

SUNDAY PLUS

Look for answers

Facing the locals



Old Nazareth

by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

When people from obscure backgrounds suddenly emerge as important public figures, journalists and television crews often seek out the family and neighbours of the new star to discover what they think of the local hero. Mixed impressions are usually given: delight is shown, congratulations are forthcoming, surprise is admitted, polite disbelief is registered and resentment is uncovered.

In today's Gospel Jesus returns to his home place of Nazareth. This is not a social visit: like other towns in Galilee, Nazareth has to hear the Good News of the kingdom. When Jesus teaches in the local synagogue, many of the townspeople are astonished at the performance. They wonder at the origin of Jesus' teaching and the nature of his wisdom, as well as the miracles that are done through him. From the unanswered

questions about Jesus' wisdom, the neighbours move to more familiar territory and focus on what they do know about Jesus. Whatever their wonder, they are not going to allow Jesus' wisdom to interfere with their memories of him.

Jesus' experience of rejection in Nazareth renders him powerless to do any miracle among his own people. This is an extraordinary statement about the human Jesus: people's lack of trust limits his ministry. Jesus is profoundly affected by the way people react to him. He is not a robot, programmed for flawless performance, indifferent to all responses. Distrust disables him. So he moves elsewhere, refusing to be enslaved by his failure to reach his own people.

And he never returns to Nazareth again.

Fr Denis McBride's many CDs, DVDs and books are available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk.

The local prophet?

by James Gallogly

Celebrating a Service of Word and Sacrament in the Segregation Unit is an auspicious privilege. It is a reminder that the Good Shepherd will go to any length to be with his sheep. This member of the flock has strayed far from the path. By grace he knows this and welcomes any help that might lead to the narrow gate.

Any farmer, educator or parent knows that growing goes on out of sight. Chaplains know this too. Sharing the Eucharist in a very ordinary meeting room is a strange field. Yet the fertile ground of God's kingdom is so often beyond us.

That same communicant has continued to accept the support

of God in his life. He has sustained growth in the Lord by accepting the demand to move away from the past into a new life. News of his rehabilitation is a glimpse of God's work where we might least expect it.

James Gallogly is a Catholic lay chaplain in a UK prison.

Loving Lord, you have the answers to my questions. Help me to listen and to take you seriously. Amen.

God's instrument

by Bridie Stringer

Today's reading from Mark's Gospel describes Jesus on a visit home and the fact that his old friends and neighbours think he has got above himself. He is, after all, just a carpenter albeit, it would appear, a wise one. I find the end of the account rather ironic. On what might have been regarded as an "off day" because of local opposition, he could only cure a few sick people!

I suppose that the lesson for us all is not to make assumptions about people because of their background, their appearance, or the way they speak. Holy wisdom can sometimes be found in children as well as clerics.

I am reminded of a conversation with a toddler some years ago who

asked why the bells of the local cathedral were ringing. I told him that people were inside singing and saying prayers. He suggested that churches were places where God holds meetings. I agreed.

Bridie Stringer is a mother, grandmother and pastoral theologian.

"The world tells us to seek success, power and money; God tells us to seek humility, service and love."

Pope Francis

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Safe harbour



by Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

This is the beach where the Cockleshell Heroes trained before they set off to Germany." Often, chatting to the locals – even during a time of social distancing – can be a fascinating experience. "And that's where they trained before heading off to the Falklands." He continued. "Keep straight on along the seafront and you'll come to the fort which Henry VIII built to keep out the French and, a bit further

along, there's a set of fortifications, the Round Tower, which was also built to defend Portsmouth and keep out the French. They even heated cannon balls so that they could create havoc when they landed on wooden ships."

We live on an island. Our history is inextricably linked to the sea and ships on which we still depend. Times have changed. We no longer depend on whether or not an Admiral Lord Nelson does or does not use his blind eye when looking through his telescope. Neither do we need half-


Today is Sea Sunday, when the Catholic Church remembers, prays for and supports seafarers, fishers and the work of the Catholic maritime charity, Stella Maria (Apostleship of the Sea).

frozen younger crew members to climb masts and spend long hours in the "crow's nest", helping to ensure a safe voyage. Technology has developed far beyond our ancestors' wildest dreams...

Yet, stand on Portsmouth Harbour as the ferries, hovercraft and fishing boats enter and leave the harbour. It's still a navigational mini-miracle. We still need people of experience, wisdom and know-how, who treat the wind and the waves with the respect and deference they deserve.

Perhaps we could all take to our hearts the prayer of the Breton fishermen: "Lord, be kind to me. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small."

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

Loving Lord, help all seafarers, fisherfolk and those who depend on the sea for survival. Be with the lifeboat crews, coastguard, lifeguard and all those who risk their own lives to keep others safe.  Amen.

Home is the sailor

by Fr John Guest

The favourite topic of conversation among long-distance seafarers is home. Although they spend ninety per cent of their lives on board ship, their minds and hearts are always turning to home and their families. Maintaining contact with home during voyages was practically impossible in the past. That has become much easier with the advent of mobile phones and the social media, but the Covid-19 outbreak has shown how vulnerable that link still remains.

A main aim of the Stella Maris (Apostleship of the Sea) chaplains has always been to facilitate the links with home, and though they were unable to provide a physical welcome or community experience during social isolation, they were still able to provide the one thing the seafarers were desperate for: SIM cards for their mobile phones. At times it was back to old-fashioned style communication with a bucket loaded with SIM cards, welfare packages and chocolate being hoisted on deck, but they made it.

Fr John Guest, a priest of the Diocese of Nottingham, is also a regular contributor to Redemptorist Publications' *Living Word* and *Weekday Living Word*.

Setting sail

by Cowan Watson

We all know of people who, when preparing for a trip abroad, will always find room in their suitcase for a few tea bags or a couple of tins of baked beans, just in case! They are groundless fears, but for seafarers the anxieties associated with a trip to sea are clearly genuine. To leave behind family and friends for months at a time, to perform a hard and dangerous job with sometimes only loneliness as a companion requires faith.

When Jesus instructed his disciples to take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses and only one tunic, how must they have felt? Excitement, yes, but no doubt mixed with some genuine apprehension. As Christians, it can be desperately hard to trust, to "launch out into the deep", but experience over time forces us to consider that relying on God's love for us is truly the only way.

Cowan Watson is the Editor of *Light of the North*, the magazine of the Diocese of Aberdeen.

"Know that you are not alone and that you are not forgotten. Your work at sea often keeps you apart from others, but you are close to me in my thoughts and prayers... May the Lord bless each of you, your work and your families and may the Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea, protect you always."

Pope Francis

Today:
Amos 7:12-15
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:7-13

Monday:
Exodus 1:8-14, 22
Matthew 10:34-11:1

Tuesday:
Exodus 2:1-15
Matthew 11:20-24

Wednesday:
Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12
Matthew 11:25-27

Thursday:
Exodus 3:13-20
Matthew 11:28-30

Friday:
Exodus 11:10-12:14
Matthew 12:1-8

Saturday:
Exodus 12:37-42
Matthew 12:14-21

Next Sunday:
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:13-18
Mark 6:30-34

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Take a break!

Everybody needs a holiday

by Mary Bell

Everybody needs a holiday and if we ever wanted proof of Jesus' humanity, this Gospel is it. His words to the disciples reveal his total understanding of what it means for people to be under stress, exhausted by their exertions. He knows they have had a gruelling

time trying to carry out his instructions: walking the roads from town to town as beggars with no money and with only one tunic, a pair of sandals and a stick. Their mission was to preach repentance to anyone who would listen, to anoint the sick and cast



out demons. Many times they must have encountered rejection. They have earned their holiday in a quiet place and he attempts to give them space to recuperate.

Alas, celebrity then was like it is now. Jesus is like a magnet, attracting all-comers. The crowds are there before them and it is a mark of Jesus's love of people and deep compassion that he does not send them away. He tends them like the Good Shepherd that he is because caring for all his followers is an essential part of his nature.

However, we should remember Our Lord's words whenever we feel guilty about resting. Jesus knew that people need a break from the rigours of life in order to be able to carry on with the important things. To remain quiet, to meditate, to do nothing at all is a God-given gift to the human spirit: "Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest."

Mary Bell is a grandmother and a retired teacher who continues to use her skills in the University of the Third Age.

Space in busy-ness

by Gráinne Treanor


We often imagine that life in the past was slower than it is today. Children strolled home from school and stayed home for the evening. Fewer people endured long commutes to work. Shops closed on Sundays, and there was a distinctive "Sunday feel" – quiet, unrushed, even reverent.

Today's Gospel tells us that even the disciples were so busy they had no time to eat, and Jesus told them they needed to retreat to some lonely place and rest for a while.

Some of us were forced into that situation with the arrival of Covid-19 in 2020. Yet despite the terrible circumstances, the break gave many of us the space in our "busy-ness" to reflect on what

mattered in life. Some of us vowed never to become so rushed again, even if that's easier said than done. Jesus reminds us in today's Gospel that we all need "some lonely place".

Gráinne Treanor is a mother of three and professional editor/proofreader who works from her home in the west of Ireland.

Loving Lord, I'm glad that you also knew what it was like to be achingly tired and desperate for a break. Help me to keep the balance between work and play.  Amen.

Food for the soul

by Sr Janet Fearnis FMDM

We'd just finished an extremely busy week in the Pastoral Centre: four consecutive school groups, their visits separated by the few hours in which all the rooms had to be cleaned and prepared for the next teenage invasion. However, the departure of the last group signalled the onset of a day reunion of more than 100 participants in the diocesan Lourdes pilgrimage. As I tiredly presented the latest visitors with coffee and biscuits, an elderly lady declared, "It must make such a lovely change to have people visit you!" Hah!

People and their various needs can be extraordinarily tiring. It's easy to imagine Jesus' exhaustion because of the constantly

demanding crowds who appeared whenever he did.

Even Jesus needed time for himself, to enjoy a few minutes of uninterrupted silence, confident that, for a few minutes at least, he could enjoy peace and quiet. If he sought food for his soul, how much more should I also make space in my busy-ness!

Sr Janet Fearnis is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

"Lord, teach us to step outside ourselves. Teach us to go out into the streets and manifest your love."

Pope Francis

Today:
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:13-18
Mark 6:30-34

Monday:
Exodus 14:5-18
Matthew 12:38-42

Tuesday:
Exodus 14:21-15:1
Matthew 12:46-50

Wednesday:
Exodus 16:1-5, 9-15
Matthew 13:1-9

Thursday:
Song of Songs 3:1-4
John 1:1-2, 11-18

Friday:
Exodus 20:1-17
Matthew 13:18-23

Saturday:
Exodus 24:3-8
Matthew 13:24-30

Next Sunday:
2 Kings 4:42-44
Ephesians 4:1-6
John 6:1-15

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Feed your heart

Enough for everybody

by Catherine Pepinster

For people living in the ancient world in a land surrounded by desert and with little water, food and drink were even more precious than they are to us. There was



always a fear that survival would become impossible. So a lack of food would be a source of anxiety. Food and water dominate scripture and our need of it is often a metaphor of our need for God and of his generosity to us.

In the reading from Kings we read how the Lord ensures there was enough for everybody when it was shared out. It was a forerunner of the miracle that is one of the most famous in the New Testament: the feeding of the five thousand. Yet again it is a situation where Jesus attracts a huge crowd. They have heard of his reputation

and have followed this teacher, wanting to know more about him. But this crowd might get out of control. The people are hungry. We know how agitated they can become without food. Despite there being just five loaves and two fish, there is enough to go round. It is a remarkable moment. People who might have fought one another for a scrap of bread share it between them. Jesus has brought them together. In this way, the people on the hillside are forerunners of those who gather together for the Eucharist. There is enough spiritual food for us all. Jesus himself is the nourishment we need – the peace, as the letter to the Ephesians says, that binds us together.

Catherine Pepinster, a former Editor of *The Tablet*, is a regular contributor to Redemptorist Publications' *Living Word* and *Weekday Living Word*.

Hungry for wholeness

by Canon Paul Douthwaite

In today's Gospel miracle, the multiplication of loaves and fishes grabs our attention as the finale to Jesus' teaching of the multitude. The question could be asked as to why so many were following Jesus – was it because they wanted to be fed loaves and fishes? The boy who brought with him his packed lunch of five loaves and two fish remind us that at least he was looking for something else. He was attracted by Jesus' message and wanted to be fed spiritually by his words.

Potentially, the familiar miracle overshadows Jesus' teaching. It detracts from the hunger the people had, enabling them to receive his words and become

whole. The young boy stands as a vivid reminder in the Gospel of one who came to receive Jesus' words and, exemplified what he had received in his willingness to share. In so doing he became Christ to his brothers and sisters.

Canon Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons and HMPPS Roman Catholic Faith Adviser.

“Miracles happen. But prayer is needed! Prayer that is courageous, struggling and persevering, not prayer that is a mere formality.”

Pope Francis


Hungry for love

by Gráinne Treanor

The Gospel of the loaves and fishes stands out as one of the most memorable stories from my childhood. Back then, I probably thought Jesus was a magician to have fed so many with so little and still have had leftovers! Yet despite my literal understanding, I had a sense that this story meant something more. It was about sharing – an important concept in the life of most children – but also about fairness and human need: everyone's hunger was satisfied through human cooperation in God's miracle. It introduced me to what I understood as God's desire for justice and equality. Later, another meaning enriched those earlier ones. It was that hunger can be more than physical, and that the greatest human hunger is possibly

the hunger for love. Humanity today is called to cooperate with God to share God's justice and love in a world that hungers for it.

Gráinne Treanor is a mother of three and professional editor/proofreader who works from her home in the west of Ireland.

Jesus, you gave people food for their bodies but also fed their souls. Fill my heart to overflowing so that I might share your love with others. Amen. 

Today:
2 Kings 4:42-44
Ephesians 4:1-6
John 6:1-15

Monday:
Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34
Matthew 13:31-35

Tuesday:
Exodus 33:7-11; 34:5-9, 28
Matthew 13:36-43

Wednesday:
Exodus 34:29-35
Matthew 13:44-46

Thursday:
1 John 4:7-16
John 11:19-27
or Luke 10:38-42

Friday:
Leviticus 23:1, 4-11,
15-16, 27, 34-37
Matthew 13:54-58

Saturday:
Leviticus 25:1, 8-17
Matthew 14:1-12

Next Sunday:
Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15
Ephesians 4:17, 20-24
John 6:24-35