

SUNDAY PLUS

Prayer first

To God through prayer



by Fr Paul Douthwaite

The Gospels give us an insight into the ministry of Jesus which, prior to his passion, death and resurrection, is dominated by miracles. In today's Gospel we encounter what could be described as a "flurry" of both physical and spiritual healing miracles. Revolving around the physical healing of Simon (Peter)'s mother-in-law, Jesus embarks upon assisting all who came to

him in need. These encounters have been described as "The Grace of Disaster". In the midst of what appears to be for the individual a catastrophic situation, the grace of God genuinely abounds.

It is very easy to be overwhelmed by Jesus' power to heal instantaneously and to overlook that which is the lasting result of his actions. The grace received through healing enables and guides the recipient to enter into

a deeper relationship with God. It is not surprising, therefore, that following his "flurry" of healing, Jesus "went off to a lonely place and prayed there"! He intrinsically links his ministry of healing with maintaining his relationship with the Father.

What appears to be an account of a healing is in fact a gospel instruction. The disciple, by virtue of baptism, is called to share in the ministry of Christ and engage

in "The Grace of Disaster". In taking those events in life that, humanly speaking, could be considered a "disaster" to God in prayer, the disciple is following Jesus' example. It is by entering into a deeper relationship with God through prayer that the spirit can be refreshed and needed grace can be obtained.

Fr Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons and HMPPS/NOMS Catholic Faith Adviser.

See. Pray. Act.

by Emerald O'Hanrahan

I often struggle with action: I'm a brilliant procrastinator. Recently, I've noticed that if I start my day with exercise and prayer or meditation, somehow the day flows a bit more easily, and I find that the things that need doing don't feel so overwhelming.

When I was a teenager, I had a long time away from the Church, and used to go to Quaker meetings. I was so inspired and nourished by their example.

They provided a wonderful blueprint for Spirit-led action, coming out of contemplation, quiet and discernment.

When I returned to my Catholic roots, it was such a joy to find the rich treasure we have in our faith: the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius; contemplative prayer; the writings and lives of Catholic mystic saints - all the many tools, inspiration and examples we have, helping us find strength and energy to take the action of God into the world.

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

Lord Jesus, teach me to pray.  Amen.

Roses may be prayers

by Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Many years ago I drove a pair of prospective buyers to the nearby home of a local millionaire. Such was not my usual occupation but, unlike the would-be buyers, I both knew where the house was situated and was also curious to see it for myself.

The householder was away from home, so his gardener conducted us around the property. We stopped beside a huge, magnificent rose garden. "The owner had these planted in a single day", he said, "so that his wife could come home to roses." He

laughed and pointed to one particularly beautiful bush. "This is the best of the lot - and was free with a tank of petrol."

We've all stood in a rose garden and admired the flowers' loveliness.

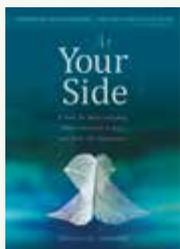
In some Latin American countries, people say that a rose is a prayer.

The next time you are surrounded by roses, pause and reflect that you may be encircled by prayers. God is good!

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

**"Each day we pray:
Lord, may your
kingdom come. With
these words, we want
our own lives and
actions to become a
hymn of praise."**

Pope Francis



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A collection of prayers that are deeply rooted in real life, often funny, sometimes poignant, always inspiring. They are accompanied by scripture quotes, thought-provoking insights from inspirational Christians and questions for deeper reflection.

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

Monday:
Genesis 1:1-19
Mark 6:53-56

Tuesday:
Genesis 1:20 - 2:4
Mark 7:1-13

Wednesday:
Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17
Mark 7:14-23

Thursday:
Genesis 2:18-25
Mark 7:24-30

Friday:
Genesis 3:1-8
Mark 7:31-37

Saturday:
Genesis 3:9-24
Mark 8:1-10

Next Sunday:
Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1
Mark 1:40-45

SUNDAY PLUS

Be touched by Jesus

The next step

by Claire Wright

Two things strike me in today's Gospel - the first is the physical healing of the leper. Having battled several serious illnesses throughout my twenties, I know what it is to beg God for healing. The leper's desperate words have been spoken by my own lips. And while I still wait on healing in some areas, I know what it is like to feel the touch of Jesus heal you miraculously. I know what it is like to have doctors dumbfounded as they abandon heavier treatments upon finding a cancer disappeared.

But the second thing is, in many ways, the hardest for me to hear. Jesus has just healed this

man - he is ready and willing to do anything Jesus asks of him. He longs to know what plans Jesus has for his newly healthy body. And then he hears from Jesus just one instruction. The next step. So often, God only shines a light on the next right thing, knowing that too much makes us proud, but the next step leads us back to him every time.

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.



Be healed

by Paul Higginson

We are all broken in some way - few of us are truly whole. This can be through such things as ill-health, poverty, bereavement, loneliness, anxiety, addiction, relationship difficulties, lack of confidence, or simply a sense of disappointment with how our lives have turned out. No doubt the leper in today's Gospel experienced many of these feelings. Yet the touch of Jesus was enough to bring about physical and spiritual healing - his leprosy went and he was no longer a social outcast. What are the areas in our lives that need the healing touch of Jesus? Place these before him in prayer today and ask for his blessing. Of course, the power of

Jesus can be passed on too - so we are challenged to become aware of the broken ones around us, and extend to them the hands that heal and bless, so that the love of God can spread from us to them.

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

“The proclamation of the Gospel of Life urgently requires that we as a community become a field hospital, ready to heal wounds and to offer always a path of reconciliation and forgiveness.”

Pope Francis

Be cleansed

by James Gallogly

Throughout the Gospels Jesus is approached with requests for healing. In those times leprosy was a particularly horrendous disease, sufferers not only experiencing great pain but also social isolation. We have learned something of that curse!

Jesus was generous in his response but also wary, conscious that his every move was scrutinised in order to trip him up. This caution though, never curtailed his will.

People who are unemployed desperately seek the healing of work. We are blessed to have the welfare state yet the process of “signing on” is challenging, bruising and occasionally humiliating. Yes,

we have a safety net, but there is damage in the fall.

The Gospels make abundantly clear that Jesus is always ready to answer when we call. Whether it is our health, our family or our livelihood, we need to constantly seek his touch. It becomes our challenge to fully accept the healing he has for us.

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

Loving Lord, teach me how to touch people's wounded hearts and offer them your healing. Amen.

Prayer for the anniversary year of *Laudato Si'*

Loving God, Creator of Heaven, Earth, and all therein contained. Open our minds and touch our hearts, so that we can be part of Creation, your gift. Be present to those in need in these difficult

times, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. Help us to show creative solidarity as we confront the consequences of the global pandemic. Make us courageous in embracing the changes required

to seek the common good. Now more than ever, may we all feel interconnected and interdependent. Enable us to succeed in listening and responding to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

May their current sufferings become the birth-pangs of a more fraternal and sustainable world. We pray through Christ our Lord, under the loving gaze of Mary Help of Christians. Amen.

Today:
Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46
1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1
Mark 1:40-45

Monday:
Genesis 4:1-15, 25
Mark 8:11-13

Tuesday:
Genesis 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 10
Mark 8:14-21

Wednesday:
Joel 2:12-18
2 Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Thursday:
Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Luke 9:22-25

Friday:
Isaiah 58:1-9
Matthew 9:14-15

Saturday:
Isaiah 58:9-14
Luke 5:27-32

Next Sunday:
Genesis 9:8-15
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:12-15

SUNDAY PLUS

The time is NOW!

Respond to Jesus

by Fr Paul Douthwaite



Today's Gospel passage immediately follows St Mark's opening verses in which he discloses not only Jesus' earthly

home as Galilee, but also the revelation of him as the Messiah and the Son of God. Clearly, the evangelist wished to impress upon his audience that Jesus

was at one and the same time deeply human and eternally divine. In this first adult encounter with Jesus after John has announced and baptised him, the focus is placed on the humanity of Jesus. In his forty-day experience in the wilderness we are told that he battled with human temptation, that which potentially leads to sin. However, Jesus' response to temptation and Satan was far from human.

In exiting the wilderness Jesus immediately embraces his divinity and his divine mandate. He approaches temptation and sin head-on and announces to the people "The time is NOW! Repent!" There is haste in his message and he demands an

immediate human response to the divine promise of a heavenly kingdom. Jesus, in his message of "repent", inherently links the living out of our finite human existence with a divine promise of immortality in the kingdom of heaven.

In announcing that "The time is NOW" Jesus warns us that if we hit out in temptation, if we rest on our laurels when we are tested then, as human beings, we will fall into sin. However, if we immediately respond to Jesus' divine invitation to repent, we will overcome temptation, avoid sin and inherit the promised kingdom.

Fr Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons and HMPPS/NOMS Catholic Faith Adviser.

Dust and ashes

by Katie Knight

Prisoners and guards gathered in the concentration camp of Görlitz in Silesia to hear the music of a French Jewish prisoner. Oliver Messiaen created his *Quartet for the End of Time* in 1941 using the only four instruments available: a cello, a piano, a violin and a clarinet – and, as a moment of hope, inserted birdsong into his score.

Similarly, Vedran Smailović will forever be remembered as "the cellist of Sarajevo". When a mortar round killed twenty-two people in a food queue in a ruined Sarajevo marketplace, he courageously performed Albinoni's *Adagio in G Minor* for twenty-two days, one day for each victim, ignoring the sniper fire aimed at him.

Lent is a time of dust and ashes, but it is also – uniquely – hope-filled.

Messiaen and Smailović longed for new life amidst chaos and despair. Our own chaos is different from theirs. We have forty days in which to do a bit of spring-cleaning in our hearts and lives. Lent prepares for Easter.

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

"Kingdom of heaven is our common goal, a goal that cannot be only about tomorrow. We have to implore it and begin to experience it today, amid the indifference that so often surrounds and silences the sick and disabled, the elderly and the abandoned, refugees and immigrant workers."

Pope Francis

A time for every purpose...

by Max Mathews

Just as a new year can encourage fresh resolutions, the Lenten period is an opportunity to give our spiritual lives a spring-clean.

Lent begins with the symbolic placement of ashes, representing penance, and dust across our foreheads.

The ash tells us to repent: to turn away from our sometimes messy and sinful ways towards God's ways. Peter describes this act of repentance as "the pledge of a good conscience given to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ".

Similarly, the priest telling us that we are dust and to dust we shall return is less a reminder of our own mortality than

encouragement to make changes now rather than later.

When Jesus returns from the wilderness, he urges us to repent and believe in the Gospel: so faith in the good news is part of this transformation but we are also called to translate that faith into tangible action in our own lives.

There's no time to waste – so start now!

Max Mathews is a young Catholic student of journalism.

Jesus, "now" can be messy. Help me to use my "now" during Lent so that my tomorrow will be totally yours  Amen.

Today:
Genesis 9:8-15
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:12-15

Monday:
1 Peter 5:1-4
Matthew 16:13-19

Tuesday:
Isaiah 55:10-11
Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday:
Jonah 3:1-10
Luke 11:29-32

Thursday:
Esther 4:17
Matthew 7:7-12

Friday:
Ezekiel 18:21-28
Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday:
Deuteronomy 26:16-19
Matthew 5:43-48

Next Sunday:
Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18
Romans 8:31-34
Mark 9:2-10

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“Only” Jesus?

Jesus-focused faith



by Claire Wright

As I write this, the coronavirus pandemic is at its peak and there is no Mass for us to go to on Sunday. During this time, we have been forced to radically re-think “church” and how to be Christians in the midst of the craziness.

Our family has instead been enjoying the ministries appearing online: live-streamed Mass, children’s liturgies run from living rooms and family worship interrupted by shouting kids. It is strange, messy and real. I miss the Mass, church and community. But there has been a realisation for us in this time that we have sometimes relied more on those things than on Jesus himself.

In today’s Gospel, Peter witnessed a moment of community between heaven and earth, almost as though he were at a Mass. And it is good, beautiful and holy. But when he suggests that they stay there forever rather than go back into the world to their daily, messy lives, the moment passed and they found themselves alone with Jesus.

As this pandemic passes, I hope we remember this - that we will hear Jesus call us out to take our faith beyond church-focus and make it Jesus-focused, knowing that he is with us in every moment of our lives.

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.

Total Jesus in a total way

by Des Kelly

In the Gospel we see pre-resurrection events like the transfiguration or Jesus walking on water. In these events we have to let go of Jesus as true man on one level before we can accept and believe in Jesus as true God. On Mount Tabor Peter, James and John, in a moment of ecstasy, saw Jesus when his divinity was revealed. They wanted to stay on the mountain, especially when they heard the voice from the cloud say, “This is my Son the beloved. Listen to him.” Then, when they looked around, no one was there but Jesus. They were told to tell no one what they had seen and

heard until Jesus had risen from the dead. This event revealed the total Jesus in a total way: true God and true man. Today how do people tend to relate to Jesus in their prayer life - more as God or man?

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

“Our faith is in the God of the living. Christ is alive and at work in our midst, leading all of us to the fullness of life. He is alive and wants us to be alive; he is our hope.”

Pope Francis

The more I see you...

by James Gallogly

Seeing is apparently believing. Peter might have taken issue with this as he reflected on the events of the transfiguration.

Peter, James and John, though chosen from among the disciples and trusted by Jesus, would be found wanting. Their mountain top experience was one of rapture, this is it! Peter rushes in and wants to mark this moment formally. He believes, as fleetingly as the moment allows, that they can stay in the moment of triumph. Their work is done.

Peter, like us on so many occasions, is missing the point.

Yes, there are grace-filled moments, some of them incredibly intoxicating. So often sacramental celebrations can be truly delightful high points, but how long does the fervour last? How much confirmation confidence survives secondary school?

When we emerge from the shadows are we lost or do we radiate the light of Christ? As the hymn puts it, “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

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

My Lord and my God, I want to see you. Open my eyes and my heart. Amen. 

Today:
Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18
Romans 8:31-34
Mark 9:2-10

Monday:
Daniel 9:4-10
Luke 6:36-38

Tuesday:
Isaiah 1:10, 16-20
Matthew 23:1-12

Wednesday:
Jeremiah 18:18-20
Matthew 20:17-28

Thursday:
Jeremiah 17:5-10
Luke 16:19-31

Friday:
Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28
Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Saturday:
Micah 7:14-15, 18-20
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Next Sunday:
Exodus 20:1-17
1 Corinthians 1:22-25
John 2:13-25