

SUNDAY PLUS

Feed the hungry

A Year of the Word



Respond with compassion

by Claire Wright

When you have young children, you can truly empathise with Jesus in today's Gospel. Just as you pour a cup of tea, or sit down to read, or shut your eyes for a minute, the inner radar in your children switches on and before you know it, your sleeves are tugged, body prodded and shouts of "muuuuuuummy" follow you down the stairs.

I always admire Jesus' patience in this passage. When my children have had yet another two seconds to themselves before coming to find me, I find my temper wearing thin and the desperate desire to

go to a "deserted place" grows strong. But when the crowds followed Jesus to his, he responded with compassion. He tended to their scrapes, listened to the whining and when their hunger grew, he fed them.

As parents (or siblings, children, friends) we can lose ourselves in the craziness of family life and forget that what we are doing, what we are called to do, is sacred. We daily have the opportunity to live as Jesus lived by caring for our "crowds", those he has entrusted to us to "feed", physically, and spiritually.

Claire Wright is a Brighton-based freelance writer who runs a faith blog and a healthy family food website, all while taking care of two lively toddlers.

Don't wait to be asked

by Moire O'Sullivan

We all have something we'd like to change. Perhaps we want to be thinner, fitter, wiser. Maybe we dream of having a different career, home or lifestyle.

Change is hard. It can be overwhelming, confusing, tiring. We can convince ourselves it can't be done.

But what if we just take the first step, even a little one? What if we eat that salad, go for a walk, email in that CV, pick up a book?

The disciples only produced a meagre five loaves and two fishes, a token gesture, but it was enough for Jesus to take it from there to feed a whole five thousand.

Maybe God will reward us for

our initiative, help us to take our dreams one step further. Maybe God will grant us more confidence, more drive, more support from those around us so that we can really make that change we want in our lives.

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.

Loving Lord, help me to recognise ways in which I can share what I have with people who, in some way, have less than I do. Most of all, Lord, let me give of myself and my time. ☪ Amen.

"I am thinking about the many hungry people and how much leftover food we throw away... Let each of us think about this: where does the food that is left over from lunch go, from dinner, where does it go? What is done with the leftover food in my house? Is it thrown away?... Never throw away leftover food."

Pope Francis

A different kind of hunger

by Michael George

"There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves," Jesus instructed his disciples. To feed the hungry is a corporal work of mercy; Jesus' instruction was not just for his disciples standing amongst the crowd of five thousand, but was for all of us.

Providing food to the hungry certainly does mean responding to the needs of those who do not have

enough to eat, but it also means recognition of a spiritual hunger. We are called to address our own spiritual hunger and to seek to feed others who hunger spiritually by helping them to become closer to Jesus, as Jesus tells us we cannot be nourished and "full" without him.

Today's Gospel reminds us that with Jesus, all things are possible. It reminds us of our duty to serve, and it encourages us to use initiative, whilst placing all our trust in him.

Following more than twenty years as a teacher and headteacher, Michael George has recently started work as a lay school chaplain.

Today:
Isaiah 55:1-3
Romans 8:35, 37-39
Matthew 14:13-21

Monday:
Jeremiah 28:1-17
Matthew 14:22-36

Tuesday:
Jeremiah 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22
Matthew 15:1-2, 10-14

Wednesday:
Jeremiah 31:1-7
Matthew 15:21-28

Thursday:
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
2 Peter 1:16-19
Matthew 17:1-9

Friday:
Nahum 2:1, 3; 3:1-3, 6-7
Matthew 16:24-28

Saturday:
Habakkuk 1:12 - 2:4
Matthew 17:14-20

Next Sunday:
1 Kings 19:9, 11-13
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:22-33

SUNDAY PLUS

Take the risk

A Year of the Word

Staying afloat



by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

The doubts that Matthew's church is experiencing are expressed movingly in today's Gospel. Jesus is praying to his Father. His followers are separated from him. It is night. They are in a boat which is battling against a heavy sea and strong winds. All seems lost. The boat clearly represents the Church, while the night storm represents the opposition the Church is facing. Jesus calls to them and tells them not to be afraid, and then he comes to them over the water. When

Peter tries to do the same as Jesus, even he is seen to begin to doubt Jesus' power and to panic. But Jesus supports him.

When Peter "felt the force of the wind, he took fright and began to sink." Matthew tells his struggling community that even if their faith falters and they panic when they look at the surrounding danger, Jesus – even though he is with the Father – will come and save them. This is Gospel. This is good news indeed.

Peter did not have the faith to match his zeal, but Jesus supported him. That promise is extended to all who put their faith in God and in his Son,

Jesus Christ. Often when we feel that we are battling against the odds, we wonder why Jesus always seems to be off somewhere else. Although we know that we won't be asked to walk on water, we still get that sinking feeling. In that plight we are not thrown back on our resources. In this community gathered in faith, we have the word of God and the bread of life and the support of each other. That has to be enough to keep us afloat.

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

Just try!

by Siân Owen-Owen

There's no point in asking if the late Stephen Hawking might have achieved more without his wheelchair. He forged new astronomical paths and set the scene for future scientists. When most of us know little about black holes and can't understand Hawking's excitement with complicated and long mathematical equations, why did he become a household name? Was there something deeper?

People who are perfect in every way don't give us the courage to "try, try and try again" in our personal moments of shattered high hopes.

We recognise ourselves in Peter's momentary panic which stopped his miraculous watery walk towards Jesus. We admire Hawking's "can do" approach to an otherwise massively limited life. His watchword was, "Look up at the

stars and not down at your feet."

"Two men looked out of prison bars. One saw mud, the other stars."

Where do I stand? When I fall, can I hear Jesus saying, "Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid." With Jesus, I really can pick myself up and keep going.

Siân Owen-Owen is a freelance Catholic writer.

Lord, sometimes I'm just lazy and can't be bothered taking risks, especially if I'm trying to avoid inconvenient consequences. Most of the risks that challenge me don't involve life or death situations, unlike those people who literally take their lives in their hands as they try to help others. Be with them and fill them with courage. 🙏 Amen.

Be brave

by Daniel Kearney

Like most ordinary people I feel profoundly inadequate when I compare myself to others who have done something truly extraordinary with their life. Martin Luther King Jr., Maximilian Kolbe, Mahatma Gandhi... the list is endless. Their unstinting selflessness and courage seem far beyond my personal capabilities and bravery. Like Peter, I too would have denied Christ and cowered in the upper room with the terrified apostles.

"When it comes to the children who come into the world, no sacrifice on the part of adults is too costly or too great, to ensure that no child believes he or she was a mistake, is worthless or is abandoned to a life of wounds and to the arrogance of men. How beautiful a society like this would be! I say that for such a society, much could be forgiven, innumerable errors. Truly a great deal."

Pope Francis

Today:
1 Kings 19:9, 11-13
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:22-33

Monday:
2 Corinthians
9:6-10
John 12:24-26

Tuesday:
Ezekiel 2:8 – 3:4
Matthew 18:1-5.
10, 12-14

Wednesday:
Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:18-22
Matthew 18:15-20

Thursday:
Ezekiel 12:1-12
Matthew 18:21 – 19:1

Friday:
Ezekiel 16:1-15, 60, 63
Matthew 19:3-12

Saturday:
Ezekiel 18:1-10, 13, 30-32
Matthew 19:13-15

Next Sunday:
Apocalypse 11:19; 12:1-6, 10
1 Corinthians 15:20-26
Luke 1:39-56

SUNDAY PLUS



Women of faith

A Year of the Word

Mary and Elizabeth



by Kasia Greenwood

In the Bible, as well as in history, politics and industry, the narrative is often driven by men, so today's reading about Mary and Elizabeth has particular importance as we reflect on the theme "Women of Faith".

At the time of the cousins' meeting, both women were pregnant, leading

us to immediately consider the role of woman as mother. Mary's position as Jesus' mother is highly significant. She is not a figure who is swept under the carpet and only mentioned briefly in the Bible. Her virtuous nature, innate goodness and undoubtable love for Jesus paint a picture of the most nourishing and loving mother figure, and indeed a mother to us all.

However, Mary and Elizabeth's roles are not defined purely as mothers. After all, both of their pregnancies are brought about due to their great faith in God. Not only that, but both women are to raise significant figures for the whole of Christianity: St John the Baptist and, of course, Jesus himself. In the reading, Elizabeth immediately recognises the enormous import of Mary's baby and the blessing

God has bestowed upon her. In response, Mary praises God's strength and mercy, and says that her "soul magnifies the Lord". What incredible faith we witness in these women!

The contribution of women to the Church continues, with thousands of missionary sisters running schools and hospitals overseas, mothers raising their children in faith, and indeed women in our own parishes taking on numerous responsibilities to keep everything running. We follow the examples of Mary and Elizabeth as we dedicate ourselves to God and the family of the Church, showing ourselves to also be "Women of Faith".

Kasia Greenwood is the mother of a growing family and also works in education.

Image: Zvonimir Atletic / Shutterstock.com

Mary, my mother, brave in situations where I could not have coped; loving beyond anything I can imagine; understanding of people and situations which I would avoid altogether. Mary, be part of my life and my love. Help me to follow Jesus. Let me love you more and more with each passing day. ☪ Amen.

Women of tenderness

by Gerlinde Symons

In our Gospel reading today we hear how Mary, having consented to God's plan for her, hurries to help her elderly cousin Elizabeth, who is soon to give birth to a son. Both women, by their faith in God's promise to them, have been touched by the power of the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth recognises Mary's special role, and calls

her blessed. Mary's response is a prayer of thanksgiving to God (the Magnificat) for having chosen her to be the mother of Jesus. She is a role model for us all – of humility, obedience and surrender to the will of God.

On this feast day of the Assumption, when Mary was lifted up to heaven, body and soul, to be with her son Jesus, we give thanks for her faithfulness. May we live in hope that, like Mary, we too will be raised up on the last day – body and soul – to everlasting life.

Gerlinde Symons is a Catholic lay prison chaplain at two UK prisons.

Woman of courage

by Catherine Pepinster

If the Gospels are a story of faith, then much of that story is bound up with women. It is women who stay loyal to Jesus when his disciples fall asleep, run away and even deny him at his time of trial. Women are persistent, frequently calling on Jesus to help them, asking for signs of his power and love. They stand

at the foot of the cross at his end, and are first to see him on Easter morning. But above all, it is Mary who is the exemplar of faith and of courage. She is willing to carry him, to raise him and to love him. At Cana, she shows that same persistence as other women, when she persuades him to turn water into wine at the wedding feast. The wine is overflowing, just as Mary's love is overflowing. Could there have been Jesus without Mary?

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.

"Functionality is not woman's purpose: it is true that a woman must do things and does things — as we all do. However, woman's purpose is to create harmony, and without woman there is no harmony in the world."

Pope Francis

Six Women from the Bible
Denis McBride



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with discount code Plus

Fr Denis McBride tells the stories of six biblical women who have a message for us today

Today: Apocalypse 11:19; 12:1-6. 10
1 Corinthians 15:20-26
Luke 1:39-56

Monday: Ezekiel 24:15-24
Matthew 19:16-22

Tuesday: Ezekiel 28:1-10
Matthew 19:23-30

Wednesday: Ezekiel 34:1-11
Matthew 20:1-16

Thursday: Ezekiel 36:23-28
Matthew 22:1-14

Friday: Ezekiel 37:1-14
Matthew 22:34-40

Saturday: Ezekiel 43:1-7
Matthew 23:1-12

Next Sunday: Isaiah 22:19-23
Romans 11:33-36
Matthew 16:13-20

SUNDAY PLUS



See the person

A Year of the Word

The Petrine figure in the Church

by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.



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

Image: Attila JANDI / Shutterstock.com

In today's Gospel Matthew shows us that Peter is chosen by God to receive enlightenment about Jesus – not flesh and blood, but the Father in heaven is the source of revelation. In response to God's choice of Peter, Jesus elects to build the Church on this rock. Like Eliakim in the first reading who is given the keys which open and close access to the kingdom of heaven. He is given authority "to bind" and "to loose", terms which mean to forbid and to

permit. This makes Peter the ruler of the Church, the one whose decisions in faith will be confirmed by God.

Given the division in the Church today, the universal community of Christians clearly needs the Petrine figure who will summarise in himself the unity of the whole Church. That is why the role of the papacy is at the centre of discussion between Roman Catholics and other Christians. We believe that being in communion

with the Pope, the Petrine figure, is as important today as it was in the early Church. Too often, however, we tend to see the figure of the Pope as the one who uses his keys, the symbol of his authority, to keep people out. But keys open doors as well as close them; they give access as well as prevent it. Many non-Catholics are hoping that the Petrine figure can still become the great symbol of unity in the Church by using his authority in the service of unity.

When I fall in love...

by Emerald O'Hanrahan

My husband and I were best friends for a few years before we got together and I tried everything to block my, in retrospect, clear love for him from myself, him, and everyone around us. This had mixed success. When he was in a play, I went to see it. Five times! His cast members told him, "That girl is in love with you." I was adamant that I was not.

When my dad became terminally ill, it clarified a lot.

I remember realising one day, during that time, that I had to admit the truth to myself. That my best friend was the only person for me and that I really loved him: body, mind, heart and soul. That even if we never got together, this was what I was committed to – and I had to fully commit, out in the open. I had to surrender to what this was, and actually be honest. I stopped hiding from the truth, and started living it.

Emerald O'Hanrahan, actor and voice-over artist, is best known as Emma Grundy in the long-running BBC radio series, *The Archers*.

Lord, it can be hard to see faces in a moving crowd, especially when I'm rushing in the opposite direction for a bus or train. Yet everyone in the crowd has his or her own story, with unique gifts, talents, joys, sorrows, family, friends and acquaintances. Help me not to lose sight of the miracle of every man, woman and child. Slow me down, Lord. 🕊 Amen.

"Conflict is resolved with respect for each person's identity. When we watch TV or read the newspapers, we see conflicts that fail to be resolved and result in war: one culture does not tolerate the other... true social conflicts, cultural too, are resolved through dialogue, but first with respect for the other person's identity... conflicts are resolved with respect for the identity of others."

Pope Francis

See inside

by Fr Paul Douthwaite

When someone you know very well surprises you by doing something exceptional, you would often say they have "hidden depths". From that moment on you might see them in a new light. In history there are many people whom we would know as famous because they did exceptional things: artists, scientists, musicians, all will at some point have been described as having "hidden depths".

Throughout the course of his mission, through his words and

deeds, Jesus very subtly and very gradually revealed himself as "the Christ, the Son of God". In seeking the disciples' understanding of who he was, he was not having an identity crisis but rather he wished to know if they had yet recognised his "hidden depths".

Jesus' invitation to look deeper, to see inside was not restricted to his disciples: it is an invitation to all people of all time to recognise his "hidden depth", to see in Jesus one who is the Christ of God.

Fr Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Today:
Isaiah 22:19-23
Romans 11:33-36
Matthew 16:13-20

Monday:
Apocalypse 21:9-14
John 1:45-51

Tuesday:
2 Thessalonians
2:1-3, 14-17
Matthew 23:23-26

Wednesday:
2 Thessalonians
3:6-10, 16-18
Matthew 23:27-32

Thursday:
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
Matthew 24:42-51

Friday:
1 Corinthians 1:17-25
Matthew 25:1-13

Saturday:
Jeremiah 1:17-19
Mark 6:17-29

Next Sunday:
Jeremiah 20:7-9
Romans 12:1-2
Matthew 16:21-27

SUNDAY PLUS



Top priority

A Year of the Word

Seize Jesus' promise



by Paul Higginson

In today's Gospel, Jesus predicts his own death. We are all on a journey towards death. I wonder what people will say about us when we are gone? Part of the answer, of course, will lie in how we have spent our life and the goals we are pursuing. Does our life revolve around our work at the expense of our relationships? Is our life about amassing nice possessions or about making as much money for ourselves and

our family as we possibly can? Do we spend our time seeking personal pleasure for ourselves without consideration of those who are in need, whether close at hand or far away? Do we live life without any thought of the environmental damage we are inflicting on the planet for future generations? Jesus asks us "what good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet lose their soul?" There is little point in pursuing wealth, material goods or fame if we end up losing our soul. We know that Jesus asks us to enter through the "narrow gate" and tread

"the narrow road that leads to life." It is often not easy – Jesus tells the disciples to "take up their cross and follow me"; but the rewards that come from discipleship are worth the struggle – it is a road that leads to the way, the truth and the life. The promise of Jesus is there for all of us to seize hold of today and make our own: "those who lose their life for my sake will find it".

Paul Higginson is the Assistant Principal at the Catholic Sixth Form College in Harrow and has been a parish catechist for thirty years.

Beyond self

by Catherine Pepinster

Being a Christian has a price. This is no comforting, easy ride. The readings today focus on the cost of discipleship, something to which that we might sometimes agree reluctantly, that we would prefer to avoid. Sometimes, out of concern for others, we would prefer them not to take the toughest route and thus not endure pain. Peter's response to the likelihood of Jesus'

suffering is to urge him to avoid it but Jesus has a path to follow and he knows it. It is a road he also urges us to follow. In so doing, we renounce the world's values and make Jesus' priorities our own. This is a selflessness that goes against natural human instinct for survival. But the day will come when we will discover the rewards that Jesus has promised. His message is constant and steeped in that promise.

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, if I'm honest, how often are my own comfort and convenience my top priorities? Yet love is inconvenient. Love means seeing someone else and their needs as important. Love means putting myself out for other people even when I don't want to do so. Lord, let love be my top priority in life: my love for others and your love for all of us. 🙏 Amen.

A different priority

by Fr Paul Douthwaite

Life is consumed by passion. For some, their passion is the arts, for others, sports and still yet, for others, work is their passion. When you have a passion for something or someone, all else is put aside and that becomes the priority in your life. A human failing is to direct our passions to the here and now.

The disciples' passion for the earthly Jesus and his presence among them was well intentioned but Jesus rebukes and invites them to embrace a passion beyond the here and now. He powerfully redirects their passions from the temporary to the eternal.

Whilst we live in the present and enjoy the life-giving passions of

the world, Jesus calls us to extend our earthly passions to the things beyond this life. As for his first disciples, so for us he wishes us to make eternal life our priority and our passion.

Fr Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

"Freedom goes hand in hand with the responsibility of protecting the common good and promoting the dignity, liberty and well-being of others, reaching the poor, the excluded and future generations."

Pope Francis

Today:
Jeremiah 20:7-9
Romans 12:1-2
Matthew 16:21-27

Monday:
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Luke 4:16-30

Tuesday:
1 Corinthians 2:10-16
Luke 4:31-37

Wednesday:
1 Corinthians 3:1-9
Luke 4:38-44

Thursday:
1 Corinthians 3:18-23
Luke 5:1-11

Thursday (E):
1 Thessalonians 2:2-8
Matthew 16:13-19

Friday:
1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Luke 5:33-39

Saturday:
1 Corinthians 4:6-15
Luke 6:1-5

Next Sunday:
Ezekiel 33:7-9
Romans 13:8-10
Matthew 18:15-20