

SUNDAY PLUS

Jesus in our midst

The Lord Jesus is with us

By Fr Richard Reid C.Ss.R.

2021 is now unbelievably behind us and we look to a brand-new year with excitement and perhaps trepidation. 2022 is opening up to each of us. What will this year bring? How will this year change us? Where will this year lead us? These are powerful questions that are best thought about in the quietness of our minds or with our nearest and dearest. Let us never forget that we do not enter the bright new territory of this year alone. No, the Lord Jesus is with us and will accompany us every step of the way. We have so recently celebrated his birthday and the fact that by coming into the world he has made it possible that we could be called brothers and sisters of one another, only because he permits us to be his brother or sister.

Let us remember the famous poem by Minnie Louise Haskins (1875-1957), made famous by King George VI as we put out in the darkness of the year ahead: And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he replied:

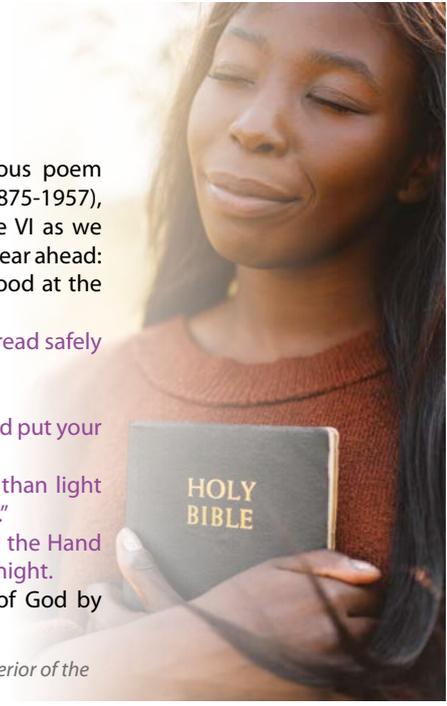
"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way."

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

Be aware of the presence of God by your side.

Fr Richard Reid is the Provincial Superior of the Redemptorists' London Province.



Epiphany house blessing

Have you ever visited a house and seen something like 20 C+M+B 20 chalked over a door and wondered what it means?

The numbers and letters represent a time-honoured Epiphany custom celebrated in many places across the world.

C+M+B stands for the names Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, the traditional names of the Magi. It's also believed that the letters are the initials of the Latin words meaning "Christ, bless this house" (Christus mansionem benedicat)

The first 20 is the century and the second figures are the year, so, for 2022, 20 C+M+B 22 would be chalked over the door.

The Epiphany Blessing places God at the entrance to the home and the entire family under God's protection. It invites Jesus to be a daily guest in the home, the family's comings and goings, conversations, work and play, joys and sorrows.

Lord God of Heaven and earth, you revealed your only begotten Son to every nation by the guidance of a star. Bless this house and all who inhabit it. May we be blessed with health, goodness of heart, gentleness and the keeping of your law. Fill us with the light of Christ, that our love for each other may go out to all. Father, bless all who gather here. Send your holy angel to defend us and fill with grace all who enter this door. We ask this through Christ our Lord,  Amen.

"Like the Magi, we too are called to allow ourselves to be fascinated, attracted, guided, illuminated and converted by Christ: it is the journey of faith, through prayer and the contemplation of the works of God, which continually fill us with joy and wonder, an ever new wonder. That wonder is always the first step to go forward in this light."

Pope Francis

from *The Coming of the Magi*

"A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter." ...
All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death."

T.S.Eliot

Today:
Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2, 8-12
Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18
John 1:1-18
(S) Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Monday:
1 John 2:29 - 3:6
John 1:29-34
(S) 1 John 3:22 - 4:6
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

Tuesday:
1 John 3:7-10
John 1:35-42
(S) 1 John 4:7-10
Mark 6:34-44

Wednesday:
1 John 3:11-21
John 1:43-51
(S) 1 John 4:11-18
Mark 6:45-52

Thursday:
Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12
(S) 1 John 4:19 - 5:4
Luke 4:14-22

Friday:
1 John 3:22 - 4:6
Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25
(S) 1 John 5:5-13
Luke 5:12-16

Saturday:
1 John 4:7-10
Mark 6:34-44
(S) 1 John 5:14-21
John 3:22-30

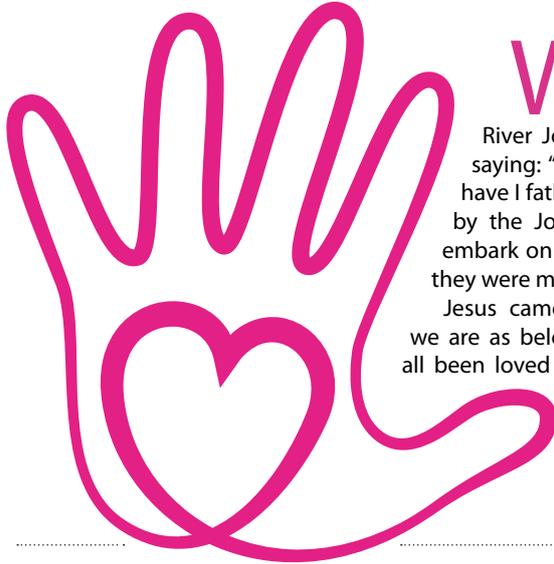
Next Sunday:
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11
Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7
Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

SUNDAY PLUS

I love you

Love like no other

By Paul Higginson



When Jesus is baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan he hears a voice saying: "You are my Son; today have I fathered you." These words by the Jordan inspired Jesus to embark on his public ministry, but they were meant for us to hear too. Jesus came to let us know that we are as beloved as he is. We have all been loved into being by God; he knitted us together in our mother's womb, he has written our name on

the palm of his hand. God says: "You are my child. You are my beloved." This "beloved-ness" does not depend on our occupation or status. Nor does it depend on how "good" we are, or how sinful we have been. It is not restricted to a particular ethnic group or religion. It is not restricted to believers. It is just how God sees us - all of us.

What a difference it would make if we could only have the imagination to see ourselves as God sees us. In God's eyes we are "wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). He is our biggest

cheerleader, always in our corner, loving us unconditionally, always ready to forgive and forget, always encouraging us to be the best version of ourselves. Nothing we can do or say can ever separate us from his love, and nothing is impossible if he is by our side. That is the promise of the Gospel, that is the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Following many years in the classroom and as a parish catechist, Paul Higginson is finding that retirement is enabling him to devote even more of his time to supporting his parish.

Lord, there are no words more precious than the words, "I love you". They make such a difference to my morale, my self-worth and my daily life. Give me the courage to tell people that I love them. Let me carry your love to everyone I meet.  Amen.

Family treasures

By Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

I recently examined at close quarters the christening gown which my grandmother made for me all those many years ago. These days, it's an ivory-coloured silk. Was its simple design originally white? Who knows! Still, it's an eye-opener to see those minute stitches and French knots which must have taken countless hours of loving care. From start to finish, that little dress was an act of pure love.

Every family has its own unique and incomparably precious heirlooms which might otherwise be valueless in the eyes of the world. The

BBC television series, "The Repair Shop", frequently shows the emotions surrounding a treasured item which, were it not for its associations, would have been thrown out long ago.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared, "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them."

Today, as God proudly declares Jesus to be his beloved Son, we can think of our own family members, who might not be perfect, but are nevertheless irreplaceable family treasures.

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

Feast of the week Wednesday 12 January

St Benedict Biscop

When you are next in church, imagine that you live in the seventh century, cannot read or write or understand the Latin in which Mass is celebrated and the scriptures read. How are you to be educated in your faith?

Then look at the pictures, statues and stations of the cross around the church... They become your book and teach you what you cannot learn by reading. We take them for granted, often overlooking the fact that, many centuries ago, churches

were often undecorated – and the homily lasted for at least one hour.

St Bede wrote that when his teacher, the Northumbrian nobleman-cum-monk, St Benedict Biscop (c628-690) founded two great abbeys in Sunderland and Jarrow, he decorated the churches with "a painting of the Mother of God, the blessed Mary, ever virgin, and one of each of the twelve apostles... pictures of incidents in the Gospels... and scenes from St John's vision of the Apocalypse... Thus, all who entered the church, even those who could not read, were able, whichever way they looked to contemplate the dear face of Christ and his saints."

"This is how God conquers the world's evil: by humbling himself, taking charge of it. It is also the way that we can lift up others: not by judging, not by suggesting what to do, but by drawing near, empathising, sharing God's love. Closeness is God's way with us; he himself says so to Moses: 'Think: what people has its gods as close as you have me?'. Closeness is God's way with us."

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11
Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7
Luke 3:15-16. 21-22

Monday:
1 Samuel 1:1-8
Mark 1:14-20

Tuesday:
1 Samuel 1:9-20
Mark 1:21-28

Wednesday:
1 Samuel 3:1-10. 19-20
Mark 1:29-39

Thursday:
1 Samuel 4:1-11
Mark 1:40-45

Friday:
1 Samuel 8:4-7. 10-22
Mark 2:1-12

Saturday:
1 Samuel 9:1-4. 17-19; 10:1
Mark 2:13-17

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 62:1-5
1 Corinthians 12:4-11
John 2:1-11

SUNDAY PLUS

Create peace

Jesus the peacemaker

By Sr Janet Fearnis FMDM

It was a potential family row. In catering for the wedding breakfast, allowance was made for unexpected guests. "Everybody" was welcome in accordance with the unwritten rules of hospitality: a wedding in the time of Jesus was an expensive business. As anticipated, some female family members arrived early to help with cooking for

the immediate and extended family, friends and acquaintances and "others" who would need to be fed. It's easy to imagine a hot, tired Mary, slaving over a fire and cooking pot, brushing her hair back in disbelief as she saw, not only Jesus, but a group of his hot, tired and thirsty fishermen friends appear for the wedding – and the food! The wine was already in embarrassingly short

supply, so Mary was possibly not thrilled to see Jesus. Her words, "They have no wine", might have implied, "and you haven't helped matters!" Jesus' reply, "What is that to me?" sounds almost churlish.

What were Mary's thoughts as she told the servants to obey any instructions Jesus might give them? She couldn't have expected her son to turn water into wine, but she might have hoped Jesus and the disciples would find some

money to buy more wine from a nearby vendor.

The wedding at Cana was Jesus' first miracle. It saved newly-weds and their families from an embarrassing start to a marriage and its celebration – but it also quite possibly saved Mary from the awkwardness of apologising on behalf of Jesus and his disciples. Cana was the first recorded incident of Jesus the peacemaker.

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

God in the home

By Pope Francis

I wish to underline how important it is for families to ask themselves often if they live based on love, for love and in love. In practice, this means giving oneself, forgiving, not losing patience, anticipating the other, respecting. How much better family life would be if every day we lived according to the words, "please", "thank you" and "I'm sorry". Every day we have the experience of fragility and weakness, and therefore we all, families and pastors, are in need of renewed humility that forms the desire to form ourselves, to educate and be educated, to help and be helped, to accompany, discern and integrate all men of good will. I dream of an outbound Church, not a self-referential one, a Church that does not pass by far from man's wounds, a merciful Church that proclaims the heart of the revelation of God as love, which is mercy. It is this very mercy that makes us new in love; and we know how much Christian families are a place of mercy and witnesses of mercy.

Letter announcing the Ninth World Meeting of Families in Dublin, 21-26 August 201

Feast of the week

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The week of the 18th to the 25th of January is dedicated specifically to this — to ask God for the gift of unity to overcome the scandal of division among believers in Jesus. After the Last Supper, he prayed for his own, "that they may all be one". This was his prayer before the Passion; we could call it his spiritual testament...

Unity can be achieved only as a fruit of prayer. Diplomatic efforts and academic dialogue are not enough. Jesus knew this and opened the way for us by praying. Our

prayer for unity is thus a humble but trusting participation in the prayer of the Lord, who promised that any prayer said in his name would be heard by the Father.

At this point, we can ask ourselves: "Do I pray for unity?". It is Jesus' will but, if we inspect the intentions for which we pray, we will probably realise that we have prayed little, perhaps never, for Christian unity. And yet, the world's faith depends on it; in fact, the Lord asked for unity among us "so that the world might believe"... Therefore, may prayer be the starting point to help Jesus achieve his dream: that they all may be one.

Pope Francis

"My hope is that peace may reign in the hearts of men and women and in families, in places of work and of recreation, in communities and in nations. In families, at work, in nations: peace, peace. Now is the time to think that life today is organized around war, and enmities, by many things that destroy. We want peace. And this is a gift."

Pope Francis

Today:
Isaiah 62:1-5
1 Corinthians 12:4-11
John 2:1-11

Monday:
1 Samuel 15:16-23
Mark 2:18-22

Tuesday:
1 Samuel 16:1-13
Mark 2:23-28

Wednesday:
1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51
Mark 3:1-6

Thursday:
1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7
Mark 3:7-12

Friday:
1 Samuel 24:3-21
Mark 3:13-19

Saturday:
2 Samuel 1:1-4,
11-12, 17, 19, 23-27
Mark 3:20-21

Next Sunday:
Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10
1 Corinthians 12:12-30
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

SUNDAY PLUS

Send me!

No local prophets

By Fr Denis
McBride C.Ss.R.

In today's Gospel Jesus is rejected by his own neighbours. Perhaps the neighbours have a vested interest in focusing on who Jesus was to them, rather than who he is now. It's much easier having a carpenter around the house than a prophet; it is much easier talking about broken chairs than broken lives.

Jesus reminds them that no prophet is accepted in his own homeland, and as if to prove him right the local crowd become so enraged,

they try to throw him off a cliff. But Jesus escapes, and it is no surprise that he never returns home again.

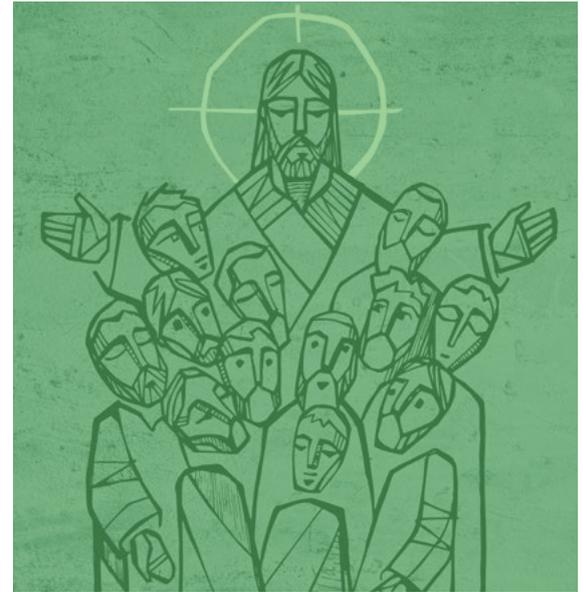
New home

We all need a place where we belong and people whom we can call our own. Usually we call that "home": where you are accepted in love for who you are, but also encouraged to become the person you could be. Perhaps the last people to accept our changes are those who live with us: they're so used to the old ways they can't believe in real change.

Jesus had to leave home

to become the person his Father wanted him to be. He couldn't rely on his own folks to foster his new life and new mission. So, he established a community, a body of people, who would recognise, as St Paul says, their need of each other. That's us. We're home for each other, pledged to support the growing life of the Spirit in each of us. In this gathering here everyone should feel welcome, and everyone should have the freedom to grow. Welcome home!

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



Lord Jesus, make your home in my heart. May we be inseparable companions as I travel towards you.

 Amen.

Set me free!

By James Gallogly

What is it that makes us feel downtrodden? It gets to us all at one time or another. Lockdown exposed this for us in ways we did not imagine.

In prison, many desire to be set free from the offending behaviour or the addiction that roots them in captivity. Hearing the message of Jesus can be a powerful step to freedom.

Too often our men struggle to believe that Jesus loves them; no one else has! Being trapped in the pain of rejection and only rewarded for crime is no way to live.

By bringing the love of Jesus into the life of another, we play a vital role in being a living part of Christ's body. In a prayer, through a card or letter sent or by the consoling visit of a chaplain this can be life-changing. The Spirit of the Lord is given... the downtrodden can seek freedom.

James Gallogly is a lay Catholic chaplain in a UK prison.

Feast of the week

Closure of Octave of Christian Unity

The Holy Spirit thus teaches us the concreteness of love for all those brothers and sisters with whom we share the same humanity, the humanity which Christ inseparably united to himself by telling us that we will always find him in the poor and those in greatest need. By serving them together, we will realise once more that we are brothers and sisters and will grow in unity. The Spirit, who renews the face of the earth, also inspires us to

care for our common home, to make bold choices about how we live and consume, for the opposite of fruitfulness is exploitation, and it is shameful for us to waste precious resources of which many others are deprived.

Dear brothers and sisters, may we remain united in Christ. May the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts make us feel children of the Father, brothers and sisters of one another, brothers and sisters in our one human family. May the Holy Trinity, communion of love, make us grow in unity.

Pope Francis

"Dear brothers and sisters, let us not ignore God's word. It is a love letter, written to us by the One who knows us best. In reading it, we again hear his voice, see his face and receive his Spirit. That word brings us close to God. Let us not keep it at arm's length, but carry it with us always, in our pocket, on our phone. Let us give it a worthy place in our homes."

Pope Francis

Today:
Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10
1 Corinthians 12:12-30
Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Monday:
2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10
Mark 3:22-30

Tuesday:
Acts 22:3-16
or Acts 9:1-22
Mark 16:15-18

Wednesday:
2 Timothy 1:1-8
or Titus 1:1-5
Luke 10:1-9

Thursday:
2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29
Mark 4:21-25

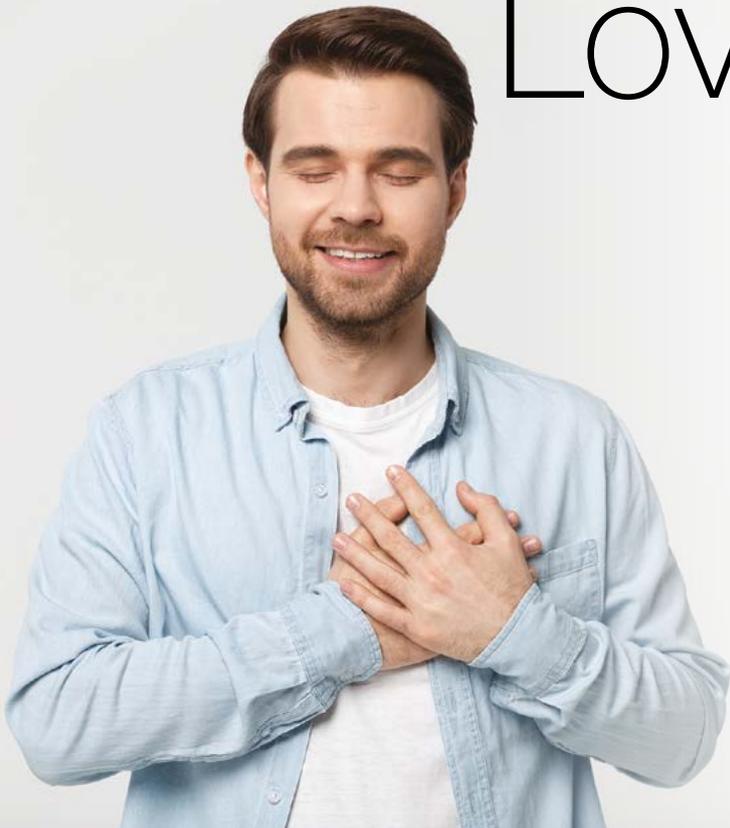
Friday:
2 Samuel 11:1-10, 13-17
Mark 4:26-34

Saturday:
2 Samuel 12:1-7, 10-17
Mark 4:35-41

Next Sunday:
Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19
1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13
Luke 4:21-30

SUNDAY PLUS

Love lasts



Love is the key

By Fr Royston Price
C.Ss.R.

In the Gospel reading this week, we see hostility from the people of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Jealousy of the success of others can be a poison in the heart, even if never voiced aloud or acted on. If unchecked, from it can flow all sorts of evils, such as defamation, gossip, and slander. St Thomas Aquinas calls jealousy the "mother of hatred", as it gnaws away at harmony in society and personal relationships.

St Paul, however, talks about the antidote to this toxin: Love. Love is never jealous, he tells us, but delights in the good of the other. Love is the supreme rule of the Gospel and the Christian life: it is the key to understanding human existence, the

mission of Christ, and to finding lasting happiness.

To be a Christian is to be drenched in the love of God, which overflows into love of neighbour. This love of neighbour is embodied by practical work, acts that directly help those in need, but all done as part of the great cosmic drama, vital notes in the operatic duet between God and humanity. St Alphonsus, the founder of the Redemptorists, spoke frequently about the love of God, and how we respond to that love, because that was the reason Jesus took flesh, to win our hearts for God.

Having won our heart, Jesus dwells there now, transforming us more and more into his likeness, and liberating us from pride, selfishness, and jealousy.

Fr Royston Price is the Vocations Director for the London Province of the Redemptorists.

A simple love song

By Sr Janet Fearnis FMDM

What's your favourite love song of all time? Can you remember all the words? Do they sometimes appear unexpectedly, creating lovely warm, fuzzy feelings?

Does your favourite love song conjure up the picture of a face and place, perhaps many years ago? Was it a love which truly lasted forever? Was it a teenage spine-tingling "happily ever after" moment which, years later, with the benefit of hindsight, is amusing – but still very special?

Perhaps your favourite love songs have no connection with romance but will, instead, always hold a unique place in your heart. Did my beloved late father notice that he always sang the "Salve Regina" when peeling potatoes? My mother always turned the radio or CD player to (painfully) full volume when she wanted to hear Schubert's or Gounod's "Ave Maria".

What is your favourite love song of all time? Take a few minutes to cherish it and thank God for its loveliness.

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

Lord, teach me to imitate the trusting patience of Simeon and of Anna, who waited a lifetime to see Jesus and to bring his light to the whole world. Help me to stand beside people like Mary and Joseph who meet with unexpected pain.  Amen.

"God's call is always love: we have to try to discover the love behind each call, and it should be responded to only with love. This is the language: the response to a call that comes from love is only love."

Pope Francis



Feast of the week
Wednesday 2 February

Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

The Offering (A Song of Simeon)

Old Man, you've sown the years longing for the harvest, hoping for the green shoot to appear. Fragrant with perfection, he is here: wanting to be purified, waiting to be crucified.

And his mother, offering her Lamb, gives him to your open arms so you can finally die in peace knowing that the Promised One is born. In gratitude you will whisper that her heart will break.

Eve Forti

Today:
Jeremiah 1:4-5. 17-19
1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13
Luke 4:21-30

Monday:
2 Samuel 15:13-14.
30; 16:5-13
Mark 5:1-20

Tuesday:
2 Samuel 18:9-10.
14. 24-25. 30 – 19:3
Mark 5:21-43

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

Thursday:
1 Kings 2:1-4. 10-12
Mark 6:7-13

Friday:
Ecclesiasticus
47:2-13
Mark 6:14-29

Saturday:
1 Kings 3:4-13
Mark 6:30-34

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