

SUNDAY PLUS

Cherish the unexpected

A Year of the Word

Become the cornerstone

by Fr Paul Douthwaite

As in to the Gospels of Mark and Luke, Matthew recalls Jesus presenting the parable of the wicked tenants to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem just before his passion. This is one of a number of parables in which Jesus challenges their dishonest behaviour, hidden behind their religious practice, by promoting the Good News he brings as the Son of God.

As with our society today, it was not uncommon for wealthy people at the time of Jesus to buy and rent out property. However, the property was often a farm, or a vineyard and the price demanded was the produce of the land. In this parable, the tenants, often described as “wicked”, went back on their agreement, refused to hand over the produce and attempted to keep it for their own pleasure. In presenting this parable, Jesus likens the behaviour of the tenants to the behaviour of the Jewish leaders who, in the name of religion and abusing the trust God had put in them, misused that which

the people had given as a divine offering to fund their lavish lives.

Jesus, speaking of his own ministry as Son of God, predicts his passion and death in terms of a rejected cornerstone. The cornerstone was different to the regular and expected shape of building stones but crucial for the structure to stand. Many of those who first encountered Jesus and his unexpected good news rejected them. It was the latecomers who eagerly accepted and cherished both Jesus and his message.

Fr Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons

Life's surprises

by Catherine Pepinster

Nowadays it's very easy to take for granted all the effort that goes into producing a bottle of wine. It's something we can easily buy from the supermarket shelf. But growing any kind of crop is a precarious business. The readings today remind us of all that can go wrong, even if the vine grower thinks he has taken care: the state of the soil, the weather, even the workers who turn out to be untrustworthy can ruin horticulture. Isaiah tells us the vineyard owner complained that his harvest was sour grapes; his response to destroy the vineyard in anger was indeed sour grapes too. Can we respond with more hope to what unexpectedly befalls us? Paul's letter to the Philippians urges Christians to pray in the face of worry. For God finds a way through

in the most unlikely ways – as scripture's mention of the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone reminds us.

Catherine Pepinster is a former editor of *The Tablet* and the author of *The Keys and the Kingdom: the British and the papacy from John Paul II to Francis*, published by T&T Clark.

Dearest Lord, be the foundation and cornerstone of my life, the one to whom I turn at every moment of every day. Amen. 🕊️

Cornerstones

by Martin Delaney

One of my best friends is an atheist. He tends to get quite upset by organised religion and we share very different views. However, by the grace of God, he is a truly valued friend. We debate subjects of faith with respect and, miraculously, he is not without spirituality. I honestly can't imagine my life without Simon. In fact, without my friend's help, my wife and I would have not visited Rome when we did, which in turn sparked our return to faith. Though we are unlikely friends in some ways, Simon has become a rock in my life, a cornerstone really, for my own happiness.

In these trying times of political unrest and polarised views, it can be easier than ever to reject those we find hard to love or like. According to Jesus, the Lord's work is in

allowing those particular people to not only become important in our lives, but also to become vital in some way: indispensable.

Martin Delaney is an actor, writer and personal development coach. He is best known for his work in Oscar-winning *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Now You See Me 2* and George Clooney's *Catch 22*.

“The cornerstone of the Church is the Lord standing before the Father who intercedes for us, who prays for us: we pray to him, but the foundation is him who prays for us.”

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 5:1-7
Philippians 4:6-9
Matthew 21:33-43

Monday:
Galatians 1:6-12
Luke 10:25-37

Tuesday:
Galatians 1:13-24
Luke 10:38-42

Wednesday:
Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14
Luke 11:1-4

Thursday:
Galatians 3:1-5
Luke 11:5-13

Friday:
Galatians 3:7-14
Luke 11:15-26

Saturday:
Galatians 3:22-29
Luke 11:27-28

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 25:6-10
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20
Matthew 22:1-14

SUNDAY PLUS



You are invited...

A Year of the Word

God's invitation

by Patrick van der Vorst

This painting by Pieter Breughel of 1567 is probably one of my favourite wedding paintings. Called *The Peasant Wedding*, it shows a party in full swing, set in a barn in summertime. We can see the bride sitting in front of a green textile hanging, wearing a crown, but oddly enough she is sitting there passively, not participating in the eating or drinking taking place around her. She is almost statuesque, like a sculpture of Our Lady. The wooden tables and chairs are roughly fashioned and the foods on offer appear to be bread, porridge and soup. Humble food is being served in a humble setting. The painting serves as a warning against the deadly sin of gluttony, as almost every

guest (with the exception of the bride), seems to be preoccupied with eating. The bride being reserved, the painting depicts humility versus the gluttony which surrounds it.

God is inviting everyone to the wedding with great generosity. All we have to do is to accept the invitation and fill the place there that is set for us. It is an invitation to the kingdom of heaven which is sent out to everyone. But as with any invitation, we are free to accept that invitation or not. We are free, every day, to say yes or no. But as generous and all-inviting as God's invitation is, it is not to be taken for granted. We should feel privileged that we are invited and love God all the more for it.



Patrick van der Vorst has left behind the world of art and antiques in order to study for the priesthood at the Pontifical Bede College, Rome. His website is www.christianart.today.

The Peasant Wedding by Pieter Breughel the Elder (1525-1569) © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Unexpected guests

by James Gallogly

As you settle down to pray in our chapel, in the Long Term High Security Estate, you notice that you cannot see any bars. Of course they are there, just purposefully hidden. It is a rare and pleasant experience in a prison setting. For the duration of the service a sense of normality reigns, one could be in any church, anywhere.

Responding to the invitation to attend Holy Mass is often something we habitually take for granted. Inside, a little more effort is required to sign up and ensure you hear the call to move. All are welcome – but all arrive at the same time or they do not attend.

In our chapel all walks of life are thrown together: no-one judges

– that has already been done. Instead all are united in a desire to worship and praise together. Awaiting the Body of Christ, we become a body in Christ, to love and to serve.

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

“It is easy to be at peace with those we love and with those who do good for us; but it is not easy to be at peace with those who have wronged us, who do not love us. Ask the Lord, in silence, for the grace to give everyone, good and bad, the gift of peace.”

Pope Francis

RSVP

by Gerlinde Symons

I have recently been actively involved in reaching out to the registered Catholics in the prison who, for one reason or another, are not engaging with the chaplaincy. My plan of action has been to invite a speaker to come and share their faith story; to send personal invitations to every Catholic in the prison, offer coffee and cake and hope for the best – and it seems to be working!

In today's Gospel, the wedding banquet symbolises God's kingdom: those accepting the invitation receive salvation while those who decline are rejected.

Many people in prison respond to God's invitation to come and eat at the table of life because they recognise their need for God's forgiveness. Jesus reminds us that God chooses to be close to those in need: the addicts,

the homeless, the bereaved, the sick, the prisoners.

So what about us – do we need God's forgiveness? Is there space for God in our hearts? When we invite God into our lives, divine healing leads to real freedom and the work of building the heavenly kingdom begins.

Gerlinde Symons is a lay Catholic chaplain in two UK prisons.

Loving Lord, there are many people behind bars whose crimes you have forgiven but society hasn't. So often, their innocent families are also sentenced to unbearable suffering, unseen by the people around them. Watch over, protect and bless prisoners and their families. Amen.

Today: Isaiah 25:6-10
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20
Matthew 22:1-14

Monday: Galatians 4:22-24, 26-27, 31 – 5:1
Luke 11:29-32

Tuesday: Galatians 5:1-6
Luke 11:37-41

Wednesday: Galatians 5:18-25
Luke 11:42-46

Thursday: Ephesians 1:1-10
Luke 11:47-54

Friday: Ephesians 1:11-14
Luke 12:1-7

Saturday: Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 12:8-12

Next Sunday: Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5
Matthew 22:15-21

SUNDAY PLUS

Go out to the whole world

A Year of the Word

Tribute to Caesar?



by Fr Denis
McBride C.Ss.R.

The enemies of Jesus ask him: "Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" In his reply Jesus does not answer the original question, but makes an announcement which seems engagingly vague: "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God."

It is tempting to interpret the reply as a teaching on temporal and religious obligations, and argue that Jesus is acknowledging the need to pay taxes to Caesar, while stressing one's primary duty to God: one must pay tribute to Caesar and God, in recognition of one's dual citizenship.

Jesus, however, does not specify the things that belong to Caesar, for Caesar does not possess anything independently of God. Jesus does not need to specify the things that

belong to God, since everything does. He is hardly arguing to two independent spheres of power and obligation, that of Caesar and that of God, with parallel sets of obligation. Since God has dominion over the whole of creation, Caesar's relative power is subservient to the ultimate power of God.

All authority and power have to be evaluated in the light of God's plan. In his reply Jesus gives a teaching: it is for the people to evaluate whether, in demanding tribute,

Caesar is reflecting the things of God. This evaluation continues in every political community. The political arena is not a territory protected from religious evaluation and criticism. If Caesar is subservient to God, then his laws are open to Christian evaluation.

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

A silver denarius from the time of Jesus.
Photo: DrusMAX / wikimedia commons

The first step

by Stephen Davies

Baptism calls us to be missionaries: to share the greatest gift we have been given – the gift of God's love, to give of our whole lives. Simple to write, but when I think about what it means, I feel overwhelmed.

Whatever I am able to give to God, however meagre it may feel, I have to trust that God will transform it to help build the kingdom.

There are those called to give physically, moving to the remotest corners of our world to help people experience God's love. There are those called and able to give financially.

All of us are called to give of our prayers for missionaries and, more importantly, the communities they serve on World Mission Day and every day. It is one way in which we can give to God what belongs to

God. The final words from Christina Rossetti's carol spring to mind: "Yet what I can I give him – give my heart."

Stephen Davies is the Red Box Director for Missio, the Pope's own charity for overseas mission.

**Dearest Lord,
missionaries carry your
message of love to the
furthest ends of the
world. Bless them and
the people whom they
serve. Give missionaries
insight and sensitivity
when they work within
unfamiliar cultures and
languages. Amen.**

Mission needs humility

by Sr Janet Fearn
FMDM

Young, naïve, excited and ready to work miracles, I travelled to Nigeria on my first-ever mission assignment, not realising that my world was about to be unexpectedly transformed. To quote from The King and I, "When you are a teacher, by your pupils you are taught."

My first lesson? I escorted a mother who had just lost the sixth and seventh of her nine children, all due to preventable causes. On arriving in the village, she started wailing her misery – and I didn't have a single word of her language to offer any comfort. Feeling utterly helpless, I hugged her – and in so doing, realised the uselessness of our talents and qualifications

in comparison with acting with humanity in a human situation. God asks nothing more of us than that.

When I first went out on mission, I thought that I had much to give. When I left Nigeria, I knew that I had far more still to learn. Mission needs humility.

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

"As far as God's love is concerned, no one is useless or insignificant. Each of us is a mission to the world, for each of us is the fruit of God's love."

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5
Matthew 22:15-21

Monday:
Ephesians 2:1-10
Luke 12:13-21

Tuesday:
Ephesians 2:12-22
Luke 12:35-38

Wednesday:
Ephesians 3:2-12
Luke 12:39-48

Thursday:
Ephesians 3:14-21
Luke 12:49-53

Friday:
Ephesians 4:1-6
Luke 12:54-59

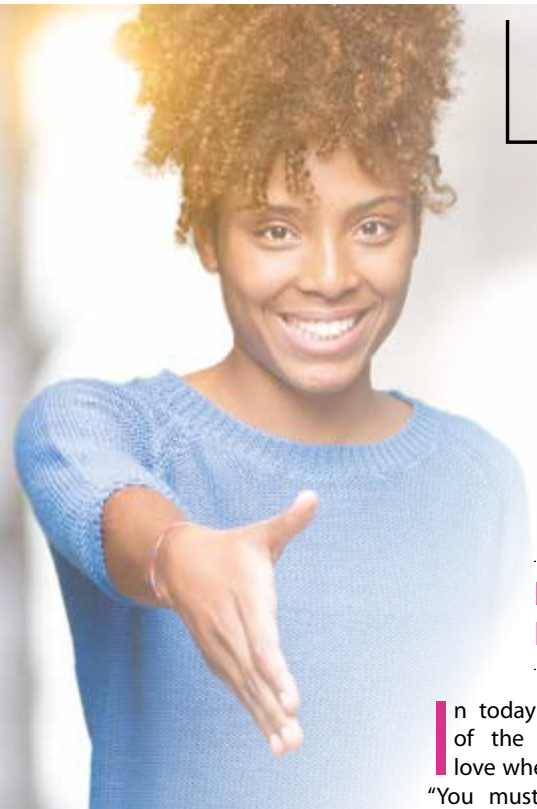
Saturday:
Ephesians 4:7-16
Luke 13:1-9

Next Sunday:
Exodus 22:20-26
1 Thessalonians 1:5-10
Matthew 22:34-40

SUNDAY PLUS

And yet more love

A Year of the Word



Love all around

by Fr Denis
McBride C.Ss.R.

In today's Gospel Jesus speaks of the conquering power of love when he tells his followers, "You must love your neighbour

as yourself." Just as the Israelites were asked to love the stranger as themselves, so Christians are also asked to love their neighbours. The ultimate offer of hospitality is the offer of love. Often the real stranger is not the person we don't know but the person we don't want to know, the person we refuse to love. That person could be a neighbour or a member of our own family. We can all have strangers in our own house, still waiting to be welcomed and loved.

We are often scared to take people in because we are afraid of being taken in ourselves. We don't want to be duped, taken for a ride. Hospitality, like everything else, has a price. Jesus knew that when he opened up his heart to receive people: after a while the

reception room begins to look like an emergency ward. People make demands on you; they bleed you. But remaining secure behind our locked doors has its own penalty: people die from being unvisited; people die behind locked doors and locked hearts, from caring only for themselves.

We all need strangers and neighbours to test the quality of our mercy. When we respond, we have the assurance that we minister to Christ: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Christ still comes to us not only in the forms of bread and wine but also in the form of the stranger seeking welcome. That is Gospel.

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

Don't be afraid to love

by Malcolm Mann

"Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?" Jesus' answer to this question defines our faith. But what does it mean to love God, and our neighbour as ourselves?

In the first reading, God commands Israel through Moses to take care of those on the margins of society: the stranger, widow and orphan, the poor and destitute.

To love God, therefore, is to love as he loves. That's a scary thought because it will mean leaving our comfort zone. But we should be encouraged, for our journey will only take us more deeply into the life of Christ.

A consequence of that journey will be that we cease to look at

ourselves as apart from Christ but in him. This in turn will allow us to love our neighbour as ourselves, so becoming, a "great example" of the faith, like the Thessalonian church in the second reading.

Malcolm Mann is Secretary of The Keys, the Catholic Writers Guild of England and Wales.

"Far from being reduced to sentimentalism, tenderness is the first step in overcoming the withdrawal into oneself, to emerge from the self-centeredness that ruins human freedom. God's tenderness leads us to understand that love is the meaning of life."

Pope Francis

Love until it hurts

by Mary Bell

At the Central African mission the sisters looked despairingly at the long line of starving people standing patiently outside the compound gates and then at the single pot of porridge they had to feed them all. There was obviously not enough. Many had walked miles in the heat, across land despoiled by war and drought: they were desperate and the mission their last hope.

One of the sisters recalls that they could always tell by looking in their eyes who was likely to survive the day and who would die. The hardest thing she had to do in her life was to refuse food to a dying person because they had to feed those most likely to live.

However, the people who received their small bowls of porridge shared what they had with those who had been refused. There is no greater love than to share the little one has with those who have nothing.

Mary Bell is a retired teacher, U3A lecturer and devoted grandmother.

Dearest Lord, teach me to love you as you deserve: with my whole self and with every breath that I breathe. 🙏 Amen.

Today:
Exodus 22:20-26
1 Thessalonians 1:5-10
Matthew 22:34-40

Monday:
Ephesians 4:32 – 5:8
Luke 13:10-17

Tuesday:
Ephesians 5:21-33
Luke 13:18-21

Wednesday:
Ephesians 2:19-22
Luke 6:12-19

Thursday:
Ephesians 6:10-20
Luke 13:31-35

Friday:
Philippians 1:1-11
Luke 14:1-6

Saturday:
Philippians 1:18-26
Luke 14:1. 7-11

Next Sunday:
Apocalypse 7:2-4. 9-14
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12