

SUNDAY PLUS

Be prepared

The family meal



by Paul Higginson

In today's Gospel Jesus asks the disciples to get ready for the Passover meal. They are to find a large upper room or guest room and make the necessary preparations. When evening comes Jesus gives them his body and blood and asks them to "do this in memory of me".

Each time we go to Mass we too are asked to prepare a "guest room" for Jesus, a place where he might reside. We are called to make these preparations in our heart, and yet we often find there is little room for him. Other things reside there, such as anger, disappointment, guilt, greed or bitterness. It's time to declutter, to get rid of those things that prevent Jesus from coming to live within us.

At Mass the bread and wine changes into the Body and Blood of Jesus. But important as this transformation is, we need to focus on the inner changes that Jesus wants and needs from us. Inviting him in is a serious commitment and not a passive event. It demands some hard work and positive action. Finding room for Jesus in our lives means letting go of unhelpful ways of thinking and acting that prevent

us from opening our hearts to him and to our neighbour.

Jesus changes the bread and wine into his Body and Blood so that we can receive him into our own body, and by so doing change our "hearts of stone into hearts of flesh". Is your guest room ready for Christ?

Having recently retired from teaching, Paul Higginson is a catechist at the Sacred Heart church in Bushey.

Held in a communist prison in Saigon and with three drops of wine and one drop of water in the palm of his hand, Cardinal Van Thuan celebrated Mass. "At 9.30 every evening when 'lights out' rang, everyone had to be lying down. I bent over my wooden board and celebrated Mass, by heart of course, and distributed Communion to my neighbours under their mosquito nets. At night, the prisoners took turns and spent time in adoration." ✚ Amen.

Sharing food

by Moire O'Sullivan

It can be hard to sit down and eat together as a family. Someone's working late, someone has a programme to watch or friends to meet, another just doesn't want to eat what's on offer.

But what if we had a less complicated version of a "family meal"?

Last summer I found myself sitting on a wall with my two young sons. We were on a brief trip to the seaside. I decided to buy us some cones from a parked-up ice-cream van.

I watched my boys munching contently on the wafer, melted streams of white ice cream running down their little hands. We sat there together, quietly looking out to sea. To this day, it is one of my happiest family memories.

Sharing food is a perfect excuse to sit down with loved ones. Jesus understood this when he shared bread and wine with his friends. Let us take these chances more often, even if it is just enjoying a quick ice cream together at the beach.

Moire O'Sullivan is a mountain runner, adventure racer, an author, mum and a regular contributor to *Look*, the younger children's Sunday sheet of Gospel-focused activities and games, available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk.

Room in the heart

by Canon Paul Douthwaite

Birthdays, engagement and marriage are examples of ritual celebrations of significant life events. There are also everyday rituals such as sitting together for a meal. Every ritual is an outward expression of the significant relationship that exists between those who will participate.

Today's Gospel recalls the combined ritual of the Passover, an annual celebration of remembrance of the covenant between

God and the Hebrew people, and a meal. The detailed preparation of the venue, the upper room, highlights its significance. Of greater significance are the events at the meal, in the breaking of bread and the offering of the cup. Jesus transformed the Hebrew Passover into the Eucharist, a new ritual by which he would not only be remembered but also be present.

Our personal preparation for ritual is the most important element if we are to be truly present. The ritual becomes wholly significant when we make room in our hearts to receive God and others.

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

"We are a community, nourished by the body and blood of Christ. Communion with the body of Christ is an effective sign of unity, of communion, of sharing. One cannot participate in the Eucharist without committing oneself to mutual fraternity, which is sincere."

Pope Francis

Today:
Exodus 24:3-8
Hebrews 9:11-15
Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

Monday:
2 Corinthians 1:1-7
Matthew 5:1-12

Tuesday:
2 Corinthians 1:18-22
Matthew 5:13-16

Wednesday:
2 Corinthians 3:4-11
Matthew 5:17-19

(I&S): St Columba (Feast)
Colossians 1:24-29
Mark 10:17-30

Thursday:
2 Corinthians 3:15 4:1, 3-6
Matthew 5:20-26

Friday:
Hosea 11:1, 3-4, 8-9
Ephesians 3:8-12, 14-19
John 19:31-37

Saturday:
Isaiah 61:9-11
Luke 2:41-51

Next Sunday:
Ezekiel 17:22-24
2 Corinthians 5:6-10
Mark 4:26-34

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SUNDAY PLUS

King of hearts

At home with the Lord



Image: Lake Bunyonyi, Uganda. Pygmy people are ancient dwellers in the forests. Travel Stock / Shutterstock.com

by Eldred Willey

“Open to me the gates of heaven, brother.” Being of a cheerful disposition himself, Père Richard did not want to sadden the negligent lay brother who had accidentally locked him out of the refectory. Born in Angola, Richard had joined the Sacred Heart Fathers and picked up a certain finesse in Europe, where he trained. Then he was transplanted like the cedar sprig in the first reading to the jungles of Congo, where he developed a ministry to the indigenous pygmy peoples.

Like the shoot of the mustard seed in today's Gospel he had to push through the darkness in search of sunshine. Long after every NGO had given up the rainy season roads as a lost cause, he would continue riding his motorbike through

the quagmire to remote Mass stations, returning plastered to the waist in mud. He provided food, clothing and education for the malnourished pygmy children, only to be billed by a delegation of parents for their lost labour force. Yet he remained their advocate: why call them sub-human, he asked, just because they adhere to their own culture?

The rattling of the motorbike handles gradually shook apart his wrists until he found himself lying in the mission station in need of prayer and with injuries which no doctor in central Africa seemed to have the skill to treat. What a witness from missionary priests, already half-exiled from the body but at home with the Lord, opening for all of us the gates of heaven!

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

Unexpected places

By Linda Jones

I admit I don't know what a mustard seed looks like, and I've never tried to grow one. I did grow a lot of tomatoes this year and found that either I had none at all because they were taking ages to ripen, or so many I had to ask the neighbours to take some off my hands!

Jesus is talking to the disciples about the kingdom of God. He tries different images to help them understand. Many of those images are agricultural, because that's what life was like then.

What would our own world look like if we truly believed that the kingdom of God is in our own here and now? There would be

good news for the poor – a fairer world. There would be healing – broken hearts would mend. There would be abundance – plenty for everyone. No one would be crushed, left out or discriminated against.

What could we do now to make this kind of world more likely?

Linda Jones is head of the CAFOD Theology Programme and a regular contributor to Redemptorist Publications' *Living Word* and *Weekday Living Word*.

Lord, King and centre of our hearts, make my heart your throne. Help me to spread your kingdom of love wherever you lead me. Amen.

Unexpected people

by James Gallogly

It's 22 March 2020 BC - Before Covid. 32 men have attended Mass at the prison chapel. It is one of the places they look for answers in their lives. 197 other Catholics, who could have attended, chose not to join in.

Fast forward five months. 84 men are signed up to receive the Sunday Mass sheets. It is one of the places they look for answers in their lives.

They engage with the Sunday Mass readings and liturgy. They have a short homily to read and upon which to reflect. They have examples of prayer forms, lives of the saints or a regular letter of hope

from a Missionary of Charity. He is in his own prison, albeit outside the gates: HMP Isolation.

This growth in interest is a positive light in the darkness of the last few months. It is a grace in a time of bleakness. Who knows what answers will be found there?

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

“We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace.”

Pope Francis

Today:
Ezekiel 17:22-24
2 Corinthians 5:6-10
Mark 4:26-34

Monday:
2 Corinthians 6:1-10
Matthew 5:38-42

Tuesday:
2 Corinthians 8:1-9
Matthew 5:43-48

Wednesday:
2 Corinthians 9:6-11
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday:
2 Corinthians 11:1-11
Matthew 6:7-15

Friday:
2 Corinthians 11:18, 21-30
Matthew 6:19-23

Saturday:
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
Matthew 6:24-34

Next Sunday:
Job 38:1, 8-11
2 Corinthians 5:14-17
Mark 4:35-41

SUNDAY PLUS

Do not be afraid



Lord of chaos

by Fr Denis McBride
C.Ss.R.

The fierce storm in today's Gospel is rebuked by Jesus, leading to the disciples' question, "Who can this be?" We believe with St Mark that the answer to the question, "Who is this man?" is that he is the Son of God. But the question remains whether our faith in Jesus will stay with us even during threat and danger and storm. The experience of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee is a graphic one: they feel all at sea, they feel up to their neck in difficulty; they feel powerless to withstand the environment of threat. For sure, their experience is not alien to us.

We believe that Jesus accompanies us on our journey to God: that he is "on board" with us. Sometimes, when we see such disorder and chaos around

our world, we might wonder if Jesus has chosen to doze through disaster – even though we know that his presence is no insurance against our own fear and anxiety. To journey with Jesus is to journey through storms, not around them. The peace of our Galilees will be disturbed. But we know that the disciples of Jesus went on to face shipwreck and hardship and rejection. Ultimately, many of them came face to face with a violent death and martyrdom. What kept them going is what keeps us going: a strenuous belief that Jesus is Lord of all chaos, a stubborn faith which tells us that there is no storm that will not be stilled at last by the peace of his presence.

In the meantime, we struggle on and hold on to our hats.

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

Just trust!

by Moire O'Sullivan

The day began so well. I was excited about that morning's hike. As I journeyed into the mountains, however, freezing fog closed in. I could no longer see the cliffs I knew were there. I panicked when I realised I could easily get lost or even die on what was meant to be an easy, relaxed outing.

I sometimes think God lets bad stuff happen to us to see how we'll fare. At that moment, my choice was either to fall apart or grow up fast. God didn't swoop in to save me from the cliffs or fog. Instead God let me face unexpected difficulty and invited me to adapt quickly.

I'm pretty sure Jesus wasn't fast asleep on that boat. He merely

closed his eyes, waiting to hear how his disciples would cope. Maybe Jesus wants to see if we too can keep calm and buckle down when he sends the occasional rough sea our way.

Moire O'Sullivan is a mountain runner, adventure racer, author, mum and a regular contributor to *Look*, the younger children's Sunday sheet of Gospel-focused activities and games, available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk.

"Our deepest joy comes from Christ: remaining with him, walking with him, being his disciples."

Pope Francis

Forward as family

by Des Kelly

When you are hanging over a cliff and a friend is holding the rope you are afraid that he might let go.

There is a saying that we will never know how brave we are until we lie on our death bed. Just as many others have sat with their mothers, I was with mine as she lay dying. Yes, I was afraid but my mother's faith held and I remember her saying to my brother, "I have been praying for you and will continue to pray for you when I am in heaven." In the Gospel reading today we see Jesus showing that he has power over nature. Before Jesus performed most of his miracles someone first had to show faith.

Jesus is the only one who has overcome death and promises us eternal life and so we have faith that whatever happens in our lives he knows what he is about even though we might be afraid.

Des Kelly, a retired headteacher, now works to develop leadership in Catholic schools and parishes.

Lord, be with me in those moments when my faith is weak, when I feel as though I'm holding on by my fingertips. Give me courage. Give me strength when I am most in need. Amen.

Today:
Job 38:1. 8-11
2 Corinthians 5:14-17
Mark 4:35-41

Monday:
Genesis 12:1-9
Matthew 7:1-5

Tuesday:
Genesis 13:2. 5-18
Matthew 7:6. 12-14

(E) Ss John Fisher & Thomas More (Feast):
2 Maccabees 6:18. 21. 24-31
Matthew 24:4-13

Wednesday:
Genesis 15:1-12. 17-18
Matthew 7:15-20

Thursday:
Isaiah 49:1-6
Acts 13:22-26
Luke 1:57-66. 80

Friday:
Genesis 17:1. 9-10. 15-22
Matthew 8:1-4

Saturday:
Genesis 18:1-15
Matthew 8:5-17

Next Sunday:
Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24
2 Corinthians 8:7. 9. 13-15
Mark 5:21-43

SUNDAY PLUS

Help!

Jesus, help!

by Catherine Pepinster

Crowds frequently press in on Jesus in the Gospels. They want to see him, to touch him, to hear him. Even in the house of the synagogue official there is a crowd, a commotion with people weeping. We can imagine the noise and the intensity of the situation. Eventually, the crowd would turn on Jesus at the end of his life and buy for his blood. They are always wanting something.

We get a sense in this Gospel of the cost to Jesus of all these demands. As a woman touches him, Luke writes that Jesus was aware of the power going out of him. But when he asks about it, there is no anger or frustration; rather the woman's openness to him helps restore her to health.

There is a sense here of Jesus' openness to others as well. That



such a woman, with her constant bleeding, touched him would have been anathema to people at that time, who thought blood, especially a woman's, unclean. But Jesus' overturns these norms, just as he will overturn death with his encounter with the daughter of the synagogue official. There is a tenderness here: "my daughter", says Jesus to the bleeding woman; taking the dead child by the hands, he calls her "little girl".

Illness and death are the greatest fears of humanity through the generations. In this Gospel we see that Jesus can overcome both. In these two accounts, the key is faith – the faith of the bleeding woman and the faith Jesus urges the official to have. We ask for help and in return God asks for our trust.

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

The real focus

by Des Kelly

Many times throughout our lives we will receive help, be it from God, our parents, doctors, nurses, priests, teachers, friends and many others.

When we are first born, we receive help from our parents who give us roots and wings to fly. As we get older, we are sometimes embarrassed to ask for help as we see it as a sign of weakness or perhaps our pride stops us. Yet, asking for help is important. We even see Jesus asking his Father for help in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In today's Gospel we see the leader of the synagogue asking Jesus to help heal his daughter who is sick. Physical illness sweeps our

lives of daily trivia and pride, leaving only the essentials. In these often-frightening moments, we discover a lot about ourselves, about others and about seeking God's help.

Des Kelly, a retired headteacher, now works to develop leadership in Catholic schools and parishes.

Jesus, help me! Be with the people I love and grant them health, happiness and safety. Comfort those who are most in need of your love. ☩ Amen.

Why wonder?

by Bridie Stringer

In today's Gospel reading two words, "my daughter", are used twice, but in entirely different contexts. In the first instance, Jairus, the distraught and anxious father begs Jesus to make a house call in order to heal his beloved twelve-year-old child. While on his way to do this, Jesus encounters someone who should have been completely unacceptable to him – a woman with a medical condition which made her both ritually unclean and socially unacceptable. This woman Jesus refers to as "my daughter" and against the odds, she is fully restored and able to re-join the community. At the house of Jairus,

again Jesus defeats the odds by restoring life to the little girl, despite the neighbours thinking it was ridiculous even to try.

As followers of Jesus in our time, what do we bring trustfully to him so that we can be made whole again in mind, body and spirit?

Bridie Stringer is a mother, grandmother and pastoral theologian.

"How beautiful is the gaze with which Jesus regards us—how full of tenderness! Let us never lose trust in the patience and mercy of God."

Pope Francis

Today:
Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24
2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15
Mark 5:21-43

Monday:
Genesis 18:16-33
Matthew 8:18-22

Tuesday:
Acts 12:1-11
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18
Matthew 16:13-19

Wednesday:
Genesis 21:5, 8-20
Matthew 8:28-34

Thursday:
Genesis 22:1-19
Matthew 9:1-8

Friday:
Genesis 23:1-4,
19; 24:1-8, 62-67
Matthew 9:9-13

Saturday:
Ephesians 2:19-22
John 20:24-29

Next Sunday:
Ezekiel 2:2-5
2 Corinthians 12:7-10
Mark 6:1-6