



THE LORD'S DAY

20th Sunday of Year C

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

First Reading

Jeremiah 38 : 4-6, 8-10

Today's is a strange and cruel reading. The year is 588 BC, only a year before the defeat and capture of Jerusalem. Jeremiah and Baruch (another prophet) have been warning against the making of political alliances, advising that trust in the guidance of God must be supreme. King Zedekiah is willing to listen, but the powerful courtiers are not.

As chapter 38 opens Jeremiah is in prison, accused of destroying the morale of the people and soldiers by speaking of the certain victory of the Chaldeans over Judah. He has the king's favour but the king is too weak to protect the prophet, though he has alleviated his sufferings.

Today's reading tells of the decision to kill Jeremiah. An Ethiopian slave (Cush was the ancient name of today's Ethiopia) bravely speaks up for Jeremiah and the king takes new courage, releases the prophet and gives him protection. Ebea-melech, the slave, is the hero of the reading. Read on to the following few verses to understand his moral courage and his loyalty to king and prophet.

Second Reading

Hebrews 12 : 1-4

Chapters 10 and 11 have discussed the lesser salvific value of Old Testament sacrifice in contrast to Christ's single sacrifice, and developed the theme of faith as found in the Christian's own individual life - and in the lives of illustrious men throughout the centuries, from Abel to the prophets. Chapter 11 finishes with the acknowledgement of the holy men who lived by faith and were unafraid to die for their beliefs.

Now we reach chapter 12. The heroes of the past are called as witnesses to encourage us to live as they did. Their example inspires us. But an even greater inspiration is offered in the person of Jesus whose bearing of cross and crucifixion brought him to God's right hand - and offers us the way to follow him.

The race we run is not one of speed but of endurance. Victory is finishing the race - not simply being the one who finishes first. Thus the Christian race is for everyone to win. Birth begins, death ends and faith supports the Christian life. The sufferings we may have to endure will not be as great as Christ's, Hebrews seems to say (surely far greater for many Christians, our human history seems to record?), but his example gives us courage.

Gospel Reading

Luke 2 : 49-53

Today's reading will increase awareness of hurt in many families. Tensions between in-laws are a common feature of family hurt, and faith, finance, personalities, jealousies also bring hurt and division. We know this. For Jesus to seem to suggest that he wants such tensions is startling. The same teaching in Matthew's Gospel (10:34-36) is even cruder - where Jesus seems to make it his purpose to foment division. What does he mean?

The first Christians were Jews, faithful to the law of Moses, observing the Sabbath as well as the Lord's Day, worshipping at the Temple as well as meeting for the Eucharist. That tensions would arise was inevitable, families coming to favour the Church more than the Jewish way of life, and homes would have become divided.

Paul's letters reflect those tensions and he would certainly have been a focus for them, he being a persecutor of Christian who then joined the Christian community! He must have been hated by Christians and Jews, and there would have been others like him.

Did Paul's own Pharisee family know the sort of divisions that today's Gospel reading foresees? How savagely families might have resented some of their members becoming Christians, brother against brother, the younger generation against the older, even wives against husbands (did that happen to St. Paul?).

The fire Jesus brought to the earth (v.49) has blazed for over 2,000 years. Fire destroys as well as purifies. What does Jesus mean?

Wisdom from the Saints



"Our divisions prevent our neighbours from hearing the Gospel as they should"

Pope John Paul II

TENSIONS

The Prophet suffers;
The Christian endures;
The family suffers.

This week I shall . . .
pray for persecuted Christians

People of God

The boy attended a Catholic Secondary school. His Christian family wanted a religious and moral dimension to his education. As he grew in understanding of the Catholic faith so he wanted to become a Catholic. In the 6th Form he did - and the headmaster spoke of his delight before the whole school. But the boy's parents suffered. Their Christian family could not accept that one of them should become a Catholic and he and his parents were cut out of family life. Even when the parents were dying none of the family came near. The years of bitterness reflected the pain in today's Gospel, religious belief dividing families . . .

The Catholic girl did not marry in a Catholic church but in another Christian church. None of the Catholic family attended the wedding - following the advice of their local priest. Years of sadness followed which, again, reflected the divisions of today's Gospel.

Questions of Faith

Religious Divisions. We call God "Our Father" and believe all the human family to be the children of God. It is impossible to understand the hatred that people who believe in God can have for others who express that belief in a different way. We understand why the world looks - and then looks away with disgust.