

SUNDAY PLUS

Woman of promise

First of the disciples

by Mary Bell

This account of Mary's visit to Elizabeth describes one of the most joyous episodes in the Gospel: the meeting of two pregnant women, one seemingly beyond child-bearing years, the other a young virtuous woman selected for an extraordinary role in the history of the human race. Their greetings are full of wonder and hope for the future. Elizabeth acknowledges the blessing which has brought her cousin to her home, even the child in her womb responding joyfully at Mary's voice. It is Elizabeth who recognises her as the mother of the Lord, calling her blessed for believing God's promise.

The beautiful words of the Magnificat uttered by Mary express such abundant praise of the

Lord who has brought about her transformation from an ordinary village girl to the prospective mother of his son that it is uplifting and inspiring for all of us. It is transcendent in its praise of the Almighty who is all-powerful and all-merciful and will bring about a better world for the poor and lowly, just as he fulfilled his promise to Abraham in the past.

We are so familiar with these words that it is easy to overlook their significance. Mary is the chosen one who will give birth to the saviour of

the world. From her womb will come forth a man of flesh and blood, her flesh and blood, who is also God. By accepting this role to which she was called by the power of the Holy Spirit she surely became the first of the disciples.

Mary Bell is a grandmother and a retired teacher who continues to use her skills in the University of the Third Age.

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Woman of hope

by Phil Ferguson

Many members of the Mafia boast of their undying devotion to Our Lady at the same time as they commit terrible crimes. Similarly, in Mexico, drug barons are regularly seen with tattoos of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In Brazil, lifelong criminals tend to prefer images of Our Lady of Aparecida.

Why is this gentlest and truest of women is so important to people who are guilty of heinous crimes?


Many people would be surprised to discover that prison chaplains in this country receive constant requests for rosaries. One inmate boasted to me that the notice board in his cell was decorated with six, whilst he kept the seventh in his pocket for prayer.

Mary is the woman of hope. Perhaps the Mafiosi and their like are better than they would be, were they not devoted to her.

Without the heartfelt company and support of Mary, many prison inmates might find it harder to turn around their lives for the better and also to survive their prison sentences.

Mother of hope, pray for them.

Phil Ferguson is a former teacher.

Loving Lord, you took your mother to be with you in heaven. Come into my heart so that it can be heaven on earth.
 Amen.

Ordinary and extraordinary

by Fr John Guest

For St John, it is Jesus' mother, Mary, who encourages Jesus to perform his first miraculous sign. The story has touches of comedy. Jesus turns up at a wedding feast in Cana with all his disciples, perhaps causing a few catering anxieties for the organisers.

Jesus' mother spots that they are running out of wine. No wonder!

The initial exchange between mother and son is that of a mother dealing with a reluctant teenager. Like all good mothers Mary ignores her son's response and tells the servants to follow his instructions.

Jesus creates the equivalent of nine hundred bottles of choice

wine. The ordinary has become the extraordinary, the water into wine, a sign of what is to come. Mary is there at the heart of this transformation, just as she will be at the foot of the cross with the beloved disciple. She is now joined with her son in the fullness of his glory.

Fr John Guest, a priest of the Diocese of Nottingham, is also a regular contributor to Redemptorist Publications' *Living Word* and *Weekday Living Word*. www.rpbooks.co.uk.

"The one who listens attentively to the Word of God and truly prays, always asks the Lord: what is your will for me?"

Pope Francis

Today:
 Apocalypse 11:19; 12:1-6. 10
 1 Corinthians 15:20-26
 Luke 1:39-56

Monday:
 Judges 2:11-19
 Matthew 19:16-22

Tuesday:
 Judges 6:11-24
 Matthew 19:23-30

Wednesday:
 Judges 9:6-15
 Matthew 20:1-16

Thursday:
 Judges 11:29-39
 Matthew 22:1-14

Friday:
 Ruth 1:1. 3-6. 14-16. 22
 Matthew 22:34-40

Saturday:
 Ruth 2:1-3. 8-11; 4:13-17
 Matthew 23:1-12

Next Sunday:
 Joshua 24:1-2. 15-18
 Ephesians 5:21-32
 John 6:60-69

