

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS WITH HELEN

24 AUGUST 2025

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

First Reading: Isaiah 66:18-21

Second Reading: Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13

Gospel: Luke: 13:22-30

THOUGHTS FROM THE WORD

The extract from Isaiah this week in our First Reading, presents an image of the coming of the Reign of God. The larger text from which this extract is taken, illustrates this coming with destruction and cleansing violence. God will bring about a new heaven and new earth where God will reign and all will abide in peace and unity.

This goal cannot be achieved through weakness, as our following texts illustrate. They challenge us to enter into a paradigm shift or a discombobulation, that is, the capacity to be confused, to wonder, to see things from another perspective. Weaknesses need to be turned into strengths. Beliefs need to be critiqued.

Jesus constantly challenges his disciples to have a new way of thinking and being. How can the first be last and the last be first?

It is a constant teaching of Christ that there is a tendency to want to put ourselves first and to be feted by others. Jesus' message in this week's Gospel is for disciples to have a sense of unity in community. All have dignity, all people have worth. I don't think Jesus is saying: hide your talents, don't stand out. I think he is saying: use your talents but ensure that we are not achieving at the expense of others. True humility means that we have a sense of our own worth within the crowd. Honour is for the whole community, no one is overshadowed.

Jesus tells his disciples to enter through the narrow gate. Think of the entrance to walled cities in ancient or medieval days. The gates were meant for protection. Large gates allowed merchants and those with large pack animals to enter, while smaller side doors were able to be open for single travellers or after the main gates had closed.

Jesus points to this everyday sight and asks his disciples to see it as a metaphor for discipleship. Jesus asks his disciples to journey forward carrying no extra encumbrances. One the encumbrances Jesus points to is the belief that just being born into a particular race ensures salvation.

For us today, just being baptised is not enough, we need to activate that baptism and claim our place in the mission of Christ. Jesus forms disciples who are agile and responsive to the needs that they encounter. It is in this way that the Reign of God is realised. In the Letter to the Hebrews we again see the image of the athlete. Paul teaches that disciples must be ready for action just as an athlete is ready. This involves training and discipline. Ours is not a discipleship of “drooping hands” or “weak knees”.

Journeying towards a spiritual life where the love of God reigns, we are challenged to constantly reflect on our current perspectives, to develop spiritual strength, to see things with the eyes of Christ and to follow his leadership. Hint: to know the mind of Christ, let’s turn our current perspectives around!

P.S.

Two things came my way this week that illustrated for me a discombobulation. Firstly, I watched a UTube video of the song “Gethsemane” from the current Hollywood Bowl production of “Jesus Christ Superstar”. Jesus is played by Cynthia Erivo (Elthaba in “Wicked”). There are both fans and critics of the production.

The song challenged me to think about the production, the singer, the portrayal of Jesus in a way I had not seen before, by a person of colour, by a female (although I think Cynthia would claim to be non-binary). Needless to say it sparked a time of rich reflection and discussion within my family. Perhaps you might like to view it for yourself and open up some dialogue. Would you be courageous enough to share it with your staff?

The second paradigm shift I came across this week was through a Zoom production by John Garrat publications on Vatican II. In August there is a series of presentations reflecting on Vatican II, sixty years on. This was the first and they are all going to be available on UTube.

I was reminded that Vatican II was and still is a huge paradigm shift in the Church and it is not fully realised. An important point that was made in this first presentation is that the reflection on the Church turned the perspective of Church organisation on its head. The documents reinforced the concept that the Church is the whole People of God and that through baptism we all have a SHARED responsibility for the organisation, the governance and the mission of the Church.

Harking back to our texts this week: the mission is embodying the love of God and making it known in the life we live; keeping ourselves spiritually strong and growing; and seeing with the eyes of Christ in everyday life especially when we come across things that really challenge our current perspectives..

MEDITATION

Reflect on what Jesus means by going through the narrow door. What prejudices might have built up in your perceptions? This week as you start each day imagine that you are leaving behind any unhelpful “baggage”. Try to enter the new day with an open, confident heart and mind.

Ask yourself: How can the first be last and the last be first in my world, today?

In the dialogue between faith and culture what challenges your current thinking?

PRAYER

This prayer can be done as Leader and Group response or as a 2-side call and response prayer. Before you pray with your staff, decide how you want to proceed.

INTERCESSIONS

LEADER: We bring our prayers and our needs to our God who turns our perceptions inside out and our thinking up-side down.

RESPONSE: Living Presence, enable us to grow as people of the narrow door.

LEADER: For strength as we strive to leave behind all that keeps us from our loving God, we pray:

RESPONSE: Living Presence, enable us to grow as people of the narrow door.

LEADER: That we journey towards the Reign of God not as an imagined future but as a reality we meet each day, we pray:

RESPONSE: Living Presence, enable us to grow as people of the narrow door.

LEADER: For a peaceful end to world conflict, we pray:

RESPONSE: Living Presence, enable us to grow as people of the narrow door.

LEADER: For our own needs, PAUSE, we pray:

RESPONSE: Living Presence, enable us to grow as people of the narrow door.

LEADER: With confidence we echo the prayer of Pope Leo XIV

LEADER:

Jesus, Lord of our history,
Faithful companion and living presence,
You who never tire of coming to meet us,
Here we are, in need of your peace.

ALL:

We live in times of fear and division.
Sometimes we act as if we were alone,
Building walls that separate us from one another,
Forgetting that we are brothers and sisters.

LEADER:

Send us your Spirit, Lord, To rekindle within us
The desire to understand one another, to listen,
To live together with respect and compassion.

ALL:

Give us the courage to seek paths of dialogue,
To respond to conflict with gestures of fraternity,
To open our hearts to others without fear of differences.

LEADER:

Make us builders of bridges,
Able to overcome borders and ideologies,
Able to see others through the eyes of the heart,
Recognizing in every person an inviolable dignity.

ALL:

Help us create spaces where hope can flourish,
Where diversity is not a threat, but a richness that makes us more human.

ALL: Amen.

REFERENCE

Pope Leo XIV (2025) Monthly Prayer Intentions. World Wide Prayer Network. popesprayerusa.net

Erivo, Cynthia (2025) *Gethsemane* from **Jesus Christ Superstar** at the Hollywood Bowl. Playbill, UTube.

Vatican II Keeping the Windows Open Webinar series session 1. John Garret publications. (2025). https://www.youtube.com/embed/YKHuA_pNh30



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Helen has three adult children and four grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Edithvale, Victoria.