

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

You are just, O Lord, and your judgement is right;  
treat your servant in accord with your merciful love.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption,  
look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters,  
that those who believe in Christ may receive true freedom  
and an everlasting inheritance.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Ezekiel 33:7-9

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the Lord was addressed to me as follows, "Son of man, I have appointed you as sentry to the House of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, warn them in my name. If I say to a wicked man: Wicked wretch, you are to die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked man to renounce his ways, then he shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death. If, however, you do warn a wicked man to renounce his ways and repent, and he does not repent, then he shall die for his sin, but you yourself will have saved your life."

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 94

Response:

O that today you would listen to his voice!  
Harden not your hearts.

- Come, ring out our joy to the Lord;  
hail the rock who saves us.  
Let us come before him, giving thanks,  
with songs let us hail the Lord. (R.)

- Come in; let us bow and bend low;  
let us kneel before the God who made us  
for he is our God and we  
the people who belong to his pasture,  
the flock that is led by his hand. (R.)

- O that today you would listen to his voice!  
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,  
as on that day at Massah in the desert  
when your fathers put me to the test;  
when they tried me, though they saw my  
work." (R.)

**SECOND READING**

Romans 13:8-10

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans.

Avoid getting into debt, except the debt of mutual love. If you love your fellow men you have carried out your obligations. All the commandments: You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and so on, are summed up in this single command: You must love your neighbour as yourself. Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbour; that is why it is the answer to every one of the commandments.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Your word is truth, O Lord,  
consecrate us in the truth.  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Matthew 18:15-20

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples: "If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between you two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector.

"I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.

"I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;

through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

O God, who give us the gift of true prayer and of peace,  
graciously grant that, through this offering,  
we may do fitting homage to your divine majesty  
and, by partaking of the sacred mystery,  
we may be faithfully united in mind and heart.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

Like the deer that yearns for running streams,  
so my soul is yearning for you, my God;  
my soul is thirsting for God, the living God.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Grant that your faithful, O Lord,  
whom you nourish and endow with life  
through the food of your Word and heavenly Sacrament,  
may so benefit from your beloved Son's great gifts  
that we may merit an eternal share in his life.  
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

Christ asks for a home in your soul, where he can be at rest with you, where he can talk easily to you, where you and he, alone together, can laugh and be silent and be delighted with one another.

Caryll Houselander

**SORT IT OUT!** (MATTHEW 18:15-20)

Matthew continues his account of the teaching of Jesus about life in community. Jesus accepts that relationships between disciples are likely to go wrong from time to time, but the true disciple will not allow such a situation to continue.

The threefold procedure which Matthew presents is the Jewish way of resolving a grievance: first, the personal, informal confrontation; secondly, the more formal meeting in the presence of witnesses; and thirdly, when these attempts fail, the official proceedings in front of the community, the Church. Treating the offender "like a pagan or a tax collector" can be understood as excommunicating them from the body of believers: it might also be taken to mean that they need further evangelising and training in what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Earlier in the Gospel narrative, Jesus had given Peter the power to bind and loose, to forbid and to allow. Here, he gives the same power and authority to the wider group of disciples. The way in which this is expressed means that God will accept whatever decision the disciples arrive at. And Jesus will be present when disciples gather in his name, he will be truly *Emmanuel*, "God-with-us". ■

**LEARN**

The term "brother" here signifies another member of the community: we can reasonably understand it as meaning brother or sister.

In Rabbinic thought, the divine presence is with people who study *Torah*, the Law.

In some synagogues, a light is kept burning in front of the Ark, the cupboard where the scrolls of the scriptures are kept. Christians will recognise the significance of this sanctuary lamp.

The divine presence is denoted by the Hebrew noun *Shekhinah*.

**REFLECT**

Misunderstandings are a very common occurrence in social interaction. We can all think of occasions when someone has taken something we have said in the wrong way, and when we have done the same. Judaism and Christianity are both community religions, and so it is important for the wider group that such damaged relationships should be repaired as soon as possible. Jesus tells us that if we are at odds with someone, then we should sort it out before we come to celebrate the Eucharist, which is the sign of unity among those who are taking part. Whether we are the innocent or guilty party does not matter; we are told that we are to clear the air and be reconciled. Otherwise, we are likely to end up in that most unhealthy of emotional states, resentment. Anger can compel us towards action: resentment simply turns us in on ourselves, nursing our wrath to keep it warm. For our own sake, even if our efforts fail, we are encouraged to do what we can to put things right.

Also in our Gospel passage, we find that Jesus gives the same authority to the wider group of disciples as he gave to Peter in the matter of deciding what to allow and what to forbid. Perhaps there is a lesson here for discerning decisions in the Church today. ■

**DO**

Sort out any awkward situation you experience with another person, especially anyone with whom you celebrate the Eucharist.

**SAY**

How very good and pleasant it is, when kindred live together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

Give peace, O Lord, to those who wait for you,  
that your prophets be found true.  
Hear the prayers of your servant,  
and of your people Israel.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

Look upon us, O God,  
Creator and ruler of all things,  
and, that we may feel the working of your  
mercy,  
grant that we may serve you with all our  
heart.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** Ecclesiasticus 27:30-28:7

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus.  
Resentment and anger, these are foul things,  
and both are found with the sinner.  
He who exacts vengeance will experience the  
vengeance of the Lord,  
who keeps strict account of sin.  
Forgive your neighbour the hurt he does you,  
and when you pray, your sins will be  
forgiven.  
If a man nurses anger against another,  
can he then demand compassion from the  
Lord?  
Showing no pity for a man like himself,  
can he then plead for his own sins?  
Mere creature of flesh, he cherishes  
resentment;  
who will forgive him his sins?  
Remember the last things, and stop hating,  
remember dissolution and death, and live by  
the commandments.  
Remember the commandments, and do not  
bear your neighbour ill-will;  
remember the covenant of the Most High,  
and overlook the offence.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM**

Psalm 102

Response:

The Lord is compassion and love,  
slow to anger and rich in mercy.

1. My soul, give thanks to the Lord,  
all my being, bless his holy name.  
My soul, give thanks to the Lord  
and never forget all his blessings. (R.)
2. It is he who forgives all your guilt,  
who heals every one of your ills,  
who redeems your life from the grave,  
who crowns you with love and  
compassion. (R.)
3. His wrath will come to an end;  
he will not be angry for ever.  
He does not treat us according to our sins  
nor repay us according to our faults. (R.)
4. For as the heavens are high above the  
earth  
so strong is his love for those who fear  
him.  
As far as the east is from the west  
so far does he remove our sins. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Romans 14:7-9

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Romans.

The life and death of each of us has its  
influence on others; if we live, we live for the  
Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord, so  
that alive or dead we belong to the Lord. This  
explains why Christ both died and came to  
life, it was so that he might be Lord both of  
the dead and of the living.

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Speak, Lord, your servant is listening:  
you have the message of eternal life.  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL** Matthew 18:21-35

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Matthew.

Peter went up to Jesus and said, "Lord,  
how often must I forgive my brother if he  
wrongs me? As often as seven times?" Jesus  
answered, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-  
seven times.

"And so the kingdom of heaven may be  
compared to a king who decided to settle  
his accounts with his servants. When the  
reckoning began, they brought him a man  
who owed ten thousand talents; but he had  
no means of paying, so his master gave  
orders that he should be sold, together with  
his wife and children and all his possessions,  
to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw  
himself down at the master's feet. 'Give me  
time,' he said, 'and I will pay the whole sum.'  
And the servant's master felt so sorry for him  
that he let him go and cancelled the debt.  
Now as this servant went out, he happened  
to meet a fellow servant who owed him one  
hundred denarii; and he seized him by the  
throat and began to throttle him. 'Pay what  
you owe me,' he said. His fellow servant fell  
at his feet and implored him, saying, 'Give  
me time and I will pay you.' But the other  
would not agree; on the contrary, he had him  
thrown into prison till he should pay the debt.  
His fellow servants were deeply distressed  
when they saw what had happened, and they  
went to their master and reported the whole  
affair to him. Then the master sent for him.  
'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all  
that debt of yours when you appealed to me.

Were you not bound, then, to have pity on  
your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?'  
And in his anger the master handed him  
over to the torturers till he should pay all his  
debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will  
deal with you unless you each forgive your  
brother from your heart."

The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;

through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

Look with favour on our supplications, O Lord,  
and in your kindness accept these, your  
servants' offerings,  
that what each has offered to the honour of  
your name  
may serve the salvation of all.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

How precious is your mercy, O God!  
The children of men seek shelter in the  
shadow of your wings.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

May the working of this heavenly gift, O Lord,  
we pray,  
take possession of our minds and bodies,  
so that its effects, and not our own desires,  
may always prevail in us.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**THE WORD**

During this discourse, the fourth of five in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus continues to show how society's standards are not those of his disciples.

Peter presents a question about forgiving other people, and his initial proposal of doing so on seven occasions might appear to veer on the generous side. But Jesus replies in terms which suggest an incalculable number, and one which calls into question a system of pardon founded strictly on justice. Jesus illustrates God's attitude by the parable of the debtor who refused to cancel a trifling amount in spite of his own creditor wiping out an enormous bill which he had no hope of ever settling.

Peter wants to know the limits of forgiveness. He is told that there is no limit to God's forgiveness, and the parable makes it clear that the disciple of Jesus is expected to reflect this when dealing with other people. The master's understanding and kindness is further emphasised when he cancels what he now refers to in the original text as a loan, rather than a debt. The ghastly punishment mentioned at the end of the story is not given in light of the debt owed but because of the person's refusal to forgive someone else. Also, this forgiveness must be genuine, "from the heart", and not just a superficial action which conceals the person's true feelings and attitude. ■

**LEARN**

The law of retaliation (*lex talionis*) was a statute restricting retribution to the extent of the injury caused. It was intended to stop the developing of a vendetta which would have no ending.

A talent was a financial unit, representing a great sum of money. Ten thousand of these would be an astronomical amount which a servant would have no hope of ever repaying.

To end up in slavery as a result of debt was common in the ancient world. Under Jewish law, a wife could not be sold in this way.

**SAY**

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
like the wideness of the sea.  
(F.W. Faber)

**REFLECT**

There is, in fact, a limit to God's forgiveness, and that is the limit which we ourselves impose. We are warned elsewhere in the Gospel that the amount we measure out will be the measure which we receive. But, more importantly, we ourselves remind God of this, and ask God to treat us as we treat others each time we say the Lord's Prayer. One of the effects of using archaic language is that sometimes we do not really understand what we are saying: the line "Forgive us our trespasses..." really means "And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors", and Jesus goes on to spell out clearly that this is the standard of forgiveness that we will be subject to, one that we ourselves have laid down.

Peter's posing of the question recalls an early story in Genesis about Lamech (Gen 4:23-24). This episode illustrates the increase in violence among human beings, where Lamech boasts about exacting seventyfold vengeance for injuries he received. The law of retribution ("eye for eye, tooth for tooth") was intended to restrict revenge to the proportion of the offence, so it meant *only* an eye for an eye, *only* a tooth for a tooth... But later biblical teaching is about reconciling the parties. It may well be that Matthew is linking the debt owed to the master in the parable to sin, hence the master represents the heavenly Father. It is the clear, and uncomfortable, message that if we hope that God will forgive us, then we should be careful where we set the limits of God's mercy. It is truly in our hands. ■

**DO**

Look into your own heart. Is there someone there whom you will not forgive? What might you do about this?



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

I am the salvation of the people, says the Lord.  
Should they cry to me in any distress,  
I will hear them, and I will be their Lord for ever.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

O God, who founded all the commands of  
your sacred Law  
upon love of you and of our neighbour,  
grant that, by keeping your precepts,  
we may merit to attain eternal life.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING**

Isaiah 55:6-9

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.  
Seek the Lord while he is still to be found,  
call to him while he is still near.  
Let the wicked man abandon his way,  
the evil man his thoughts.  
Let him turn back to the Lord who will take  
pity on him,  
to our God who is rich in forgiving;  
for my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
my ways not your ways – it is the Lord who  
speaks.  
Yes, the heavens are as high above earth  
as my ways are above your ways,  
my thoughts above your thoughts.  
The word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

**PSALM**

Psalm 144

Response:

**The Lord is close to all who call him.**

- I will bless you day after day  
and praise your name for ever.  
The Lord is great, highly to be praised,  
his greatness cannot be measured. (R.)
- The Lord is kind and full of compassion,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.  
How good is the Lord to all,  
compassionate to all his creatures. (R.)

- The Lord is just in all his ways  
and loving in all his deeds.  
He is close to all who call him,  
who call on him from their hearts. (R.)

**SECOND READING** *Philippians 1:20-24,27*

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Philippians.

Christ will be glorified in my body, whether  
by my life or by my death. Life to me, of  
course, is Christ, but then death would bring  
me something more; but then again, if living  
in this body means doing work which is  
having good results – I do not know what I  
should choose. I am caught in this dilemma:  
I want to be gone and be with Christ, which  
would be very much the better, but for me to  
stay alive in this body is a more urgent need  
for your sake.

Avoid anything in your everyday lives that  
would be unworthy of the gospel of Christ.

The word of the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Blessings on the King who comes,  
in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven  
and glory in the highest heavens!  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL**

Matthew 20:1-16

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Matthew.

Jesus said to his disciples: "The kingdom  
of heaven is like a landowner going out at  
daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard.  
He made an agreement with the workers  
for one denarius a day, and sent them to  
his vineyard. Going out at about the third  
hour he saw others standing idle in the  
market place and said to them, 'You go to  
my vineyard too and I will give you a fair  
wage.' So they went. At about the sixth  
hour and again at about the ninth hour, he  
went out and did the same. Then at about  
the eleventh hour he went out and found  
more men standing round, and he said to  
them, 'Why have you been standing here  
idle all day?' 'Because no one has hired us'  
they answered. He said to them, 'You go  
into my vineyard too.' In the evening, the  
owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff,  
'Call the workers and pay them their wages,  
starting with the last arrivals and ending  
with the first.' So those who were hired at  
about the eleventh hour came forward and  
received one denarius each. When the first  
came, they expected to get more, but they  
too received one denarius each. They took  
it, but grumbled at the landowner. 'The men  
who came last' they said 'have done only one  
hour, and you have treated them the same as  
us, though we have done a heavy day's work  
in all the heat.' He answered one of them  
and said, 'My friend, I am not being unjust  
to you; did we not agree on one denarius?  
Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay  
the last-comer as much as I pay you. Have I  
no right to do what I like with my own? Why  
be envious because I am generous?' Thus the  
last will be first, and the first, last."

The Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;

through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,

*(all bow during the next three lines)*

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

Receive with favour, O Lord, we pray,  
the offerings of your people,  
that what they profess with devotion and faith  
may be theirs through these heavenly  
mysteries.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

You have laid down your precepts to be  
carefully kept;  
may my ways be firm in keeping your  
statutes.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Graciously raise up, O Lord,  
those you renew with this Sacrament,  
that we may come to possess your  
redemption  
both in mystery and in the manner of our life.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at  
the church door, you will not find him in the  
chalice.

*St John Chrysostom*

**THE WORD**

Today's Gospel passage tells of the workers in the vineyard who are hired at different times of the day, and so put in unequal amounts of work.

At the end of the day, the foreman is told to pay the wages in reverse order to the time when the labourers were employed, thus setting up the ones engaged at the beginning of the day to expect a higher rate of pay. Most people probably feel some sympathy with their indignant reaction on discovering that everyone receives the same remuneration.

Perhaps we might consider another point of view: that of the owner. It is not the fault of the workers that they found no employment until the final hour before dusk. They have indeed been "standing here idle all day", not because they were unwilling to work, but as they tell the landowner, it is "because no one has hired us". They also have families to feed, their needs are just as great as those of the others, who were probably younger and fitter and so chosen first. The owner sees their willingness to work, but also their need, and responds to that. In justice, the ones hired earlier have nothing to complain about because they receive the amount to which they agreed: their fault lies in criticising the owner for his generosity, and perhaps not appreciating the desperate situation and anxiety of those who were earlier passed over by all those who could have helped them with a day's employment. ■

**REFLECT**

In certain parts of the world today, the setting of this parable is acted out daily. Gangs of people gather at a pick-up point, a lorry arrives, and those engaged clamber aboard and are driven to a building site, roadworks or some agricultural place of work. Such people have no assured employment, therefore no certain pay, but they do have family responsibilities.

Translated into religious terms, we can see that there is a lesson here. It is tempting for a person to think that having been a practising Christian for a long time entitles them to some sort of special recognition. But the Gospel teaching is of our expectations being reversed; that God does not think as we do. The parable is concerned with the attitude of the owner. It is a trap: we instinctively, perhaps, side with those individuals who have borne the heat of the day and are annoyed that the most recent arrivals receive the same pay as they do. But the ones who come later are not "shirkers": they just were not given the same chances as the others. The Gospels show Jesus as being concerned with such people, those on the margins, who are written off by those who are socially and religiously respectable. But the master (God) does not write off this latter group either: rather he appeals to them to change their attitude, to see the others' situation from a different point of view. God's mercy extends to all, and there are no degrees of mercy. ■

**DO**

Make the sign of the cross with holy water: ask the Lord for the grace to see others as God sees them.

**LEARN**

The workers hired later are not "shirkers": they have been available all day; it is not their fault that no one has offered them work.

A theme throughout the Gospel tradition is that of reversal, for instance, "the last will be first and the first, last".

To be a disciple of Jesus is more important than the length of time that a person has been one.

**SAY**

With the Lord there is  
mercy, and plentiful  
redemption  
(Psalm 130:7)

**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

All that you have done to us, O Lord,  
you have done with true judgement,  
for we have sinned against you  
and not obeyed your commandments.  
But give glory to your name  
and deal with us according to the bounty of  
your mercy.

**GLORIA**

Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace to people of good will.

We praise you,  
we bless you,  
we adore you,  
we glorify you,  
we give you thanks for your great glory,  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
O God, almighty Father.

Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,  
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us;  
you take away the sins of the world,  
receive our prayer;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father,  
have mercy on us.

For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.  
Amen.

**COLLECT**

O God, who manifest your almighty power  
above all by pardoning and showing mercy,  
bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly  
upon us  
and make those hastening to attain your  
promises  
heirs to the treasures of heaven.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of  
the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**FIRST READING** Ezekiel 18:25-28

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel.

The word of the Lord was addressed to me  
as follows: "You object, 'What the Lord does  
is unjust.' Listen, you House of Israel: is  
what I do unjust? Is it not what you do that  
is unjust? When the upright man renounces  
his integrity to commit sin and dies because  
of this, he dies because of the evil that he  
himself has committed. When the sinner  
renounces sin to become law-abiding and  
honest, he deserves to live. He has chosen  
to renounce all his previous sins; he shall  
certainly live; he shall not die."

The word of the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**PSALM** Psalm 24

Response:  
Remember your mercy, Lord.

1. Lord, make me know your ways.  
Lord, teach me your paths.  
Make me walk in your truth, and teach me:  
for you are God my saviour. (R.)

2. Remember your mercy, Lord,  
and the love you have shown from of old.  
Do not remember the sins of my youth.  
In your love remember me,  
because of your goodness, O Lord. (R.)
3. The Lord is good and upright.  
He shows the path to those who stray,  
he guides the humble in the right path,  
he teaches his way to the poor. (R.)

**SECOND READING** Philippians 2:1-11

(For shorter form, read between > <)

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the  
Philippians.

>If our life in Christ means anything to you,  
if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that  
we have in common, or any tenderness and  
sympathy, then be united in your convictions  
and united in your love, with a common  
purpose and a common mind. That is the  
one thing which would make me completely  
happy. There must be no competition among  
you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self-  
effacing. Always consider the other person  
to be better than yourself, so that nobody  
thinks of his own interests first but everybody  
thinks of other people's interests instead. In  
your minds you must be the same as Christ  
Jesus:<

His state was divine,  
yet he did not cling  
to his equality with God  
but emptied himself  
to assume the condition of a slave,  
and became as men are;  
and being as all men are,  
he was humbler yet,  
even to accepting death,  
death on a cross.  
But God raised him high  
and gave him the name  
which is above all other names  
so that all beings  
in the heavens, on earth and in the  
underworld,  
should bend the knee at the name of Jesus  
and that every tongue should acclaim  
Jesus Christ as Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

>The word of the Lord.<  
Thanks be to God.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

Alleluia, alleluia!  
If anyone loves me he will keep my word,  
and my Father will love him,  
and we shall come to him.  
Alleluia!

**GOSPEL** Matthew 21:28-32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to  
Matthew.

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders  
of the people, "What is your opinion? A man  
had two sons. He went and said to the first,  
'My boy, you go and work in the vineyard  
today.' He answered, 'I will not go', but  
afterwards thought better of it and went. The  
man then went and said the same thing to  
the second who answered, 'Certainly, sir', but  
did not go. Which of the two did the father's  
will?" "The first" they said. Jesus said to  
them, "I tell you solemnly, tax collectors  
and prostitutes are making their way into

the kingdom of God before you. For John  
came to you, a pattern of true righteousness,  
but you did not believe him, and yet the tax  
collectors and prostitutes did. Even after  
seeing that, you refused to think better of it  
and believe in him."

The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

**PROFESSION OF FAITH**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with  
the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
(all bow during the next three lines)  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the  
Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under  
Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored  
and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic and  
apostolic Church.  
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness  
of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the  
dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

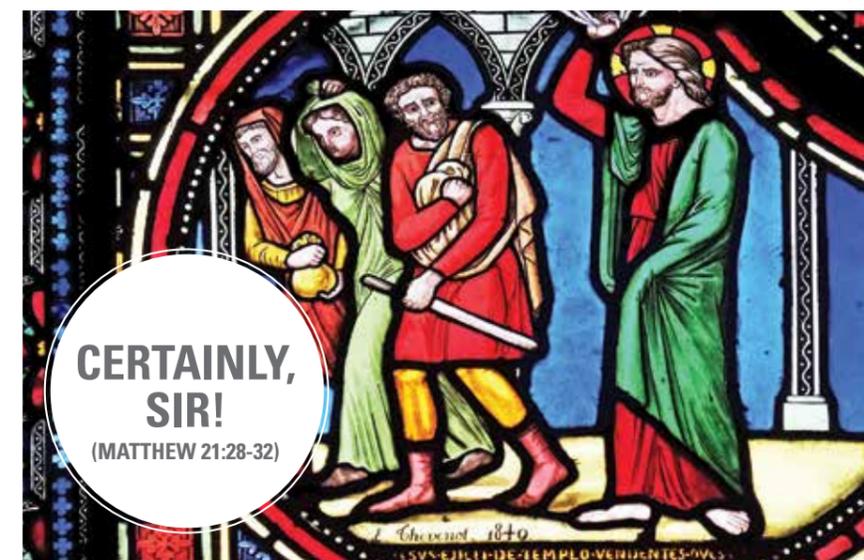
Grant us, O merciful God,  
that this our offering may find acceptance  
with you  
and that through it the wellspring of all  
blessing  
may be laid open before us.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

Remember your word to your servant,  
O Lord,  
by which you have given me hope.  
This is my comfort when I am brought low.

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

May this heavenly mystery, O Lord,  
restore us in mind and body,  
that we may be coheirs in glory with Christ,  
to whose suffering we are united  
whenever we proclaim his Death.  
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

**THE WORD**

Christ driving the merchants from the Temple: stained glass window from Saint Germain l'Auxerrois church in Paris, France.

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem with his disciples. He has caused a scene by driving out the merchants from the precincts of the Temple, and the chief priests and elders of the people have questioned his authority to act in this way.

Jesus does not answer their demand, but challenges them about the origin of the teaching of John the Baptist, whether it was human or divine. They cannot admit that John is a prophet, as they are allied with the Romans and with Herod Antipas, who regard the Baptist as a possible focal point for a popular rebellion: if they declare that his teaching is simply human doctrine, then they risk antagonising the people, who hold John in high esteem.

Sensing themselves caught out whatever answer they might give, they play the political card and avoid committing themselves. Jesus then refuses to reply to their question, but tells them the parable about the two sons and their reaction to the instruction of their father. By implication, the religious authorities are identified with the second son, who outwardly assents to his father's desire – "Certainly, sir" – but fails to carry it out. In this way, they prove themselves less than members of the most despised groups in the land, tax collectors and prostitutes, both of whom, in different ways, collaborate with the Roman occupiers of the country. Not even the positive reception of John's message on the part of these groups caused the authorities to listen to what he had to say and to amend their ways of thinking and living. ■

**REFLECT**

One of the ways in which we can fail to appreciate the meaning of the Gospels is to regard them simply as historical documents, relating the story of Jesus, and, among other things, his teaching and his conflict with the religious authorities of his day. This can, in a way, be quite comforting, as we can tell ourselves that, like the Hebrew prophets, we are looking at a past situation which has little to do with us. But even with the Gospel versions which have come down to us, it is not so simple. The

arguments which we find in Matthew's account, especially the passages where Jesus condemns in unambiguous, and untypical, language the scribes and the Pharisees, reflect more the situation of Matthew's later community versus the synagogue and its contemporary leaders, than disputes which Jesus might have had with the authorities of his time, especially the chief priests and the elders.

The Gospels are part of the word of God: in this way, they have a permanent and

**LEARN**

John the Baptist's preaching attracted the attention of tax collectors and soldiers, both groups essential to the maintaining of Roman rule.

It was more likely for this reason that John was eventually imprisoned and executed.

The teachings of the Gospel are valid for each generation: we should read and apply them in the light of our own situation and experience.

**SAY**

Lord, teach me your ways,  
Lord show me your paths.  
(Psalm 25:4)

**DO**

Listen to politicians avoiding answering questions directly. Reflect on what it would mean if they (and we) committed ourselves to a more honest approach in speaking.



contemporary message for the disciples of Jesus in each generation. One danger that the prophets, including John the Baptist, saw was that organised religion can become a substitute for a true commitment to the covenant relationship between God and God's people. It can encourage a complacent attitude, where the responsibility of living up to the calling to be the people of God can be forgotten: where positions of authority can become instruments of power. ■