

# SUNDAY PLUS

## Mission of hope

# Defending the Jesus story

By Fr Denis  
McBride C.Ss.R.

On the hot summer night of 18 July in the year AD 64, a fire broke out in the arcade of shops surrounding the Circus Maximus, Rome's chariot stadium. The flames raged for nine days before they came under control. After the desolation, two-thirds of the imperial city lay in ruins.

When the fire began, the emperor Nero was miles away, at the cooler coastal resort at Anzio. Well aware of his growing unpopularity among the people and the rumours spread by the surviving

homeless that he started the fire, Nero sought to divert suspicion away from himself, so he looked for victims to blame. Thus began the first great persecution of Christians. The two principal apostles of the emerging church, Peter and Paul, were martyred in this persecution.

While the Church was adapting to its illegal status within the Roman Empire, the first great defence of Christianity was written – the two-volume work of

the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. As we hear in today's Gospel, Luke dedicates his defence to an unknown high Roman official, his excellency Theophilus. Luke will defend Christianity against the accusations of the Romans.

Luke will portray the founder of Christianity as a figure of nobility, grace and charm; a man who breathed kindness and graciousness. Luke will show that Jesus and his followers were found innocent by the representatives of the Roman law: Pilate declares three times that Jesus is innocent of the charges brought against him. As you listen to Luke's Gospel this year, listen to his great defence of Christianity against the charge of the Roman authorities.

Fr Denis McBride's many books, CDs and DVDs are available from Redemptorist Publications, [www.rpbooks.co.uk](http://www.rpbooks.co.uk).



Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.

Pope Francis

## On the margins

By Camilla Harrison

Jesus teaches us to care for those on the margins of society – in his time, the poor, the sick and the despised. He reached out to these people with his love.

Who are the marginalised in twenty-first-century Britain?

Those in loving families and caring communities can thrive at the centre of a phalanx of love, knowing what it is to be valued and needed. Without these vital elements of life, we are vulnerable

to despair. Mother Teresa said that the worst human disease, far worse than poverty, was loneliness.

The migrant worker, far from home, may feel at the margins of our society. So, too, may the young person emerging from the care system, with neither family nor community to protect them or to guide them into meaningful occupation.

Thankfully, none of us is outside the reach of God's love. But if we lack the warmth of human compassion at the centre of our lives, we know what it is to be marginalised.

*Camilla Harrison was the head of an RE department at a comprehensive school for twenty years and the writer of two of the Family Walks series of books.*

## Jubilee 2025


### The Jubilee Pilgrimage

The Jubilee calls for us to set out on a journey and to cross boundaries. When we travel, we do not only change place physically, but we also change ourselves. Hence, it is important to prepare ourselves well, to plan the route, and learn about the destination. In this sense, the Jubilee pilgrimage begins before the start of the journey itself: the starting point is the decision to set out...

The journey takes place gradually: there are various routes to choose from and

places to discover; it is made up of particular sets of circumstances, moments of catechesis, sacred rites and liturgies. Along the way our travelling companions enrich us with new ways of understanding things and fresh perspectives... Pilgrimage is an experience of conversion, of transforming one's very being to conform it to the holiness of God. During the pilgrimage, one also shares in the experience of those who, for various reasons, are forced to leave their homelands to seek a better life for themselves and their family.

*Diastery for Evangelisation*

Dearest Lord, you know my weaknesses and that I am not your greatest witness. Help me to celebrate your presence in my life and to tell others of your goodness.  Amen.

Today:  
Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10  
1 Corinthians 12:12-30  
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Monday:  
Hebrews 9:15, 24-28  
Mark 3:22-30

Tuesday:  
Hebrews 10:1-10  
Mark 3:31-35

Wednesday:  
Hebrews 10:11-18  
Mark 4:1-20

Thursday:  
Hebrews 10:19-25  
Mark 4:21-25

Friday:  
Hebrews 10:32-39  
Mark 4:26-34

Saturday:  
Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19  
Mark 4:35-41

Next Sunday:  
Malachi 3:1-4  
Hebrews 2:14-18  
Luke 2:22-40