

Friday 1 May

Matthew 13:54-58 • St Joseph the Worker (Optional Memorial)

Today we celebrate the feast day of St Joseph. The New Testament is largely silent about this great saint of the Church, apart from his significant role in the nativity narratives and the account of when Jesus went missing on the family's annual visit to the Passover in Jerusalem and was only found three days later in the temple courts, listening to the teachers and asking them questions (Luke 2:41-52). We tend to assume that St Joseph died early in Jesus' life leaving Mary a widow, but his influence on Jesus cannot or should not be underestimated.

St Joseph was chosen, along with Mary, to be Jesus' foster parent. On discovering that the young woman to whom he was betrothed was pregnant, he displayed a remarkably noble and dignified disposition. Described by Matthew as a 'righteous man', he determined to divorce her quietly to avoid her public disgrace. However, God spoke to him through a dream and from that moment on his 'Yes' to God was the same 'Yes' as Mary's (see Matt. 1:19-24). His faith united with her faith in a special and unique way. Deeply moved by the witness of St Joseph, Pope John Paul II wrote *Redemptoris custos* as a tribute to him.

St Joseph not only watched over Mary and Jesus, he watches over the whole Church. Like the patriarch Abraham, he is a model of faith. Confronted with bewildering circumstances, St Joseph freely committed himself entirely to God, submitting his intellect and will to God's revelation. Just as God had called Abraham to hope against hope that his obedience to God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac would bring blessing, so too St Joseph hoped against hope that Mary's pregnancy was from the Lord.

We will never know the struggle he went through to arrive at this knowledge of faith. It cannot have been easy – he must have thought the worst. He might have even entertained the idea that Mary had been unfaithful, or that she had been raped or taken against her will. His reason, not yet touched by revelation, could only construe these answers. And yet when enlightened by the Holy Spirit he became the one chosen by the Father to be the earthly guardian of the Saviour and the earthly protector of Mary. Could there be a nobler or higher calling? Today we turn to St Joseph and ask for his intercession. St Joseph, pray for us.

Acts 13:26-33 • Psalm 2:6-11 • John 14:1-6

Proper of Saints: Matthew 13:54-58

Saturday 2 May

(Memorial) St Athanasius • John 14:7-14

St John's Gospel is an amazing and wonderful revelation into the mind and heart of God. Theologians speak of this Gospel as having a 'high' Christology – by which they mean that the accent is very much on the divinity of Christ and less on his humanity. This is not to say that John does not unpack Jesus' humanity, but rather that he offers us an insight into how Jesus, the Son of God, lived, moved and had his being during his time on earth. Scholars tell us that John was well into his nineties when he finished his Gospel, and it is therefore clear that it was the fruit of many years of prayer, reflection and meditation.

One of the things that really strikes you when you read St John's Gospel is Jesus' relationship with his Father, and that is what comes across in our reading today. We tend to think in terms of us having a relationship with God – which we do – but there are three persons in the Godhead and we are called to have a relationship with all three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is a way in which our Christian lives are to be rooted in a living and lively sense that God is Father. However, one of the mysteries of faith is that the Spirit enlightens our hearts and our minds to grasp that to have seen Jesus is to have seen the Father. Jesus reveals the beauty of God as Father, and the Father reveals the beauty of Jesus, the Son.

Jesus invites his disciples to ask him for anything – but what did he mean by this? One thing he certainly meant is that we can ask for the gift of the Spirit to open up our hearts and minds, our vision, our imagination, our prayer, our reading of the Scripture, our receiving of the Eucharist, so that we come to a deeper knowledge of the love of God the Father. We can tend to think of ourselves having to submit our wills to God (and in a way we do). However, it is more than this because what we learn to do more than anything else is to surrender our whole being, including our will, to God's love. The Father does not want to crush our wills but rather melt and break our hearts with his love and mercy.

Heavenly Father, by your grace give me the strength to live as Jesus lived.

Acts 13:44-52 • Psalm 97(98):1-4

John 14:7-14

Sunday 3 May

John 15:1-8 • Fifth Sunday of Easter

For some being a believer is like belonging to a club. But the Church is not a club. For some being a believer is like being part of a clique. But the Church is not a clique. For some belonging to the Church is like being a member of a society or an organization. But the Church is not a society or an organization. The Church is, actually, unlike any club, clique, organization or society on earth, because the Church is the mystical body of Christ. When we are baptized we become members not of a club, clique, society or organization but of the body of Christ.

Now, of course, the Church can and does operate like a club, society or organization, for she, like us all, is always in need of renewal and reform. Many parishes are cliquey, they are hard to break into, they are suspicious of ‘outsiders’ and they impose all kinds of silly rituals of who is ‘in’, who is ‘out’, and who is part of the ‘inner ring’. There is a kind of unspoken hierarchy – Father at the top, followed by those who lead this or that parish organization, and so on.

A layman, not a Catholic, unaware of titles and so forth, rang up his local parish, asking to speak to ‘Chris’, the parish priest. His innocent request was rebuked harshly by the parish secretary, who retorted, ‘His name is Father Chris to you.’ This poor layman had not yet earned the right to be on first-name terms with the parish priest! This seemingly minor error of inhospitality put this young man off the church.

The sad truth is that many people experience the Church as a cold and rather cantankerous organization and not the mystical body of Christ. So how can we change that? We change – for all change comes through conversion – by learning to ‘remain in Christ’. We learn to walk with the Lord during our day and hold onto his word. This is how we produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control and gentleness, and against these there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23) – there is no limit to love, mercy or kindness.

Lord, teach me to remain in you – to be still and know that you are God and that by remaining in you I produce much fruit for the kingdom and much blessing in my life.

Acts 9:26-31 • Psalm 21(22):26-32

1 John 3:18-24 • John 15:1-8

Monday 4 May

(Feast Day) The English Martyrs • John 14:21-26

‘I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you’ (v. 18 NIV).

We can often feel alone and succumb to thinking that no one cares or understands. We can feel lonely and isolated even when surrounded by friends and loved ones. Why is this? It is hard to say for sure but we are wounded by sin and each of us carries our own burdens and baggage. Often more than we realize, we lean towards a kind of self-pity, a negative or pessimistic outlook on life. This is why living a life in the power of the Holy Spirit involves us in a battle for the mind. Paul taught that transformation and renewal come through a transformation and renewal of the mind – in other words, changing the way we think and thinking with God.

The way to think with God is by becoming familiar with what God thinks and knowing his mind. We do this by reading the sacred Scriptures for they reveal the mind of God. What revelation makes clear to us is this very simple truth: God has poured out the Holy Spirit into our lives – we receive this grace primarily through the sacrament of baptism and confirmation on repenting and turning back to God. The truth is we are not alone – we have the Holy Spirit. The truth is we don’t need to feel isolated or lonely or carry around hurts, wounds and baggage because the Holy Spirit can heal our wounds and lead us to fullness of life. We are a people of the Holy Spirit.

How important a role does the Holy Spirit play in your life? Do you turn to the Spirit during your day? Do you think of the Holy Spirit as your Counsellor, your Advocate and the Wisdom of God? The Spirit moves us to ask ourselves such questions because this kind of spiritual curiosity allows us to hear the Lord speak to us. We are never alone. We have the Holy Spirit who is closer to us than we are to ourselves. The Holy Spirit knows and understands us more than we know and understand ourselves. The Holy Spirit is with us, even unto the end of time.

Lord, on this feast day of the English Martyrs, may I turn anew and afresh to the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, who guides me and gives me strength.

Acts 14:5-18 • Psalm 113(115):1-4, 15-16 • John 14:21-26

(Proper of Saints: Acts 7:55-60 • Ps 30(31):3-8, 17-21 • Mt 10:17-22)

Tuesday 5 May

John 14:27-31

In the early 1960s a movement began in the Catholic Church called the Charismatic Movement. It was a stream of renewal with a new emphasis or accent on the work, action and person of the Holy Spirit. Prayer meetings and conferences sprang up at which the gifts of the Holy Spirit including tongues, prophecy and healings were manifest. It was as if those caught up in this blessing had discovered the Holy Spirit for the first time.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, co-equal with the Father and the Son. As believers we profess our faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We cannot say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). It is the Spirit living in us that makes it possible for us to call God "'Abba", Father' (Gal. 4:6). It is the Spirit who touches our hearts and minds to bring us to a knowledge of faith. This knowledge or understanding is the grace of revelation as the Spirit reveals what 'flesh and blood' or reason alone cannot grasp.

The Spirit is a fire. Without the Spirit the truths of faith can remain on ice, frozen. With the Spirit these truths burn in our hearts. Although sometimes the Charismatic Movement can be perceived as a movement which stresses the spiritual gifts, in many ways its major fruit has been passion for God. However, the greatest gift and anointing we receive from the Spirit is the ability to proclaim with confidence and joy that Jesus Christ is Lord.

As we journey towards the feast of Pentecost we can begin to expect and anticipate a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Pope Francis is very receptive to the grace of the Charismatic Movement and seems relaxed and comfortable when people pray over him, asking for God's blessing and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the Pope was prayed for by members of the Charismatic renewal as he made his way to the Conclave where he would be chosen to be Pope. Little did he know then that this would be God's plan for his life! Perhaps we should all ask for prayer for the Holy Spirit to reveal more of his plan for our lives – God is, after all, the God of surprises.

Lord, send forth your Holy Spirit and renew not just the face of the earth but my lukewarm heart.

Acts 14:19-28 • Psalm 144(145):10-13, 21

John 14:27-31

Wednesday 6 May

John 15:1-8

Most of us, even if we are not enthusiastic gardeners, understand the need to prune trees and manage our foliage (so to speak). St John is the only Evangelist who uses the analogy of the vine and its branches to draw attention to our call to holiness. Now holiness isn't really a la mode these days – there is an undercurrent that too much piety makes us all pious, and God forbid we should be too pious! Even clergy can sometimes fall into this trap – they can be reluctant to pray or take the lead in this regard for fear of appearing too intense or even, hard to believe, religious. They would prefer to be 'down with the kids' and showing us all how real they are and that prayer or reading the Scripture is for their private lives, their private faith. And, of course, where clergy lead, lay people follow. However, we need to change the way we think because God is calling us to be holy. And for the very simple reason that he is holy.

But what is holiness? And how do we become holy? The key to holiness is to remain in God's love and we do this through prayer. We can only bear fruit for God by drawing from the Vine, and we draw from the Vine, our Lord Jesus Christ, when we take time to pray and read his Word. We can reduce the Christian life to doing things and neglect to rest in God's presence. But it is when we rest in God's presence and learn to hear his voice that we begin to bear fruit, fruit that will last. This is the fruit of peace, of love in our hearts, and a living and warm sense that our sins are forgiven. Rooted in prayer we can then serve the Lord and learn what it means to be holy.

It is easy for lay people to think that holiness is more the reserve and preserve of the religious – those who have dedicated their lives to God and the Church. Certainly, those who have been called to this vocation must surely, and above all, be witnesses of a life given over to prayer and must truly bear witness to the peace of Christ. This is true – but just as surely and just as truly, so must we.

Lord, teach me today to remain in your love and so learn to live a holy and joy-filled life.

Acts 15:1-6 • Psalm 121(122):1-5

John 15:1-8

Thursday 7 May

John 15:9-11

The Christian life is about remaining in God's love so that we may have complete joy. It is about living and moving and having our being in a deep sense of being loved by God the Father. The Holy Spirit moves within us so that we cry out to God, 'Abba, Father'.

This idea is rather a shocking one to Muslims and Jews. For them God, the Creator, cannot be addressed in such a personal and intimate way. The hallmark of our faith, however, is a living and personal relationship with God. But how true is this for you? Do you live and move and have your being in a dynamic awareness of God's love for you?

After Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta's death it was revealed that she experienced God as remote and far from her, although this hadn't always been the case. It would appear that the more she grew in holiness, the greater this sense of God's absence intensified. Many commentators were quick to say that this proves there is no God – at times Blessed Mother Teresa's suffering meant that she herself was tempted to believe this, too. Her faith, however, taught her to cling to the Lord because Christianity has a long tradition of holy men and women undergoing something of a 'dark night of the soul', when they feel as though God has abandoned them.

Not many of us will undergo this kind of suffering but many of us can feel that God is remote, when in fact he is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Knowing the love of God is not a passive process – it is about remaining in God's love. And we remain in God's love by constantly recalling and reminding ourselves of it. This is why prayer is really at the heart of our relationship with God. In prayer we engage in this process of remaining, recalling and reminding ourselves of God's love for us.

Here are two scriptures which will help us today to remain in God's love: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16); 'But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8).

Lord, teach me to walk in your love and daily remind myself of the love of God poured out upon me by the Holy Spirit.

Acts 15:7-21 • Psalm 95(96):1-3, 10

John 15:9-11

Friday 8 May

John 15:12-17

Where as the English language has only one word for 'love', New Testament Greek has four different words, distinguishing four different types of love: eros (sexual love), storge (family affection), philia (friendship) and agape (sacrificial love). All four loves are wonderful and enrich our lives, giving them purpose and direction. In this sense we were born to love.

Of the four loves, the New Testament focuses most on agape, which always involves self-sacrifice, a laying down of one's life for others. It is this kind of love to which the Holy Spirit calls us because it most resembles the love God has for us. The supreme expression and act of love is the death of Christ on the cross. If you want to contemplate love, pick up a crucifix and meditate on the image of Christ crucified.

The greatest tool of evangelism we have is our capacity for love. We can do this or that course, we can understand the kerygma and have a heart to proclaim the gospel, but not have a heart on fire with the love of God. The Jesuit priest and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote: 'The day will come when after harnessing space, the winds, the tides and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And on that day, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire.' Paul's hymn to love in 1 Corinthians 13 captures a similar idea: we can do many amazing things for God – even move mountains – but without love, what does it profit?

So we need a heart on fire with love – love for God and love for others. How then do we get a heart on fire like this? The answer is easier than we think: we must want it and desire it and cry out to God for it. For we cannot love God or our neighbour simply in and of our own strength; it is impossible. We need God's grace. What is impossible for us is possible for God. We are called to spread love, not hate, forgiveness not resentment, light not darkness, mercy not revenge, and service not selfishness.

'Spread love everywhere you go. First of all in your own home, let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.' (Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

Acts 15:22-31 • Psalm 56(57):8-12

John 15:12-17

Saturday 9 May

John 15:18-21

Throughout history right up to today Christians have been persecuted and even put to death for their faith. We are blessed to live in a society that does not torture, imprison and execute believers. Nevertheless, as our society becomes increasingly secular, the problem isn't so much persecution as an odd combination of hostility and indifference. Though we may not be risking our lives, it takes courage to stand up for the truth of the gospel. And, certainly, the recent child abuse scandals and stories of corruption do little to stem the flow of ridicule, mockery and antipathy that is directed towards people of faith.

Jesus, however, warned his disciples that believing in him would invite hate and not love. If the Master was hated and despised, then so will we be. Peter wrote the following words of encouragement to believers in the first century who were undergoing a period of intense persecution: 'Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed' (1 Pet. 4:12-13). This echoes, of course, the teaching of the Beatitudes: 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven' (Matt. 5:11-12 NIV).

To think and act like this we need a revolution in the way we think and act. Only by the grace of the Holy Spirit are we able to rejoice and give praise to God when we are mocked or ridiculed or teased for our faith or, worse, excluded, taunted and ostracized. By God's grace we can carry and conduct ourselves with dignity when we undergo any kind of persecution or suffering for our faith.

Sometimes this suffering and persecution can even come from those within the Church. Enthusiasm, a thirst for holiness, a love for the Scriptures and a seriousness about one's faith is not always met with a warm embrace, even at parish level. Those who set out to follow Christ encounter persecution in many different ways and many different places.

Lord, teach me to bless if cursed, to pray for those who persecute me, and to give thanks and praise to God for counting me worthy to suffer for his name.

Acts 16:1-10 • Psalm 99(100):1-5

John 15:18-21

Sunday 10 May

(B) Sixth Sunday of Easter • John 15:9-17

‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you’ (v. 9). We may be so familiar with these words of Jesus from John’s Gospel that we fail to take the opportunity to contemplate them and consider how amazing they truly are. The perfect and infinite love that exists between God the Father and God the Son is the same love that Jesus has for us. This revelation is enough, if we truly grasped it, to get us hopping, skipping and, yes, even jumping down the street. Winning the biggest lottery win ever couldn’t even compare with the treasure and riches of knowing that Jesus has as much love for us as the Father has for him.

The challenge with which this amazing truth presents us is whether we allow it to touch our lives and actually excite us? Do we allow it to permeate into our very being and give us joy? Understanding Jesus’ relationship with his Father is the key to faith, because Jesus was guided and led by his Father every moment of his life. Through the grace of baptism we become partakers in the divine life: we share in some way in the life of the Blessed Trinity. This is our birth right, if you like, the fruit of our baptism. Our vocation is, then, to grow and deepen in the lively awareness that we are loved by each person of the Trinity.

We can often feel daunted because we think we have to get our minds around the mystery of the blessed Trinity when the truth is that it is impossible for us to do so. What we do have to do, though, is get our hearts around it and immerse ourselves in it. The Bible presents the Trinity as a fact; it does not explain it. And since this is the case, we can only pray for the light and revelation of grace to enlighten us and lead us into a deeper knowledge of the Father’s love for us. All we need to do is simply pray: ‘Father, show us your love.’ Knowing that we are but flesh and blood, God delights to give us the grace of revelation.

O Lord God Almighty, I bless you and glorify you through the eternal and heavenly High Priest Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, to whom be glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. Amen.

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48 • Psalm 97(98):1-4

1 John 4:7-10 • John 15:9-17

Monday 11 May

John 15:26–16:4

How well do you know the Holy Spirit? Do you call upon the Holy Spirit during your day? Or do you think about God the Father and God the Son before you call upon or think about the Holy Spirit? These are important questions to ask ourselves because they challenge us and move us to acknowledge the role of the third person of the Blessed Trinity.

The Holy Spirit could only be sent because Jesus was glorified on the cross – without the cross the Holy Spirit could not have been sent. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us and we receive the Spirit both at baptism and in a special strengthening way when we are confirmed. Today, across the world, there are as many as 100 million people who speak of having received the baptism in the Holy Spirit over a period in the Church's history when Christians have experienced a renewing of their relationship with God and a fresh awareness of God the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Counsellor. He said, 'when the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father...he will bear witness to me' (v. 26). The Counsellor has come and does testify about Jesus. Indeed, without his help and grace we would not even be able to say, 'Jesus is Lord.' We don't turn to the Holy Spirit often enough. This failure on our part is at the root of many of our problems – we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us more and he will. St John Vianney once said: 'Those who are led by the Holy Spirit have true ideas: that is why so many ignorant people are wiser than the learned. The Holy Spirit is light and strength.' We need to grow in a more lively awareness of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

'There is a gentle breeze if we can but catch it, which blows all the time to help us on our journey through life to our final destination. That breeze is the Holy Spirit. But the wind cannot be caught or used unless the sail is hoisted, and the hoisting is our task. We must be on the watch, ready to recognize it and play our part. God does hold us, and will lead us, if we want it; but we must want it.' (Cardinal Basil Hume)

Acts 16:11-15 • Psalm 149:1-9

John 15:26–16:4

Tuesday 12 May

John 16:5-11

Many today, particularly social commentators in the media, accuse Christians, and especially Catholics, of having put on them the burden of sin and guilt; now they are free of faith, they declare, they no longer feel guilty about the way they live. While they would argue that guilt is a bad thing, Christians believe that it has a positive role to play in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts us of guilt and shows us our sin. Yet we need always to distinguish between the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the condemnation of the accuser. God does not condemn us or accuse us; rather when we sin, the Holy Spirit creates a sense of guilt within us. We don't understand how bad sin is for us – if we put our hand in the fire, anyone who cared about us would rush to stop us injuring ourselves. Sin is not dissimilar to putting one's hand in the fire – if we sin, we and others get burnt!

We need the help of the Holy Spirit even to see our sin in the first instance. Why is this? It is because sin has a blinding effect on our lives. We easily get trapped in patterns of sin and ways of thinking which are harmful and destructive, and we are often blind to their influence and power. The more obvious sins we can avoid (e.g. adultery, fornication, murder, theft) because not only are some of these against the moral law, they are also against the law of the land! However, the Spirit wants to show us those weaknesses and failings which prevent us from enjoying life to the full. We should welcome and invite the Holy Spirit into our lives and ask him to show us our sin.

Our society has become very coarse and crude – we like to think we are broad-minded and tolerant, but in truth we have little by little become a rude and disrespectful society with scant regard for the sacred: the sanctity of marriage, the teaching of the Church and religious freedom. The Holy Spirit sets us free from sin, evil and unrighteousness. We need only to turn to him to know his power and the grace to live as children of God and enjoy the freedom and liberation this brings.

‘There is only one thing more dangerous than sin – the murder of man's sense of sin.’
(Pope John Paul II)

Acts 16:22-34 • Psalm 137(138):1-3, 7-8

John 16:5-11

Wednesday 13 May

John 16:12-15

The knowledge of truth is essential for our spiritual and social well-being; it is life-giving and the source of our freedom (John 8:32). In our Western society truth has become elusive. Death rules as the looming finality for all human endeavours, and a plethora of lies and erroneous beliefs about life have excluded God's sovereignty and mercy. Self-gratification and personal ambition are portrayed as the only things that matter. The inevitable results have been widespread suffering, isolation and confusion. At such a time it is vital that we are able to discern truth, and particularly so for parents who are anxious to guide their children through the maze of modernity.

In an earlier discourse, Jesus had revealed himself as the truth (John 14:6). In today's Gospel he takes us more deeply into that revelation and associates truth with, in the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 'the mystery of God in himself' (para. 234). It is an amazing revelation, so simple and yet so profound, that God wishes to bring us into his truth and the reality of himself in the person of Jesus through the working of the Holy Spirit.

To know the truth is to know Jesus. He is the light and focus of our being and we have his promise that, as we seek him, his Spirit will reveal to us, in increasing measure, the reality of who he is. Our ability to discern truth from lies, light from darkness, is directly related to our understanding and grasp of who Jesus is.

It is the Father's plan of salvation that we be united with him as his children, in the image and likeness of his only-begotten Son, as nothing less than brothers and sisters of Jesus. As we grow in the truth of who we are, why we are, and how we are to lead our lives, we will bring glory to our heavenly Father.

We need to understand that the Holy Spirit is not third in the hierarchy of the Trinity – all three persons are equally God. The role of the Holy Spirit is to bring God's light into our minds so that we touch his reality. Let us turn to the Holy Spirit today, confident in the knowledge that the truth that is Jesus will illuminate every aspect of our lives.

Holy Spirit, deepen within me a knowledge of Jesus, that the light of his truth may guide me into all truth.

Acts 17:15, 22–18:1 • Psalm 148:1-2, 11-14

John 16:12-15

Thursday 14 May

(Feast) St Matthias • John 15:9-17

Love of God is inseparable from love of neighbour. John censures all who might think otherwise: ‘If any one says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar’ (1 John 4:20). The importance of our love for one another is such that Jesus does not ask, he commands it: in today’s Gospel he does so no less than three times. Obeying that command is the most challenging and critical issue each of us faces. All God’s commands are summarized in the need to love him and our neighbour – so it follows that love will be the basis of judgement.

We can love in a basic human way through the power inherent in our nature. Our tendency is to be highly selective and love only those we find agreeable, but as Jesus points out, ‘Do not even the tax collectors do the same?’ (Matt. 5:46). Even as we try to be more forthcoming in loving others we can find ourselves withdrawing in the face of personality clashes and resentments.

But we cannot take lightly this inability to love: we have to face up to the daunting truth that we are commanded to love as Jesus loved (and continues to love) us, which exactly mirrors the way in which the Father loves him.

To love in the way Jesus loved goes beyond human impulse; it is a different strain of love. It is the kind of love that goes the extra mile, always trusts, always hopes and overflows with charity. To love so that we are able to live for others and even lay down our lives for them is above our nature and beyond any teeth-gritting self-improvement crusade. It is supernatural.

Our capacity to love as God does was diminished at the Fall, but it can be restored: we can learn to love in his way. The key is in Jesus’ invitation to ‘abide in my love’ (John 15:9-10). We do this by spending time in his presence through prayer, feeding our minds with his word in Scripture, celebrating the Eucharist and serving the poor. As we do so, we shall come into contact with his Spirit and discover within a developing ability to love and reach out to others.

Lord Jesus, heal me of my self-interest and restore in me a heart as open to others as your own, that in loving them I may come to love you and bring glory to my heavenly Father.

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26 • Psalm 112(113):1-8

John 15:9-17

Friday 15 May

John 16:20-23

C S Lewis wrote, 'Joy is the serious business of heaven.' If the world understood that to follow Jesus is to know unimaginable, beautiful and glorious joy our pews would be full and our churches overflowing. Sadly we and many others don't always associate Christian faith with joy – duty, yes, morality, certainly, and religious obligation, most definitely, but joy?

Jesus helps us understand his teaching by drawing a parallel with childbirth. If men had babies there would without doubt be fewer children in the world! However, the pain of childbirth gives way to great joy once the baby is born – parents, grandparents, relatives and the whole community rejoice in the new life. Similarly, following Jesus involves times of hardship and suffering: try dying to oneself (even for a nano-second) – it isn't easy!

To hold a Christian position on many issues is to invite ridicule, mockery and insult. Jesus never said it would be easy. In fact, in today's Gospel he uses rather sober words to describe what it means to follow him – no one wants to 'weep and lament' (v. 20). However, he promises that out of the trough of despair will come great joy.

The key to receiving this joy is to ask God for it. Have you ever asked God for joy? Today's your chance to step out in faith and take Jesus very seriously (remember joy is the serious business of heaven). Listen to the words of Jesus: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full' (vv. 23-24).

St Augustine of Hippo had the right idea; he positively encourages us to rejoice in salvation so that our joy will be complete:

'So, brethren, now let us sing Alleluia, not in the enjoyment of heavenly rest, but to sweeten our toil. Sing as travellers sing along the road: but keep on walking. Solace your toil by singing – do not yield to idleness. Sing but keep on walking. What do I mean by walking? I mean, press on from good to better. The apostle says there are some who go from bad to worse. But if you press on, you keep on walking. Go forward then in virtue, in true faith and right conduct. Sing up – keep on walking.'

Acts 18:9-18 • Psalm 46(47):2-7

John 16:20-23

Saturday 16 May

John 16:23-28

Growing in faith is a life-long task. It takes time, perseverance, energy, enthusiasm and dedication. Faith is an unusual virtue because if it's not growing it's dying. Faith is not meant to be something static and inert. It isn't something one can attend to (by being baptized or rededicating one's life to Christ, for example) and then discard. Faith isn't instant and shallow; rather it's a life-long, daily and single-minded commitment to grow and mature.

An ingredient of faith which is often lacking in believers is confidence. Jesus displayed great confidence in His Father. His existence was focused on pleasing and obeying the Father, and he encourages us to cultivate the same disposition. The kind of confidence Jesus counsels us to have towards his Father is rather shocking: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full' (vv. 23-24).

Sometimes we have to second-read scriptures because the full meaning and impact just goes above our heads. Jesus' words are shocking, aren't they? If we ask in Jesus' name, we will receive whatever we ask for and be blessed with indescribable joy. The key is asking the Father in Jesus' name. What kind of things should we ask the Father for in Jesus' name? A good question, and one which leads us to pause and reflect. One presumes (and it's a fair presumption) that one should ask for the kinds of things that are close to Jesus' heart. Jesus only wants what is good, wholesome and of eternal value. Our vision is rather more limited – we focus on the immediate.

Try asking the Father in Jesus' name for the following: a deeper understanding that God is our Father, a greater intimacy in prayer, a more profound love for Scripture, the ability to penetrate God's Word in a way which impacts our lives, the grace to love as Jesus loved – the list is endless and the possibilities for joy immense.

Heavenly Father, I call you 'Abba' and I delight in the freedom and confidence with which I can approach your love and mercy.

Acts 18:23-28 • Psalm 46(47):2-3, 8-10

John 16:23-28

Sunday 17 May

Mark 16:15-20 • Ascension of the Lord (B)

Today Jesus Christ our Lord went up to heaven: let our hearts go up with him. ‘Listen to the words of St Paul: “If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” Just as he ascended without leaving us, so too we are already with him in heaven, although his promises have not yet been fulfilled in our bodies.

‘Christ is now raised above the heavens; but he still experiences on earth whatever sufferings we his members feel. He showed that this is true when he called out from heaven: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” And: “I was thirsty and you gave me drink.”

‘Why then do we not exert ourselves on earth so as to be happy with him already in heaven through the faith, hope and charity which unite us with him? Christ, while in heaven, is also with us; and we, while on earth, are also with him. He is with us in his godhead and his power and his love; and we, though we cannot be with him in godhead as he is with us, can be with him in our love, our love for him.

‘He did not leave heaven when he came down to us from heaven; and he did not leave us when he ascended to heaven again. His own words show that he was in heaven while he was here: “No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven.”

‘He said this because of the unity between us and himself, for he is our head and we are his body. The words “no one but he” are true, since we are Christ, in the sense that he is the Son of man because of us, and we are the children of God because of him...

‘He came down from heaven, then, in mercy; and it is he alone who has ascended, since we are in him through grace. This is why no one has descended but Christ, and no one but Christ has ascended: not that the dignity of the head is fused with the body but that the body in its unity is not separated from its head.’ (St Augustine)

Acts 1:1-11 • Psalm 46(47):2-9

Ephesians 4:17-23 • Mark 16:15-20

Monday 18 May

(B) Seventh Week of Easter John 16:29-33

The penny has dropped and the disciples are beginning to grasp the bigger picture. Jesus has come from the Father. Jesus' relief is obvious as he cries, 'Do you now believe?', or in other words, 'You believe at last!' Jesus warns his disciples that a time is coming when trial, suffering and persecution will prevail; when anguish, trouble and strife will colour the landscape. Life, he warns, is going to get hard. However, despite their external troubles the disciples will have peace (v. 33).

If we are honest, our own experience can fall short of the promise of peace held out to us. The spiritual writer Evelyn Underhill, contrasting God's peace with our own experience, wrote perceptively:

God always works in tranquillity. Fuss and feverishness, anxiety, intensity, intolerance, instability, pessimism, and wobble, and every kind of hurry and worry – these, even on the highest level, are signs of the self-made and self-acting soul. The saints are never like that. They share the quiet and noble qualities of the great family to which they belong.

Our experience tends to be less peace and more wobble! Life does seem to be getting more frenetic. We rush about our daily lives, oppressed by the dictates of today and the demands of tomorrow. It is possible to manufacture a kind of peace, but it is not lasting: we find that it is there when things go well, but if things go badly we lose it. Jesus' peace can't be manufactured. Listen carefully to his promise: 'I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace' (v. 33).

Peace enters our souls as we take time to come into the Lord's presence. We enjoy his presence when we pray and silence our racing minds. Prayer affords us the opportunity to raise our vision and taste the goodness of the Lord. Most of us don't have the time to devote to long hours of prayer, but all of us can, if we try, make some time. When we pray we enter the clear air of God's presence by laying aside the demands of our day. Prayer allows us to take hold of the victory Jesus won for us.

Heavenly Father, help me today to realize that peace is not the absence of trouble but rather your presence with me. May I always know within me, amidst all the hustle and bustle of the world, the peace that comes from living in your presence.

Acts 19:1-8 • Psalm 67(68):2-7

John 16:29-33

Tuesday 19 May

John 17:1-11

Jesus is both priest and victim. He is about to die. He is the scapegoat par excellence through whom the triune God gave the world salvation. The priestly prayer he offers just before his passion and death is divided up – perhaps because of the length as well as the exceptional richness of the text – and presented to us over the next few days as Eastertide draws to a close. Spoken out of the very heart of Christ's intimate and inseparable relationship with the Father, it is profoundly moving and theologically challenging. There is one overarching message: that of Christ's union with the Father and God's oneness with humanity.

'Father, the hour has come' (v. 1) tells us that tension is mounting. 'Glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee' is a supreme expression of the identification of Father with Son and of the bond of union between them. Jesus has been preoccupied with his duty to carry out the Father's will. Though probably terrified, he keeps a clear focus. He prays for the strength to go through with the mission before him, sacrificing his life so that, in him, God's glory may be seen. Jesus reminds himself of the nature of his mandate: to give eternal life to all those entrusted to him. 'Eternal life' in this context means knowing God the Father and the One whom he sent. Jesus reminds the Father in prayer that he has done all that was asked of him in respect of his followers, and so begs the Father to glorify him in turn.

Jesus then prays for his disciples, who have kept God's word and know that it has come to them from God the Father through Jesus. Then, in a lovely filial touch, Jesus offers all that is his back to the Father from whom it came. This offering includes his beloved disciples. Acknowledging that it is in them that he has been glorified, Jesus begs God's protection of them, because they have believed and they belong to the Father. The passage ends with the uplifting hope that they may be one, as Father and Son are one.

Lord, help us to open our hearts to those around us on our pilgrim way, to accept their differences without judgement and to love them with your love, that the priestly prayer of Christ may be answered in our day: 'Father, may they be one, as we are one.'

Acts 20:17-27 • Psalm 67(68):10-11, 20-21

John 17:1-11

Wednesday 20 May

John 17:11-19

Close as Christ's relationship with the Father is, it is never exclusive. All who have believed and trusted are invited into the Trinitarian circle of love, and there is ample room for everyone.

Jesus lives constantly in the radiance of the Father's love and has spent three years preparing his disciples to do the same. He has missed no opportunities to teach them the ground rules of good Christian living, based on his knowledge of the Father's will. He has evangelized them in the best way: through oral tradition and experience. He now seems confident that they reflect some of the holiness of God himself. Jesus is entrusting his own priestly mission to his followers, and ultimately to the Church. We know that today the Church's mission is expressed in multifarious ways across the globe, in keeping with the various cultures which enshrine Christianity. But one aspect of our mission as Church is unchanging everywhere: the imperative to treasure and share the true knowledge of God and the commandment to love, as taught by Jesus.

How may we come to 'know' God, as Jesus prays that we will? For those of us struggling today to stay connected with the gospel message amid all the temptations and struggles of modern life, the answer lies in faithful and attentive reading of Scripture, the Word of God, and in ever greater fidelity to personal and communal prayer.

Some of these passages from John may seem abstract and inaccessible to the modern mind, but if we take time to ruminate on them, slowly reading and re-reading them and allowing the words gently to penetrate like soft rain on the sometimes hardened 'soil' of our hearts, we begin, little by little, to be drawn into the paschal mystery of Christ's life, death and resurrection. It is like being suffused with hope and joy or – to take Jesus' earlier image of the vine and the branches – staying in such close union with God that his life and love are coursing through our veins. It is a state of holiness attained by very few, but Jesus prayed this for us, and we need to make this prayer our own.

'Soul of Christ, sanctify me. Body of Christ, save me. Blood of Christ, inebriate me. Water from the side of Christ, wash me. Passion of Christ, strengthen me. O good Jesus, hear me. Within your wounds hide me. Permit me not to be separated from you.' (Anima Christi)

Acts 20:28-38 • Psalm 67(68):29-36

John 17:11-19

Thursday 21 May

John 17:20-26

Christ's priestly prayer reaches a climax in its last seven verses. Jesus has spoken of the union between himself and his Father, and of his communion with and great love for those to whom he has transmitted God's word. He has mentioned the 'holiness' of the ones set apart and consecrated in truth, and now takes the prayer one step further. 'I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one' (vv. 20-21). This plea for oneness is so that the whole world may take on board the union between Father and Son, believing in Jesus and in the One who sent him.

The priestly prayer is repetitive, but such theology not only bears repetition: it somehow requires it. How easy it would be for our eyes to glide over the print of this Gospel passage, or for its rather intangible and nebulous-sounding message to escape our ears! We might say that Jesus could have tried to express these truths in more everyday, user-friendly language, but what language could truly depict the mystery of God's love and its capacity endlessly to replicate itself, indomitably growing wherever planted, spreading everywhere, influencing always for good? Perhaps some truths are best left to speak for themselves, not once only, but repeatedly, until something begins to penetrate humanity's natural incomprehension of the things of God. It has been said that a mystery is not something we know nothing about, but something we do not know everything about.

One thing we do know is that Christ's prayer, uttered out of the very depths of his own commitment and of his human anxiety on the eve of his passion and death, was heeded by God and is still being answered today. Millions on God's earth have heard of and embraced Christianity, yet the Holy Father urges us not to be complacent, but to participate with ever-growing zeal in the new evangelization. Only then will the peace and unity for which Christ prayed reign in the hearts of all who love him.

Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, the Word-made-flesh, and for the Good News transmitted to us down the centuries. We thank you for the many Christian groups, movements and organizations in the world today. May we play our part in spreading the word, 'harnessing everything' for evangelization.

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11 • Psalm 15(16):1-11

John 17:20-26

Friday 22 May

John 21:15-19

The lakeside breakfast, around the charcoal fire, is a reminder of the occasion when Peter warmed himself at the fire just before he denied the Lord (John 18:18). The threefold question, 'Do you love me?', and Peter's threefold response, 'You know that I love you', are seen by most commentators as a symbolic undoing of Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. This is thus his rehabilitation to discipleship. The Lord's questioning establishes that he has the devoted love required of a disciple. The old Peter might have boasted that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples did, but the repentant, chastened Peter relies on the fact that Jesus knows what is in his heart, that he does indeed love him.

Jesus is about to leave his flock, and commissions Peter to 'feed my sheep' as shepherd in his place. In other words, he becomes the one who is to care for the Church. Jesus is the model shepherd, and the sheep remain his, even when he entrusts their care to Peter. St Augustine of Hippo said that Jesus was telling Peter: 'Tend my sheep as mine, not as yours.' The choice of Peter, following his rehabilitation, demonstrates that God did not choose him for his special worthiness: God works through the weak things of this world.

The author knew that Peter had already died (John 21:19). Tradition tells that Peter was crucified, upside down, on the Vatican hill. Whatever the details, in his old age Peter followed his master in suffering, imprisonment and death. In the end his martyrdom demonstrated that his faith in and commitment to Christ were fully restored.

A shepherd feeds and cares for his sheep because he loves them. In a similar way, we too are called to love and help others. There are many ways in which we may be called to do this, and we all have our own vocation from the Lord. We are also called to stand up for the gospel in a world that sees it as irrelevant. The task requires courage and hard work, but our love for Christ should compel us to share the Good News.

Lord, Peter showed his love for you as he cared for your Church, and was prepared to witness to the truth even though at last it cost him his life. Help us to stand fast in our love for you and to feed your sheep as we witness to your truth.

Acts 25:13-21 • Psalm 102(103):1-2, 11-12, 19-20

John 21:15-19

Saturday 23 May

John 21:20-25

Scripture scholars suggest that the last chapter of John's Gospel was written by someone other than the Beloved Disciple, but acknowledge that its atmosphere and message seem to have been greatly influenced by John.

There is nothing as convincing as a first-hand witness, particularly in the Jewish tradition, where even today – especially among Orthodox Jews – evidence plays an important part. Jesus, the Son of God, was born into that tradition, as an ordinary human being. John expresses this movingly at the beginning of his first letter, where he identifies his subject as 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands...the word of life' (1 John 1:1). John conveys the divinity and the humanity of Christ, illustrating that, through Jesus, God chose to be in intimate relationship with us. That we were made for this, and that Jesus longed for it, is something of which John is convinced. John states what he knows, shares what he has seen and heard, and witnesses to the life that Jesus brings.

John's enthusiasm is compelling and contagious because he speaks from personal experience. John, the Beloved Disciple, had been at Jesus' side for three years, in every situation – at sea, at weddings and parties, among the sick, on Mount Tabor, at the Last Supper, in Gethsemane and at the crucifixion. That is why his words carry such weight and texture. The Gospels are living proof of the faith of the evangelists and living testimony to the power of God. For two thousand years people have been drawn to Christ by the Gospels because, in the words of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, 'The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all, can show people the way and strengthen them through the Spirit, so that they become worthy of their destiny' (*Gaudium et spes* 10).

Authenticity speaks for itself, so verse 24 declares John's testimony to be true. The last verse of the Gospel adds that there is infinitely more evidence than John recorded or than the world could hold about Jesus and his saving power, leaving us thirsting for the boundless, transforming love of Christ.

Lord, you are the Way, the Truth and the Life. May your love, which goes beyond our imaginings, take us ever onward and upward as we explore its height and depth and endless scope.

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31 • Psalm 10(11):4-7

John 21:20-25

Sunday 24 May

(Solemnity) Pentecost Sunday • John 20:19-23

After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus breathed the Spirit into his disciples (v. 22). Then, after filling them with the power of the Spirit, he sent them out to proclaim to all the Good News that, by his death and resurrection, he has saved the world. He also sent them to give the fruits of his salvation – the forgiveness of sins – to all who turned to him in faith and repentance (v. 23).

On the Day of Pentecost Jesus poured the Spirit out on his apostles as they were gathered together in prayer (Acts 2:1). Filled again with the Spirit, they received the power to preach about the ‘mighty works of God’ in many languages (Acts 2:11). The mighty works of God are centred on the person of Jesus, so they proclaimed his resurrection: Jesus has conquered death! They proclaimed that the Father has given Jesus, the first-born from the dead (Col. 1:18), the power to give life to all who believe in him (John 5:21). They proclaimed that God, in Jesus Christ, has reconciled the world to himself and established a new creation, a new order of being.

Then the apostles invited those listening to them to receive the fruits of Jesus’ salvation into their own lives: to ‘be reconciled to God’ (2 Cor. 5:20) and become ‘a new creation’ (2 Cor. 5:17). In this new order of creation all can enter into an intimate relationship with God, a relationship in which God becomes their Father and they become God’s beloved, adopted children. In this relationship, delivered from the power of death, they no longer live in the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). They are to believe in Jesus as their Saviour and ask him to fill them with the Holy Spirit.

Today the Church celebrates the Father’s gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is given to the Church to communicate to us the things of Jesus (John 16:15). He makes Jesus known to us (1 Cor. 12:3). He communicates to us all the fruits of salvation that Jesus gained for the human race by his saving death and life-giving resurrection. How wonderful that we can receive the power of the Spirit from Jesus! Turn to him in faith and receive the Spirit from him.

Jesus, my Saviour and my Lord. Breathe your Spirit upon me and fill me with your forgiveness, salvation, life and peace.

Acts 2:1-11 • Ps 103(104):1, 24, 29-31, 34 • 1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13 or Gal 5:16-25 • Jn 20:19-23 or Jn 15:26-27;16:12-15

Monday 25 May

Mark 10:17-27 • St Bede the Venerable (Memorial in England Only)

Imagine being on a walking holiday and coming to a fork in the way. A narrow path winds up into the mountains and a well-trodden path goes downhill towards a town. Both paths beckon for different reasons. The path into the mountains offers a challenge, a risk and a glorious view. The way into the town offers comfort, ease and a warm bed for the night. Whichever path you choose will mean a touch of sadness at losing the good that the other path offered.

It is a similar choice between two goods that faces the rich young man in today's Gospel. Although he is rich he is obviously not greedy or he wouldn't have been able to say sincerely that he had kept the outward laws of God. Nevertheless, to go further on the path of perfection the rich young man has to be detached from his wealth. He has to turn from his old life – even though it is worthy – and set out with none of his old securities into the unknown. So Jesus calls him to leave the good in order to find the best. And this choice makes the young man sad.

In our own lives too, we are constantly faced with a choice between the good and the best. How do we respond when Christ calls us to take the challenging path of faith? Are we saddened at what we must leave behind or excited by the challenge that lies before us? Today's Gospel makes it clear that Christ asks no less than everything. In other words, the way of the gospel is a way of complete detachment from material possessions.

There are indeed great sacrifices to be made if we wish to follow Christ, but we are not expected to make the sacrifices in our own power. Jesus admits that detachment from all things is humanly impossible. Instead the grace and power of Christ himself enable us to move steadily forward in the challenging path of sacrifice. God never asks something of us except to make room to give us something far greater. What he wants to give us is that blessed state of freedom and joy which T.S. Eliot called 'a condition of complete simplicity – costing not less than everything'.

Heavenly Father, help me to yield all things to you, knowing that you have far greater things in store for me than I can ever hope or imagine.

Ecclesiasticus 17:24-29 • Psalm 31(32):1-7

Mark 10:17-27

Tuesday 26 May

(Memorial) St Philip Neri • Mark 10:28-31

In traditional Jewish thought riches were a sign of God's blessing and gave you more opportunities to do good, but now Jesus was teaching that they are a positive hindrance to entering God's kingdom. Naturally enough, Peter asked about himself and the other disciples. Though they had not been rich, they had left their homes and families to follow Christ. Their sacrifice was not necessarily any easier for them than that being asked of the rich man: it is hard for anyone to give up what is familiar and dear, and step out into the unknown. Jesus told them that they would surely be rewarded, as would anyone who put him before their possessions and family. They would be rewarded with eternal life, but even in this world what they received in return would be greater than what they gave up.

Being Christians does not mean that we sacrifice happiness in this life in the hope of a better life after death. If we truly follow Christ, we will also be happier in this life, because the blessings he gives are greater and more lasting than any worldly pleasures, even the love of our family and closest friends.

Passages like these are sometimes misinterpreted to mean that Jesus promises his followers material rewards and comfort in this life, the so-called 'prosperity gospel'. This is completely contrary to Jesus' emphasis on the danger of riches and the blessings of poverty. The rewards he promises are spiritual, not material. He adds the words 'with persecutions' to his promise of rewards. Christ does not guarantee that his followers will avoid suffering in this life: on the contrary, he tells us that being his disciples brings suffering with it, that we must take up our cross and follow him. But he does promise that he will be with us always, and that he can bring us joy and peace that no sufferings can shake. If we are faithful to Christ, we are always sustained by the comfort of his love and the hope of eternal life with him in the future.

Lord Jesus, forgive us for the ways in which we put things or people we love before you. Help us to give up what keeps us from you, and sustain us with your joy and peace as we journey towards our heavenly home.

Ecclesiasticus 35:1-12 • Psalm 49(50):5-8, 14, 23

Mark 10:28-31

Wednesday 27 May

Mark 10:32-45 • St Augustine of Canterbury (Feast in England only)

Consider for a moment that we've got it all wrong. Think, if you will, that the things we value, esteem and cherish are simply dust and straw, and that which is precious, beautiful and eternal we have scorned and ignored. We live in a world which celebrates success and excellence, and affirms those at the top of the league or at the top of their game. We like to be thought of as the best, to have pride of place and to be recognized for our abilities, social class or choice of employment. Our egos are very much alive and kicking. Jesus, however, turned our idea of greatness on its head. It is in fact the very opposite of what we think. The greatest is the one who is the least; the leader is not the one who lords it over others but the one who serves.

The virtue of humility is the rock upon which so much of Jesus' teaching is built. But Jesus did not just preach humility, he practised it. Whoever we are – bishop, priest, deacon, lay person – we all need to grow in the grace of humility. It was Elizabeth Ann Seton who declared: 'The gate of heaven is very low; only the humble can enter it.' St John Vianney, whom some would call the 'apostle of humility', wrote: 'Humility is to the various virtues what the chain is in a rosary. Take away the chain and the beads are scattered; remove humility, and all virtues vanish.'

The humble have an understanding of who God is and who they are. They know they need God's grace to strengthen and help them on their path through life. Jesus' rebuke of his disciples started a revolution. In this revolution, only the humble can enlist; only the humble will have the stomach for the fight. The proud, the arrogant, the conceited, those who look down on others, those who think of themselves as superior to their fellow human beings are embracing an illusion. Those who walk the path of humility are embracing reality and the way of Christ and the cross.

It is to the humble that Christ belongs, not to those who exalt themselves above his flock. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Sceptre of God's majesty, did not come in the pomp of pride and arrogance – though he could have done so – but rather in humility.

Proper of Season: Ecclus 36:1, 4-5, 10-17 • Ps 78(79):8-13 • Mk 10:32-45
(Proper of Saints: 1 Thess 2:2-8 • Ps 116(117) • Lk 10:1-9)

Thursday 28 May

Mark 10:46-52

There is much we can learn from Bartimaeus. The witness of a poor blind beggar speaks across the ages. Consider his plight: blind and destitute, to survive he had to beg. Humbled by his affliction, his cry came from the depths of his being: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' (v. 47). Impervious to rebuke, he pushed his way forward; tenacious and determined, he was undaunted by opposition. His perseverance attracted the attention of Jesus. His request was simple and straightforward: he wanted his sight. His encounter with Jesus healed and transformed him.

Bartimaeus is a model of discipleship for us. He reveals the attitude of a true disciple. We too are beggars. Our problem is that we don't fully grasp how great is our need for God's grace and mercy. Our confidence in ourselves makes us less inclined to cry out to the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit, however, who can help us understand ourselves.

Those who are spiritually poor are blessed: this is the truth that Bartimaeus reveals to us. He understood he could not change himself – he needed not just human help but God's. Another quality he displayed was purity of heart. He had no hidden agenda or duplicitous motive in approaching the Lord – he simply wanted his sight.

We tend to turn to the Lord when we are in a tight spot or things are difficult. We find ourselves trying to make all kinds of promises to and bargains with the Lord. God, however, knows our every need; he also knows what is best for us. He wants us to trust in him, rely on him and, like Bartimaeus, cry out to him. The Lord wants to transform us.

In so many ways we too need the gift of sight. We can be blind to our own sin and yet inexplicably find we have remarkable insight and vision into the behaviour of others! We can be blind to the good things we have received and lose sight of our many blessings. We can give way to moaning or complaining about so many things. To avoid this trap we need to learn from Bartimaeus and ask God for the grace to help us in our need.

Lord Jesus Christ, you came to bring sight to the blind. Shine the light of your truth into my mind so that I may see you more clearly, love you more dearly and follow you more nearly.

Ecclesiasticus 42:15-25 • Psalm 32(33):2-9

Mark 10:46-52

Friday 29 May

Mark 11:11-26

How often is your anger righteous? How often do you rant, rage or vent your spleen? Paul taught that we should not let the sun go down on our anger (Eph. 4:26). As far as Jesus is concerned, anger is not that far removed from murder. In fact, it can be as bad! Perhaps, in truth, it's only the saints who can be angry in a good, holy and righteous way. Perhaps, in truth, it's only Jesus who has ever been angry in a good, holy and righteous way. We encounter this anger in today's reading as the Lord drives the traders from the temple.

For Jesus to have overturned the tables of the moneylenders and the benches of those selling doves he would have had to use force. What kind of force we don't know, but force for sure. A close reading of the text shows that he also acted as a kind of temple guard and prevented other traders from carrying merchandise through the temple courts. Somehow the 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' caricature goes out of the window. He must have caused quite a stir – he must have been resisted, at least verbally, if not physically. Clearly he stamped his authority so strongly on the situation that no one felt they could stop him: he was not restrained or overpowered. The religious authorities were left seething with rage.

What are we to make of this episode in Jesus' life? What drove Jesus to this pitch of indignation and anger? The answer we, like Jesus, must draw from the ancient prophet: 'my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples' (Isa. 56:7). Jesus would not tolerate the violation of God's house – his name, his house and his person are worthy of all honour, praise and reverence. We need to cultivate a living sense of the sacred – we must not tolerate the denigration or trampling of God's name by others: people we know, the media, our culture. Taking a stand will not make us popular but we must stand up for what is good, true and beautiful.

Lord, give me a holy zeal for your word and truth. Grant me the grace to resist the philosophy of this age which encourages a false kind of tolerance. Teach me to be intolerant of all that is sinful and offensive to God.

Ecclesiasticus 44:1, 9-13 • Psalm 149:1-6, 9

Mark 11:11-26

Saturday 30 May

Mark 11:27-33

In Mark's Gospel this episode comes during the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry, after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had probably alarmed the authorities by the nature of his entry into the city and by driving the traders out of the temple. So the priests and elders asked Jesus why he allowed himself to be addressed by the crowds as if he was the Messiah, and why he had taken it upon himself to say what should happen in the temple? The authority for such actions could only come from God, and if Jesus claimed this directly he would be coming close to blasphemy.

Jesus avoided their trap by asking the priests a question about the authority of John the Baptist, which he knew they would be unable to answer. This was not just a clever trick on Jesus' part: in getting them to think about John the Baptist's authority he was also talking about his own. The priests and elders now found themselves hoisted by their own petard: they did not want to acknowledge that John the Baptist had authority from God, but could not say this openly because he was considered a prophet by the people.

Jesus did not openly proclaim who he was: indeed, Mark often reports him telling people to keep quiet about what he has done for them. He wanted his words and actions to show who he was by themselves. Those whose hearts and minds were open could see that Jesus spoke with authority and performed acts that nobody could perform unless God was with him. The religious leaders should have been the first to see this, but they closed their minds to Jesus because what he said challenged them and called them to change.

The same is true for us today. Jesus continues to challenge men and women as to who he is, and whether we can accept his claims. Even though we only read the Gospels rather than seeing him in the flesh, Jesus' authority comes across to us: let us be among those who hear his words and humbly open our hearts to him.

Lord, we pray that you would open the hearts of men and women everywhere to trust in you and believe that you are the Saviour of the world. Help us to be witnesses of your saving power in all that we say and do.

Ecclesiasticus 51:12-20 • Psalm 18(19):8-11

Mark 11:27-33

Sunday 31 May

Matthew 28:16-20 • The Holy Trinity (Solemnity) (B)

In today's reading Jesus confirms that God is three Persons in One God. God is Father, God is Son, God is Holy Spirit. We are sent out as evangelizers, as apostles and witnesses of Christ, because we are baptized into the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Some protest that they can't get their mind around the Trinity. Thank God, we never will! As St Augustine once said: 'If you can fathom it – it's not God.' Having said that, we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, get our minds into the Trinity and penetrate the mystery, light and wisdom of the Godhead.

Paul encouraged the believers at Ephesus to do just this – perhaps we could adopt the prayer he gave them as our Trinity Sunday prayer:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:14-19)

What a powerful and utterly wonderful prayer!

God wants us to enter into the mystery of who he is. The essence of being a Christian is knowing God; when we know God we want to love and serve others. The Trinity is not a dry, unreachable, ancient dogma – no, on the contrary, it is the essence of faith, the heart of belief. God wants us to get excited today about the mystery that God is Three-in-One.

In a profound and moving hymn of praise Dionysius the Areopagite wrote:

'Trinity! Higher than any being, any divinity, any goodness! Guide of Christians in the wisdom of heaven! Lead us up beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak of mystic scripture, where the mysteries of God's Word lie simple, absolute and unchangeable in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence. Amid the deepest shadow they pour overwhelming light on what is most manifest. Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen they completely fill our sightless minds with treasures beyond all beauty.'

Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40 • Psalm 32(33):4-6, 9, 18-22

Romans 8:14-17 • Matthew 28:16-20