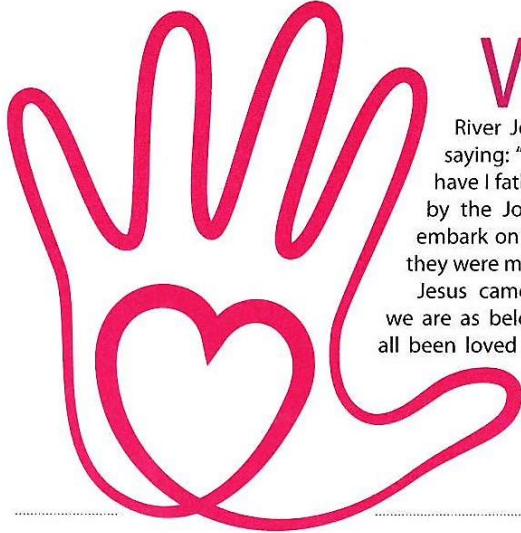


SUNDAY PLUS

I love you

Love like no other

By Paul Higginson




When Jesus is baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan he hears a voice saying: "You are my Son; today have I fathered you." These words by the Jordan inspired Jesus to embark on his public ministry, but they were meant for us to hear too. Jesus came to let us know that we are as beloved as he is. We have all been loved into being by God; he knitted us together in our mother's womb, he has written our name on

the palm of his hand. God says: "You are my child. You are my beloved." This "beloved-ness" does not depend on our occupation or status. Nor does it depend on how "good" we are, or how sinful we have been. It is not restricted to a particular ethnic group or religion. It is not restricted to believers. It is just how God sees us - all of us.

What a difference it would make if we could only have the imagination to see ourselves as God sees us. In God's eyes we are "wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). He is our biggest

cheerleader, always in our corner, loving us unconditionally, always ready to forgive and forget, always encouraging us to be the best version of ourselves. Nothing we can do or say can ever separate us from his love, and nothing is impossible if he is by our side. That is the promise of the Gospel, that is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Following many years in the classroom and as a parish catechist, Paul Higginson is finding that retirement is enabling him to devote even more of his time to supporting his parish.

Lord, there are no words more precious than the words, "I love you". They make such a difference to my morale, my self-worth and my daily life. Give me the courage to tell people that I love them. Let me carry your love to everyone I meet.  Amen.

Family treasures

By Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

I recently examined at close quarters the christening gown which my grandmother made for me all those many years ago. These days, it's an ivory-coloured silk. Was its simple design originally white? Who knows! Still, it's an eye-opener to see those minute stitches and French knots which must have taken countless hours of loving care. From start to finish, that little dress was an act of pure love.

Every family has its own unique and incomparably precious heirlooms which might otherwise be valueless in the eyes of the world. The

BBC television series, "The Repair Shop", frequently shows the emotions surrounding a treasured item which, were it not for its associations, would have been thrown out long ago.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared, "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them."

Today, as God proudly declares Jesus to be his beloved Son, we can think of our own family members, who might not be perfect, but are nevertheless irreplaceable family treasures.

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

Feast of the week

Wednesday 12 January

St Benedict Biscop

When you are next in church, imagine that you live in the seventh century, cannot read or write or understand the Latin in which Mass is celebrated and the scriptures read. How are you to be educated in your faith?

Then look at the pictures, statues and stations of the cross around the church... They become your book and teach you what you cannot learn by reading. We take them for granted, often overlooking the fact that, many centuries ago, churches

were often undecorated – and the homily lasted for at least one hour.

St Bede wrote that when his teacher, the Northumbrian nobleman-cum-monk, St Benedict Biscop (c628-690) founded two great abbeys in Sunderland and Jarrow, he decorated the churches with "a painting of the Mother of God, the blessed Mary, ever virgin, and one of each of the twelve apostles... pictures of incidents in the Gospels... and scenes from St John's vision of the Apocalypse... Thus, all who entered the church, even those who could not read, were able, whichever way they looked to contemplate the dear face of Christ and his saints."

"This is how God conquers the world's evil: by humbling himself, taking charge of it. It is also the way that we can lift up others: not by judging, not by suggesting what to do, but by drawing near, empathising, sharing God's love. Closeness is God's way with us; he himself says so to Moses: 'Think: what people has its gods as close as you have me?'. Closeness is God's way with us."

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11
Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7
Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

Monday:
1 Samuel 1:1-8
Mark 1:14-20

Tuesday:
1 Samuel 1:9-20
Mark 1:21-28

Wednesday:
1 Samuel 3:1-10, 19-20
Mark 1:29-39

Thursday:
1 Samuel 4:1-11
Mark 1:40-45

Friday:
1 Samuel 8:4-7, 10-22
Mark 2:1-12

Saturday:
1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1
Mark 2:13-17

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 62:1-5
1 Corinthians 12:4-11
John 2:1-11