

## BIBLICAL RESOURCES



**Genesis 3:9-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35**

## Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother

Mark 3:20 The crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. 21 When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind (*exestē*).”

22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.”

23 And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 26 And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. 27 But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

Mark 3:28 “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”— 30 for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Mark 3:31 Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside (*exō*), they sent to him and called him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside (*exō*), asking for you.” 33 And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34 And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The passage before us manages to be both intriguing and disturbing. It is in-

triguing because it gives us a window onto the perception of Jesus’ own family. This account of their reaction to Jesus is likely to be historical, on the basis of the criterion of embarrassment. It is also disturbing: what could this “sin against” the Holy Spirit mean? Is there really such a thing as a sin which *cannot* be forgiven?

### KIND OF WRITING

We have here a kind of transitional passage, bridging the appointment of the Twelve in 3:13-19 and the parables in chapter 4. Often in Mark, stories take the form ABA\*:

- A. 20-21 Jesus’ relatives; true discipleship
- B. 22-30 Controversy with the scribes
- A\*. 31-35 Jesus’ true family.

The *frame* (family / discipleship) and the *centre* (gross misunderstanding of Jesus’ ministry) are intimately connected, as usual. One comments on the other.

### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live. (Exodus 22:18)

No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)

Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay injured; so he sent messengers, telling them, “Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.” But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, “Get up, go to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?’” (2Kings 1:2-3; cf. also vv. 6 and 16).

### Thought for the day

In our time, those who “persist” in religious faith can seem to outsiders “beside themselves.” The question needs to be asked: who is more sane, those who say life has a deep purpose and meaning and those who evidently content themselves with a “this world only” view. The apparently more rational view is ultimately irrational, in the literal sense that life has finally no *reason*, no *ratio*. By contrast, for the believer, behind the gift of creation stands a Giver. Within the gift of love, we come to know the Lover. As we gain and lose in life, finally nothing is ever truly lost. Faith is ultimately wholesome and utterly sane.

### Prayer

Father, help us to see your goodness at work around us. As we acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit, may we be drawn to you, the giver of every gift.

### NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

#### Family

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offence at him. (Mark 6:3)

#### Demons / unclean spirits

Demons (Mark 1:32, 34, 39; 3:15, 22; 5:15-16, 18; 6:13; 7:26, 29-30; 9:38; 16:9, 17) and unclean spirits (Mark 1:23, 26-27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 12-13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25) are mentioned regularly in the first part of Mark’s narrative (1-9) and not at all in the second part (16:9-20 is an addition). Before chapter 3, there are important mentions but we have to wait until

Mark 5 for a full-blown exorcism.

### *The Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is mentioned more often in Mark than one might have imagined. Mark 1:8; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11: the Baptism, the sin against the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the Psalms and the one who will provide us with words.

### ST PAUL

Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. (1Corinthians 12:3)

### BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 20** This feeling of immense pressure is found earlier in Mark, when Jesus has hardly time even to pray.

**Verse 21** The term "he was beside himself" (= *exestē*) is used elsewhere to indicate the static amazement of the crowds (2:12; 5:42; 6:51 and, perhaps, 16:8). Here, in contrast, it refers to Jesus' own state of mind. His own family think he has gone out of his mind, a condition attributed in antiquity to demonic forces. The verb to restrain / seize is used in the arrest of Jesus (14:1, 43, 45, 46, 49). Thus the family's misapprehension leads directly into the overt claim that Jesus is under the power of evil spirits.

**Verse 22** When special powers are evident, it is sensible to query their origin. The accusation here is that Jesus is practicing magic. In all probability, the original Baal-zebul (= *Baal the prince*) was consciously distorted to the caconymic Baal-zebul (= *Lord of the flies*) as an insult in 1 Kings 1:1-16. Beelzebul is found outside the Gospels only in the *Psalms of Solomon*, where he is identified as the prince of demons. Because the scribes are *from Jerusalem*, there is a link with the great controversies in 2:1-3:6, already recounted.

**Verse 23** Evidently, the complaint had not been made directly to Jesus, as in Mark 2:16. His retort leads to a series of parabolic sayings, that is, analogies.

**Verses 24-25** Both government and home are used to show that a system of power divided *against itself* cannot stand.

**Verse 26** The comparisons are applied to Jesus' ministry. His enemies had already admitted he had power to exorcise. Even if they are right (and they are wrong), even so Satan's power is broken.

**Verse 27** This parabolic story takes its

force from the reader's awareness that Jesus already has the Holy Spirit as God's beloved Son (1:10, 12). In the Jewish tradition, Solomon was empowered to use good spirits to defeat evil spirits: *Then it happened that while I was praying to the God of heaven and earth, there was granted me from the Lord Sabaoth through the archangel Michael a ring which had a seal engraved on precious stone. He said to me, "Solomon, Son of David, take the gift which the Lord God, the highest Sabaoth, has sent to you; (with it) you shall imprison all the demons, both female and male, and with their help you shall build Jerusalem when you bear this seal of God."* (Testament of Solomon 1:6-7)

The plundering of the house means that the evil owner has been comprehensively defeated. Mark may have in mind a passage of Isaiah: *Can the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of a tyrant be rescued? But thus says the LORD: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the tyrant be rescued; for I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children.* (Isaiah 49:24-25)

**Verse 28** An oracular introduction, giving special significance to what follows.

**Verses 29-30** V. 29 immediately contradicts v. 28. It does happen in the Bible that a general statement is followed by a specific exception: Gen 2:16-17 or Ex 12:10. This problematic verse is best given its contextual meaning from the gloss in v. 30: the scribes sided against the Holy Spirit and as long as that is their stance, they placed themselves somehow beyond forgiveness. This sin is different to a single misdeed; instead it indicates a false fundamental option.

**Verses 31-32** The family turns up again, this time mentioning his mother and in the second verse including the sisters (see Mark 6:3 above). NB the emphasis on being outside (*exō*): they think Jesus is "outside himself" thus revealing themselves to be true outsiders.

**Verse 33** This is shocking and meant to be. The repudiation of blood ties would have sounded just as harsh then as now. It does affirm Jesus' choice and creation of the "fictive" family of the faith, which is preferred explicitly. See Mark 10:29-30 above. Thus, doing the will of God will indeed look crazy to some people. Suddenly the frame makes sense: misunderstanding Jesus is resistance to the Holy Spirit.

**Verse 34** Those listening *to him* are his true relatives. Cf. Mark 4:9. The family

remains outside and the insiders are those who listen. This contrast of inside / outside sets the stage for Mark 4, where the narrative moves deftly from outside to inside and back again. Again on account of the criterion of embarrassment, this scene is historical because it is awkward to recall that Jesus' own family did not recognise him.

**Verse 35** The concrete is rendered general in this sweeping statement. This is the only occurrence of the will of God in Mark. Thus Jesus and his followers, far from being magicians, are precisely those who do the will of God. This is wider than the similar verse in Matthew 12:46 and Luke 8:21.

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. It can be the case that within the family of the faith a deeper and more personal conversation is possible than with our blood relatives. Even with relative strangers, it is possible to reach a deep level quickly on account of the shared experience and worldview.

2. To be divided against ourselves / myself is both common *and destructive*. Like Paul in Romans 7, we all know this sense of being pulled in different directions. Consistent choosing of the good will eventually shape within us an orientation towards God and his will.

3. A strong sense of tradition (good in self) can blind us to both the necessary and the new. Those "from Jerusalem", meaning people in leadership, are at special risk. Remember: *And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.* (Mark 2:22)

### PRAYER

God our redeemer, in Jesus your promised Messiah, you crushed the power of Satan.

Sustain your Church in the struggle against evil, that, hearing your word and doing your will, we may be fashioned into a household of true disciples who share in the victory of the cross.

Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

# We have a building from God, a house not built by human hands

2 Cor 4:13 But since we have the same spirit of faith as that shown in what has been written, “*I believed; therefore I spoke*,” we also believe, therefore we also speak. 14 We do so because we know that the one who raised up Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence. 15 For all these things are for your sake, so that the grace that is including more and more people may cause thanksgiving to increase to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day. 17 For our momentary, light suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison 18 because we are not looking at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

2 Cor 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, the tent we live in, is dismantled, we have a building from God, a house not built by human hands, that is eternal in the heavens.

### INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

The Sunday lectionary for Year B makes use of 2 Corinthians from the 7th to the 14th Sunday. The vagaries of Lent and Easter often interrupt the sequence. This year, we pick up here in chapter 4.

### KIND OF WRITING

It is disputed where 2 Corinthians is one letter or a combination of one or more documents. It is evident that something is up: for instance, 6:14-7:1 interrupts the trains of thought; 7:5 seems to take up where 2:13 left off. There is a considerable contrast of tone between 2 Cor 1-7 (conciliatory) and 2 Cor 10-13 (sarcastic and cutting).

In general however, there is a reasonable case for saying that chapters 1-9, perhaps not exactly as we have them now, formed a single document while chapters 10-13 represent another context. This means that dating the letter(s) is hazardous. A case can be made for saying that the substance of the present 2 Corinthians came into being before a much happier visit of Paul to Corinth around AD 56.

Our particular passage come from the

second bloc of argument, 2:14-7:4. In this section, Paul explains his apostolic ministry and defends it. It helps to trace the overall train of thought, as follows:

- 4:7-12 Earthenware vessels
- 4:13-15 Paul’s faith
- 4:16-18 Daily renewal
- 5:1-5 The human condition
- 5:6-10 Dwelling with the Lord

Our reading today takes us through steps 2, 3 and 4. The reading next Sunday is 5:6-10.

### CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

2 Corinthians is unlike 1 Corinthians which deals with a wide range of issues within the community in Corinth. Instead, 2 Corinthians is focused almost exclusively on who is a genuine apostle and how may such a person be recognised. In other words, it is a fruit of the fraught relationship between Paul and the Corinthians Christians. Perversely or conversely, in 2 Corinthians we hear the voice of the apostle as its most personal, yielding many attractive and inspiring paragraphs, such as our one today.

### RELATED PASSAGES

I believed; therefore I spoke, but I, I was brought very low. (Ps 115:1 LXX)

Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life. (Rom 6:4)

For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us. (Rom 8:18)

My dwelling is plucked up and removed from me like a shepherd’s tent; like a weaver I have rolled up my life; he cuts me off from the loom; from day to night you bring me to an end (Isa 38:12)

...a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful mind. (Wis 9:15)

### BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 13** Thus far, Paul has acknowledge various gifts given to him, such as confidence, hope, ministry, treasure in earthen vessels. Now he comes to faith. By faith he means his Spirit-driven trust in God. In Psalm 115 LXX, the person

praying has been delivered from death. Paul reflects on his difficult experience in light of the Psalm. Thus, because Paul trusts, he is able (to continue) to speak. The Psalm is in the singular but Paul speaks in the plural, as a member of a team.

**Verse 14** For Paul, God raised Jesus and in Jesus has also raised us all. Cf. Romans 6:4 above and many other times in Paul’s letters (Rom. 4:24, 25; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11, 34; 10:9; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:4, 12, 15, 20; Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:10).

**Verse 15** “All these things” includes his suffering. The grand overall purpose is that grace should abound more and more to the great glory of God (not Paul!).

**Verse 16** Cf. *we do not become discouraged* (2 Cor 4:1). Paul speaks literally of outer and the inner person. Paul is no dualist, of course. He contrasts at the apparent (the physical appearance) with the real (his inner self). What is seen is like the earthen vessels mentioned in vv. 7-12.

**Verses 17-18** This contrast is more Semitic than Hellenistic. To get the sense of glory, it is necessary to read 2 Corinthians 3 in its entirety. Suffering means end-time suffering which gives birth to the future. In Hebrew, glory (*kābôd*) refers to the weight of esteem and honour accorded a person. Cf. Romans 8:18. The seen is transitory; the unseen is everlasting. Appearances count for little, in this context.

**Verse 1** In vv. 1-5, Paul portrays the human condition in language inspired by Isaiah 38:12 and Wisdom 9:15. Here, Paul contemplates his very own death. “Not made by human hands” points to the gift of resurrection life in Christ.

### POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. As Paul reflects on what keeps *him* going, we could ask ourselves what keeps us going as disciples and proclaimers.
2. Paul’s faith in Christ enables him to look forward to the transformation in Christ that death will bring. Have I spent time contemplating my own end?

### PRAYER

God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we place all our trust in you. Help us to see our sufferings and the challenges we face as part of our coming to new life in Christ, risen from the dead, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, now and always. Amen .

# Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures

Gen 3:9 The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” 11 Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?” 12 The man said, “The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” 13 And the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done!” The woman replied, “The serpent duped me, and I ate.” 14 Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you did this,  
More cursed shall you be  
Than all cattle  
And all the wild beasts:  
On your belly shall you crawl  
And dirt shall you eat  
All the days of your life.  
15 I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your offspring  
and hers;  
They shall strike at your head,  
And you shall strike at their heel.”  
*(Jewish Publication Society translation)*

## INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

In the Gospel reading, Jesus is accused of being on the side of the devil, Beelzebul. Accordingly, our first reading anticipates the Gospel by telling part of the story of garden of Eden, dealing with the emerging of sin. Instructively, the word “sin” does not occur in the narrative (the first occurrence is Gen 4:7).

## KIND OF WRITING

Genesis 2-3 form an etiological tale, that is, a description of *how* things are and *why* they are so. In that broad sense, the Garden of Eden tale reflects the journey we all make from the garden of childhood to the labyrinth of the adulthood, with all its hidden complexities.

- The universal experience of original innocence
- The discovery of free will and choice.
- The emergence of sexuality, nakedness and shame
- The already given surrounding world, which shapes our choices.

- The need for wisdom which can be legitimately received from God or illegitimately snatched.
- The mysterious experience of temptation.

Our reading comes from Genesis 3, which shows an intriguing sequence, a kind of verbal three-card trick:

- 1-7 *Transgression*: the snake, the woman and the man.
- 8-13 *Inquest*: man, woman (snake)
- 14-19 *Sentence*: snake, woman, man.

Our reading takes in the inquest and the beginning of the sentencing.

## ORIGIN OF THE READING

This part of Genesis (traditionally, the Yahwist account) is very old. It is written with the greatest of care and with marvellous insight into human nature, subtly described.

## RELATED READINGS

There is some connection in Ezekiel 28, in particular with vv. 11-19, which echo many of the themes in Genesis 2-3, including the distorted quest for wisdom. It is too long to cite, but here is a flavour:

You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and flawless in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your adornment: Carnelian, chrysolite, and amethyst; Beryl, lapis lazuli, and jasper; Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald; And gold beautifully wrought for you, Mined for you, prepared the day you were created. (Ezek 28:12-13 JPS translation)

## BRIEF COMMENTARY

**Verse 9** The inquest starts with the sudden entrance of God calling on Adam. The question is rhetorical, as in 4:7.

**Verse 10** Note the telling of the story backwards: voice, fear, hid.

**Verse 11** It is not that God does not know; he speaks rather to elicit a confession.

**Verse 12** The fault is located elsewhere: in the woman and in God who provided Adam’s companion. It is our common

experience that the distortion of sin triggers further distortion as here.

**Verse 13** The inquisitor turns to the next culprit. With convincing directness, she in turn blames the serpent.

**Verse 14** God pronounces a series of judgments, attacking first the snake (vv. 14-15), then the woman (v. 16) and finally the man (vv. 17-19). Although the snake evidently can speak (3:1-4), no opportunity for defence is given. The verses break into poetry, which often happens when something especially intense, holy or important is being recounted. Curse, in this context, means to invoke God’s judgment. Given that it is God’s who speaks, the curse will be completely effective. Among all animals, domestic and wild, the snake will cursed by having no legs (a source of wonder). To eat dust is not literal but a metaphor for abject humiliation (cf. Ps 72:9; Isa 49:23; Mic 7:17). Finally, the curse is permanent (“offspring”).

**Verse 15** The conflict between humans and snakes is a given: snakes bite humans and humans kill snakes. But this is a curse on the serpent, not on humans, so the conflict is not balanced (head v. heel). But this is not just about snakes; rather, the meaning is deeper. The serpent represents, in some fashion, temptation and sin, death and evil. The earlier deception is now exposed as the snake and the woman are exposed as enemies. Although the conflict will be intense, evil will not be the last word. Later Jewish reading (followed by the Christians) took the serpent to represent Satan, a name not used here. In its historical context, the writer affirms the eventual good outcome of the struggle. Note that neither Eve nor Adam is cursed. Instead, their earlier roles are disrupted and life will become a struggle, much harder and painful.

## POINTERS FOR PRAYER

**1.** Perhaps we can all see ourselves in the deflection of responsibility so richly recounted here. It is not unknown, alas.

**2.** There is indeed a struggle between good and evil in the heart of each of us. It is the hope of us all the goodness will prevail.

## PRAYER

God of goodness and life, strengthen us in times of trial and temptation that we may choose goodness and right, bring bringing your dream for human even closer. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# THE LITURGY



## Genesis 3:9-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

### READINGS 1 AND 3

Both readings have to do with evil and the power of evil. In Genesis, it is implied that evil will not be victorious. In the Gospel, we see unfolding Jesus' victory over the power of evil, sin and death.

### THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Guilt is a topic in Genesis 2-3 and comes up again in this Psalm of lament. All the emphasis falls, however, not on the sinner but on God, with whom there is mercy and fullness of redemption. St Paul would approve!!

### SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

#### First Reading

*Genesis 3:9-15*

In a symbolic way, this very ancient reading explores the human experience of losing innocence and entering the adult world of temptation and sin, death and evil.

#### Second Reading

*2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1*

Paul did not find it easy to be an apostle and yet he had vision and an inner source of strength. Today, we can learn from him.

#### Gospel

*Mark 3:20-35*

This Gospel story — Jesus is accused of being in league with the devil — may seem somewhat bizarre. There is a kind of logic at play: if Jesus is *not* from God, then, some other explanation must be found. On the other hand, given Jesus' power of over evil, he must actually be from God. No one really know what the "sin against the Holy Spirit" might be, except some kind of fundamental option against God.

### WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

#### Monday 11 June

*St Barnabas, apostle*

*Acts 11:21-26, 13:1-3*

Barnabas is appropriately mentioned in today's reading from the Acts. He was a

close collaborator of Paul, until they had a major row and separated (Acts 15:39).

*Matthew 5:1-12*

Even non-religious people are attracted by the vision and ideals of the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes make a great opening to the Sermon—after all, who does not want to be happy? And yet, the path to happiness is highly paradoxical, right from the very start. We know this is true to our experience, but often we do not recall such wisdom.

#### Tuesday 12 June

*1 Kings 17:7-16*

This is the second testing of Elijah and really leads to the great testing of the raising of the widow's dead son. God's providence towards his chosen prophet is the theme today.

*Matthew 5:13-16*

When we want to acknowledge someone a truly good, we call them the "salt of the earth." This apparently native expression comes from Matthew's Gospel. As we listen to this Gospel, we can ask ourselves two questions. *How* is God asking me today to be salt of the earth? *In what way* is God asking me to be not just a bearer of light but light itself in my own circumstances?

#### Wednesday 12 June

*St Anthony of Padua, priest, doctor*

*1 Kings 18:20-39*

Our reading today is a contest between idolatry and the worship of the one true God. Elsewhere in the Bible, this topic is presented in concepts. Here, however, we have a drama, with inherently comic aspects. It is, therefore, to be enjoyed and should be read aloud as such. For us today, with our many idolatries, the reading invites us to recognise that "the Lord is God," as the people cry out. The responsorial psalm picks up the same theme and enriches it.

*Matthew 5:17-19*

The first Christians were greatly exercised by one question: how much of the previous religious tradition should be retained and how much of it loses its importance in light of Christ. Paul is very liberal. Matthew—rather more

traditional—seems to rein in such Pauline freedom. In Matthew's mind, however, Jesus brings the law to completion (lit. fulfilment, an eschatological term). This takes us beyond mere repetition or observance to a new, radical view illustrated in the next verses.

#### Thursday 14 June

*1 Kings 18:41-46*

Our reading follows on yesterday's and shows Elijah at the height of his powers, ending the drought. The last verse—Elijah as marathon runner—sustains the reputation of the prophet.

*Matthew 5:20-26*

Matthew's Gospel is highly realistic when it comes to human behaviour. For him, both forgiveness and reconciliation stand at the heart of discipleship.

#### Friday 15 June

*1 Kings 19:9, 11-16*

We turn to our Elijah stories and today's account is a favourite of many people on account of one line: "the sound of a gentle breeze." The NRSV translation is more poetic and more paradoxical: "and after the fire a sound of sheer silence."

*Matthew 5:27-32*

We hear today Jesus' sharpening of the Law, moving from external acts to the internal movement of the heart.

#### Saturday 16 June

*1 Kings 19:19-21*

This extraordinary scene is worth reading for itself and for its use in the Gospel. For itself: it looks forward to the time when Elijah will be dead and establishes Elisha as his prophetic heir. For its use in Luke's Gospel: *Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62)

*Matthew 5:33-37*

Our Gospel continues Jesus' radicalisation of the ethics and behaviour. The very last line should speak to any culture of equivocation, where yes doesn't always mean yes and no doesn't always mean no!