

**28** *Don't be afraid of your enemies; always be courageous, and this will prove to them that they will lose and that you will win, because it is God who gives you the victory.*

The readings today for your perusal are: Exodus 16: 2-15, Philippians 1: 21-30 & Matthew 20: 1-16.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

**2** *There in the desert they all complained to Moses and Aaron* **3** *and said to them, "We wish that the Lord had killed us in Egypt. There we could at least sit down and eat meat and as much other food as we wanted. But you have brought us out into this desert to starve us all to death."* The Children of Israel have escaped from slavery in Egypt but they are not happy, they start to complain about their hardship and turn their blame on God, as we tend to do when things go wrong in the world lets blame God. In this case the Israelites start to remember and consider that they would be better off back in Egypt still living as slaves because as far as their wrong thinking goes at least there they had food and water. What do they do? They grumble constantly about their perceived poor lot in life and especially towards and against Moses and Aaron, but they were complaining against God. How often is it the case among the people of God, then and now, that at a time of crisis, whether one of daily need, or of physical suffering that we turn it into a crisis of faith? For most people, their material and spiritual well-being is more closely linked than they would care to admit. **4** *The Lord said to Moses, "Now I am going to cause food to rain down from the sky for all of you. The people must go out every day and gather enough for that day. In this way I can test them to find out if they will follow my instructions.* We see here that despite the peoples complaining and lack of faith and trust in God, He provides. There, in the wilderness, where death should have been expected, God instead offers the people life. Through

the provision of daily bread, the people are saved. The food is symbolic of God's desire not only to feed a physical hunger within us but also, to fill the deeper spiritual hunger of the soul. When both are fed by God then and only then can a man or woman be made truly whole.

*11 The Lord said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them that at twilight they will have meat to eat, and in the morning, they will have all the bread they want. Then they will know that I, the Lord, am their God." 13 In the evening a large flock of quails flew in, enough to cover the camp, and in the morning there was dew all around the camp. 14 When the dew evaporated, there was something thin and flaky on the surface of the desert. It was as delicate as frost. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they didn't know what it was and asked each other, "What is it?" Moses said to them, "This is the food that the Lord has given you to eat.* In the reading from the book of Exodus we can plainly see God's grace and mercy at work. But what else can we take from this reading today? It reminds us that our God is abundant, and He is to be found in the everyday experiences of life where his blessings fall. If we lose sight of the 'ordinariness' of God's provision, then there may be a temptation to assume that if we cannot see 'big miracles', then God has become absent, which is not true. Do not be like the atheist, the non-believer who denies God because they cannot see Him, and at the same time ignore the evidence all around them in creation. Paul recognised this lack of faith and trust in God, and so he addressed this misunderstanding, this common fault of man in the perceived absence of God. *21 For what is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more.* Paul is in prison for preaching Christ's Gospel message, and in the eyes of the world this is a place of failure and humiliation. But Paul does not see it that way, he has a different perspective on life, he sees things differently. Prison was not a hindrance to his mission, but an enhancement. In what must have been a time of doubt and

anxiety Paul held onto his faith and declared his trust in God to the reader of his letter to the Philippian church. Basically, what he is telling us that whatever happens to you in life he encourages the believers to remain true to their faith in Christ Jesus.

*27 Now, the important thing is that your way of life should be as the gospel of Christ requires, so that, whether or not I am able to go and see you, I will hear that you are standing firm with one common purpose and that with only one desire you are fighting together for the faith of the gospel.* Paul is not afraid to live or die because he believes he is held firmly in God's hand, **28** *Don't be afraid of your enemies; always be courageous, and this will prove to them that they will lose and that you will win, because it is God who gives you the victory.* **29** *For you have been given the privilege of serving Christ, not only by believing in him, but also by suffering for him.* **30** *Now you can take part with me in the battle. It is the same battle you saw me fighting in the past, and as you hear, the one I am fighting still.* Once again Paul demonstrates to the Philippians and to us the modern-day reader that if he, Paul, can have confidence in his own situation and future, so can they and we. Whatever our external, or internal, circumstances, God remains God, the Spirit is still One, and the unity of God's Church that reflects the mind of Christ is still something to be strived after despite fractions, impediments and disappointments – perhaps even because of them. Free or captive, successful or failures, God's grace, peace, mercy, inclusion, and love work through, around, despite and beyond every limitation or reluctance, contrary sometimes to every evidence that tells us it should be otherwise. Whatever the wilderness experience, God will provide, and lead, and restore – it is part of God's unshakeable inclusive and loving nature and this can be seen again in the Gospel reading.

**1** *"The Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a man who went out early in the morning to hire some men to work in his vineyard. 2 He agreed to pay them the regular wage, a silver coin a day, and sent them to work in his vineyard.* The parable is not about fair play, it is about God's grace, which does not rest on merit for long hours worked. Grace is a word we cherish within the Church – it has to do with God's mercy towards undeserving people. It is an important word, which brings hope.

**8** *"When evening came, the owner told his foreman, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with those who were hired last and ending with those who were hired first.' 9 The men who had begun to work at five o'clock were paid a silver coin each. 10 So when the men who were the first to be hired came to be paid, they thought they would get more; but they too were given a silver coin each. 11 They took their money and started grumbling against the employer.* Grace challenges our understanding of God, our understanding of ourselves, and our understanding of our neighbour. It challenges us to look at things differently, to be more Christ like, and show his love to those who need it.

**12** *"These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, "while we put up with a whole day's work in the hot sun - yet you paid them the same as you paid us!' 13 "Listen, friend,' the owner answered one of them, "I have not cheated you. After all, you agreed to do a day's work for one silver coin. 14 Now take your pay and go home. I want to give this man who was hired last as much as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do as I wish with my own money? Or are you jealous because I am generous?" 16 And Jesus concluded, "So those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last." Jesus believed in divine justice, but He had a greater belief in divine compassion. Our challenge, again, is to imitate that generosity, not begrudge*

it. God's goodness is for all and is intended for all. There is no hierarchy in His favour, and He refuses to choose between His children because He loves us all, equally, and so should we. Therefore, let us commit ourselves afresh today to serve the Lord and show His grace, mercy, and love to all those we meet and become a blessing in His name bringing hope to the hopeless and love to the loveless.

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father we thank you today for all that you have given us in our lives, loving families, dear friends, and neighbours. A home to call our own, money to pay the bills and food for the table and clothes to wear. Bless all those who provide us with heat and light, for all the delivery drivers and shop owners we thank you. For the emergency services workers we thank you and for the love of family and friends we thank you.

Yet today Lord there are many people out there in our world who are without friends and family to love and share life with, so we bring you them today in our prayers, we bring you the lonely, the bereaved and the heartbroken, heal them we pray, spiritually and physically and bring them your peace. For all those who are struggling with life, guide them with the Holy Spirit so that they can come to know you as we know you, as our Lord and Saviour, help them we pray to find you and your peace as we have. If Lord we are struggling today help us to remember your grace, mercy and love and let us learn to lean on your strength so that we can rest in your everlasting arms.

Comfort us Lord when we need to be comforted and help us to be a comfort to others in your name. Bless and guide our brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they are in the world and help them to stand strong in their faith, so that we can all become a beacon of hope, light and love in this dark and hostile world. In Jesus holy name we pray. Amen.