

Monday 20 March 2023

St Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Dreams

Readings: 2 Samuel 7:4-5. 12-14. 16; Romans 4:13. 16-18. 22;
Matthew 1:16. 18-21. 24



*“When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do.”
(Matthew 1:24)*

Some people think dreams can reveal the future. Three days before his assassination, Abraham Lincoln told his wife and some friends he'd had a disturbing dream. “Ten days ago I could not have been long in bed when I fell into a slumber. I soon began to dream.” He heard subdued sobs, and in his dream got up and went from room to room. “I kept on until I arrived at the East Room. Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse. Around it were stationed soldiers acting as guards. ‘Who is dead?’ I demanded of one of the soldiers. ‘The President,’ was his answer; ‘he was killed by an assassin’.”

Joseph had a happier dream that Mary had conceived a child by the Holy Spirit, and that contrary to his intention he must not be afraid to marry her and help bring up her son. Only a person of deep spiritual sensitivity would have acted upon this, the inspiration of an angel, instead of dismissing it.

St John Paul II, whose mother died when he was young, leaving his father to bring up two boys, may have been thinking about him when he preached, “Generations of fathers have followed in [St Joseph’s] footsteps who, with the example of a simple and laborious life, imprinted in their children’s spirit the inestimable value of faith. I ask God that they be men of a robust interior life, who fulfil their mission in the family and society in an exemplary way.”

Prayer

God our Father, we ask you to bless and give strength to all fathers and mothers, and especially those who bring up children alone and in difficult circumstances, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Tuesday 21 March 2023

Love rules

Readings: Ezekiel 47:1-9. 12; John 5:1-3. 5-16



“Now at the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem there is a building... consisting of five porticos.” (John 5:2)

Archaeologists have uncovered many places mentioned in the Bible. In the nineteenth century they discovered the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem, with its building containing five porticos. In the days of Jesus, crowds of sick people would shelter there, believing that an angel rippled the pond occasionally and that the first person in would be healed. Here, we're told, lay this poor man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, but someone always beat him into the water.

St John had a particular reason for writing about this miracle. By healing someone on the sabbath day, in the minds of those who thought religion was a matter of keeping rules and regulations, Jesus broke the law. That is why they began to persecute him. Religious people can be very attached to rules, presuming that keeping them assiduously ensures they stay on the right side of God. This is a world away from the Gospel of Jesus. He had only one rule, or rather one rule with two parts: to love God and to love one another as God loves us.

So what of our religious observances: coming to the Eucharist, reading the Bible, being in prayer groups? These are among the ways we respond to the Lord's love and draw closer to him, and receive his grace; so that we may more faithfully live in him and he in us, and learn more deeply to love him and to love each other.

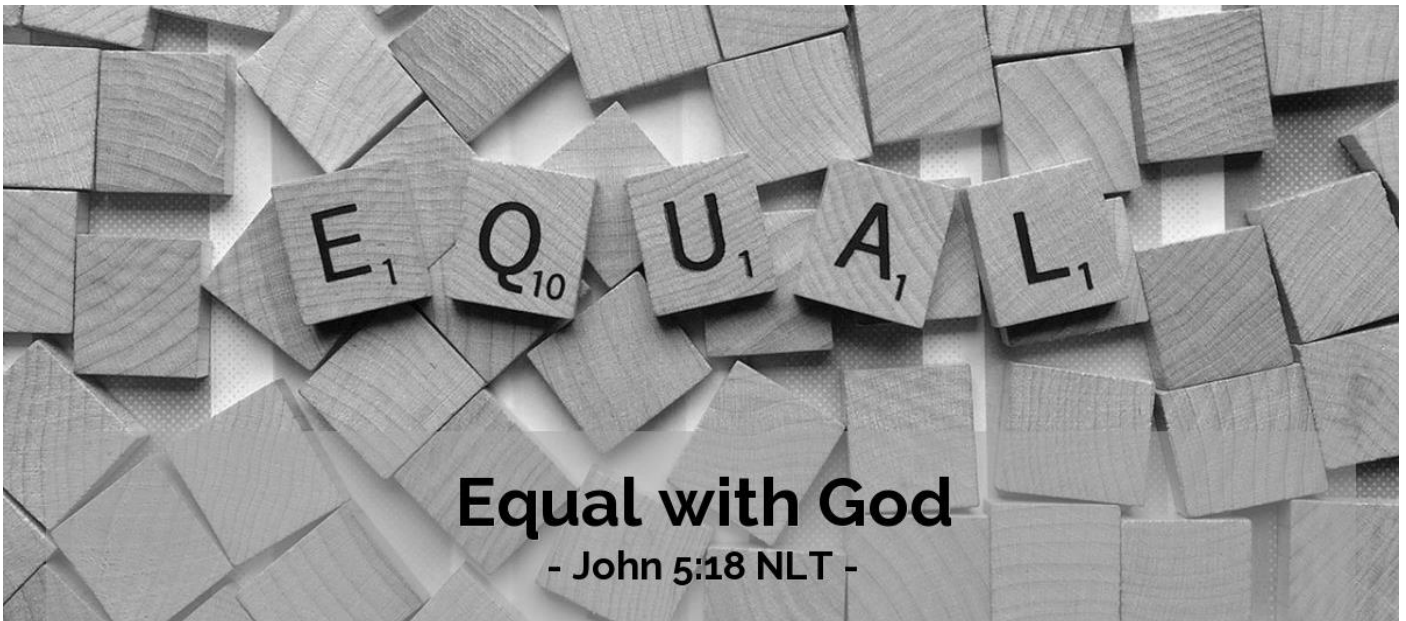
Prayer

Father, your Son, Jesus Christ, heals our lives: accept the gratitude and devotion of our hearts and deepen our love for you and for one another, and those we know who are in need, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wednesday 22 March 2023

Crucify him!

Readings: Isaiah 49:8-15; John 5:17-30



“He spoke of God as his own Father.” (John 5:18)

In our world today, with its modern means of communication and news media, we are all too aware that miscarriages of justice occur. Sometimes people are convicted and imprisoned, and years later new evidence proves they were innocent. And there are regimes that stage mock trials and assassinate good people.

The trial and crucifixion of Jesus was one such travesty of justice, and St John, in today's Gospel, relates the false accusations which led to his conviction. At the start of today's Gospel, when Jesus says, “My Father goes on working, and so do I,” John tells us that this only made the religious authorities “even more intent on killing him”. Their verdict had already been reached. “Not content with breaking the sabbath, he spoke of God as his Father and so made himself God's equal.” Here, in a single sentence, John explains why the authorities conspired to be rid of this teacher whom people were beginning to revere as a prophet. He had to die.

Jesus allowed the recognition of his Godhead to sink in gradually. People first saw him as a compassionate healer, a remarkable teacher, a prophet; then some recognised him as the Messiah. Finally, at the end of John's Gospel, Thomas, once the doubter, spoke for all the disciples when he exclaimed: “My Lord and my God!” Writing to the Colossians, St Paul expressed the truth in beautiful words: “[Christ] is the image of the unseen God”.

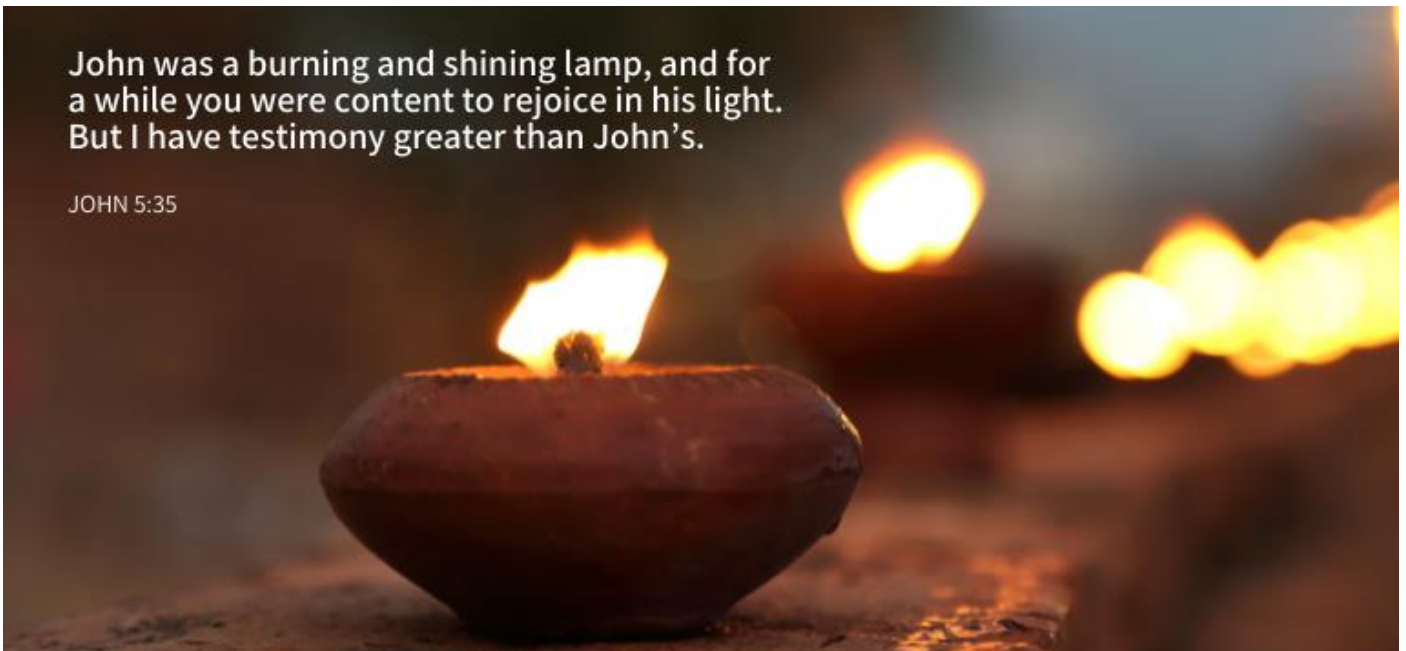
Prayer

Father, you revealed your beloved Son Jesus Christ to be light from light, true God from true God; grant that we who worship him on earth may one day behold his glory in heaven at your right hand. Amen.

Thursday 23 March 2023

Believe in me

Readings: Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:31-47



“John was a lamp alight and shining.” (John 5:35)

Anyone who has attempted to convert people who do not believe in God, or to bring back to the Church those who have lapsed, knows what an uphill task that is. But in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is trying to do just that. He reasons with them and appeals to them. With some people he was, of course, successful. Although the religious leaders rejected him, others became his followers, the beginning of the Church.

So how did Jesus try to persuade them, and how could we follow his example today? Jesus talked about John the Baptist, whom many of the people of his day revered. We could talk, too, about the inspiring lives of saints. The Church had, and still has, many great holy men and women, known and unknown. Then he appealed to them to respond to his miracles, “the works my Father has given me to carry out”. Answers to prayer are not uncommon for those who have eyes to see them, and personal testimonies to them can be powerful.

Jesus also talked about the scriptures, which, as he told them, testify to him. For someone open to faith, nothing reaches the heart more than reading a Gospel. The Acts of the Apostles is a gripping story of how people came to faith through the Church. Pope Francis compares the Bible to a “love letter” from God to humanity, recommending us to read it daily. It truly does encourage our faith and joy.

Prayer

Father, help us to trust in your goodness and generosity. May we hold on to your word rather than to our possessions. May we proclaim your kingdom through our words and our actions to bring about a better world, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Friday 24 March 2023

Seeing the light

Readings: Wisdom 2:1. 12-22; John 7:1-2. 10. 25-30



“Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking.” (Wisdom 2:14)

The Gospel today tells us about Jesus going to Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Tabernacles. He sent his disciples ahead of him, but went up privately, without drawing attention to himself. Why, when he knew his life was in danger, did he go at all? Why did he particularly want to be in Jerusalem on the feast of Tabernacles? Tabernacles was a joyful harvest festival of prayer, ritual, singing and dancing. The highpoint was the lighting of four immense candelabra. Pilgrims could see this astonishing light shining from afar, and it symbolised and celebrated the light of God’s revelation to the Jewish people.

St Augustine wrote that Jesus went there secretly, not because he was afraid, but because he actually was the true light they were celebrating, though they were unable to recognise and believe in him. Augustine himself rejected the Christian faith when he was young, until one day he saw the light and believed.

Today’s first reading, from the book of Wisdom, describes why some people do not believe in Christ. It is because they see Jesus as a reproof to the way they think. Yet there are determined non-believers who have considered the evidence, prayed and become believers. For example, the American prize-winning science-fiction writer John C. Wright was received into the Church after years of atheism, saying, “It was like a man born blind suddenly receiving sight... it was like falling in love.”

Prayer

Father, your Son is the light of the world who shines in the minds and hearts of all who believe in him and follow him. Give grace to all who are searching and find it difficult to believe. Amen.

Saturday 25 March 2023

The Annunciation of the Lord

A big “yes”

Readings: Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38



“You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.” (Luke 1:31)

When did the incarnation of Jesus begin? Was it on Christmas Day? And when did it end? Was it when Jesus ascended into heaven? Neither of these answers is correct. The incarnation began on this day, the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, when Mary responded to the angel’s message with the words “let what you have said be done to me”. This was when God became human. And it has never ended, because Jesus took his humanity, our humanity, back with him when he ascended to heaven.

Jesus became human in Mary’s womb when she said “yes” to God. This is the beginning of a sacred human life. For all life is sacred; each human life, no matter how weak, vulnerable or insignificant it may seem to us, is precious, valuable and deeply loved by God at every stage of our human existence.

Mary’s active consent, her willingness to put her life in God’s hands, has made possible salvation for the whole human race. Through her, God has a human face. “To have seen me is to have seen the Father,” Jesus told his disciples. We can relate lovingly to him as we relate to other human beings. We can love God. Not only that, but it becomes possible for us “to share the divine nature”, as St Peter puts it in one of his letters – here on earth and, one day, fully in the glory of heaven.

Prayer

Father, you chose Mary to be the mother of your Son. Grant that she, who so willingly said “yes” to you, may pray for us to be similarly open to the will of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.