

SUNDAY PLUS

Gifts for the giving

The reality of loving



By Fr Denis McBride
C.Ss.R.

In today's Gospel Jesus does not ask his disciples to fall in love with their enemies – that would be wholly unrealistic. The followers of Jesus are challenged to be determined about their enemy's welfare, to be stubbornly gracious and to refuse to pay back violence with violence. Hatred can be defeated only by love; injury can

be healed only by forgiveness; evil can be controlled only by goodness. That may not reflect conventional wisdom, but it is Jesus' wisdom in action. It was also David's response to King Saul's aggression.

In his own life Jesus had to work hard at honouring his own ethic. That process was not a painless or bloodless affair: it cost Jesus everything. He offered love first, even though he knew that the return would never measure up to what was offered; he never

bargained love for love; he never became involved in stocktaking returns. Above all, he made a habit of confusing his enemies with love.

Jesus expects us, his followers, to share the gifts we have received. Love is offered because someone somewhere is shuffling through a loveless life. Mercy is given because someone somewhere is cloistered in his or her wrongdoing. These are gifts which create worth in another person; they build temples in wasteland; they introduce people

to the forgotten geography of paradise; they stop the contagion of meanness.

Love creates its own reality, its own force for goodness. It enables us, time after time, to refuse the offer, like David, of putting a spear through the heart of our sleeping victims.

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

"The pandemic has also highlighted the dedication and generosity of healthcare personnel, volunteers, support staff, priests, men and women religious, all of whom have helped, treated, comforted and served so many of the sick and their families with professionalism, self-giving, responsibility and love of neighbour."

Pope Francis

It's the thought that counts

By Mary Bell

Giving and receiving gifts is a fundamental part of being human. If you visit even the poorest house in an Indian village you are welcomed with something, if only a drink of water: the gift dignifies the guest, its reception honours the host.

In my wardrobe is a bag full of the small presents my children gave me – shells, pebbles, cards with tissue paper flowers and tippy writing, pompoms and cut-out figures. Nothing could persuade me to part with these precious artefacts. No jewels or expensive

artistic creations could replace these simple objects presented with innocent, unaffected love.

One imagines that Jesus would have greeted the presentation of a flower by a child with delight. Truly it is not the gift but the thought that counts. Even the smallest gift

provokes pleasure, so think of the immensity of happiness in store for us when we receive in heaven the gift of God's love.

Mary Bell, a retired teacher, is also a mother, grandmother and a regular contributor to the University of the Third Age, u3a.

Lord my God,
you have
given yourself
to me. Let me
give myself to
you. Amen.

Feast of the week Monday 21 February St Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

Few people have claimed that their poetry influenced Shakespeare, Johnson, Donne, Herbert, Crashaw and Hopkins. Even fewer could boast that, whilst in prison, a torture victim and awaiting a gruesome execution, they had been thinking of Christmas and had written some of the most beautiful Christmas poetry in the English language.

Yet both claims are true of St Robert Southwell, a young Jesuit priest, arrested

and charged with treason for practising his priesthood and distributing the sacraments.

At his trial, he declared, "I have been tortured ten times. I had rather have endured ten executions. I speak not this for myself, but for others; that they may not be handled so inhumanely, to drive men to desperation, if it were possible."

As Southwell declared in his poem, "The Nativity of Christ", written shortly before his execution:

"God is my gift,
himself he freely gave me.
God's gift am I,
and none but God shall have me."

Today:
1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23
1 Corinthians 15:45-49
Luke 6:27-38

Monday:
James 3:13-18
Mark 9:14-29

Tuesday:
1 Peter 5:1-4
Matthew 16:13-19

Wednesday:
James 4:13-17
Mark 9:38-40

Thursday:
James 5:1-6
Mark 9:41-50

Friday:
James 5:9-12
Mark 10:1-12

Saturday:
James 5:13-16
Mark 10:13-16

Next Sunday:
Ecclesiasticus 27:4-7
1 Corinthians 15:54-58
Luke 6:39-45