

SUNDAY PLUS

Love comes first




By Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

In his criticism of religious leadership in today's Gospel, Matthew argues that the requirements of the Law as laid down by the scribes are a burden which people cannot bear. Not only are the burdens imposed too heavy, but religious leaders absolve themselves from all responsibility of lightening them. This criticism is echoed in the Acts of the Apostles when Peter opposes certain members of the Pharisees' party who have become 'Christians': "It would only provoke God's anger now, surely, if you imposed on the disciples the very burden that neither we nor our ancestors were strong enough to support?" (15:10). Faith in Jesus should bring people a new freedom which many had not experienced in Judaism.

Religious leaders are also criticised for craving attention and expecting to be treated with deference by the rank-and-file members. Honorific titles are criticised, principally because they introduce distinctions which obscure a most important truth: that all disciples have only one Father, therefore they are brothers and sisters.

All of Matthew's argument reflects his concern about what is happening in his own church. He is clearly opposed to Christian leaders arrogating to themselves titles that divide the family of the Church into a hierarchy. To do that is to imitate the mistakes of the scribes and the Pharisees. If religious leaders want to strive for any title, it should be that of "servant". Real religious leadership is humble work in the service of the Gospel. Matthew is unambiguous about Christian leadership: if it is not humble service, it is fake.

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

Help me, Lord, not to give up. Let me hold your hand in good times and bad, in all of life's ups and downs, successes and failures.  Amen.

Oberammergau's act of love

By Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Every ten years for almost 400 years, the townsfolk of Oberammergau have re-enacted Jesus' passion, death and resurrection in thanksgiving for the town's deliverance from the bubonic plague.

Last year, I had the unique opportunity to attend the Covid-postponed Oberammergau Passion Play. It was unforgettable – and life-changing. Pilgrims from across the world sat for five hours for their once-in-a-lifetime experience in a theatre which accommodates 4,500 people. Despite the 35°C outdoor temperature, I counted one empty seat.

The play presented Jesus as a Jew amongst Jews. How many people present found tears in their eyes as, on a German stage, Jesus and his disciples covered their heads and exquisitely chanted the Shema – in Hebrew? Similarly, at the Last Supper, Jesus used the Hebrew of the Passover ritual to bless the bread and wine. It was profoundly moving.

In today's Gospel, Jesus recites the Shema – and his audience was silenced. There is no better summary of Judaism, Christianity and Jesus' entire life on earth: Love comes first!

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

Feast of the week

Sunday 3 November

St Rupert Mayer SJ (1876-1945)

The Nazis couldn't silence Fr Rupert Mayer SJ. He was the first World War One military chaplain to win the Iron Cross for bravery in recognition of his work with the soldiers at the front. A grenade attack shattered Mayer's leg, which was then amputated.

Mayer returned to Munich, where an artificial leg didn't stop his tireless work helping people to rebuild their post-war lives – and then Hitler appeared on the scene. The Jesuit's public criticism of the

Nazi party landed him in prison several times.

Following his arrest on November 1939 and detention in Sachsenhausen, Mayer developed heart problems.

The authorities didn't want a popular hero to die a martyr in a concentration camp so they placed him in solitary confinement in the Benedictine abbey at Ettal, where he remained until May 1945.

Mayer returned to Munich and immediately resumed work. He died on 1 November 1945, following a heart attack while celebrating Mass. Today Fr Rupert Mayer SJ is celebrated as "The Apostle of Munich".

Let's do something today. We may all have likes and dislikes; many of us are perhaps a little angry with someone; then let us say to the Lord: Lord, I am angry with this or that person; I am praying to you for him or her. To pray for those with whom we are angry is a beautiful step towards that law of love. Shall we take it? Let's take it today!

Pope Francis

Today:
Malachi 1:14 – 2:2, 8-10
1 Thessalonians 2:7-9, 13
Matthew 23:1-12

Monday:
Romans 11:29-36
Luke 14:12-14

Tuesday:
Romans 12:5-16
Luke 14:15-24

Wednesday:
Romans 13:8-10
Luke 14:25-33

Thursday:
Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12
1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17
John 2:13-22

Friday:
Romans 15:14-21
Luke 16:1-8

Saturday:
Romans 16:3-9, 16, 22-27
Luke 16:9-15

Next Sunday:
Wisdom 6:12-16
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
Matthew 25:1-13