

## Readings for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

27<sup>th</sup> July 2025

### First Reading: Hosea 1:2-10

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and have children of prostitution, for the land commits great prostitution by forsaking the LORD.” So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

And the LORD said to him, “Name him Jezreel, for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.”

She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, “Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”

When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered, and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

### Second Reading: Colossians 2:6-15

Brothers and sisters, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

### Gospel: St Luke 11:1-13

Jesus was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’

And he said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

### **A Reflection for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**

What do you think of when you hear the word 'faithfulness'? It's a word we often associate with qualities such as commitment, loyalty, trust; it's about keeping one's promises even when that becomes challenging. Maybe you think of the declarations made in a marriage service: in the modern version the partners are asked if they will love, respect and *be forever faithful* to the other person. Implicit in this is the idea of putting that person, that commitment, ahead of others.

For the last few Sundays, our readings have been considering aspects of discipleship, of what it means to us to be followers of Jesus. And today's readings have something to say to us about faithfulness in the Christian context. In the Bible, we are told much about God's faithfulness to his people, his commitment and his promises to them, and, in turn, they are called to be faithful to God. We are to be committed to the promises we make at our baptism or confirmation.

Today, we hear first from Hosea, the first book of the minor prophets in the Old Testament (minor simply because the books are shorter than those of the major prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah). Hosea was a successor to Amos, from some of whose prophecies we have heard in the last two weeks, although Amos' book comes a bit later. Where Amos spoke out about the injustice and corruption of the wealthy and their exploitation of the poor, Hosea focussed on the people's lack of faithfulness to God, their breaking of the covenant and their idolatry, especially their worship of Baal. The reading seems strange to us, even rather distasteful, as Hosea is told by God to marry a prostitute and give names to his children that speak of God's judgement of the people and their behaviour. It probably seemed similarly distasteful to the people of his own day, but Hosea's marriage was a living embodiment of how the people had treated God.

However, these symbols of judgement in Hosea's family were not God's final word. At the end of today's reading, beyond the words of judgement, remains the promise of restoration, that the number of God's people will be like the sand of the sea, beyond number, and that they will be called 'children of the living God'.

Paul also wrote of the importance of faithfulness to God in his letter to the Colossians. Although he did not use the word 'faithfulness' in today's passage, that concept is fundamental to being '...rooted and built up in him [Christ Jesus] and established in the faith...'. And he warns them to beware lest they are led astray by other things, including

‘human tradition’. As Fr John reminded us last week, it seems to be part of the human condition that we so often go along with the norms of society without stopping to consider how they fit in with our commitment, our faithfulness, to God.

So how can we try to ensure that we are faithful to God, or at least as faithful as possible within our human limitations? From today’s Gospel reading, we see that one of the most important factors is prayer, through which we build and strengthen our relationship with God. Jesus showed the importance of prayer himself in his own life; in the opening today and at many other points in the Gospels, we are told of Jesus withdrawing by himself to a quiet place to pray. The disciples had seen that for themselves, and they had seen the impact of it in Jesus’ ministry of healing and teaching. Despite living in a culture where prayer was already an important and central part of their heritage, in Jesus they seem to have recognised something a bit different, and so, they asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

In response, Jesus gave them the familiar words of the Lord’s prayer; but that was not all he said. He immediately followed it with this story of a person repeatedly asking a friend for bread at midnight until he gave him what he wanted. This is not about us nagging God until we get what we want but rather an exhortation to persistence in prayer.

I have never met anyone who would describe themselves as being ‘good’ at praying, although I do know some people who lead excellent public prayers; and few people, I suspect, would say that they find praying easy. But Jesus’ message here is not about the quality or otherwise of our prayers, or whether we find it easy or difficult, it’s about the importance of us showing up, of coming to God in prayer time after time after time. Our commitment to prayer is an essential part of our faithfulness to God.

Why so? Prayer provides an opportunity for us, whether individually or corporately, to focus our attention on God. Prayer is a conversation, with or without words, in which we recognise and praise God for who he is and how he continues to love and provide for us, in which we acknowledge our own shortcomings and renew our baptismal commitment to following his ways, and in which we bring to him all those things which concern us in our own lives and in the wider life of the world. Through prayer, we develop a habit of paying attention to God as, in turn, God shapes us and guides us in the way he would have us be.

There is no magic formula for prayer. As the saying goes, ‘practice makes perfect’; to develop God-centred habits of thinking and behaving takes time and effort. And it can be frustrating if it is not immediately apparent what God is calling us to, or if God seems to be silent, or not even listening. Yet we are told to persevere, to be faithful in prayer, to keep on showing up.

When we do, Jesus promises that our prayers will be answered: ‘ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you.’ How can Jesus promise that when we know, sometimes only too well, that persistence in prayer still doesn’t necessarily result in God giving us what we want? Of course, that’s a difficult question and there is no simple answer. But part of the answer is that faithfulness in prayer, whether for people or situations, transforms us too. It draws us closer to those we pray for and starts to align our will with God’s will. We start to realise that, in some situations, the answer we first thought of isn’t necessarily the best answer. And that recognition can be really hard.

The transformation that faithful prayer works in us also gives us the courage to go into difficult situations, to say uncomfortable things, to bring God's blessing to those situations. It enables us to become part of the answer we are praying for.

In the last part of today's Gospel, Jesus continues, promising 'everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.' It may not be in the way we expected or desired but, as the last verses remind us, God knows even better than we do what good gifts are needed in each situation, something we may only see with hindsight. God is faithful to us, loves us and wants the very best for us and those we pray for, and these are promises to hang on to, particularly when times are dark.

If there is one overall message to take away from today's readings, it is that faithfulness to God begins with faithfulness in prayer, which persists even when the going is difficult. God is always waiting for, longing for us to do that, for God is faithful to us.

And it is what we commit to in our baptismal promises. In the words of the current baptism liturgy of our church: 'Will you continue in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread *and in the prayers?*' When that seems hard, remember that we are not asked to do it in our own strength; the response is: 'With the help of God, I will'.