

SUNDAY PLUS

Prepare the way

“Not
reed
but
root”

by Fr Denis
McBride C.Ss.R.



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None of the Gospel writers begins the story of Jesus' public ministry with Jesus himself. Each of the evangelists introduces us first to a wonderful prophet, the wild man in the wilderness, John the Baptist. There is a fixture in the tradition: if you want to tell the story of Jesus you first tell the story of John the Baptist.

It is the towering figure of John who introduces the adult Jesus in all the Gospels. John worked no miracles, held no office and

belonged to no religious party. Yet his importance for Jesus was unique: he stands as the only religious leader that Jesus ever sought out and spoke of with deep affection and admiration. He is described as a voice crying in the wilderness, a large presence that dominates the emptiness of the wasteland.

World War II poet Sidney Keyes catches something of John's place in sacred history in his poem “St John the Baptist”:

I, John, not reed but root;
Not vested priest nor saviour but a voice
Crying daylong like a cricket in the heat,
Demand your worship. Not for me
But for the traveller I am calling
From beyond Jordan and the limestone hills,
Whose runner and rude servant I am only.
Not man entirely but God's watchman,
I dwell among the blistered rocks
Awaiting the wide dawn, the wonder
Of His first coming, and the Dove's descent.

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

Offer the map

by Christine Clark

Parents nurture their children in many ways. Babies mainly need the physical care of feeding and being cleaned up; but as they progress to toddlerhood and beyond, the care widens considerably. Unconditional love; good diet and home environment; safety while exploring their world; social interaction and sharing; stimulating creativity and curiosity; encouraging their relationship with God; and answering endless, endless questions. The list gets bigger with every year.

We are right to be focused on the practical care that every child needs, but we shouldn't underestimate the importance of feeding the compassionate, kind, generous,

thoughtful and tolerant outlook that will shape the people they will become.

What's important is not only what we do or say to provide this nurturing, but how we do it. We may not even realise that the messages that we give and the habits that we encourage provide our children with the map for their routes through life.

Christine Clark is a retired member of the Redemptorist Publications Editorial staff.

“God walks along
the dusty paths of our
lives and responds to
our longing for love
and happiness by
calling us to joy.

Pope Francis

Just ask

by Jo Siedlecka

In today's readings, there is a reassuring but slightly scary sense that a complete change is coming. I am told to prepare for a completely new life. But where to start? John the Baptist began his mission in the wilderness. Later Jesus also went into the desert for forty days before he began his ministry. And once he had begun, he would often leave the crowds to pray. Every person needs to face their own wilderness, their own place of testing – a quiet time of exploration and encounter with ourselves – whether it is a retreat, a walk, listening to music or a time of silent prayer and reflection at home. We need not be afraid of going into this wilderness, since it is there

that, we are told again and again, the word of God will come to us. We only need to ask.

Jo Siedlecka runs the Independent Catholic News website: www.indcatholicnews.com

**My Lord, my God,
my life and my love,
take hold of my hand
as we travel together.
Keep me very close
to you. Show me
how to reach out to
other stragglers on
our shared journey.
Amen.**

Today:
Baruch 5:1-9
Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11
Luke 3:1-6

Monday:
Isaiah 35:1-10
Luke 5:17-26

Tuesday:
Isaiah 40:1-11
Matthew 18:12-14

Wednesday:
Isaiah 40:25-31
Matthew 11:28-30

Thursday:
Isaiah 41:13-20
Matthew 11:11-15

Friday:
Isaiah 48:17-19
Matthew 11:16-19

Saturday:
Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4, 9-11
Matthew 17:10-13

Next Sunday:
Zephaniah 3:14-18
Philippians 4:4-7
Luke 3:10-18