

SUNDAY PLUS

God in our midst

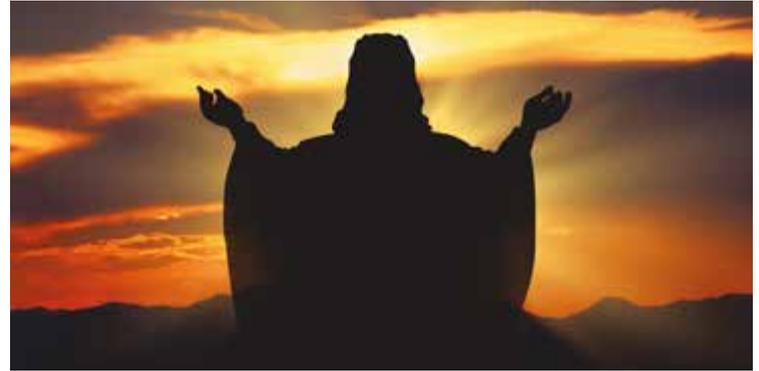
Living in relationship

by Fr Denis McBride
C.Ss.R.

The Jesus story in John's Gospel begins not with an adult Jesus by the river Jordan (Mark) or a genealogy going back to Abraham (Matthew) or the annunciations of the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus (Luke) but before the creation of the world. John's Messiah does not come from Bethlehem but from outside the realm of creation; neither can he be accurately identified as Jesus of Nazareth because he does not come from there, but from the upper realm.

For John, the details of Jesus' earthly beginnings are irrelevant – no birth story is told, no mother is introduced, no time is recorded, no place is noted, no witnesses are named – because his true origin is beyond the cosmos: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John goes back beyond the beginnings of Mark, Matthew and Luke to rework Genesis and anchor the beginning of the Jesus story in the originality of God.

As the Son is in relationship with the Father, so "the children of God" are those who live in relationship with the one who reveals the Father. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in the introduction to his



first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." In

the language of the evangelist that new event is the light come into the world; the new person is Jesus Christ.

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

God in the family

by Phil Ferguson

"I don't know what it's going to be like when we're 'back to normal' and the children return to school", my colleague complained. "Working from home hasn't been easy and the children have really missed their friends. Talking on Skype and WhatsApp hasn't been the same."

Yet, almost in the same breath and in spite of coping with working at home alongside her husband – also working from home – and her two young children, Sandy admitted that the coronavirus pandemic had offered unique moments of family togetherness. The special times included allowing her five-year-old son to bake the blue cake for which he longed. True, it ended up the colour of toothpaste...

There were family ups and downs during the course of the

year, but weren't there moments when, whatever was happening, you stopped and thought "God is in this somewhere"? Thank God for those times of family togetherness, whatever, whenever and wherever they were!

Phil Ferguson is a former teacher.

"Through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, may the Lord allow us to be artisans of peace – and this begins at home, in the family: artisans of peace – each day of the new year. And I wish you, once more, a happy and holy year. Please, do not forget to pray for me."

Pope Francis

Privilege beyond all others

by Sr Janet Fearn
FMDM

Did your parents tell you what was the very first word that you spoke? At a guess it might have been "Mama" or "Dada" or "Baba". Whatever you chose to say, you gave them seemingly endless joy. They won't have any idea of the number of times that they repeated that one word back to you, hoping to hear you copy the sound and, from one word, progress to two, three...

If you have children, you will also treasure those first sounds which the whole world could identify as words.

"The Word became flesh." The Father chose our human words,

our limited vocabulary, to speak the eternal Word in our world, our culture, our language and our homes.

God gave us the unique privilege of using our human words to make the Word really and truly present in our every thought, word, action and relationship. God asked us to use our words to make the Word become flesh. There is no greater privilege.

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

Loving God, let my words help your Word to become alive and active in your beautiful world. Let this New Year be one of hope. Amen.



Happy New Year from all of us at Redemptorist Publications

Today:
Ecclesiasticus
24:1-2, 8-12
Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18
John 1:1-18

(S) Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Monday:
1 John 3:7-10
John 1:35-42
(S) 1 John 3:22 – 4:6
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

Tuesday:
1 John 3:11-21
John 1:43-51
(S) 1 John 4:7-10
Mark 6:34-44

Wednesday:
Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12
(S) 1 John 4:11-18
Mark 6:45-52

Thursday:
1 John 3:22 – 4:6
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25
(S) 1 John 4:19 – 5:4
Luke 4:14-22

Friday:
1 John 4:7-10
Mark 6:34-44
(S) 1 John 5:5-13
Luke 5:12-16

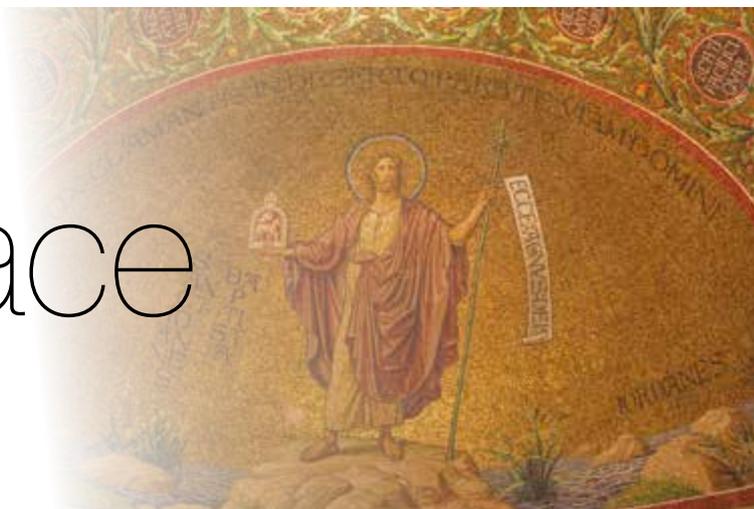
Saturday:
1 John 4:11-18
Mark 6:45-52
(S) 1 John 5:14-21
John 3:22-30

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 55:1-11
1 John 5:1-9
Mark 1:7-11

SUNDAY PLUS

Beloved of God

Happy in second place



Renata Sedmakova / Shutterstock.com

by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

John the Baptist is the independent prophet who stands between the hidden life of Jesus and his public ministry. Jesus does not begin alone: none of us does. Jesus is a northerner from the hills of Galilee and one day he makes the long journey south, which would have taken around four days. Like many other people, he is attracted by the person and preaching of John the Baptist; like many of his contemporaries, he submits to John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. After his association with John, Jesus' life takes a dramatic turn.

John the Baptist has a clear sense of himself that he does not occupy the number one slot.

Although John has his own group of disciples, he does not make himself the focus of his prophetic witness; he does not claim that he is the way, the truth and the life. "Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am..." John understands his own powerful place within the larger context of God's plan and this frees him to defer to the greater one. Jesus' greatness does not diminish John's importance: John is important precisely because of who Jesus is.

John's way is a challenge to all of us: to foster the

greatness in others without feeling threatened about the value of our own contribution; to be free to celebrate the importance of others because we have a sense of our own worth and value. As John Ruskin said: "Really great people have a curious feeling that the greatness is not in them, but through them. And they see something divine in every person."

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Child of my love

by Katie Knight

There was no performance when a well-known actor saw his new daughter for the first time: tears of joy poured unashamedly down his cheeks.

One of my greatest joys as a midwife was letting a couple see their new baby for the first time. For a few minutes, the world became Mummy, Daddy and Baby. "That was when we became a family", smiled one new mother. "Little Alex changed us for ever."

So imagine what it was like for God to see Jesus standing in the river Jordan. There were no cameras but the Father had his own way of letting the world know about Jesus. "This is my beloved Son", he declared without showing off a bundle of photographs. "Listen to him" – and God wasn't referring

to Jesus' first words or party piece song.

We perhaps overlook the fact that the Father had his own "Wow!" moments. Remember what it was like when you saw your child for the first time and you will know how God felt!

Katie Knight is a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Father God, you identified Jesus as your "beloved Son". Be with all parents who work to provide a happy, secure home for their children. Comfort those children who have never known a parent's love. Amen. 

Beloved and not forgotten

by Max Mathews

It's easy to work on our relationship with God without ever considering God's relationship with us – and after all, relationships are a two-way street.

When God said: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased", he chose an important theme for his first-ever message from heaven to earth.

Jesus was and is the Son of God and, through Jesus, God calls us also to be his children even if – especially if – we don't return that willingness to bring him closely and intimately to us.

It is hugely liberating for, and comforting to, all God's people to know that God loves us – despite all our flaws and imperfections

– divinely, infinitely and unconditionally, more than we can even love ourselves. The love between a parent and child is the closest comparison that we have in our human experience.

We can all draw on that liberating and comforting knowledge which can shield us in darker times and can provide the unshakeable bedrock to our faith.

Max Mathews is a young Catholic student of journalism.

"Upon each one of us too, born anew through the water and through the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Father makes his voice resonate with infinite love, saying 'You are my beloved son'."

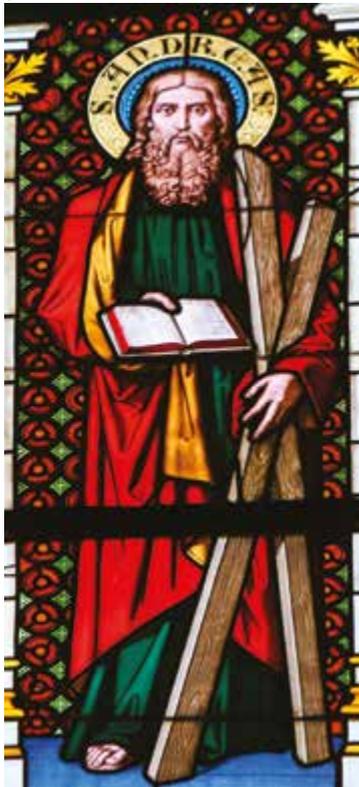
Pope Francis

Today: Isaiah 55:1-11 1 John 5:1-9 Mark 1:7-11	Monday: Hebrews 1:1-6 Mark 1:14-20	Tuesday: Hebrews 2:5-12 Mark 1:21-28	Wednesday: Hebrews 2:14-18 Mark 1:29-39	Thursday: Hebrews 3:7-14 Mark 1:40-45	Friday: Hebrews 4:1-5, 11 Mark 2:1-12	Saturday: Hebrews 4:12-16 Mark 2:13-17	Next Sunday: 1 Samuel 3:3-10, 19 1 Corinthians 6:13-15, 17-20 John 1:35-42
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SUNDAY PLUS

Keep looking

jorisvo / Shutterstock.com



Introducing people to Jesus

by Fr Denis
McBride C.Ss.R.

In today's Gospel we see John the Baptist introducing two of his own disciples to Jesus: in doing this he introduces them to their new future. The disciples follow Jesus and stay with him. John points away from himself to the Christ – that is his role. In the fourth Gospel this man sent by God runs the first introduction agency for those on the lookout for the Messiah.

Andrew is one of the two disciples. He leaves his master, John, to follow in the footsteps of his new master, Jesus. He needs John the Baptist to point him in

the right direction, to make a new start. And what John the Baptist did for Andrew, Andrew does for his brother, Simon. He shares his experience with Simon, tells him that he has met the Christ, and introduces him to Jesus.

Before we meet Jesus, first we meet a litany of other people. We all come to Jesus by way of generations of Christians who shared their experience of Jesus, people who were themselves introduced to Jesus by others. Thus the story of Christianity is a story of a great chain of witnesses linked through the apostles to Jesus himself.

Of course we have to play our own part in introducing others to Jesus. We don't have to be great missionaries to do this; if we believe that Jesus is worth knowing, we will bring others into his loving presence by our quiet witness. In that way the Christian faith grows and there will never be an end to it. Because somewhere, someone like the apostle Andrew will be bringing another person to meet Jesus of Nazareth.

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A daily search

by Lucy Russell

St Oscar Romero said, "Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty." In the year gone by, which marked the fortieth anniversary of Romero's death, his words proved true. Last year, shaking hands as a sign of peace was replaced with acts of generosity and kindness which brought some peace in difficult times. Thank you to our friend Tim, who left a spare inner tube and a bike he didn't use outside our house, so that James and Edgar could enjoy a daily bike ride when their worlds were

turned upside down and their own bikes were broken. Opportunities to share peace are always available, waiting to be shared.

Lucy Russell's book *Who Do I Say I Am?* Is available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk

"The lamb is not a ruler but docile, it is not aggressive but peaceful; it shows no claws or teeth in the face of any attack; rather, it bears it and is submissive. And so is Jesus! So is Jesus, like a lamb."

Pope Francis

Found!

by Emerald
O'Hanrahan

It's very easy to get caught up in busy-ness - even in lockdown, distractions are always available. One of the first things my husband and I created at home, in that terrifying time at the start of lockdown, was a little sanctuary - just a crucifix and two cushions on the floor. Sitting here became our lifeline. It was a space to be scared, tearful and honest with God - a place where we were found by Jesus. As time went on, we found Jesus in the faces of people reaching out to each other across balconies; in neighbours offering each other support and comfort; in my friend, a midwife, volunteering to be redeployed to an ITU ward in

central London. As Mother Teresa said, "God has no hands but ours". It has been in this time that I have really understood where to find Jesus: yes, in the quiet and the stillness, and in the action, in the hands of all those people.

Emerald O'Hanrahan is best-known as Emma Grundy in the BBC Radio 4 series, *The Archers*.

Lord, it's sometimes easy to miss you because I am looking in the wrong places. Please put on my path people who radiate your love and compassion so that, seeing them, I see you. Amen.

Today:
1 Samuel 3:3-10. 19
1 Corinthians 6:13-15. 17-20
John 1:35-42

Monday:
Hebrews 5:1-10
Mark 2:18-22

Tuesday:
Hebrews 6:10-20
Mark 2:23-28

Wednesday:
Hebrews 7:1-3. 15-17
Mark 3:1-6

Thursday:
Hebrews 7:25 - 8:6
Mark 3:7-12

Friday:
Hebrews 8:6-13
Mark 3:13-19

Saturday:
Hebrews 9:2-3. 11-14
Mark 3:20-21

Next Sunday:
Jonah 3:1-5. 10
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

SUNDAY PLUS

Do things differently

It sounds simple

by Siân Owen-Owen

The 1976 drought was one of the driest, sunniest and warmest summers of the twentieth century. Determined not to be defeated by sunny Guildford's water shortages, Sr Conrad visited every ward, collecting empty intravenous fluid bags and tubing. She placed every single plant in the hospital greenhouse on a carefully monitored drip. An elderly former nurse who had worked in remote African mission hospitals, she would save her beloved plants at all costs. As a result, even in temperatures which could cause other gardeners to despair, Sr Conrad's flowers bloomed magnificently.

Think differently. Jesus told his disciples that instead of working as fishermen, they would reach out to people rather than shoals of fish. In other words, he instructed them to use their existing gifts but simply use them differently.



We saw this with amazing clarity and ingenuity during last year's coronavirus pandemic. With churches closed and pastoral opportunities limited, the Church used social media in an unprecedented way. Pope Francis led by example: anything he could do, he did... and we saw similar energy and enthusiasm across the world in parishes great and small.

People needed encouragement and support in a unique way during the isolation, lockdowns and crises of the battle against an unseen enemy – and the Church responded. "Thinking differently" ensured that people need not be alone.

Jesus wanted his disciples to "think differently". Nothing more. Nothing less. All they had to do was to look at their existing gifts and talents and use them for the good of others. Sounds simple, doesn't it?

Siân Owen-Owen is a Catholic freelance writer and a former nurse and midwife.

Real icons

by Mary Bell

Saints, we are told, are our models for living but virgin martyrs and holy hermits never seemed very relevant to our own times.

In the school library was a series of well-thumbed small books outlining the lives and achievements of modern men and women whose generosity and courage made a difference to others, among them Father Damian, Martin Luther King and Cicely Saunders, the founder of the hospice movement, all admirable rolemodels.

However, I believe, if we look, saintliness is really all around us. Think of the carers looking lovingly after the sick and disabled, hospital nurses putting on big welcoming smiles even if their feet are killing

them and, my own favourite, the check-out assistant who deals patiently with a fumbling elderly shopper, maintaining cheery banter throughout.

I challenge you to think of an example of someone who by their Christ-like humanity makes a difference to everybody's life. I expect you can.

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

Loving Lord, you challenged the apostles to use their talents differently so that they could spread your message to others. Help me to identify my gifts and see how I might become your more effective follower and friend. ☩ Amen.

Dare to be different!

by Michael George

Contributing to a school self-evaluation exercise a ten-year-old pupil wrote: "You can't blend in when you're born to stand out." I felt proud of this recognition of each person's uniqueness, and articulation of the school's approach towards promoting and valuing self-confidence.

I have always believed that for teachers, creating outstanding learning experiences for children means taking a few risks and doing something a bit differently. Feeling safe to embrace being an individual and assured enough to take considered risks have been important principles for me as a school leader.

To bystanders the disciples must have appeared reckless. They left their jobs, families and homes to follow Jesus. They dared to be different. They dared to stand out. They dared to take a risk.

For "daring" not to be reckless it's not a fishing net but a different net that's needed - the safety net that is the love of Jesus.

After many years in the classroom, Michael George is now a lay school chaplain.

"May the Lord give us the grace to open our hearts to this encounter with his Word, and to be unafraid of joy, to be unafraid of making the feast of joy."

Pope Francis

Today:
Jonah 3:1-5, 10
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

Monday:
Acts 22:3-16 or 9:1-22
Mark 16:15-18

Tuesday:
1 Timothy 1:1-8
or Titus 1:1-5
Luke 10:1-9

Wednesday:
Hebrews 10:11-18
Mark 4:1-20

Thursday:
Hebrews 10:19-25
Mark 4:21-25

Friday:
Hebrews 10:32-39
Mark 4:26-34

Saturday:
Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19
Mark 4:35-41

Next Sunday:
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Mark 1:21-28

SUNDAY PLUS

Teach truthfully

Teach with authority

by Patrick van der Vorst

In today's Gospel reading, Mark writes that Jesus taught with authority. Jesus wasn't just interpreting the laws, but was teaching with authority. This was different from the scribes or rabbis whose teaching was dependent on what others had said or written before them. Jesus was teaching with his own authority, however. This authority also led to casting out devils, as described in today's passage. Such exorcisms are a witness to the final victory of the kingdom of God over evil and death.

Why is Mark recounting this episode at the beginning of his Gospel and wanting to share this "teaching with authority" in his very first chapter? Mark wants to set the tone and make the point that Jesus came to heal. Jesus, from the very start of his ministry revealed how the gift of Christ's power is to be revealed: not in dominance but in healing! Casting out devils is part of this healing, again, with authority.

The Gothic illuminated manuscript page on vellum depicts St Francis of Assisi performing an exorcism.

The black winged devil is leaping out of the woman's mouth. Assisi is depicted in the background. I love the way the exorcism is depicted. It is a very simple, yet very effective way to show what happens, in a single illustration. Just like Jesus, Saint Francis and many of the saints spoke with courage, wisdom and... with loving and caring authority.

Patrick van der Vorst gave up his career in art and antiques in order to study for the priesthood at the Beda College.



*Saint Francis of Assisi performs an exorcism on a woman, illustration from *Vie et Miracles de Saint François d'Assise*, painted miniature on vellum, executed c.1480. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France, NAF 28640.*

Dare to be different

by Eldred Willey

Edith Cavell was born towards the end of the stable Victorian era in a peaceful English backwater. From the lawn of her father's rectory she could view a pretty pond in one direction and the mediaeval church tower in another.

She might have always lived in this idyllic setting had she not felt a call to nursing, which took her to Belgium during World War I. After the Germans overran the country, she was executed in 1915 for helping wounded British soldiers to escape.

The men whom Jesus called came mostly from a similarly stable rural community, where they enjoyed respect and mutual

support. Stepping out of such a setting would mean taking a path of no return. For the majority it would mean a violent end in a far country.

What a remarkable attraction Jesus must possess, for men and women down the ages to have made such a choice. How rich our lives are as a result of it.

Eldred Willey works as a communications officer for the Diocese of East Anglia.

"Justice based on mercy is the path to follow in order to achieve a dignified life to which every human being has a right."

Pope Francis

If truth were told...

by Catherine Pepinster

For the Jewish people, Moses was the great authority – and that authority was recognised in the trust they gave him. But Moses recognises that another prophet is to come – someone also with authority. That word comes up again in Mark's account of Jesus.

The quality of authority is sometimes hard to define but when a person has it, people trust what they say, they listen. They recognise the truth of what is being said.

Jesus' authority has lasted through time because of the truth of his words: a truth that is about love and justice. On Racial Justice Sunday, we recognise what Jesus

has taught us about one another: all are loved by God, all matter to him regardless of the colour of their skin, or their gender, or where they were born. To follow in Jesus' footsteps is to listen, to trust his authority, and to treat others as he treated the people around him, with compassion.

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.

Lord of wisdom, be with teachers and help them to inspire their students with your gifts of love, justice and compassion. Accompany those people who experience injustice and discrimination. Amen.

Today:
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinthians 7:32-35
Mark 1:21-28

Monday:
Hebrews 11:32-40
Mark 5:1-20

Tuesday:
Malachi 3:1-4
Hebrews 2:14-18
Luke 2:22-40

Wednesday:
Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15
Mark 6:1-6

Thursday:
Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24
Mark 6:7-13

Friday:
Hebrews 13:1-8
Mark 6:14-29

Saturday:
Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21
Mark 6:30-34

Next Sunday:
Job 7:1-4, 6-7
1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23
Mark 1:29-39