

SUNDAY PLUS

Look deeper



Look inward

by Gerlinde Symons

I was recently invited to a restorative justice session at the prison where I work. *Sycamore Tree* is a six-week programme for prisoners, where they're encouraged to reflect on the effect that their crime has had on the victims. The course also gives them an opportunity to consider the subject of forgiveness, by hearing victims' stories. That afternoon we listened to the tragic story of James, whose twin brother had been brutally murdered on his way home from a night out. The two teenage boys who committed the crime had originally set out to rob him but went too far. The indescribable pain and devastating impact the murder had on James and his family was clear to all who listened to him; he called them "monsters."

But when I reflected on the two young lads who had committed this horrendous attack, I wondered where that violence had come from and what their home life had been like. Had they known the love, care and security of a good family?

It's so easy to judge others when we haven't walked in their shoes. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus challenges those listening to him in the Temple to change their way of thinking and invites them to look inward. It is only when we begin to see ourselves as we really are that we understand our need for God who loves us unconditionally, despite our faults and failings. And that's the challenge for us today – can we love others in their brokenness, in their weakness, in their fragility? By God's grace, I believe we can!

Gerlinde Symons is a Catholic lay chaplain at two UK prisons.

See differently

by Cowan Watson

The online social networks, which enable us to connect with friends and family, can be a godsend. However, sometimes a fear is expressed that they are actually making us less social and more aggressive as the constraints imposed by face to face contact no longer apply. As we discover in today's Gospel reading there is a big difference between telling a person their actions are unacceptable and condemning them without leaving any room for mercy or forgiveness. Jesus does not condemn the woman caught in adultery but he does call for her to change her ways. All too often, when a

scenario like this is played out on the social media, there is little to choose between the offender and their aggressive and self-righteous accusers. We should listen carefully to Jesus' words: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her".

Cowan Watson is the Editor of *Light of the North*, a quarterly magazine produced by the Diocese of Aberdeen.

"It is not good when we look down on others like heartless judges, lording it over them and always trying to teach them lessons. That is itself a subtle form of violence."

Pope Francis

The hidden story

by James Gallogly


In today's Gospel the scribes and the Pharisees are observing the letter of the law; they are seeking accountability, looking for judgement and retribution. Crime and punishment are complicated issues. If we are honest with ourselves, we too have probably demanded the same legal precision; perhaps less so when we have been the culprit?

Our "writing on the ground" is the breathing space necessary to consider the spirit of the law. By its very nature, the adulterous act was not committed alone, yet only the woman is presented. By his apparent inaction, Jesus makes a

clear statement to all concerned. Imagine the embarrassment of the crowd as they waited. Awkward.

There is a time to hold each other accountable, for judgement and the hope of rehabilitation. But let us not forget: "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" is a message for everyone in the story – and for each of us too.

James Gallogly is a Catholic lay prison chaplain.

Lord, help me to remember that I am not always right: I might sometimes be wrong. I might have made some mistakes  Amen.

Today:
Isaiah 43:16-21
Philippians 3:8-14
John 8:1-11

Monday:
Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17.
19-30, 33-62
John 8:12-20

Tuesday:
Numbers 21:4-9
John 8:21-30

Wednesday:
Daniel 3:14-20, 24-25, 28
John 8:31-42

Thursday:
Genesis 17:3-9
John 8:51-59

Friday:
Jeremiah 20:10-13
John 10:31-42

Saturday:
Ezekiel 37:21-28
John 11:45-56

Next Sunday:
Procession: Luke 19:28-40
Mass: Isaiah 50:4-7
Philippians 2:6-11
Luke 22:14 – 23:56