

SUNDAY PLUS

Be blessed

A Year of the Word

Sanctified brethren



by Fr Denis
McBride C.Ss.R.

Lake Wobegon is a quiet town, the seat of Mist County in Minnesota, USA. It doesn't actually appear on any map because it's an imaginary place, the centre of a marvellous portrait of small-town American life in *Lake Wobegon Days* by Garrison Keillor. We follow the fortunes of a skinny kid who is raised in this strait-laced town where the first car and the first radio were greeted with stubborn scepticism by the townsfolk. Our hero is fascinated by the Catholic Church with all its saints and processions and colour; he belongs to a small sect that meets in his Uncle Al's bare living room where they sit on folding chairs and wait for the Spirit to move them. He says:

"In a town where everyone was either Lutheran or Catholic, we were neither one. We were Sanctified Brethren, a sect so tiny that nobody but us and God knew about it, so when kids asked what I was, I just said Protestant. It was too much to explain, like having six toes. You would rather keep your shoes on."

Today we celebrate the feast of the Sanctified Brethren – not a small sect in an imaginary town, but a great many men, women and children, the faithful in Christ Jesus. They are a small part of a marvellous company of believers who struggle into holiness. Among them are people who know us and love us. There will even be some from Lake Wobegon, from the places of which no one has ever heard. The Sanctified Brethren, today we salute them.

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

Special saints

by Gráinne Treanor

Living in the countryside, I often pass derelict houses on my travels. These houses evoke mixed emotions, especially during the month of November, when we remember our dead.

There is a sense of smallness and transience. I wonder about the families who lived in these houses, once homes. No doubt the pace was slower back then, but life would have been filled with the same duties, joys and sorrows we experience today.

Outside one house, a carpet of daffodils appears each spring, the planter departed. They remind me that everyone who has lived on earth has left their mark. Not all experience celebrity or sainthood. But many continue to touch our lives today through the love,

kindness, gentleness, justice, mercy and peace they lived. They shape those who follow like a "gene" that preserves the values Jesus taught in the Beatitudes. These too are "special saints" whom we cherish.

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

"In meeting you, may each person at least touch the beauty of God, the security of his company and the fullness of his closeness. It is a sanctity that grows as we discover that God cannot be tamed, does not need fences to defend his freedom and does not contaminate himself as he draws near."

Pope Francis

Little saints

by Michael George

When Pope Benedict visited the UK in 2010 he addressed the schoolchildren of the nation via a "Big Assembly". Like others in Catholic schools similarly unsuccessful in an attempt to secure tickets, I watched the Pope's address in a hall full of children, parents and staff, via the Internet.

The theme of the address was "Becoming Saints". God is calling each of us to holiness and to strive for sainthood.

Work in the days and weeks afterwards revealed a real understanding amongst the children that saints are born as people like them, and that whilst not easy to reach, sanctity is attainable. They – we – can become saints, through our

relationship with God, lived out through relationships with one another.

Children can often express profound ideas in simple terms. "To achieve sainthood," one ten-year-old child wrote, "Devote your life to God. Think like God. Breathe like God. Be kind. Smile. Persevere." Amen.

Michael George has served Catholic primary schools as a teacher and headteacher for more than twenty years. He now works as a lay school chaplain.

My loving Lord, touch my heart, my eyes, my mind – my whole life. Let everything that I say, think and do radiate you to the people around me. Fill my littleness with your greatness. Amen.

Today:
Apocalypse 7:2-4, 9-14
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

Monday:
Isaiah 25:6-9
Romans 5:5-11
Matthew 11:25-30

Tuesday:
Philippians 2:5-11
Luke 14:15-24

Wednesday:
Philippians 2:12-18
Luke 14:25-33

Thursday:
Philippians 3:3-8
Luke 15:1-10

Friday:
Philippians 3:17 – 4:1
Luke 16:1-8

Saturday:
Philippians 4:10-19
Luke 16:9-15

Next Sunday:
Wisdom 6:12-16
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

SUNDAY PLUS



Remember and do not forget

A Year of the Word



Waiting for action

by Sr Janet Fearnis FMDM



“When you’re training, they talk about the honour of defending your country but, when you’re out there on the front line, real guns and real bullets are aimed at you. You feel scared.”

Today’s Gospel speaks of the bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom, some of them prepared and others ill-prepared for his arrival.

We also remember those who waited in warfare for violence which

might or might not happen; who fearfully faced things for which no amount of classroom teaching could have made them ready.

Waiting is active. We try to fill the gaps. Those who are on the frontline in battle were and are no different whether or not they returned to their families at the end of the wars in which they took part. Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke wrote poetry in the trenches. Others created works of

art from scraps of wood and metal which they found lying around the battle field. Most wrote letters to their loved ones and cherished the news from home – and still do.

My father and some of his fellow Commandos marched five miles beyond enemy lines somewhere in Malaya, fully armed and ready to defend themselves against any Japanese patrol which, contrary to reports, might still be in the area. They attended Mass on Christmas

Eve in a nearby village and then marched back to camp.

Today, Remembrance Sunday, we gratefully remember all those who fought and died on our behalf in scenes of conflict that, hopefully, few of us today expect to meet first-hand.

We also remember those who waited and attempted to make the best use of their time.

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

They shall not grow old

by Liam Waldron

The act of remembering those who are no longer with us is very much associated with this time of the year. We reminisce about and pray for those who have gone before us. While we grieve for those we have lost through bereavement, many of us also lament the loss of those who are still with us, but who have lost their own memories as a result of dementia. The phrase “remember who I am when I forget who you are”, challenges us to be mindful of the personhood of our brothers and sisters who no longer recognise us.

It is said that grief is the price we pay for love, but we can take comfort from the words of St Paul to the Thessalonians which encourage us to grieve not “as others do who have no

hope”, but rather as people who truly believe that we are all alive in the memory of God.

Dr Liam Waldron and Cristina Gangemi co-authored *Intellectual Disability: caring for yourself and others*, available from Redemptorist Publications: www.rpbooks.co.uk

“Remembrance is what makes a people strong, because it feels rooted in a journey, rooted in a history, rooted in a people. Remembrance helps us understand that we are not alone, we are a people: a people with a history, with a past, with a life.”

Pope Francis

We shall always remember them

by Mary Bell

Around the small village of Bucquoy in northern France can be found three Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries. A reading of the headstones reveals that nearly all the soldiers died in August 1918 during the Battle of Arras, only three months before the armistice that ended the First World War.

Most of the fallen were young men in their late teens or early twenties. Carved into the gravestones are their names, ages, dates of death and regiments. Most poignantly, every now and again, the tablet reads: “A soldier of the Great War. Known unto God”.

The gently undulating countryside surrounding the village gives the lie to the evidence

of slaughter revealed by the graves.

In one of these cemeteries lies my great-uncle William, a young man who volunteered at the age of seventeen. He died among his comrades of the Manchester Regiment on 23 August 1918, aged nineteen. Rest in Peace.

We shall always remember them.

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

Living Lord, today we remember unforgettable people who died so that we can live, laugh and love today. Reward them, Lord, with the peace and joy which is yours to give, joy that is truly heavenly. ☩ Amen.

Today:
Wisdom 6:12-16
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13

Monday:
Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12
1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17
John 2:13-22

Tuesday:
Titus 2:1-8, 11-14
Luke 17:7-10

Wednesday:
Titus 3:1-7
Luke 17:11-19

Thursday:
Philemon 7-20
Luke 17:20-25

Friday:
2 John 4-9
Luke 17:26-37

Saturday:
3 John 5-8
Luke 18:1-8

Next Sunday:
Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Matthew 25:14-30

SUNDAY PLUS

Count your blessings

A Year of the Word

Take time to reflect

by Fr Denis
McBride C.Ss.R.

Dear friends, as we approach the end of the liturgical year, the coming season of Advent resets the clocks and calendars of Christian worship. Time moves on; perhaps this might be a good moment to pause, to look back and to look forward – to look back at a year that is closing and look ahead to the year that is beginning.

When you pause and look back at this year, do you think you are a better person? How have you grown this year? What good things have happened to you? What bad experiences have you endured? Have you lost anyone close to you this year? Has anyone close to you died, or has someone you loved moved away, out of your life? Is there a new absence in your life?

Have you made new friends? Has it been a good year for your family? Have you stayed close to them?

Do they know you love them? Do you feel better about yourself now than you did last year? Are you still excited about your vocation, your career, your work? Or are you content in retirement?

And when you look ahead, how do you feel? What are looking forward to?

Dear friends, we are a community of memory that looks back; we are

a community of Spirit that looks forward. It's important, though not easy, to look back with kindness and to look forward in hope. Let us hand over the past to God for his healing blessing. Let us ask the Lord to face the future with us, because we do not want to face it alone.

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



Small blessings

by Gráinne Treanor

My life as a mother of three can be hectic. School, sport, music, work and home life move quickly. It is easy to get caught up in the rush of morning alarms, school buses, laundry, meals, training schedules, voluntary roles and more.

Times may have changed since the description of "the capable wife" we hear about in today's reading from Proverbs, but mothers and fathers today are often riddled with doubt about their ability to "do enough" for their children.

When all is said and done, however, it is not the possessions or victories that matter. It is the quiet moments together, the stories told at bedtime, the tears

wiped away – the small blessings – that make life precious. My children often thank me, but the most precious thank you of all has been the handwritten note that said, "To Mam. Thank you for making me exist." A not-so-small blessing?

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

Lord, our world is often split between the "haves" and "have nots". Some people face difficulties which I would find impossible to handle. Lord, open my eyes to their needs and teach me to be compassionate and generous. 🕊 Amen.

Count my blessings

by Phil Ferguson

I was eight years old and, for some now long-forgotten reason, the most miserable, underprivileged, neglected individual in the entire human race. Determined to prove that I had nothing and was going nowhere, I started my list of assets, beginning with clothes and pencils – and continued for a surprising distance. Before long, I'd discovered that I was

much better off than I had realised. Not only that: I no longer felt grumpy and the weight of the world had vanished from my young shoulders.

St Teresa of Calcutta commented, "When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed."

Today is the World Day of the Poor. Perhaps I could count my blessings and think of those people who have a shorter list. Is there something I can do to help them?

Phil Ferguson is a former teacher.

"The boat of our life is often storm-tossed and buffeted by winds. Even when the waters are calm, they quickly grow agitated. When we are caught up in those storms, they seem to be our only problem. But the issue is not the momentary storm, but how we are navigating through life. The secret of navigating well is to invite Jesus on board."

Pope Francis

Today:
Proverbs 31:10-13. 19-20. 30-31
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
Matthew 25:14-30

Monday:
Apocalypse
1:1-4; 2:1-5
Luke 18:35-43

Monday (S): St Margaret (Feast):
Proverbs 31:10-13. 19-20.
30-31 or 1 Corinthians 12:31 –
13:13; Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday:
Apocalypse
3:1-6. 14-22
Luke 19:1-10

Wednesday:
Apocalypse
4:1-11
Luke 19:11-28

Thursday:
Apocalypse
5:1-10
Luke 19:41-44

Friday:
Apocalypse
10:8-11
Luke 19:45-48

Saturday:
Apocalypse
11:4-12
Luke 20:27-40

Next Sunday:
Ezekiel 34:11-12. 15-17
1 Corinthians 15:20-26. 28
Matthew 25:31-46

SUNDAY PLUS

Share life. Share love.

A Year of the Word

Share appreciation



by Moire O'Sullivan

It's amazing how grumpy people can be when they are sick. Even if you care for them and tend to their every need, our thoughtful actions can sometimes be taken for granted, without a single word of thanks in return.

I remember going to great lengths to make warm soup for my sick spouse, only for him to wander past the bowl and forget it was there. I remember driving at high speed to A&E with my young sick son in the middle of the night, waiting for hours for a doctor to see him, only for my child to then complain that "hospital is boring" because there were no toys there for him to play with.

We often read today's Gospel as a gentle reminder for us to be kind to those who are in need. But what if it is also

a request for us to be more like Jesus when we are the ones who are suffering? When someone brings us food, do we eat without thanks or grumble that it's the wrong thing? When we are ill, do we complain about our own ailments instead of thinking of the one who is looking after us, putting their own busy life on hold?

It is so easy to get swept up in our own thoughts and emotions when we are hungry, thirsty, alone, cold or ill. But instead of reminding our helpers how miserable we feel, let us thank them and appreciate them for the kind deeds that they are doing.

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

Young messengers

by Jimmy Mulgrew

Soon after tuition fees came into play with our children I saw a cartoon in a newspaper. It depicted the dean of a university sitting behind a desk and talking to the parents of a prospective student. The caption underneath says, "Well, if we can't afford the fees, how much would it be for a scarf?"

I vividly remember when my eldest boy Dale left home to go to Queen's University in Belfast. Every parent feels the same. You're proud of what they've achieved to get there but it's tinged with the sadness that you'll no longer be seeing them every day. Now it's only at holiday times. Then you pray they'll meet the right friends who will inspire them in a positive way.

Or, more importantly, that they'll be able to inspire their new friends with the knowledge that God will help them through their troubles and will rejoice in the victories.

Jimmy Mulgrew is best-known as a comedian by the name of Jimmy Cricket.

"We all want peace; we all want freedom and we want fulfilment. And how do you do this? Allow the love of God, the Kingdom of God, the love of Jesus, to take root in your heart and you will have peace, you will have freedom and you will have fulfilment."

Pope Francis

Share and care

by Liam Waldron

In feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the lonely, we, as Christians, are engaged in much more than providing a social service. When we share our lives and our love with others, we share God's redeeming work in the world. The righteous in today's Gospel are those who shared, not only what they possessed in terms of goods, but who also gave of their time, their love and their attention.

Nor is sharing only about doing things to and for others. In fact when we serve others by sharing our lives with them, an exchange takes place and we too are changed, becoming more fully alive. Nor is sharing only about doing to and for others. In fact when we serve others by sharing our lives with them, an exchange takes place and we

too are changed, becoming more fully alive. This is the experience of many who share their lives with those who have disabilities, or who are struggling with addictions or living with dementia. It is in this deep sharing, where "heart speaks to heart" that we come to recognise our own need for love.

Dr Liam Waldron and Cristina Gangemi co-authored *Intellectual Disability: caring for yourself and others*, available from Redemptorist Publications: www.rpbooks.co.uk

Lord my God, I love you and I adore you. Be the king and centre of my heart. Amen.

Today:
Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17
1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28
Matthew 25:31-46

Monday:
Apocalypse 14:1-5
Luke 21:1-4

Tuesday:
Apocalypse 14:14-19
Luke 21:5-11

Wednesday:
Apocalypse 15:1-4
Luke 21:12-19

Thursday:
Apocalypse 18:1-2,
21-23; 19:1-3, 9
Luke 21:20-28

Friday:
Apocalypse 20:1-4, 11-21:2
Luke 21:29-33

Saturday:
Apocalypse 22:1-7
Luke 21:34-36

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1, 3-8
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:33-37

SUNDAY PLUS



Stay awake!

A Year of the Word

We are not alone

by Gráinne Treanor



Today's Gospel instilled fear in me when I was a child. If there was one reading that made me feel like "going to confession" in preparedness for my own end or "the end of the world", this was it. It was about getting caught, punishment and eternal damnation. Of course, my theology was immature and my interpretation out of context. I'm not sure it was much clearer to those who had the difficult job of explaining it to children.

Years later, with the benefit of study and life experience, that childhood fear has eased. Study reveals a context – the coming of the Son of Man

and the kingdom of God. The Gospel of Mark shows Jesus trying to encourage both preparedness for that time and patient endurance of whatever suffering precedes it. Experience reveals that suffering – including sudden and severe suffering – is entwined in life's journey. It is not something we must always accept unquestioningly, but neither is it something we should expect to always escape. Recently, we have seen suffering shake even those who normally have the privilege of feeling in control of their destiny.

We cannot be complacent or banish fear. We do not know the day of our individual ends or the end of time as we know it. But we are not alone in our waiting. As Christians, we support each other in our staying awake, balancing unavoidable suffering with patience, solidarity and sometimes action as we wait in hope for the salvation of all humanity.

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

Learn from others

by Br Royston Price
C.Ss.R.

Christ tells us forcefully in the Gospel to stay awake. This certainly means looking forward to his return at the end of time, but perhaps we can take this attitude into other parts of our lives? I may be very keen to listen to God speaking through scripture, but am I so keen to listen to God speaking through my neighbour, particularly the ones I don't get on with? The Lord wants what's best for us and never misses an opportunity to help us grow in love, so perhaps we should be awake and alert to the lessons we can learn from those around us. An attitude of respectful listening can help people see the dignity

that they have in your sight and, indeed, their dignity in the sight of God. This Advent is the perfect time to "wake up" to what matters most and our "alarm clock" might not be sitting on our bedside table, but might actually be our neighbour.

Br Royston Price is the Vocation Director for the Redemptorist London Province.

"May Jesus help you to discover the beauty of being alive and awake. Alive and awake."

Pope Francis

Do I count my blessings?

by Eldred Willey

Dr Donald Nicholl, Rector at Tantaros, near Jerusalem, inspired many people with his book *The Testing of Hearts*. He also inspired people by the way he finished his life. In great pain with terminal cancer, he looked out of his bedroom window one evening and rejoiced in the beautiful full moon which he could see.

The angel Gabriel calls on Mary to rejoice, although nothing has happened yet. She is simply to rejoice in God's favour: the fact that she is chosen, that God has good plans for her. Her agreement opens the way to the great miracle.

We always have something to be thankful for, always have blessings to count. It is in recognising the

good which God is already doing for us that we open the way to receive greater things. So let us choose to rise above discouragement and despondency, for God loves to give good things to the joyful.

Eldred Willey works in communications for the Diocese of Northampton.

Loving Lord, I don't always enjoy waking up. Sometimes I'd prefer to sleep. Help me to be awake and alert to life's challenges during Advent. Don't let me doze off halfway. Amen.

Today: Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:1. 3-8
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:33-37

Monday: Romans 10:9-18
Matthew 4:18-22

(S) Solemnity
Wisdom 3:1-9
Romans 10:9-18
Matthew 4:18-22

Tuesday: Isaiah 11:1-10
Luke 10:21-24

Wednesday: Isaiah 25:6-10
Matthew 15:29-37

Thursday: Isaiah 26:1-6
Matthew 7:21. 24-27

Friday: Isaiah 29:17-24
Matthew 9:27-31

Saturday: Isaiah 30:19-21. 23-26
Matthew 9:35 – 10:1. 6-8

Next Sunday: Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11
2 Peter 3:8-14
Mark 1:1-8