Readings and Reflections for the Week

SUNDAY 15 November - 33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Reading 1, Proverbs 31:10-13,19-20,30-31
Psalm 127(128), Reading 2, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Gospel, Matthew25:14-30
You have been faithful in small things: come and join in your master's happiness

Monday 16 November – St Edmund of Abingdon, Bishop
Reading 1, Revelation 1:1-4,2:1-5, Psalm 1
Gospel, Luke 18:35-43
'Son of David, have pity on me'

Tuesday 17 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 3:1-6,14-22, Psalm 14(15)
Gospel, Luke 19:1-10
Salvation comes to the house of Zacchaeus

Wednesday 18 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 4:1-11, Psalm 150
Gospel, Luke 19:11-28
The parable of the talents

Thursday 19 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 5:1-10, Psalm 149
Gospel, Luke 19:41-44
Jesus sheds tears over the coming fate of Jerusalem

Friday 20 November – Feria
Reading 1, Revelation 10:8-11, Psalm 118(119)
Gospel, Luke 19:45-48
You have turned God's house into a robbers' den

Saturday 21 November – Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Reading 1, Zechariah 2:14-17, Psalm Luke 1:46-55
Gospel, Matthew 12:46-50
My mother and my brothers are anyone who does the will of my father in heaven

SUNDAY 22 November - OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE
Reading 1, Ezekiel 34:11-12,15-17
Psalm 22(23), Reading 2, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28
Gospel, Matthew25:31-46
I was naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me

United with Churches together in St Albans we pray for all members of St Albans Pentecostal Assembly of God.

SAINT OF THE WEEK ST EDMUND OF ABINGDON
Edmund Rich was born in Abingdon on 20 November, the feast of St Edmund, the King of East Anglia, about the year 1175. He was probably first educated at the abbey in that town. His mother encouraged him to wear sackcloth, to fast on Friday, and to refuse food on Sunday and other feast days until he had sung the whole Psalter. Legend has it that — as a child — Edmund encountered the Christ Child at Milham Ford near Magdalen Bridge, and that he also placed a ring on a statue of Our Lady in the Church of St Mary the Virgin and a ring on his own finger which he never removed, as a pledge of his commitment to her. Edmund was sent to be educated in Paris, then closely connected with Oxford. His next few years were spent in Paris and Oxford in study and teaching. Edmund practiced austere self-discipline, wore garments of rope cloth and horsehair. He was devoted to his pupils, nursing them in sickness and selling books to help needy scholars. He became one of Oxford's first lecturers with a master of arts, and Oxford's first doctor of divinity. Edmund taught, at first, the secular disciplines at Oxford, particularly philosophy and mathematics, and was one of the pioneers in the revival of the study of Greek. In 1222, Edmund left Oxford to become treasurer of Salisbury Cathedral and cannon of Calne. He was also preaching the Crusade all over England, with marked success. In 1227, Pope Gregory IX ordered him to preach the Sixth Crusade. In 1233, whilst in Calne, he was appointed archbishop of Canterbury by the Pope, to whom a disputed election had been referred. King Edward I was confirmed by Edmund. As archbishop, Edmund excommunicated Simon de Montfort for his clandestine marriage with Eleanor, the king's sister. Notwithstanding the gentleness of his disposition, he firmly defended the rights of Church and State against the demands of Henry III. He visited Rome in 1237 to plead his case. He finally broke down under the stress of all these struggles and, feeling his position to be intolerable, he retired to exile at Pontigny and lived in seclusion as a simple monk. As a boy, he had seen visions in the fields of Abingdon and Oxford. The end of his life at Pontigny and Soisy was also vision-haunted. He died at Soisy on 16 November 1240, and his body was carried back to Pontigny, where his shrine may be seen today, behind the high altar of the abbey there. Reported miracles and the memory of his pure and holy life, attracted many worshippers to the shrine and led to his canonization in 1247. St. Edmund Hall at Oxford College is named after him. He is the joint principal patron of the diocese of Portsmouth, England, and has lent his name to the Edmundite Order.

Prayer of St Edmund: Into Thy hands, O Lord, and into the hands of Thy holy angels, I commit and entrust this day my soul, my relations, my benefactors, my friends and my enemies, and all Thy people. Keep us, O Lord, through the day, by the merits and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, from all vicious and unruly desires, from all sins and temptations of the devil, and from sudden and unprovided death and the pains of hell. Illuminate my heart with the grace of Thy Holy Spirit; grant that I may ever be obedient to Thy commandments; suffer me not to be separated from Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

Reading 1, Proverbs 31:10-13,19-20,30-31
The gospel parable is about a man who is an astute administrator, and this first reading delicately pairs it with a woman who is a shrewd businesswoman, running her household and her cottage industry capably, wisely and generously in reverence for the Lord. The Bible is often felt to be unduly male-oriented (an accusation often made also against the Church), but this was the normal state of society in biblical times. Nevertheless, a succession of remarkable women appear in the pages of the Old Testament; they are real partners to their husbands, and they often provide the motive force in the pursuit of the fulfilment of God's promises. In the New Testament too, besides Mary and Jesus' female followers in the gospels, we see Jesus valuing women. Particularly the playful scenes between Jesus and the Samaritan woman and the Canaanite (or Syro-Phoenician) woman spring to mind. In Paul's letters and apostolate women play important roles, even leadership roles, working with Paul to establish his communities – women like Chloe, Phoebe, Junia. Indeed, the first convert to Christianity in Europe was a woman, Lydia.

What gifts do I have that (like the gifts of the woman in Proverbs) give praise to the Lord?

Reading 2, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Paul had obviously taught the new Christians at Thessalonika that Christ had conquered death, so that death had no more grasp on Christians. So they were puzzled that Christians nevertheless died. Paul explains in his letter to them that Christians who have died will be the first to rise up and join the returning Christ in his triumphant procession. Only after them will come those who are still alive. However, Paul's principal stress is on the unpredictability of the Day of the Lord, that final day when the Lord will set right all injustice. It makes little difference whether I imagine meeting the Lord on the great Day of the Final Judgement, or meeting with the Lord personally at my own death. I know that it is very unlikely that I will be ready ("If only I had just a little more time to prepare!" is my constant excuse) and that I will not be in a fit state to face the glorious, pure wonder of divine love. The Day will come as unexpectedly as a thief in the night or the pains of childbirth, with that same finality and inescapability.

How may I best prepare for the coming of the Day of the Lord?

Gospel, Matthew 25:14-30
It is encouraging to think of all the talents which friends and neighbours have and which I don't have. It is all part of the gifts of the Spirit, which Paul sees as making up the whole Body of Christ. Everyone has a special contribution to make. As for me, it is extraordinary that God created me with all my twists, defects, fears and failures and it is precisely because of those boils, sores, abscesses that God loves me, helps me and guides me to work out my salvation. And it is just possible that there may be friends who can think that God has given me talents which make a tiny contribution to the happiness and goodness of the world. In the longer version of this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus mentions a man with just one talent who hides it in the ground: the master calls him "wicked and lazy" and has him thrown out. Why is he so severely treated? This is surely someone who resolutely turns his (or her) back on the goodness she (or he) has received and refuses to work with it for the Lord's purposes or for anyone else's. Such a talent goes to waste and merely rusts and corrupts. If I know anyone like that, it is just worth asking whether, with infinite and patient kindness, I can help that person to release their talent and bring it to blossom.

Just think for a moment: what is your best talent? Is it a gift, skill or humour which brings joy and happiness to those around you? Are you like the man who buried his talent in the ground, or do you use this skill or gift or wisdom to bring joy to others?

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