

MONDAY
2 NOVEMBER
 Philippians 2:1-4
 Psalm 131
 Luke 14:12-14

TUESDAY
3 NOVEMBER
 Philippians 2:5-11
 Psalm 22:22-27
 Luke 14:15-24

WEDNESDAY
4 NOVEMBER
 Philippians 2:12-18
 Psalm 27:1-5
 Luke 14:25-33

THURSDAY
5 NOVEMBER
 Philippians 3:3-8a
 Psalm 105:1-7
 Luke 15:1-10

FRIDAY
6 NOVEMBER
 Philippians
 3:17 – 4:1
 Psalm 122
 Luke 16:1-8

SATURDAY
7 NOVEMBER
 Philippians 4:10-19
 Psalm 112
 Luke 16:9-15

REFLECTION

This week's Gospel readings are a series of parables. The *Chambers Dictionary* defines a parable as "a fable or story told to illustrate some doctrine or moral point." They

were a teaching tool much favoured by Jesus, and much of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) consist of parables. Parables weren't a new idea – Greek rhetoricians, who coined the word, had used brief fictional narratives to illustrate points. The Old Testament, and the interpretation of it in Judaism, employed the Hebrew tradition of "mashalim," or comparisons – this thing is like that thing – to make scriptural teachings clearer.

Jesus starts from everyday, familiar objects and scenarios – a banquet, a lost sheep, a lost coin, a dishonest manager. This truth I am trying to teach you, he says, is like this familiar thing, if only you could understand it. His hearers often didn't "get it," and now, too, it can be hard for us to understand. Either we are unfamiliar with the context (how many of us are sheep farmers?), or Jesus' words challenge our idea of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild."

Let us pray that we may understand what Jesus is saying to us.

PRAYER

Lord God, we give you thanks for the teachings of your Son, which help us to know you.
 Open our eyes and our hearts to understand his words, to grapple with that which challenges us, and to see your love for all humankind reflected in everyday life.



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THE CHURCH FATHERS

PART I – THE INFANT CHURCH

A three-part series in which Richard Gunning looks at some of the early Church Fathers.

If you were going to church in the second century the experience would be rather different from today. To begin with, the building would not be identifiable as a church, but would be a private house. The service would be held behind closed doors, because under the Roman authorities being a Christian was a capital offence.

The second century was a turbulent time in the development of Christianity. St Paul was dead, beheaded in Rome around AD 64. The twelve apostles, who had known Jesus and were witnesses to the resurrection, had also died; the last of them (St John) surviving until around AD 100. Despite this, the word was spreading rapidly. Christian communities sprang up in Galilee, Samaria, Damascus, Antioch and elsewhere in Syria. Also, significantly, in Rome. These communities were regarded as sects within the Jewish faith, although many devout Jews objected very strongly to this association. They accused Christians of cannibalism (consuming the body and blood of Christ), of incest and, most importantly, of welcoming the hated Gentiles. Some synagogues introduced a prayer into their liturgy that Christians "be suddenly destroyed and removed from the Book of Life".

Not only this, the Christians were arguing among themselves. One sect, the Gnostics, believed themselves spiritually superior, possessed with a special knowledge and inspiration, and rejected the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Another sect taught asceticism, believing that theatre-going, partying and pleasure should be firmly off limits. Yet another sect, heretical in the extreme, taught that the Old Testament God of the Jews was simply not good enough to have been the father of Jesus.

This, then, was the scene into which the early Church Fathers emerged – a vibrant mixture of original thinkers, persuasive teachers and prolific writers. Many were unafraid to die martyrs' deaths for their beliefs. Over the next two weeks, we will highlight the achievements of some of these influential figures.

Richard lives in Surrey and preaches at local churches. His passion is the golf course – for freedom, fresh air and inspiration.

LIVE
 the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
 THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
 Caroline Hodgson
 and
 Heather Smith



St Gummarus Church in Lier, Belgium. Window depicting Augustine, Jerome, Gregory and Ambrose. jorisvo / Shutterstock.com

Fourth week
 before Advent

Monday 2 November to
 Saturday 7 November
 2020

WEEK