

Readings and Reflections for the Week

SUNDAY 18 OCTOBER - TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Reading 1, Isaiah 45:1,4-6, Psalm 95(96)

Reading 2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

Gospel, Matthew 22:15-21

Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar

Monday 19 October – Feria

Reading 1, Ephesians 2:1-10

Psalm 99(100), Gospel, Luke 12:13-21

Fool! This very night your soul will be demanded of you

Tuesday 20 October – Feria

Reading 1, Ephesians 2:12-22

Psalm 84(85), Gospel, Luke 12:35-38

Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit

Wednesday 21 October – Feria

Reading 1, Ephesians 3:2-12

Psalm, Isaiah 12, Gospel, Luke 12:39-48

The Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect

Thursday 22 October – St John Paul II, Pope

Reading 1, Ephesians 3:14-21

Psalm 32(33), Gospel, Luke 12:49-53

How I wish it were blazing already

Friday 23 October – Feria

Reading 1, Ephesians 4:1-6

Psalm 23(24), Gospel, Luke 12:54-59

Do you not know how to interpret these times?

Saturday 24 October – Memorial of the Blessed

Virgin Mary

Reading 1, Ephesians 4:7-16

Psalm 121(122), Gospel, Luke 13:1-9

'Leave the fig tree one more year'

SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER - THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Reading 1, Exodus 22:21-27, Psalm 17(18)

Reading 2, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10

Gospel, Matthew 22:34-40

The commandments of love

United with Churches together in St Albans we pray for all members of the Society of Friends (Quakers).

SAINT OF THE WEEK St John Paul II, Pope

Karol Wojtyła was born in 1920 in Wadowice, Poland. His study of Polish literature at Krakow University was interrupted when Germany invaded Poland in 1940. The university closed, and the professors sent to concentration camps. During the German occupation, Karol became a labourer in a stone quarry and a chemical plant. His father, who had taught him how to invoke the Holy Spirit, died in 1941, leaving the young man alone. But with this grief came illumination: "God was calling me to be a priest." Karol studied for the priesthood in Krakow's clandestine seminary and was ordained in 1946. His bishop sent him to complete a doctorate in Rome. He served as pastor of a parish and a university chaplain, before becoming professor of moral theology and ethics at Krakow and Lublin. His discussions with his students, Wojtyła would say, made him "fall in love with human love." In 1958, Wojtyła became a bishop. The communist authorities had approved his appointment, believing this "philosopher" would not cause trouble. They soon learnt otherwise. Great events were taking place in the church: a new ecumenical Council was convoked by Pope John XXIII. From 1962 to 1965 Bishop Wojtyła participated extensively in Vatican Council II, contributing to the drafting of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* and to the *Dignitatis humanae*. In 1967, he became a Cardinal. In 1978, Albino Luciani was elected Pope John Paul I, but died a month later. As Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła became the first non-Italian to have been elected in 455 years. This new Pope knew what it was to face fear and, on 22 October 1978, at his inaugural Mass, he cried out to the whole world, "Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!" To Christ in whom alone the human being understands himself, to Christ the Redeemer of Man. This Pope would travel the world to show people the love of this Redeemer of Man and invite them to let go of their fear. On 13 May 1981, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, an assassin aimed and fired. The Pope came close to death, saying later that the Mother of God had protected him. He then made two pilgrimages, one to Fatima to place the bullet in her crown and another to prison, to forgive the "brother who shot me" face-to-face. John Paul II was a prolific author and tireless preacher, convinced that the human person is "the way of the Church" and that "the splendour of truth shines forth ... in a special way, in man, created in the image and likeness of God" (Veritatis Splendor 1). The Pope was outspoken whenever he encountered anything that threatened the dignity of the human person, from dictatorships to Marxism to unbridled capitalism. The Solidarity movement in his own country drew strength from his example, which helped precipitate the fall of communism throughout Eastern Europe. From the beginning of his pontificate, John Paul II sought to heal the divisions between the Christian churches, especially with his Orthodox brothers and sisters.

In the 1990s, John Paul II was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and gradually lost the capacity to speak. As Pope Benedict XVI observed, this "master of words" still had, not to say, but to show that "the Lord redeemed us with his cross, with the passion, as an extreme act of love." On 2 April 2005, the vigil of the feast of Divine Mercy, John Paul II died. His last words were whispered, "Let me go to my Father's house." In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI beatified his predecessor, and in 2013, Pope Francis declared him a saint. Pope John Paul II is the patron saint of World Youth Day, young Catholics, families, and his native Poland.

REFLECTIONS

Reading 1, Isaiah 45:1,4-6

This passage of Isaiah must have been written at the very end of the exile in Babylon (586-538 BC), as Cyrus, King of Persia, was approaching to take over that city and decree that the captives, Jews and other nations, should be sent home to their own countries. Because of this, the Jews saw Cyrus as God's own envoy. It must have finally confirmed them in their new understanding, reached by being sunk into the hostile and alien civilisation of Babylon, that their God, the Lord, was God not just of Israel but of the whole world. Before the exile, of course, they were convinced that the Lord was their own special God and protector, but what of other nations? Confronted with the alien and materialistic gods of Babylon, they realised that God, their own intimate and loving Lord, was the God not just of Israel but of the whole world, the whole universe, the creator of light and darkness. If no other lesson was learnt from the exile, this was a major advance in understanding of God and his ways.

Do we have other gods which we worship? Do we accept the Lord as key to every door in the universe, even the door of our own hearts?

Reading 2, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5

This Sunday we start reading First Thessalonians, the earliest of all Paul's letters. It is read for the next five Sundays. Paul moved so rapidly round the new Christian communities which he established that he could never instruct them fully when they were first founded: indeed there is always more to learn about our faith. So Paul needed to keep in touch, answering questions, solving difficulties, showing his 'concern for all the Churches'. Paul's 'letters' are real letters, each responding to a different set of circumstances. Each of them begins with a warm greeting, 'grace and peace'. 'Grace' is God's affectionate and powerful smile, drawing us into God's loving protection, and empowering us to live and work for him. Then, with his thoughtful courtesy, Paul encourages the community with praise for their achievements in Christ (where possible - the Galatians get no compliments, for they have let Paul down badly). In this letter he praises the faith of the Thessalonians, their love and their firm hope, and also the effectiveness in their lives of the power of the Spirit. It never does any harm to look for the best in people, and show that their efforts have been recognised!

How do you show your faith in action and work for love?

Gospel, Matthew 22:15-21

They must really have thought they had their victim sewn up! If Jesus said he paid the Roman taxes, he recognised the Emperor, not God, as his Lord. If he said he didn't pay, he was a traitor to Rome. Jesus turns the question back on them. First he makes them admit that they themselves recognise Rome as overlord by carrying a Roman coin, for the coin would carry the Emperor's head. Next he puts them a question: what do they consider is due to Caesar? Finally he goes beyond their question, to interrogate their ultimate loyalty: in the last analysis, just what is due to God? At a superficial level this seems a little verbal tussle, in which Jesus outwits his opponents. But the story was remembered and passed on in the Christian community not because of Jesus' cleverness, but because at a deeper level it is a question which Jesus puts to each of us: just where do our loyalties and priorities lie? Money? Respect? Sex? Fame? A good holiday? Comfort? Power? Jesus is not a dictator who imposes his will. He just asks the question and leaves us to give our own answer. To those who question him he gives no easy response, but always replies with another question.

What takes priority in my life? Does God get a look-in? In what way?