

Here's a text if you've only a minute ...

You yourselves have seen how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself. *First Reading*

He made us, we belong to him. *Psalm*

What proves that God loves us, is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. *Second Reading*

You received without charge, give without charge. *Gospel*

Almighty God, our hope and our strength,
without you we falter.
Help us to follow Christ
and to live according to your will.

Old Opening Prayer

This week's texts if you want to explore further:
Exodus 19: 2-6; Psalm 99 (100); Romans 5: 6-11; Matthew 9: 36-10: 8



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ST BEUNO'S OUTREACH IN THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM



Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Year A, 18th June 2023

'We are his people,
the sheep of his flock'

This week's liturgy reminds us of who we are, whose we are, what has been done for us, and then, how we might feel drawn to respond.

For the people of Israel, relations with neighbouring tribes always offered tempting religious alternatives. The Exodus story (**First Reading**) was a constant reminder of their covenant with God, in which the whole nation was called to be made holy.

St Paul writes to the Christians in Rome, teaching that their concerns should not, ultimately, be about what *they* are doing for God, but about what God has done, and is doing, for them. (**Second Reading**)

That is also a sentiment echoed in this week's **Psalm** – we, the sheep, are beneficiaries of a Good Shepherd who made us, who loves us, who is faithful to us, and to whom we belong.

St Matthew (**Gospel**) portrays Jesus as the compassionate shepherd of his suffering people. Jesus is concerned not only with their spiritual and practical needs, but also about ensuring there are enough 'labourers' on the ground to reach every 'lost sheep'.

As I pray this week, I might ponder: are there tempting alternatives getting in the way of my own covenantal relationship with the Lord? What has God done for me is God doing for me ... will God do for me? How is my relationship with the Good Shepherd, to whom I belong? In what ways am I able to labour alongside Christ in today's world?



Opening Prayer

O God, strength of those who hope in you, graciously hear our pleas,
and, since without you mortal frailty can do nothing,
grant us always the help of your grace,
that in following your commands
we may please you by our resolve and our deeds.

First Reading Exodus 19: 2–6

From Rephidim the Israelites set out again; and when they reached the wilderness of Sinai, there in the wilderness they pitched their camp; there facing the mountain Israel pitched camp.

Moses then went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Say this to the House of Jacob, declare this to the sons of Israel, “You yourselves have seen what I did with the Egyptians, how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself. From this you know that now, if you obey my voice and hold fast to my covenant, you of all the nations shall be my very own for all the earth is mine. I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation.”’

As is often the case, this reading has a socio-political context. God is making a promise to a runaway people: ex-slaves with neither status nor a place where they can settle. But God’s promise is that they are to be a chosen, holy nation, set apart from all other nations. Because they have been ‘borne up’ they are now God’s alone.

However I am coming to prayer today, I take some moments to become still. I take a few deep breaths, ask the help of the Holy Spirit, and place myself before the Lord. I read the text slowly, allowing myself to be drawn by the words. I pause where I feel moved. Noticing what is going on within me, I ponder any interior movements without judgement.

It can feel hard, however, when we face life’s struggles, to feel ‘borne up’. Here the sufferings of the people of Israel continue: wandering lost, they are starved of food and water, sometimes feeling on the point of annihilation.

Do they – do I – continue to feel ‘carried on eagle’s wings’?

Am I dealing with present difficulties that can sometimes cause me to forget that God is leading me? What is my sense that, always and in everything, God is inviting me to encounter his divine presence?

I look at the reading again, through the lens of my own personal journeying with God. Maybe there is an invitation to look deeper into the value of my own spiritual history? Like the people of Israel, perhaps I realise that I would not even be here were it not for God sustaining me at every moment?

I remain quietly with the Lord, pondering whatever is coming to mind. When ready, I end with a slow sign of the cross.

Gospel Matthew 9: 36–10: 8 (part)

When Jesus saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.’

He summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: ‘Go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.’

It is because Jesus feels his heart so moved by those he encounters that he enlists twelve disciples to enable him to respond, as he desires – first to the twelve tribes of Israel, and then to the whole world.

Having read the Gospel slowly, prayerfully, I take some moments to enter into stillness. Whether I feel ‘harassed’ or not at the moment, I pause to consider the heart of Jesus, moved towards me. I take a few deep breaths. Perhaps I can already begin to sense a desire in me to respond. I gently stay with whatever I am noticing.

Jesus’s compassion reaches the most inaccessible places where the flock has wandered. His desire is to show the Kingdom by revealing his Father’s tender heart, which freely gives to all. But this is not a kingdom free from suffering.

Like the chosen people in Exodus, and like the Good Shepherd himself, saying ‘yes’ to the Kingdom will not exempt me from the difficulties and struggles of life. How do I feel about this?

Is there anything I want to say to the Good Shepherd?

Jesus summons ... gives authority ... and then sends the disciples.

Have there been occasions when I have felt a call from the Lord?

What have I freely received?

Have I ever felt sent to a person, a place, a situation?

Maybe, even now, some situation requiring my labour is coming to mind?

I hold that situation before the Lord, asking for the help of his authority.

I sit quietly for a while before the Lord, whose heart is always moved towards me. When ready, I end: *Glory be...*