

Readings and Reflections for the Week

Sunday 2 August - EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Reading 1, Isaiah 55:1-3, Psalm 144(145)

Reading 2, Romans 8:35,37-39

Gospel, Matthew 14:13-21

The feeding of the five thousand

Monday 3 August - Feria

Reading 1, Jeremiah 28:1-17

Psalm 118(119), Gospel, Matthew 14:22-36

Jesus walks on water

Tuesday 4 August - St John Mary

Vianney

Reading 1, Jeremiah 30:1-2,12-15,18-22

Psalm 101(102), Gospel, Matthew 15:1-2,10-14

Any plant my Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots

Wednesday 5 August - Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major

Reading 1, Jeremiah 31:1-7

Psalm, Jeremiah 31:10-13

Gospel, Matthew 15:21-28

The Canaanite woman debates with Jesus and saves her daughter

Thursday 6 August - TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Reading 1, Daniel 7:9-10,13-14

Psalm 96(97), Gospel, Matthew 17:1-9

His face shone like the sun

Friday 7 August - Feria

Reading 1, Nahum 1:15, 2:1,3,3:1-3,6-7

Psalm, Deuteronomy 32:35-36, 39,41

Gospel, Matthew 16:24-28

Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it

Saturday 8 August - St Dominic

Reading 1, Habakkuk 1:12-2:4

Psalm 9A(9), Gospel, Matthew 17:14-20

If your faith were the size of a mustard seed, the mountain would move

Sunday 9 August - NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Reading 1, 1 Kings 19:9,11-13, Psalm 84(85)

Reading 2, Romans 9:1-5

Gospel, Matthew 14:22-23

Jesus walks on the water

United with Churches together in St Albans this week we pray for all members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

SAINT OF THE WEEK St John Mary Vianney (the Curé of Ars)

John Mary Baptiste Vianney was born near Lyon in France 3 years before the start of the French Revolution, when the Catholic Church came under ferocious attack. During this time, the Vianney family often hid priests and attended clandestine Masses. In 1799, Napoleon seized power in France and, in 1801, he and Pope Pius VII signed an agreement that permitted public worship. In 1806, the local parish priest, Fr Balley, opened a school for prospective seminarians where, aged 20, John began his formal education. Although he struggled academically, his faith was manifest. In 1809, John was drafted into Napoleon's army but fell ill and was left behind. Appointed to another regiment, he was so immersed in prayer that he missed their departure. Sent after the troops, he was misdirected to where a number of deserters were hiding and was convinced to stay with them. Eventually, he was granted amnesty.

In 1815, John was ordained and became an assistant priest to Fr Balley, where he served until Fr Balley's death. In 1817, Fr Vianney became chaplain at the church of Saint Sixtus, in Ars where would remain for the next 41 years. Few attended Father's first Masses but as word spread of his devotion, people started to come to church and were touched by Fr Vianney's simple homilies that presented the basic Gospel message: Those who remain in sin will go to hell. Those who turn to God will be saved and welcomed into Heaven. Fr Vianney's method of being a priest was simple. He allowed God to consume him, live in him, and minister to the people through him. He said "What use is a treasure chest full of gold if there is no one who can unlock it? The priest has the key to the treasures of Heaven." Within the first 3 years of Fr Vianney's ministry, Ars was transformed. In 1823, Saint Sixtus Church became a parish with Fr Vianney as pastor. His reputation travelled far and wide, thousands of people went to Ars every year to attend his Masses and confess their sins. On many days, Fr Vianney spent up to 16 hours in the confessional.

On 4 August 1859, Fr Vianney died at the age of 73. He was entombed above the main altar in the Basilica at Ars. Some relics are kept in the Church of Notre-Dame de la Salette in Paris. There are statues of Vianney in many French churches and in Catholic churches throughout the world.

He is the patron saint of parish priests.

Prayer of St John Vianney

I love You, O my God, and my only desire is to love You until the last breath of my life. I love You, O my infinitely lovable God, and I would rather die loving You, than live without loving You. I love You, Lord and the only grace I ask is to love You eternally...My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love You, I want my heart to repeat it to You as often as I draw breath.

REFLECTIONS

First Reading, Isaiah 55:1-3

Our approach to God and to things divine has two seemingly contrasting aspects. On the one hand we must be aware in awe of the splendour of God and of our own terrifying littleness; this engenders a hushed stillness in us. On the other hand we are filled with joy and celebrate what God has given us. Particularly in Christianity there is the joy of family and community, celebrating our oneness in Christ; the obvious way to celebrate this is a party with noise, food and drink. The readings on this Sunday are all about joy and celebration, and the first reading and gospel sound as if they are about a party. Isaiah hands us an invitation to the party. Two points are worth making about this invitation in Isaiah. Firstly, it is couched in similar terms to the biblical invitations from God's Wisdom to come and share the banquet prepared by Wisdom for those who wish to learn God's ways. Secondly, it is a fulfilment of the tradition of the covenant which dominates the Old Testament. God made an alliance, an intimate bond, with special promises to Abraham; he renewed it and intensified it with Moses and again with David. When Israel shattered that covenant by constant rebellion, God promised a new covenant, ratified again at a party, at Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples

The Lord's invitation is to all of us: what is he inviting you to?

Second Reading, Reading 2, Romans 8:35,37-39

This lively expression of delight and confidence really sums up what God's love for us is all about, as it is manifested and given to us in the saving act of Jesus. In Romans, Paul gives us the fullest explanation of just how Christ saves us, and how we are made a new creation and now live by the Spirit of Christ. After that, Paul goes on to present particular consequences and applications of this. There will be another such outbreak of joy from Paul which we read in three weeks' time (Romans 11:33-36). It is Paul at his best and most ardent. First, just before our reading, comes a series of excited rhetorical questions: 'What can we add?', 'Can anyone condemn?', 'Are we not certain?' Then there is the expression of Paul's total confidence in God's saving love, from which nothing can cut us off. In the biblical mind 7 is the perfect number, signifying completion: Paul first gives 7 hardships and trials which cannot cut us off, then 7 hostile powers which are powerless against the love of God. The message is: there isn't anything that can separate us from the love of God.

Do you sometimes feel that God is distant? What helps us to realise that nothing can separate us from the love of God?

Gospel Reading, Matthew 14:13-21

Every parent knows the disaster-situation of the family day out when the shops turn out to be closed and the emergency supplies have been left at home. This lot have been following Jesus three days on the trot, and there must have been nothing left at all to eat. Jesus turns the disaster into a party for that huge crowd of people. Left to our own resources we are helpless, but Jesus can deal with that. How many were there? We don't know, for the numbers are symbolic. In the Bible '12' alerts us to the tribes of Israel. So the 12 baskets of scraps show that the crowd is the 12 tribes of Jesus' new Israel. The way Jesus takes the bread and says the blessing must remind any Christian of the Eucharist. So this gigantic field-party was a sort of Eucharist, Jesus at the centre of his people, entertaining them and cheering them. It probably wasn't very orderly. There would have been children enjoying the food and then running around and tripping up themselves and others. An African Mass is often like that, with lots of singing and dancing and celebration. That is why the Sunday Mass is so important: meet your friends and celebrate Christ together!

What does this Gospel teach us about the Eucharist?