfully proclaim the meaning of Jesus' advent, namely that "For our sake he (God the Father) made him (Jesus, God the Son) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

#### **. . . that mortality may be swallowed up by life . . .**

"He who has prepared us for this very thing . . ." When Paul writes in v. 5 that God has "prepared us for this very thing" he is referring to our mortality being "swallowed up by life" (v. 4). The means by which God accomplishes this great work of grace is summarized in vv.14-15 ". . . we have concluded this: that one (i.e. Jesus) has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live

What does this passage say about how to be ready?

In this passage the way to be ready is to be faithful with that with which one has been entrusted. Jesus uses the image of a steward to illustrate his point. A steward (or manager of the house) was an individual charged with looking after the master's household during his absence. The steward had power to act on behalf of his master, was responsible to provide for the other members of the household (see v. 42) and was entrusted neither to squander nor selfishly use the master's goods (see v. 45). The steward was to follow the master's instructions, in effect working to further the master's will and not his own (see v. 47). A steward who served faithfully could expect to be rewarded when his master returned, and he who was unfaithful could expect punishment (see vv. 43-44, 47-48).

As we read in the epistle appointed for this past Sunday, Christians in general (and the clergy in particular) are called "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1). The Church has been entrusted with the gospel and with the sacraments – we have been "entrusted with the message of reconciliation (as) ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:19b-20a). The degree to which we shall be found to have been ready for Jesus' return will in some way be related to the degree to which we have been faithful with that which he left for us to do in his Name.

**Excursus: What is an Ember Day?** There are 4 sets of Ember Days in the year, each set being made up of the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday which follow the 1st Sunday in Lent, the Feast of Pentecost, September 14th (Holy Cross Day) and December 13th (the Feast of St. Lucy). From the 5th century (though likely having even more ancient roots) the Ember seasons were regarded as especially appropriate for ordinations, and this continues to be the emphasis of The Book of Common Prayer in which prayers "For those who are to be admitted into Holy Orders" are prescribed to be said on the Ember Days (pgs 38-39) (see ODCC). In the Anglican tradition the Ember days are days of abstinence.

Given the fact that today is an Ember Day we cannot help but to consider how this text directly applies to those members of Christ's body who serve in holy orders. In the Anglican tradition, just after a man is made a Deacon, he is given the high honor of reading this same Gospel text we read today – this being the first time he would have been permitted to read the Gospel within the liturgy of the church. The choice of this particular text is very significant. It speaks both to the high dignity of the clergy's calling to serve Christ by serving and caring for his people in his "house" and also serves as a sobering reminder of the promised judgment for any clergy who neglects or

abuses those entrusted to his care. It is no small thing that the one time that Paul speaks of Christians facing some sort of negative judgment after death is in reference to leaders and teachers who have failed to be faithful to their calling (see 1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Thus this passage asks clergy: “when the Master comes, will they be found busy (and faithful) at their tasks, or taking their ease and abusing the household?” (N. T. Wright). Remember to pray for your clergy and pray for those whom God is calling into Holy Orders.

✠ Jesus has told us that we will be blessed if he finds us awake when he returns – Let us pray that God would give us the grace to be prepared to meet Christ, either in the hour of our death or on the day of his return. ✠

**Thursday, December 16 • Psalm 96; Isaiah 32:1-20; Mark 6:1-6**

### **Jesus is rejected in Nazareth**

“He went away from there and came to his own hometown . . .” The location that Mark has in mind is likely Nazareth, the place in which Jesus grew up (but note – this is different from Jesus’ place of birth, which was Bethlehem - see Matthew 2:1 and Luke 2:15).

Here in Nazareth, Jesus was rejected by his own people. As St. John writes: “(he) came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (John 1:11). In this, Jesus gave his followers a foretaste of the cost not only of following him but also of ministering in his name.

“What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary . . .” It has been said that familiarity breeds contempt. Can one “know Jesus” too well for one’s own good? Such may have been the case for these hometown companions. Mark tells us that they recognized Jesus’ wisdom and could not dispute the power of his deeds and yet they reject him. As C. E. B. Cranfield wrote: “The people of Nazareth know Jesus according to the flesh; but their familiarity with him is a hindrance to knowing him truly, for it makes it all the more hard for them to see through the veil of his ordinariness.”

“. . . and his disciples followed him there.” In the passage which follows today’s lesson (Mark 6:7-13) Jesus will send the Apostles out on a training exercise. As a part of his instructions to them he tells them what to do when they are rejected by those to whom they seek to minister –

“And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them” (6:11). Perhaps the practical realities of rejection were especially on Jesus’ mind because of his own ministry’s cold reception in Nazareth. It seems plausible that the wise teacher took his disciples to Nazareth in order that they might witness his rejection, and thus be better prepared for the rejection which they too would experience, first when sent out on mission (in chapter 6) and later when they too would face persecution for preaching Jesus’ message.

This passage (especially when read in conjunction with vv.7-13) reminds us that God does not give us more than we can handle. Before he sent them out (where they would experience hardship and rejection), Jesus prepared the Apostles by first modeling and then teaching them about the reality that faithfulness to God will sometimes result in being rejected by men and family.

### **Miracles & Unbelief**

“And they took offense at him (. . .) And he could do no mighty work there . . . and he marveled at their unbelief.” Do these verses indicate that Jesus was powerless apart from men’s faith?

To understand these verses we must keep in mind why Jesus went about doing miracles in the first place. As we have discussed elsewhere, Jesus intended his miracles to be signs pointing to his identity (calling forth, confirming and sometimes rewarding faith in him). In Nazareth, however, the people had a profound lack of faith and Jesus “could do no mighty works there.” This does not mean “Jesus was powerless apart from men’s faith, but that in the absence of faith he could not work mighty works in accordance with the purpose of his ministry.” St. Gregory Nazianzen writes: “Something essential for healing is required on both sides – faith on the part of the patients, power on that of the healer. So one side without its counterpart ‘could not,’ so to speak, perform them.”

A quick survey of Jesus’ miracles highlights the important relationship between faith and God’s “ability” to do mighty works. Consider, for instance:

*And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David.’ . . . and Jesus said*