

SUNDAY PLUS

Break out of boxes

Celebrate our differences!



Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

By Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

If every bird in the wood were a nightingale, a crow would sound sweet – and yet we still fear to step out of line and look or sound different from the people around us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us to step out of our little boxes and to stop seeing the world in categories. We are to use our brains and our hearts to understand and do things in new ways, perhaps breaking boundaries that we might never have realised existed.

The apostles complained that a man who performed miracles was not "one of us" and

so shouldn't have the same powers and entitlements. Ouch! No wonder Jesus was unimpressed!

Why do we want people to fit into a mould? Life is much more exciting when we dare to be different. A few years ago, when the Moscow State Circus visited London, I treated myself to a ticket and sat totally spellbound by young performers who were gifted far beyond my physical capacity. (Uniquely, I was reserve for the reserve goalkeeper in the class netball team at school. Few people can match that achievement!)

Jesus wants us to celebrate our differences. If we were identical, we couldn't learn from each other. There'd be no point in visiting art galleries or museums. Sport would be boringly predictable. We wouldn't bother with the television, radio or cinema because nothing would be new. We'd all live in "little boxes made of ticky-tacky" and we'd "all look just the same" – but God didn't use a production line when creating our wonderful world.

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

[God] calls us not to think according to the categories of "friend/enemy", "us/them", "those who are in/those who are out", "mine/yours", but rather to go beyond, to open our heart in order to be able to recognise God's presence and action, even in unusual and unpredictable environments that are not part of our circle.

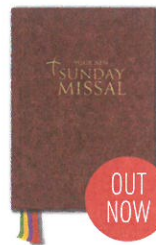
"Little boxes"

By Paul Higginson

We like to put people into little boxes and give them labels, based on such things as their political views, ethnicity, gender, sexuality or religion. Margaret Thatcher used to ask if politicians were "one of us", with the implication being that if they weren't, they were an opponent or even an enemy. Religious leaders have often been guilty of regarding those not in their particular group as outsiders or "not saved". Yet for Jesus, there was only one box. As Paul put it, there are "no more distinctions", we are all "one in Christ Jesus". In today's Gospel Jesus says that if you are not against us, you are for us. He tells us that it's a big box (he calls it "the kingdom of God") and we are all invited to be a part of it.

Paul Higginson is a retired teacher and author of Doing Christianity: how religion is about what you do, not what you believe. Columba Books, Dublin, 2023.

Pope Francis



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Feast of the week
Thursday 4 October
St Francis of Assisi
(1181-1226)

You are holy, Lord, the only God,
and your deeds are wonderful...
You are love. You are wisdom.
You are humility. You are endurance.
You are rest. You are peace.
You are joy and gladness.
You are justice and moderation.
You are all our riches, and you suffice for us.

St Francis of Assisi

Loving Lord, it's so easy to judge people.
Help me to look more deeply into the hearts of everyone I meet and to love them with your love. Amen.

Today:
Numbers 11:25-29
James 5:1-6
Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

Monday:
Job 1:6-22
Luke 9:46-50

Tuesday:
Job 3:1-3, 11-17, 20-23
Luke 9:51-56

Wednesday:
Exodus 23:20-23
Matthew 18:1-5, 10

Thursday:
Job 19:21-27
Luke 10:1-12

Friday:
Job 38:1, 12-21; 40:3-5
Luke 10:13-16

Saturday:
Job 42:1-3, 5-6, 12-17
Luke 10:17-24

Next Sunday:
Genesis 2:18-24
Hebrews 2:9-11
Mark 10:2-16