

SUNDAY PLUS



Make tracks in the desert

A Year of the Word

God's watchman

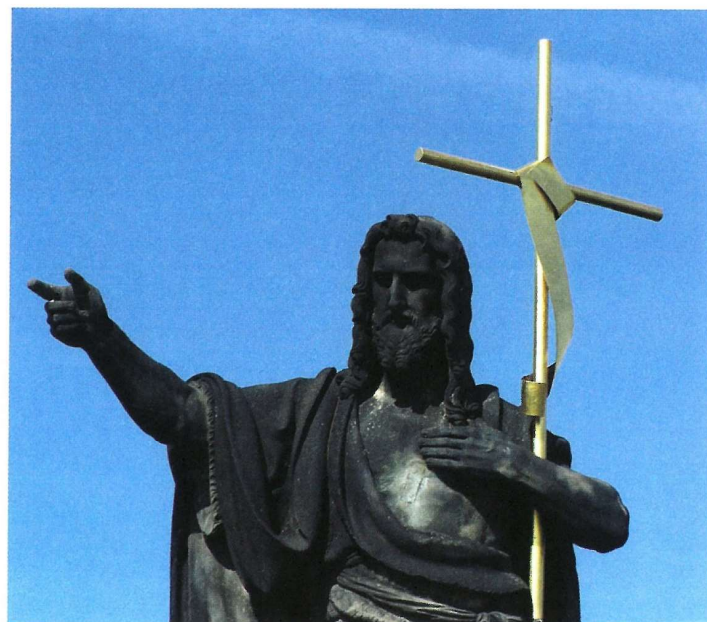
by Fr Denis McBride
C.Ss.R.

Today we heard the opening of the Gospel of Mark, which introduces us to the two great figures that stand at the beginning of the Christian story: Jesus and John the Baptist. All four evangelists witness to the truth that you cannot tell the story of Jesus without first speaking about John the Baptist. It is the towering figure of John that introduces the adult Jesus in all the Gospels. John worked no miracles, held no office, belonged to no religious party. Yet his importance for Jesus was unique: he stands as the only religious leader that Jesus ever sought out and spoke of with deep affection and admiration. He is described as a voice crying in the

wilderness, a large presence that dominates the emptiness of the wasteland.

John is a waiting figure, God's watchman, but his waiting is anything but passive. He does not go into the wilderness to sit in solitude and wait for the one who is to come; rather, the word of God invades his whole being, calling the people of Israel to a radical change of heart in readiness for the approach of the Lord. From the wilderness his voice has a powerful reach: it attracts a people who have grown accustomed to the silence of God, a people who are hungry to be nourished again by the word which they recognise to be God's own word.

John's baptism marks a new beginning for them, a time of personal spiritual renewal, when they would aim themselves again at a life of fidelity to God.



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

Paths in the heart

by Phil Ferguson

We've all experienced the wilderness in recent months, thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic. The experience of lockdown touched each and every one of us. We can all think of moments of joy, sorrow, frustration, isolation and solidarity. Many thousands of people are experiencing the ache of loneliness following the death of a loved one, a friend, a neighbour or a colleague. Millions came together at 8pm on Thursdays to applaud the amazing generosity and courage of frontline workers in the NHS who responded above and beyond the call of duty in hospitals, care homes and home care. How many of us found

a lump in their throat on hearing of a simple act of spontaneous kindness which made a difference to someone's life?

Whatever else the coronavirus pandemic did or did not do, it made pathways into people's hearts where they and others discovered perhaps previously unseen loveliness.

Phil Ferguson is a former teacher.

Living Lord, road building is a messy business. Sometimes there is mud and sometimes there are stones. Help me to build a path for you in my heart. ☪ Amen.

When the heart is a desert

by Catherine Pepinster

For Mark, just as for Isaiah, the world around him was challenging: it was a desert land with little growing there. From where the next meal would come and a supply of water was always an issue. No wonder the river Jordan mattered so much and baptism, with water, was such an important sign of God's grace.

Just as God came to his people in the wilderness, we now need to look for signs of his coming to our lives and recognise how much we thirst for him.

Both the readings from Isaiah and from Mark reveal an urgency about the need for being ready for God's coming. There is a sense

that God is close by. In the rush of modern life, it is also too easy to ignore God's calling, to not listen to his voice and to forget how much we need his presence in the world.

Catherine Pepinster is a former editor of *The Tablet* and the author of *The Keys and the Kingdom: the British and the papacy from John Paul II to Francis*, published by T&T Clark.

"Respect each other, respect! And this is how we will see this miracle: the miracle of a desert that becomes forest."

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11
2 Peter 3:8-14
Mark 1:1-8

Monday:
Isaiah 35:1-10
Luke 5:17-26

Tuesday:
Genesis 3:9-15. 20
Ephesians 1:3-6. 11-12
Luke 1:26-38

Wednesday:
Isaiah 40:25-31
Matthew 11:28-30

Thursday:
Isaiah 41:13-20
Matthew 11:11-15

Friday:
Isaiah 48:17-19
Matthew 11:16-19

Saturday:
Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4. 9-11
Matthew 17:10-13

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 61:1-2. 10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8. 19-28

