

any explanation which seeks to tone down this statement e.g. the suggestion that the eye of a needle might have been a narrow gate. The picture Jesus paints would lose much of its force if there were such an explanation. Also, there are similar examples in Jewish texts about elephants going through the eye of a needle or camels dancing in a bushel (a small vessel). These were all humorous ways of getting across to people something which is absurdly impossible. Jesus seems to be deliberately using hyperbole so that we understand how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. The critical importance is that the disciples ask who can then be saved. He replies, *"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God"*.

Jesus was God. He was also a Jewish man of His time. He was steeped in Jewish learning and writing. It appears that He knew that for His audience exaggerated, indeed humorous, imagery was a sure way for them to understand His message.

-Stephen S

**Entrance antiphon: Save us, O Lord our God! And gather us from the nations, to give thanks to your holy name, and make it our glory to praise you.**

**First Reading: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13**

**Psalms 145: Response: How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

**Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia, alleluia! Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom to mere children. Alleluia!**

**Gospel: Matthew 5: 1-12**

**Memorial Acclamation: Save us, Saviour of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.**

**Communion Antiphon: Let your face shine on your servant. Save me in your merciful love. O Lord, let me never be put to shame, for I call on you..**



## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Cycle A, 2023 Weekly Reflection: Jesus' use of humour: (1) Of camels and gnats:** Jesus was not a comedian.

However, he did use humour to make a point. A problem with humour is that it does not easily cross national and cultural frontiers and it may become quickly dated. With those provisos, I still believe that it is worth seeking out and reflecting on some passages where humour seems to be employed in the Gospels. Let me begin with a section full of severe criticism of the practices of certain scribes and Pharisees, Jesus says this (Matthew 23:24): *"...you tithe the mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith: these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"*

The English translation loses the teasing play on words in the Aramaic language in which Jesus spoke. 'Camel' in Aramaic is *gamal*; 'gnat' is *galma*. Apart from the pun, the image Jesus creates is trenchantly witty. These men are taking great care to pay their tithes, as required by Leviticus 27:30, on the tiniest amounts of spices. What they are failing to do is to follow the Law of God in much greater ways: justice, mercy and faith. Straining a minuscule gnat from a drink, while swallowing a whole camel pithily conveys the message Jesus wished to send. Leviticus Ch 11 requires that neither creature be eaten, but the seriousness of ingesting the one massively outweighs the malign effects of eating the other. A gnat will probably cause little harm; eating a camel would be fatal. The metaphorical comparison applies in the spiritual as it does in the physical context. Failing to pay a very small tithe, though wrong, pales into insignificance against a lack of justice, mercy and faith.

That brings me to another camel, this time from a better-known passage. In Mark 10:25 Jesus, having told the astonished disciples how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, reinforces this by saying: *"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle"*. Most scholars do not accept