

SUNDAY PLUS

Be fruitful

Live in hope



Go out to the extremities

By Canon Paul Douthwaite

A chaplain once described prison ministry as “loitering with intent”. In faithfully walking the wings, the opportunities arise for fruitful faith encounters with the boys, girls, men and women who are in prison. Here, the opportunity arises to engage in awkward conversations, on issues from suicide to sexuality, that wouldn’t otherwise take place. It is here, sitting on a bed in a 8ft by 6ft cell that the most genuine and heartfelt sacrament of reconciliation is celebrated. There are so many opportunities in prison to encounter God.

In the Gospel Jesus, through the medium of an agricultural parable, reminds us that there is fertile ground out there in which we can sow his message. Very often we are willing, but to encounter those willing and ready to listen is challenging.

The prison chaplain’s experience is inspirational. We need to go out to the extremities, to those most in need and to people where they are, to find rich soil.

Canon Paul Douthwaite is a former CBCEW National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons and HMPPS Roman Catholic Faith Advisor.

No one can tell us not to accept and embrace the lives of our brothers and sisters, especially those who have lost hope and zest for life. How good it would be to think of our parishes, communities, chapels, wherever there are Christians, with open doors, true centres of encounter between ourselves and God.

Pope Francis

By Mary Bell

The parable of the sower speaks to us in our time as appropriately as to Jesus’ hearers, although with resonances they could never have imagined. Being fruitful for us is not only a command to spread the Good News of the coming of the kingdom of God but also an encouragement to look after this wonderful world of nature that we have inherited.

The psalmist sums it all up in a few verses where the joyfulness of God’s creation rings aloud:

“You care for the earth, give it water,
You fill it with riches.”

Of course, the focus of Jesus’ teaching is that we listen to his words and carry them out in practice.

However, an integral part of caring for creation is caring for the creatures who inhabit this world, including ourselves.

Human nature does not change. There are still those who don’t listen even to common sense. There are always people who have too much to do and people who, despite initial enthusiasm, lose interest. Jesus hits the nail on the head. To achieve a successful outcome, we must listen to what he is telling us and understand that to achieve the kingdom of God we must work and strive to be fruitful, respecting the natural kingdom as well as our fellow humans. So, in addition to loving God and our neighbour must be added caring for our environment, not being selfish with resources, always living in hope of handing to the next generations the message of eternal life.

Following many years in the classroom, retired teacher and Head of RE Mary Bell now has time to enjoy the beauties of the natural world around her.

Feast of the week Saturday 22 July

St Mary Magdalene

Up until 1969, during the pontificate of St Paul VI, the Gospel reading for the feast day of St Mary Magdalene was Luke’s passage of an unnamed woman, a public sinner, who anointed the feet of Jesus. This account was discreetly replaced for Mary Magdalene’s feast in 1969 by a totally different Gospel reading from chapter 20 of John’s Gospel in which Mary Magdalene is the first person to whom Jesus reveals himself following the resurrection. The risen Jesus commissions Mary to tell the apostles, which is why she is sometimes referred to as “the apostle to the apostles”.

Separating the identity of Mary Magdalene from the woman who was a public sinner has made little impression on the public imagination. In 591 Pope Gregory the Great delivered a homily which declared that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute and that understanding still dominates, nourished by the popular fictional tales of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*.

In the Gospels Mary Magdalene accompanies Jesus at critical moments: she is with him throughout his ministry in Galilee; she is at the crucifixion, the death and the burial; she is the first to meet Jesus after his resurrection. That fearless loyalty is her principal quality.

Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

Today:
Isaiah 55:10-11
Romans 8:18-23
Matthew 13:1-23

Monday:
Exodus 1:8-14, 22
Matthew 10:34 – 11:1

Tuesday:
Exodus 2:1-15
Matthew 11:20-24

Wednesday:
Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12
Matthew 11:25-27

Thursday:
Exodus 3:13-20
Matthew 11:28-30

Friday:
Exodus 11:10 – 12:14
Matthew 12:1-8

Saturday:
Song of Songs 3:1-4
John 20:1-2, 11-18

Next Sunday:
Wisdom 12:13, 16-19
Romans 8:26-27
Matthew 13:24-43