

SUNDAY PLUS



Chosen and called

A Year of the Word

Called to be a gatekeeper



by Catherine Pepinster

The Gospels are full of imagery of the shepherd and his sheep. Jesus lived in a time when many people made their living through the land. Shepherds were some of the lowliest people in society; it must have seemed strange that he chose this metaphorical language. Yet it is particularly successful because of its vividness and that vividness

remains; we continue to see in our day the relationship between shepherds and their sheep.

In choosing this imagery, Jesus is emphasising that he wants his followers also to be engaged in relationship with him. That relationship is based on us giving him our total trust, just as the sheep trust the shepherd. They follow him because they know his voice. The Gospel today makes us pause to ask:

do we know the Lord's voice? Have we listened so that we have grown to know it and to understand it is a voice we can always trust?

There are others who are familiar in this story too: thieves and robbers. We need to be more wary of other siren voices that we hear and might lead us astray.

But there is someone else too: the gatekeeper who opens the gate so that the shepherd can

pass through. We are being called to follow the Lord but perhaps there are times when we might be gatekeepers, when we have an opportunity, through the way we live and the way we treat others, to be a gatekeeper for Christ so that others also learn to trust God.

Catherine Pepinster is a former editor of *The Tablet* and the author of *The Keys and the Kingdom – the British and the papacy from John Paul II to Francis*, published by T&T Clark.

Called to mission

by Stephen Davies

The word "vocation" can fill me with dread. What is my vocation? Have I made the right choice? Am I succeeding in it? Yet everyone's God-given vocation is the same: to be the person God calls us to be; the best "me" I can be.

To do this, I have to enter through "the gate of the sheepfold" – the phrase Jesus uses to describe himself in today's Gospel. By following Jesus we have our guide and support. Once inside the sheep pen, I sometimes want to get some straw and make myself a nice place to curl up and rest. But this is not the "life to the full" to which Jesus is leading us.

If I have experienced God's love through my relationship with Jesus, how can I not want to share that with others? I have a mission:

to get out of the comfort and let others know, through my actions and choices, about God's love. Our mission as lay people is summed up by St Oscar Romero: "You parents, teachers, workers, labourers... transform the world by bringing to it the presence of God that you carry in your heart."

Stephen Davies is the Red Box Director for Missio, the Catholic Church's official charity for overseas mission, www.missio.org.uk

Loving Lord, when I watch sheepdogs guiding a flock into its pen, at least one sheep invariably seems to escape and needs to be rounded up again. Where do I fit into the picture? Help me to hear and follow your voice. Keep me close to you. Amen.

Chosen and loved

by Dr Lawrence Osborn

It was the day of Pentecost. Peter found himself explaining the apostles' behaviour to an incredulous crowd and the people responded. Peter's words had become God's words to them.

Whenever we hear the words of scripture, God is calling us. Sometimes those words are disturbing: they force us to say with Peter's crowd, "What must we do?" Sometimes they are challenging: they tell us only too plainly what we must do, for example, to "die to our sins and live for uprightness" (1 Peter 2:24). With the challenge, there also comes a promise: Christ's victory on the cross enables us to meet the challenge. Sometimes they are reassuring: in today's

Gospel, Jesus promises us a place of safety and nurture.

But whether the words we hear disturb, challenge, or reassure us, they are always words of love. After all, they are addressed to us by the God who is love.

Dr Lawrence Osborn is an Orthodox layman living in Glasgow.

"You can do so many things, so many works, even works of mercy, you can do many great things for the Church — a Catholic university, a college, a hospital... and they might even build a monument to you as a benefactor of the Church, but if you do not pray then none of this will bring light."

Pope Francis

Today:
Acts 2:14, 36-41
1 Peter 2:20-25
John 10:1-10

Monday:
Acts 11:1-18
John 10:11-18

Monday (E):
The English Martyrs
(Feast): Acts 7:55-60;
Matthew 10:17-20

Tuesday:
Acts 11:19-26
John 10:22-30

Wednesday:
Acts 12:24 – 13:5
John 12:44-50

Thursday:
Acts 13:13-25
John 13:16-20

Friday:
Acts 13:26-33
John 14:1-6

Saturday:
Acts 13:44-52
John 14:7-14

Next Sunday:
Acts 6:1-7
1 Peter 2:4-9
John 14:1-12

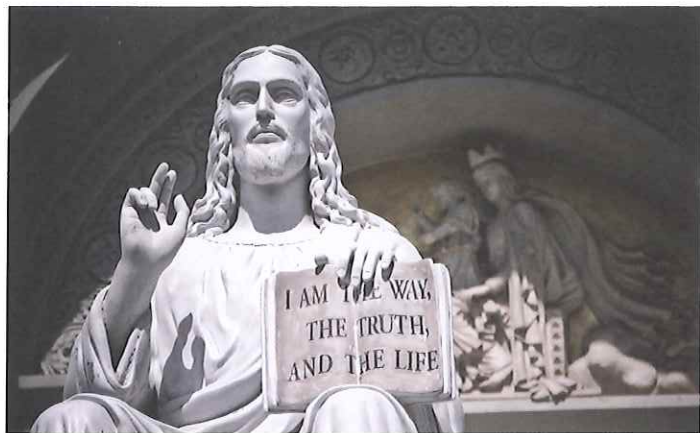


SUNDAY PLUS

Trust – even when it's tough

A Year of the Word

Facing the future



by Fr Denis McBride
C.Ss.R.

An experience of profound loss always makes us question our own direction in life, and in today's Gospel John shows us that it is no different for the disciples. Jesus gives his final discourse before leaving his close followers. He counsels them not to be afraid, for he is going to prepare a place for them and he will return to take them with him. It is Thomas who voices their problem: what direction are they going to take in the absence of Jesus?

What Jesus does not do is give his disciples a theology handbook that will answer all their questions about God. Neither does he hand them a book detailing every law with an index classifying every sin. There are no maps into the future with specific routes clearly arrowed. Jesus simply points to himself: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

But does all this help to give you direction or do you remain as puzzled as the disciples? Soon after Jesus leaves them the disciples realise that they don't have ready answers to all of life's questions. As we learn from the early divisions in the community, they all have to work together to find a way forward. There are many things Jesus did not tell them, and they have to try to face the future with honesty.

Jesus trusts his followers down the ages to face the confusion and complexity of the world. That's why he doesn't leave answers to everything. There's still a lot of working out to be done. Looking to Jesus as "the way, the truth and the life" doesn't actually solve every question effortlessly. But Jesus knew that. Clearly he wants us to put our faith to work.

Fr Denis McBride's many books, CDs and DVDs are available from Redemptorist Publications, www.rpbooks.co.uk

Trust is tough!

by Stephen Davies

When life is going well, I find it easy to trust God. Or do I really mean that when life is going as I want it to, trusting God is not difficult?

When life is difficult, when I'm exhausted, or when someone I love is diagnosed with an illness, then it can be much harder to believe that God has everything in hand.

Yet when I look back, it's usually when life was not going well that I can see the hand of God at work: in the people around me; in the change of direction I've had to take; in the growth in myself as I've overcome a challenge, or even failed – but in that failure learnt something new. That's when I usually find God at work.

So this week, I need to take to heart the words of Jesus in

today's Gospel, "You trust in God, trust also in me". It's not sitting back and doing nothing; it's listening to God in prayer and it's also taking action. And each day I'll recite the simple phrase until I can say it authentically, "Jesus, I trust in you."

Stephen Davies is the Red Box Director for Missio, the Catholic Church's official charity for overseas mission, www.missio.org.uk

Lord of hope, it's often easier said than done to put all my trust in you – or anybody else, for that matter. I like to be in control of my life and yet, there are also those moments when I need help and you're the only one with the answers. Stay with me. Amen.

Hang in there!

by Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

The expertly homemade Chinying suspension bridge in Zambia crosses the River Zambezi at a frightening height. The local people, used to the narrow, swaying bridge, often ignore the slim steel cable which provides their only handrail and security. Women carry heavy burdens on their heads and babies on their backs. Cyclists pedal unconcerned, ignoring the missing slats underneath their feet and their uninterrupted view of the Zambezi's crocodile-infested waters far below.

Newcomers to the area face a terrifying "joke": someone deliberately

and unexpectedly causes the bridge to sway uncontrollably. The petrified stranger clings to the cables, dreading the horrifying probability of becoming a crocodile's next meal. Only when the "joker" stops their dangerous prank can their trembling victim reach safety. However, having crossed in one direction, there is only one way to return to the village or to the road – and it means re-crossing the bridge.

Can you think of a time when you clung to hope because everything seemed hopeless? Can you remember when you trusted and you were not disappointed?

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

"There is a loving Father who never forgets his children: entrusting oneself to him does not magically resolve problems, but allows one to face them with the right attitude, courageously: I am courageous because I entrust myself to my Father who takes care of everything and who loves me very much."

Pope Francis

Today:
Acts 6:1-7
1 Peter 2:4-9
John 14:1-12

Monday:
Acts 14:5-18
John 14:21-26

Tuesday:
Acts 14:19-28
John 14:27-31

Wednesday:
Acts 15:1-6
John 15:1-8

Thursday:
Acts 1:15-17, 20-26
John 15:9-17

Friday:
Acts 15:22-31
John 15:12-17

Saturday:
Acts 16:1-10
John 15:18-21

Next Sunday:
Acts 8:5-8, 14-17
1 Peter 3:15-18
John 14:15-21