

SUNDAY PLUS

Love matters

No greater commandment

By Sr Janet Fearnis FMDM



A group of Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz knew they were about to die and asked if God had rejected his Covenant with his Chosen People and left them to the Nazis. Unable to reach a clear verdict, the prisoners decided to charge God with abandonment and put him on trial. One man, a former judge, presided, whilst others acted as God's prosecutor, defence and the jury. The trial lasted throughout the night.

God was found guilty as charged.

Just as the trial concluded, prison guards forced open the door and herded the men towards the gas chamber. Although they had just declared God guilty of abandonment, each realised that he had nowhere else to turn. Unprompted, they covered their bare heads with a hand and started to pray aloud the great Jewish prayer, the *Shema*. Thus, they died.

Many years later, the screenwriter Frank Cottrell Boyce retold their story in his magnificent television drama, *God on Trial*.

In today's Gospel, Jesus repeats the *Shema*. We can imagine his listeners standing in prayerful silence, perhaps pulling their shawls over their heads, rocking backwards and forwards in God's presence even in the marketplace. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love

the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Certainly, this was – and is – the greatest commandment. As Jesus recited the second most important, there was also unanimity. "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Jesus added, "There is no commandment greater than these."

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

Each one of us can become a living, different and original "translation", not a repetition but a living, different and original "translation" of the one Word of love that God gives us.

Pope Francis

Love in the here and now

By Paul Higginson

How do we go about loving God with all our heart and soul? The Church Fathers tell us to start with God's Creation. Pick up a pebble perhaps, or gaze at a flower or tree, and admire its shape, colour and beauty. Contemplate a bird outside or perhaps a pet and understand with gratitude what it is adding to your world. Then move to other people, with all

their faults and failings, yes – but brothers and sisters, all with the Christ light within. We love God by loving what's there in the here and now: where else would God be found? We can see God in certain holy places or "easy to love" people, or we can see him everywhere and in everyone. At first you might just catch small glimpses of God but keep looking and listening: try loving what's right in front of you today and see where this takes you.

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.

Feast of the week
Wednesday 6 November

St Leonard
(d. AD 559)

How many visitors to St Leonards-on-Sea – or residents, for that matter – realise that the town was originally dedicated to the patron saint of prisoners (including political prisoners and prisoners of war), women in labour, farmers and horses?

According to tradition, St Leonard, a former courtier of King Clovis I, King of the Franks, was converted to Christianity and became a monk. In return for Leonard's prayers and

the safe birth of a son, Clovis promised that he would pardon every prisoner whom the monk visited – giving rise to the legend that shackles fell from prisoners as soon as he appeared on the scene and to his patronage of women in labour.

St Leonard, although he was certainly known in England during Saxon times, became increasingly popular following the Norman Conquest, especially during Medieval times. As a result, several sites around the country were dedicated to him and, centuries later, still bear his name today.

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Lord of my life, be the Lord of my love. Amen.

Today: Deuteronomy 6:2-6 Hebrews 7:23-28 Mark 12:28-34

Monday: Philippians 2:1-4 Luke 14:12-14

Tuesday: Philippians 2:5-11 Luke 14:15-24

Wednesday: Philippians 2:12-18 Luke 14:25-33

Thursday: Philippians 3:3-8 Luke 15:1-10

Friday: Philippians 3:17-4:1 Luke 16:1-8

Saturday: Ezekiel 47:1-2, 8-9, 12 1 Corinthians 3:9-11, 16-17 John 2:13-22

Next Sunday: 1 Kings 17:10-16 Hebrews 9:24-28 Mark 12:38-44