



# THE LORD'S DAY

## 4th Sunday of Year A

The Watermead Apostolate offers this weekly page as a helpful guide and background to the readings used at the Catholic Mass for each Sunday of the Year.

The reading guides were written by Fr John Daley (RIP) who served as a Catholic priest in various parishes around the UK and world for 53 years.

Fr John co-founded Watermead in 1992 as a voice for people who wished to share understanding of living their faith through their God-given gifts and talents.

'The Lord's Day' incorporates some of those voices in this presentation and also through its many publications ~ books, resources, cards, music, etc.

Further information on what we produce, our story and the mission of our Christian apostolate can be found by visiting [www.watermead-apostolate.co.uk](http://www.watermead-apostolate.co.uk)

### First Reading

**Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13**

Zephaniah was prophet during the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC). The power of the Assyrian Empire is waning, the king, Josiah, is faithful to God, and the prophet hopes for a renewed religious and spiritual life of the people.

Zephaniah seems to be of royal descent (chapter 1 v.1) and therefore aware of the failings of the shepherd-kings who had ruled God's kingdoms. Chapter 1 is a powerful judgment on the world's idolatry - false worship, political power, wealth and non-belief - and Zephaniah promises the day of the Lord will come.

Chapter 2 condemns the pagan nations - west, east, south and north! - and promises the vengeance of the Lord against them; but the chapter begins with a gentle call, in the opening verses of today's reading, to the humble and lowly. The second part of the reading continues that gentle call in a promise of peace for Israel and for all who are faithful to the Lord.

(Read on to the joyful verses that complete the book - the promise of the end of exile and the joy of coming home.)

### Second Reading

**1 Corinthians 1 : 26-31**

Paul has earlier established true wisdom (vv. 17-25) as the following of Christ - the foolishness and weakness of God being greater than human wisdom and strength. The Jews are horrified by a crucified Christ and the pagans consider the crucifixion madness: but it is Christian faith.

Now Paul humbles the Corinthian community by reminding them how little they have in worldly terms - learning, influence, family importance. It is a deflating paragraph but reflects the lesson that Paul had needed to learn personally.

He had learned not to preach the message of Christ in terms of the world's wisdom but in terms of the cross. He had mistakenly tried to speak in terms of philosophy and to impress the learned, but had been rejected. He needed to learn by these failures to preach the simple truth of Christ crucified. If Christ could give the finality of his message in the failure of dying on a cross, only a short while after beginning his ministry, then Paul could have nothing better to offer!

Corinthians must learn from this truth. They were in danger of being pretentious, superficially superior: Paul brings them to Christ Jesus, true wisdom and holiness.

### Gospel Reading

**Matthew 5 : 1-12a**

Read Matthew 4 : 23-25. In those few lines is a whole apostolate to Galilee - many synagogues, preaching the kingdom, curing the sick (diseased, epileptics, paralysed) - over a large geographical area. In three lines!

Now the tempo slows. Matthew imagines Jesus withdrawing from the crowds to speak to the disciples. They retire to a hillside. Jesus offers his teaching in a series of paradoxes - blessings that seem not blessings, but need the vision of faith to be understood. Jesus is beginning to teach them this truth.

We are early in Jesus' ministry. The provoking reading here is not a teaching for a great crowd - it needs to be tried with a small number, honed by questions and discussion. Jesus is shaping the minds and spirits of his disciples.

Verses 11-12 prepare the disciples for persecution and death, just as the prophets of the Old Testament knew. The disciples are the new prophets, speaking the strange truths of God, echoing the Word of God.

See the comparative passage in Luke (6:20-23). Luke's setting is on level ground, there are four blessings, not eight, which are addressed directly to the listeners rather than given as great principles. Matthew and Luke seem to have looked at the same material but adapted it differently. The Beatitudes are promises, not teachings.

### Wisdom from the Saints



"By the  
intercession  
of  
St. Blaise ..."

### PARADOX

The Lord is strong and gentle;  
God is foolish and weak;  
Blessed are the poor.

This week I shall . . .  
have my throat blessed.

### People of God

**St. Brigid of Kildare** was born a few years after St. Patrick came to Ireland. Many stories are told about her. It is said that one day, after milking the cows, she gave the milk to some poor people - and then prayed to God to make up the loss! When she reached home the pail was full of milk. She was always kind to the poor. Indeed, it is said that her father wanted to find her a husband because she gave away too much of his goods! But Brigid wanted to belong only to Christ and became a nun, founding the first Irish convent.

A priest attending a synod held near Kildare said he'd had a vision that Our Lady would appear amongst them the following day. That day Brigid arrived with her companions and the priest exclaimed "There is the lady I saw in my dream!" Brigid thus came to be called "Mary of the Gael," that is, of the Irish. She was gentle, modest, very beautiful, and was said to be a living image of Mary the Mother of God. St. Brigid's feast day is 1st February.

### Questions of Faith

**Blessing of Throats.** Since the 16th century it is a custom to bless the throats of the faithful with two crossed candles on the feast of St. Blaise (3rd February). The legend is that during a Roman persecution the saint lived with wild beasts who came to him for healing. When he was captured and imprisoned he saved the life of a boy choking on a fish bone. Devotion to the saint and prayers for the healing of throats began. "Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may you be healed of all sickness of the throat."