

# SUNDAY PLUS

Messengers of hope

## Life changers

By Seonaid Alder

One or more nineteenth-century Surrey workhouses forcibly separated married couples, placing the husband with the men and the wife with the women, forbidding them to meet, except for the twice-weekly services in the local Anglican church. Once the services ended, husbands and wives were again parted. When adults received vouchers for spending in local shops, shop owners protested to the local council because workhouse residents downgraded a shop's status and discouraged its use by more affluent customers.

Anna, in today's Gospel, was an elderly widow, possibly dependent on the Temple for her food and accommodation in return for working around the Temple precincts. She spent all day, every day, devoting herself to prayer and fasting, but she was possibly one of a large group of poverty-stricken widows who, if they didn't work, didn't eat. Did she have a family? We don't know. The widows received "charity" which limited its support in order to deter others from asking for help – just as would happen in the workhouse, where people often died of hunger and neglect.

Anna was regarded as a prophetess. Did this mean that she was simply a good listener who gave useful advice? We don't know. All we know for certain is that she recognised Jesus as the Messiah and blessed God, to whom she was important. We don't hear that Temple visitors paid much attention to Anna or Simeon, or else the two elderly people might have changed the world. We need to listen to messengers of hope!

*Seonaid Alder is a retired secondary school teacher.*

Love is more powerful, love gives life, love makes hope blossom in the wilderness.

Pope Francis

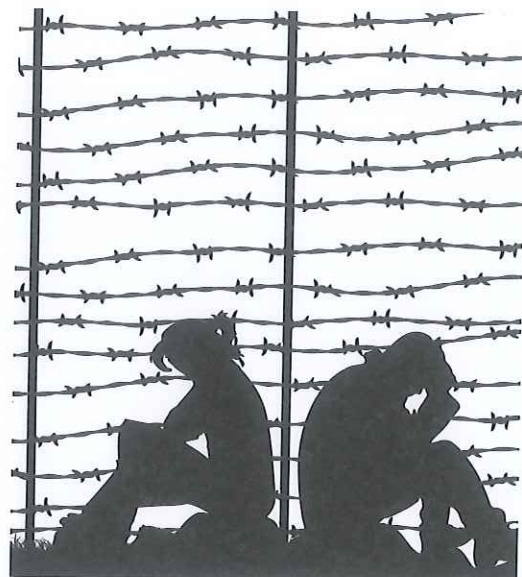
## My eyes have seen the salvation

By Neil Foley

Simeon had been waiting. I can only imagine what his waiting would have been like. Long hours in prayer and fasting, with many sacrifices made at the Temple, waiting for the Lord to comfort his people – and all during a time of ancient hardship and foreign occupation. But he waited in hope, trusting in the promise of his God. He knew that God would act to redeem his people, but he

also knew that salvation would not occur according to the ways of men – the ways of power, laws and war. He knew that the sign would be rejected: that it would be through the poor, those who mourn, the meek, peacemakers, the pure in heart, that God's blessing would come. This Jubilee Year, let us be messengers of hope like Simeon, bringing the good news of salvation to all and especially to those who suffer and are rejected.

*Neil Foley is from Wexford, Ireland, where he lives with his wife, Helen, and twin girls, Zélie and Martha. He works full-time as an environmental scientist but is also a lay missionary with the Redemptorists, a retreat facilitator and a spiritual writer.*




Jubilee 2025

## 8-9 February: Jubilee of Armed Forces, Police and Security Personnel

"Law enforcement — military and police — have the mission of ensuring a safe environment, so that each and every citizen can live in peace and serenity. In your families, in the various areas in which you operate, may you be instruments of reconciliation, builders of bridges and sowers of peace. Indeed, you are called not only to prevent, manage and put an end to conflicts, but also to contribute to the building of an order founded on truth, on justice, on love and on freedom..."

The affirmation of peace is not an easy task, especially because of war, which uproots hearts and augments violence and hatred. I urge you not to be discouraged. Continue on your journey of faith and open your hearts to God, the merciful Father, who never tires of forgiving us. Faced with the challenges of every day, be shining examples of Christian hope, which is the certitude of the victory of love over hate and of peace over war."

*Pope Francis, Jubilee for the armed forces and law enforcement, 2016.*

Lord of life, be with me on my journey towards you.  
May I carry your hope and your love to everyone I meet.  
 Amen.

Today:

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

Monday:

Hebrews 11:32-40  
Mark 5:1-20

Tuesday:

Hebrews 12:1-4  
Mark 5:21-43

Wednesday:

Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15  
Mark 6:1-6

Thursday:

Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24  
Mark 6:7-13

Friday:

Hebrews 13:1-8  
Mark 6:14-29

Saturday:

Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21  
Mark 6:30-34

Next Sunday:

Isaiah 6:1-8  
1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Luke 5:1-11