

## Readings and Reflections for the Week

### **SUNDAY 13 SEPTEMBER - TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (EDUCATION SUNDAY)**

Reading 1, Sirach 27:33-28:7

Psalm 102(103), Reading 2, Romans 14:7-9

Gospel, Matthew 18:21-35

*To be forgiven, you must forgive*

### **Monday 14 September - EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS**

Reading 1, Philippians 2:6-11

Psalm 77(78), Gospel, John 3:13-17

*God sent his Son so that through him the whole world  
might be saved*

### **Tuesday 15 September - Our Lady of Sorrows**

Reading 1, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14,27-31

Psalm 99(100), Gospel, John 19:25-27

*'Women this is your son'*

### **Wednesday 16 September - St Cornelius and St Cyprian**

Reading 1, 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Psalm 32(33), Gospel, Luke 7:31-35

*'We played the pipes, and you wouldn't dance'*

### **Thursday 17 September - Feria**

Reading 1, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Psalm 117(118), Gospel, Luke 7:36-50

*Her many sins have been forgiven, or she would not  
have shown such great love*

### **Friday 18 September - Feria**

Reading 1, 1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Psalm 16(17), Gospel, Luke 8:1-3

*The women who accompanied Jesus*

### **Saturday 19 - September Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Reading 1, 1 Corinthians 15:35-37,42-49

Psalm 55(56), Gospel, Luke 8:4-15

*The parable of the sower*

### **SUNDAY 20 SEPTEMBER - TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

Reading 1, Isaiah 55:6-9, Psalm 144(145)

Reading 2, Philippians 1:20-24,27

Gospel, Matthew 20:1-16

*Why be envious because I am generous?*

United with Churches together in St Albans on Education Sunday we pray and give thanks for everyone involved in the world of education.

### **SAINTS OF THE WEEK**

St Cornelius was elected Pope in 251 during the persecutions of the Emperor Decius. His first challenge, besides the ever present threat of the Roman authorities, was to bring an end to the schism brought on by his rival, the first anti-pope Novatian. He convened a synod of bishops to confirm him as the rightful successor of Peter. The great controversy that arose as a result of the Decian persecution was whether or not the Church could pardon and receive back into the Church those who had apostacized in the face of martyrdom. Against both the bishops who argued that the Church could not welcome back apostates, and those who argued that they should be welcomed back but did not demand a heavy penance of the penitent, Cornelius decreed that they must be welcomed back and insisted that they perform an adequate penance. In 253 Cornelius was exiled by the emperor Gallus and died of the hardships he endured in exile. He is venerated as a martyr.

St Cyprian of Carthage is second in importance only to the great Saint Augustine as a figure and Father of the African church. He was a close friend of Pope Cornelius, and supported him both against the anti-pope Novatian and in his views concerning the re-admittance of apostates into the Church. Saint Cyprian was born to wealthy pagans around the year 190, and was educated in the classics and in rhetoric. He converted at the age of 56, was ordained a priest a year later, and made bishop two years after that. His writings are of great importance, especially his treatise on The Unity of the Catholic Church, in which he argues that unity is grounded in the authority of the bishop, and among the bishops, in the primacy of the See of Rome. In, "The Unity of the Catholic Church," St Cyprian writes, "You cannot have God for your Father if you do not have the Church for your mother.... God is one and Christ is one, and his Church is one; one is the faith, and one is the people cemented together by harmony into the strong unity of a body.... If we are the heirs of Christ, let us abide in the peace of Christ; if we are the sons of God, let us be lovers of peace. "During the Decian persecutions Cyprian considered it wiser to go into hiding and guide his flock covertly rather than seek the glorious crown of martyrdom, a decision that his enemies attacked him for. On 14 September 258, however, he was martyred during the persecutions of the emperor Valerian.

**Prayer:** *Saints Cornelius and Cyprian, you loved God and remained firm in your faith, even in the face of persecution and death. Your courageous witness was coupled with a pastoral witness to God's mercy. Please pray for me, that I will imitate your courage and merciful hearts, always standing strong in my faith and offering forgiveness to every sinner. Saints Cornelius and Cyprian, pray for me. Jesus, I trust in You.*

## REFLECTIONS

### **First Reading, Sirach 27:33-28:9**

It is some months since we had a reading from this wise old scribe. He was on the staff of the Temple at Jerusalem (or at any rate moved in these circles), and clearly had the greatest love and respect for the Temple and the Law of God. He gathered together and reflected on the wisdom of the ancients, aware all the time that the Lord God is the source of all true wisdom. Most of his proverbial wisdom accords with that elusive quality, common sense, but it is none the worse or less important for that! Here he already looks forward to the message of today's gospel parable: the quality of God which we know best is the divine mercy and forgiveness. The very meaning of the divine name revealed to Moses on Sinai is 'God of mercy and compassion', and this echoes again and again down the scriptures. We are made in the image of God, and our glory is to imitate in our own poor, human way, this forgiveness at the heart of God. Once we see love and forgiveness as our divine mode of living, our whole relationship with other people changes. The last few lines of the reading give us a good, common sense summary of the foolishness of quarrelling.

*Why is it so hard to forgive?*

### **Second Reading, Romans 14:7-9**

The context of this wonderful statement of Paul is the moral exhortation to the Roman Christians towards the end of his letter. Paul has been insisting that no one should tamper with the conscience of another. He has been discussing a particular problem of the time, whether eating meat which had once been offered to idols implicated the eater in idol-worship. He states his own opinion, but will not force it on anyone else. For Paul, to be living with Christ's life gives every Christian a dignity, a trustworthiness and a freedom ultimately to make his or her own decision. It is a delicate balance: Paul gives his opinion, which means that we must listen to the voice of the Church and its teachers. At the same time he realizes the presence of the Spirit of Christ, guiding every individual Christian who is genuinely living for the Lord. To a modern believer this raises a host of questions. Have I really listened? Am I being simply stubborn, deceiving myself into avoiding truths which I find inconvenient? What is the voice of the Church? Whatever the answers, Paul's confidence in the guidance of the Spirit shows the dignity of the Christian and the respect with which the Christian must be honoured.

*How do I form my conscience?*

### **Gospel, Matthew 18:21-35**

This is a favourite theme of Matthew, continuing and concluding Jesus' teaching that forgiveness is the life's-blood of any Christian community. We cannot live together without upsetting one another, unwittingly, or even deliberately. So forgiveness is the vital step. So important is this matter of forgiveness that two consecutive Sunday gospels are devoted to it. It expands and stresses our petition in the Lord's Prayer, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others.' The importance of this petition was already underlined by Matthew; it is the only petition of the Lord's Prayer to which he adds at the end a confirmatory saying of Jesus. Like so many of Matthew's parables, this one about a king and his servants revolves round contrasting characters, the 'goodie' and the 'baddie' (wedding-guests and guest without a wedding-garment; the two who use their talents and the one who hides it; the girls with and without oil for their lamps; the sheep and the goats; and here, the generous king and the ungenerous servant). There is also a contrast between the two sums of money which is deliberately fantastic: the first slave owes the equivalent of millions of dollars, a sum no private person could ever repay, let alone a slave; it is more than a year's tax for a whole province. The second owes the couple of months' wages of a casual labourer.

*Is there anyone you cannot forgive? Do you start the forgiveness-process, or wait for the other party? What is the best way to show forgiveness?*