

February 23rd, Proper 7

Opening Prayer:

Almighty and ever-living God,
whose compassionate love transforms sin into health
and things temporal into eternal glory:
grant us a strong and gracious faith,
so that, like Joseph, when he was sold into slavery,
we too might face trials with confidence in You
and become a source of reconciliation.
We ask this through the healing power of Jesus Christ,
your Son, our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and ever.

Genesis 45:3-11: We hear of Joseph, whom his brothers previously had sold into slavery, but who has risen in power and wealth in Egypt. This reading describes their reunion, though Joseph's brothers didn't recognize him. If you were one of Joseph's brother's how would you feel when you realize this great man was the one you treated so badly? Rather than seek revenge though, Joseph reconciled his brothers to himself and said that it was not they who sent him to Egypt, but God, so that he could be in the right place at the right time to help his people. Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?' But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come closer to me.' And they came closer. He said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty."

1 Corinthians 15:45-49: Paul wrote to assure his readers of their eternal life using the analogy of the imprint: that is, just as we bear the image of Adam, that is our earthly bodies, we also bear the image (or are imprinted with) the heavenly Adam, Christ. So in the resurrection we will receive spiritual bodies.

‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Luke 6:27-38: In last Sunday’s gospel reading Luke portrayed Jesus delivering his version of the beatitudes, in which being called by God into His kingdom is the truest blessing we receive. In this reading Jesus taught the crowds what kingdom living means: loving enemies, blessing those who curse you, and so on. In fact, Jesus has set the bar as high as heaven itself, for we are to treat, not just one another, but even total strangers the way God has treated us: mercifully, gracefully, generously.

Jesus addressed a great crowd of his disciples, together with a multitude from Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon. I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

‘If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your

lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.’

In the second chapter of St Paul’s letter to the Philippians, a passage we hear every Palm Sunday, the followers of Jesus are told to let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus. Though Christ was in the form of God, Paul wrote, he humbled himself to the point of being a human being. A servant, a slave Paul wrote. Not a religious or civic superstar, no, just a run of the mill regular person.

He even humbled himself to death, and not a nice comfortable death in a nursing home surrounded by family and friends, after a long life, with soft music playing in the background. Oboe music would be nice. No, this Christ, this God-man, humbled himself to one of the most gruesome deaths available at the time. A scandalous death on the cross. So scandalous in fact, that it took Paul’s writings and many years for the cross eventually to be exalted as a sign of salvation.

Yes, we are out of our minds and into the mind of Christ, who came, not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many, In fact, to ransom you. You are why he came and endured all that he did.

Jesus is about changing us, from our minds to our motivations to our beliefs and our actions. His way is the only way to true greatness, true satisfaction in life. In fact, Jesus’ ways are the only ways to life in abundance.

Joseph, about whom we heard in our first reading, was a man open to this godly way of living. He could have sought revenge on his brothers for their selling him into slavery all over their jealousy over his magnificent coat of many colours. They sold him. Into slavery. Imagine how you would have felt. Over a piece of fabric, no less.

Yet Joseph, as a precursor to Jesus himself, saw a chance for reconciliation with his brothers, proclaiming that he believed it was God who was behind his being sent to Egypt, so that he could become what amounted to being the Prime Minister in Pharaoh’s court. In such a capacity he was able to send aid to his fellow Hebrew people. Eventually, in a family reunion for the ages, Joseph’s father and brothers and their families came to live in Goshen, a part of Egypt.

Now, let’s be honest here. There is no way we can faithfully live out this gospel reading. In fact, only one person in the history of the world could have. But! Because we have the same mind as Jesus, we will continue to be a people, a Church, the Body of Christ that love our enemies, do good to those who hate us,

bless those who curse us and pray for those who abuse us. In the spirit of Christ we will offer the other cheek and offer our shirt as well as our coat. We will give to those who beg of us, expecting nothing from them in return. In so doing, like Jesus, we will know that we are children of the Most High.

Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Concluding Prayers

Living God, you spoke to your people of old. Give to your church ears to hear your voice speaking in our day, even through those we name as enemy.

Lord, for the nations of the world, and for Charles, our king, and all the leaders of the nations of the world, we pray. Let not anger consume us. Take away from us false virtue, and break down all dividing walls of hostility.

Lord, in Jesus you called us to sacrificial love. Enable us to serve all those in need, the poor, the homeless, the sick and the dying.

Lord, through the hardships of the Hebrew leaders you preserved the life of your people. Comfort all those in distress. Make of human suffering a gracious gift of life for others.

Lord, in Jesus you have given us the first fruit of your dominion. Plant your life-giving Spirit in us and in our land, that we may bring forth justice and peace.

Most high God,
you are kind even to the ungrateful,
generously merciful,
even to the wicked who turn to you.
Pour out your love on this assembled Church.
Softens our hearts and broaden our souls
that we might be done with judging
and learn your way of compassion.
We ask this through your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God forever and ever.

For our Parish.

O GOD the Holy Ghost, Sanctifier of the faithful:
Sanctify this parish by thine abiding presence
especially at this time when some feel they cannot gather together.
Enlighten the minds of thy people more and more
with the light of the everlasting Gospel.
Bring erring souls to the knowledge of God our Saviour;
and those who are walking in the way of life,
keep steadfast unto the end.
Give patience to the sick and afflicted,
and renew them in body and soul.
Guard from forgetfulness of thee those who are strong and prosperous.
Increase in us thy manifold gifts of grace,
and make us all to be fruitful in good works;
O blessed Spirit, whom with the Father and the Son together
we worship and glorify, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

THE peace of God, which passeth all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord:
And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you
always. *Amen*