

SUNDAY PLUS

Home sweet home



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Paul the apostle

by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

Paul escapes to Jerusalem where he tries to join the disciples, but he is in for a rude awakening. The disciples are all afraid of Paul; they simply cannot believe that he has really changed. Given Paul's punishing track record, the disciples' suspicion seems all too reasonable. By his own admission, Paul had signed the death warrants of Jerusalem Christians; now he seems to expect ready admission into their inner circle.

We are not told if the apostles are impressed: only that Paul begins preaching in the city. He does the same favour for Jerusalem that he did for Damascus – he causes a riot and turns his hearers into willing assassins. Another deadly response, another security operation, another emergency exit. And when he is gone, Luke tells us, the churches in the region are now left in peace. With the dynamite shipped

back north, the churches can breathe easily again.

That need to overcome any suspicions about his authenticity makes Paul an energetic preacher, a tireless traveller, a fierce debater. He is a great example of authentic humanity: he is sensitive, impulsive, obstinate, moody, thoughtful, demanding, driven, caring. His idealism is tempered by his sense of realism and his own struggle always serves to educate his spirituality.

The poet Robert Frost could have been speaking about Paul when he wrote:

*And were an epitaph to be my story
I'd have a short one ready for my own.
I would have written of me on my stone:
I had a lover's quarrel with the world.*

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

Home is where the heart is

by Emerald O'Hanrahan

Home is where the heart is.

It took me a long time to feel secure and "at home". I've struggled a lot with anxiety – still struggle, really.

When I was a teenager, I went through a period of not really having a home, but flitting between several different friends' and relatives' homes. I was always carrying four plastic bags of stuff, trying to work out where I could stay next.

Now, I'm incredibly blessed. My husband and I live in a beautiful home, safe and secure. But really, I always had family and friends I could stay with. I was never going

to be properly homeless – but I still couldn't feel safe or secure. My "home" within me was missing while I was separating myself from God. Through coming home to my faith, meditation and prayer, I was able to finally rest in myself, in God within me, and to recognise that as God had made a home in me, I was home.

Emerald O'Hanrahan is best-known for playing Emma Grundy in the BBC series *The Archers*.

Lord of life, lead us to an ever greater love and respect for all that you have created. ☩ Amen.

Remembering lockdown

by Michael George

A privilege of working as a teacher during the Covid-19 lockdown was being invited into students' homes through the virtual means of online teaching. It was a new experience for teachers and students alike; it took a little getting used to but soon became almost second-nature.

It was a privilege to be invited into a family's private and personal space – a dwelling place where, I pray, the children felt that they belonged, and felt loved, safe, secure and happy. For forty-five minutes at a time, families trusted me to enter that sense of home they had established.

By inviting, "Make your home

in me," Jesus invites an encounter with a real presence, not a virtual one. He invites each of us to make our home within him, and find within him belonging, love, safety, security and happiness – and not for a time-limited period like forty-five minutes, but for all eternity.

After many years as a teacher, Michael George now works as a lay school chaplain.

"Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. As Christians inspired by this certainty, we wish to commit ourselves to the conscious and responsible care of our common home."

Pope Francis

Today:
Acts 9:26-31
1 John 3:18-24
John 15:1-8

Monday:
1 Corinthians 15:1-8
John 14:6-14

Tuesday:
Acts 14:19-28
John 14:27-31

Wednesday:
Acts 15:1-6
John 15:1-8

Thursday:
Acts 15:7-21
John 15:9-11

Friday:
Acts 15:22-31
John 15:12-17

Saturday:
Acts 16:1-10
John 15:18-21

Next Sunday:
Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48
1 John 4:7-10
John 15:9-17

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Love without borders

Love without limits

by Eldred Willey

Could anyone honestly believe the story in today's readings? A man facing up to the imminence of his own murder shares his testament. In it he speaks of the joy which he wants to pass

on to those closest to him, as he looks beyond his death to a scorned people of another race and religion, who will receive the gift of the Spirit as a fruit of the passion. He manages to unite his inner circle – for so long wavering and divided – so that all but one will lay down their lives, meeting a violent end as he has freely chosen

to do. Really? Does such a tale belong to the world of hard-nosed journalism and verifiable reports?

In June 1996, from the jumble of faxes and press releases crossing the desks of newspaper editors, a leaf of paper fell out – the testament of Christian de Chergé, of whose story the paragraph above is an

exact summary. He had just met martyrdom along with six of his fellow Trappist monks. Under his leadership they had voted unanimously to remain in the Atlas Mountains and in the Father's love, and to lay down their lives for their scorned Algerian friends – those Muslims whom Christian, if God willed, would see "filled with the gift of the Spirit". Even in the face of his murderer he saw that of the God to whom he wished to commend him. "And may we find each other," he wrote, "happy good thieves in Paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both."

Eldred Willey works in Communications for the diocese of East Anglia.



Open for business

by Emerald O'Hanrahan

I find it really hard to stay open in my heart and live in a heart-centred way. I know this is what being a disciple of Jesus requires and yet I struggle with keeping my heart "open for business". There's so much suffering, so much need, that I get overwhelmed and quickly close down. It's something I'm pretty ashamed of. So my challenge is remaining in Jesus' love – I guess that's a challenge we all share. To be a disciple of Jesus asks a lot of us, but the gift we receive is that of being fully alive: able to be really present with other people, not offering advice or trying to fix their problems, but just being with them in their suffering, not turning

away because it's too much for us. Then we find another gift – we no longer need to reject ourselves. I can really understand I'm God's child, and like every other person on the planet, cannot be outside his love.

Emerald O'Hanrahan is best-known for playing Emma Grundy in the BBC series *The Archers*.

"The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality."

Pope Francis

Pandemic lessons

by Michael George

At the start of the Covid-19 lockdown I had some extra time on my hands. I committed to using the time to read more, run more and practise the piano more.

Some weeks into the restrictions I discussed coping with lockdown with some senior school students. I shared with them how I had been using my time and in doing so came to the realisation that – individually worthy though each of the activities was –

"I should like, when the time comes, to have a moment of spiritual clarity which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of my fellow human beings and, at the same time, forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down."

From the Testament of Dom Christian de Chergé

none of them was about deepening my relationship with God, or my relationships with others. As so often in the past, working with children and young adults opened my eyes.

Today's Gospel is a reminder that faith is lived out through relationships – "Love one another". When we are unselfish, look out for others and love one another, relationships are stronger, with each other and with God. We're closer to God when we're closer to one another.

After many years as a teacher, Michael George now works as a lay school chaplain.

Today:
Acts 10:25-26. 34-35. 44-48
1 John 4:7-10
John 15:9-17

Monday:
Acts 16:11-15
John 15:26 – 16:4

Tuesday:
Acts 16:22-34
John 16:5-11

Wednesday:
Acts 17:15. 22 - 18:1
John 16:12-15

Thursday:
Acts 1:1-11
Ephesians 1:17-23 or 4:1-13
Mark 16:15-20

Friday:
Acts 1:15-17. 20-26
John 15:9-17

Saturday:
Acts 18:23-28
John 16:23-28

Next Sunday:
Acts 1:15-17. 20-26
1 John 4:11-16
John 17:11-19

SUNDAY PLUS

Your word is truth – is it?

Bringing the past up to date

by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.



One of the ways we try to make sense of the present is by consulting the past. When we try to figure out why things have turned out the way they have, we often search the past for an explanation. So, ancient voices are listened to with a new attentiveness and old texts are consulted with a new eye. That human effort of making sense of the present by rereading the past is one that was used widely in the early Church.

The activity of bringing the past up to date is one in which we all engage from time to

time. We review the past in the light of a new experience and in the process we begin to see a shape to our story. Certain people and dates become more important; an encounter once regarded as forgettable is seen to be directly related to what is happening now. We begin to see how our previous history contains pointers to our present situation, how everything is connected. A pattern slowly emerges. Things begin to make sense.

In today's first reading Peter is claiming the past as a reinforcement of the present. A past,

once skimmed over, now becomes part of the Church's sequence of references; what was said before becomes personal territory. The past takes on a new significance because of what is happening now. As the past throws light on the present, so the present captures the full meaning of the past. In that sense we can see how the past is not dead: it just bides its time until the full truth can be discovered.

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

True or false?

by Martin Delaney

As an actor, I am forever looking for the truth. In fact, the nature of an actor's job is "to raise the level of consciousness in the world by holding the mirror of truth to it", a wonderful acting teacher once taught me.

In our work, we are led by the word. Every clue, every hint, every detail that we mine for building our characters, comes from the script. The truth that we search for, embedded in this writing, is ever important; it is unchanging – just like God.

What happens when we drop the character and walk away from the role? For me, this is where the truth of a different word really

counts. Our authenticity beyond the set is important because it is here that I practise love. It is here that I try to live in God, in order to receive God in me.

As an actor I observe human nature – but it needs the grace of God.

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*.

Word of God, may my human words reflect your divine message of love. ☩ Amen.

Lean on me

by Sr Janet Fearnis FMDM

"Lean on, when you need a friend, call me, I'll be there.

Lean on, when you have a load, call me, I'll lend a hand.

Lean on, when you're down and out, call me, I'll lift you up.

Lean on, lean on, lean on. Call me, call me, call me..."

... and how many of us felt deeply moved when a hospital choir sang "Lean on me"? They sang at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, perhaps sometimes stretched beyond their limits as they provided care for others.

In many care homes, one or more staff moved into the home in order to look after our loved ones whom

the lockdown prevented us from visiting. Because of their love, my mother declared, "I'm so happy, I could dance."

On World Communications Day, let us communicate our heartfelt gratitude to those wonderful people who asked us to call on them in our hour of need. Thank you and may God bless you.

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

"We are united by faith in Jesus Christ, the one Saviour, who set us free by his precious blood and his glorious resurrection. We are united by our desire for his word that guides our steps."

Pope Francis

Today:
Acts 1:15-17, 20-26
1 John 4:11-16
John 17:11-19

Monday:
Acts 19:1-8
John 16:29-33

Tuesday:
Acts 20:17-27
John 17:1-11

Wednesday:
Acts 20:28-38
John 17:11-19

Thursday:
Acts 22:30; 23:6-11
John 17:20-26

Friday:
Acts 25:13-21
John 21:15-19

Saturday:
Mass in the Morning
Acts 28:16-20, 30-31
John 21:20-25

Next Sunday:
Vigil Mass
Genesis 11:1-9
Exodus 19:3-8, 16-20
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Joel 3:1-5

Romans 8:22-27
John 7:37-39
Mass During the Day
Acts 2:1-11
Galatians 5:16-25
John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

SUNDAY PLUS

Faithful companions

Gift poured into our hearts

by Sr Mary Burke FMDM

Today we celebrate the apostles gathered in the Upper Room with Mary the mother of Jesus to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit: the very Spirit of Jesus. Jesus offers each one of us this same gift today and every day. Receiving this gift invites us into the relationship of love that exists between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus makes the comforting promise of his Spirit to his disciples as he turns his face towards Jerusalem and the Cross.

As Jesus dies on the cross, John recalls, he “gave up his spirit”. This giving up of Jesus’ Spirit is the foretaste of Pentecost. The Spirit no longer indwells the physical body of Jesus only, but Jesus gives his

Spirit to the Church, his Mystical Body and we are Christ’s Church. We receive the Spirit of Christ at baptism again at confirmation and daily throughout our lives. Therefore, this “Spirit of Christ” dwells within each one of us. What a precious gift!

This gift transformed the apostles’ hearts and lives. From that closed Upper Room, these fear-filled apostles went, with joy and courage to bring Christ’s message to the ends of the earth. The word “apostle” means “one who is sent”, so, empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles became inspired channels of Christ’s message to the world. St Paul tells us this same Spirit has been “poured into our hearts” and so, we too, are sent as messengers of Christ’s love and healing to our world today.

Sr Mary Burke is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

Send me!

by Rachel Thompson

“But how do you know God is calling you?” pupils ask our visiting speakers on Vocations Day. The story of Pentecost can make recognising and responding to God seem very straightforward. Although, like our speakers, even the disciples can’t describe their experience clearly: the Spirit is “like” wind and “like” fire. They do know, however, without doubt, that this is God. Having met God, the disciples did not wait for a plan: they rushed out to share God’s love. Pentecost was just the beginning. Their actions in the rest of their lives witness to the

reality of their experience, just as it’s the years of lived vocation that speak to our pupils. It is the ongoing work of our lives to explore the depths of who we are and discern our mission. Being faithful companions in both prayer and action is ultimately how we will recognise the reality of God and be able to communicate that love.

Rachel Thompson, in addition to being the Children’s Editor for Redemptorist Publications, is also a full-time secondary school teacher.

“We are united by the fire of the Spirit, who sends us forth on mission.”

Pope Francis

Well met!

by Canon Paul Douthwaite


We are regularly asked to prove who we are. Every time we contact the bank or pick up a parcel, we are asked for identification. Unfortunately, our modern world is flooded with imposters: people who are imitating others to take advantage, to plunder and pillage. As evidence we use our passport, driving licence or other documentation, but it is accepted that the best form of proof is to be physically recognised or acknowledged by another.

In biblical times there was a

surplus of phoney prophets and mock messiahs, people who used the religious beliefs of the Hebrew people to take advantage and gain financially. In the post-resurrection period, the authorities decried Jesus as another of these deceptive imposters.

In appearing to his disciples, Jesus tells them that the promised Holy Spirit will act as a witness. He then adds that they too who have known him, seen his works and can identify him as the Son of God, must also be witnesses.

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

Holy Spirit of love, here I am. Send me. Amen. 

Today:
Vigil Mass
Genesis 11:1-9
Exodus 19:3-8, 16-20
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Joel 3:1-5

Romans 8:22-27
John 7:37-39
Mass During the Day
Acts 2:1-11
Galatians 5:16-25
John 15:26-27; 16:12-15

Monday:
Genesis 3:9-15, 20
or Acts 1:12-14
John 19:25-34

Tuesday:
Ecclesiasticus 35:1-15
Mark 10:28-31

Wednesday:
Ecclesiasticus 36:1, 4-5, 10-17
Mark 10:32-45

Thursday:
Ecclesiasticus 42:15-25
Mark 10:46-52

(E&W) Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest (Feast):
Jeremiah 31:31-34 or Hebrews 10:11-18; Mark 14:22-25

Friday:
Ecclesiasticus 44:1, 9-13
Mark 11:11-26

Saturday:
Ecclesiasticus 51:17-27
Mark 11:27-33

Next Sunday:
Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40
Romans 8:14-17
Matthew 28:16-20

SUNDAY PLUS

Never alone

With us always

by Paul Higginson

Much of what we experience in life is fleeting – it comes and goes. Our childhood, our schooling, our working life, our health and even, of course, our looks! So many things are transient – including some of our relationships. Many people come in and out of our lives, some of them very dear to us. We may even find that God comes in and out of our life, in the sense that sometimes we might feel close to him and at other times very distant. We may go through periods when we stop believing altogether. Yet Jesus says: “Know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.” Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. He has always been and always will be. Even when we stop believing in

him, he will never stop believing in us. God loves things by becoming them. God became human in Jesus and promises to be with us always, and love us, whoever we are, and whatever we have done.

The love of God and the presence of Jesus is not a transient, fleeting thing and it does not depend on our goodness or faithfulness. It is constant and lasts for ever. What we do with that unconditional love

is another matter. Jesus’ instruction to us in the Gospel today is to go out and spread the love we have been given “to all nations”. Not so easy perhaps, but make a start with those you meet today.

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



Together in peace

by Christine Clark

Jane was at one of those crossroads times of life. The family needed to move for her husband’s new job, uprooting from everything that was familiar: house, schools, her job, friends and neighbours. Feeling anxious about what lay ahead, Jane wore a long face and a worried frown as she went to collect the children from school. As she waited at the school gates, a woman she had seen before but never spoken to approached her and pressed a small card into her hand. Jane looked at the card. It said, “Jesus said, ‘I am with you always.’” Jane read it and stuffed it into her bag, too embarrassed to do anything

but acknowledge it. As she walked home with the children, she thought about it. A voice came into her head from nowhere: “It’ll be all right. Don’t forget I’ll be there with you.” Things didn’t seem so daunting after all.

Christine Clark is a retired member of the editorial staff of Redemptorist Publications.

“We are united by the new commandment that Jesus left us, by the pursuit of the civilisation of love and by passion for the kingdom that the Lord calls us to build with him. We are united by the struggle for peace and justice.”

Pope Francis

Together in love

by James Gallogly

Thanks to the wonders of modern technology we have never been so well-connected. We have all become familiar with Zoom. We can FaceTime each other whenever we want from wherever we are. There are endless apps to meet each other (although some encounters can lead to sin). Why is loneliness such a curse then?

Sociologists and psychologists will have their opinions. Today’s readings certainly do. As children of God we are never alone.

In the prison system Listeners are trusted peers. They are Wing-based Samaritans who patiently hear the pain of their neighbours. There is no place for reticence.

Jesus is our Listener, welcoming

us, no matter how we present. With him this is not a stopgap triage, a brief intervention. This is the love of our Saviour. Like his startled disciples we need to embrace the message. He is with us, “yes, to the end of time.”

James Gallogly is a lay chaplain in a UK prison.

Blessed Trinity, teach us to be one with you. Be with us in all of life’s ups and downs, successes and failures, joys and sorrows. Amen.

Today:
Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40
Romans 8:14-17
Matthew 28:16-20

Monday:
Zephaniah 3:14-18 or
Romans 12:9-16
Luke 1:39-56

Tuesday:
Tobit 2:9-14
Mark 12:13-17

Wednesday:
Tobit 3:1-11, 16-17
Mark 12:18-27

Thursday:
Tobit 6:10-11; 7:1, 9-14; 8:4-9
Mark 12:28-34

Friday:
Tobit 11:5-17
Mark 12:35-37

Saturday:
Tobit 12:1, 5-15, 20
Mark 12:38-44

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