

SUNDAY PLUS

The voice of encouragement

Destined for eternal life

By Paul Higginson

Remember my parents telling me about a hell fire and brimstone homily they had heard before I was born. The priest had half-scared them to death by depicting a vivid picture of eternal pain and suffering that might one day lie in wait for them. I'm not sure what text he was preaching from, but it certainly wasn't today's Gospel! Here Jesus tells us that we are his sheep and "I give them eternal life; they will

never be lost, and no one will ever steal them from me". What wonderful words of encouragement! Our faith is not based on fear of a vengeful, unforgiving God. This is just not who God is. Why do we find it so difficult to understand and accept that God is all-embracing, unconditional love and forgiveness? We are his sheep and he is our Good Shepherd; he is always keeping watch over us and we will never be stolen from him.

Of course, sometimes people create hell for themselves here and now by their actions. If we choose to



do wrong then the consequences for us are invariably pain, discomfort and suffering in this life. But as for the next life, remember that Jesus goes back and finds the lost sheep and brings them home. We are destined for eternal life with Christ: that is the extraordinary promise of today's Gospel – our

vocation is to help create the Kingdom of Heaven on earth now and to experience it fully in the life that is to come.

Following decades in the classroom and as a parish catechist, Paul Higginson is finding that retirement gives him even more opportunities to support his parish.

Prayer to discover your vocation

Almighty God,
You have made me to know you,
To love you, and to serve you,
And thereby to find and fulfil myself.

I know that you are in all things
And that every path can lead me to you,
But, of them all, there is one path especially
By which you want me to come to you.

Since I will do what you want of me,
I pray you; send your Holy Spirit to me;
Into my mind to show me what you want of me;
Into my heart to give me the determination to do it,
And to do it with all my love, with all my mind,
And with all my strength, right to the end.
Amen.

Diocese of Elphin, Ireland

"Wherever the Spirit sends you, I encourage you to enable the men and women of our time to discover the mercy of God who loved us to the point of dwelling among us."

Pope Francis

Lord, as you called
your disciples,
call us now.
Open our ears to
listen to you calling;
Open our eyes to
see you;
Open our hearts
to your love.
Help us to hear you,
to experience your
presence with us
and to love you.
And loving you,
let us serve you,
our servant King.
✚ Amen.

Feast of the week
Tuesday 10 May

St Joseph
de Veuster

(1840-1889)
(Damian of Molokai)

Leprosy used to be a death sentence. When diagnosed with this infectious disease that had no known treatment or cure, people were banished from their families, homes and society to live in isolation or in leper colonies and settlements. It was a life of total ostracism, loneliness, disfigurement, pain and suffering.

Some brave souls ignored the objections of wider society and cared for people suffering from what is today known as Hansen's disease and can be treated.

When, in 1873, Fr Damian agreed to travel to the colony of Molokai, he knew that he was signing his own death certificate. Undeterred, he spent the last eleven years of his life caring for the people of Molokai. He built houses, schools, roads, hospitals, and churches. He dressed residents' ulcers, dug a reservoir, made coffins, dug graves, shared pipes, and dipped his hand into their dishes of food to eat with them. He gave medical and emotional support that others refused to offer, scared for their own well-being. He eventually died of Hansen's disease on 15 April 1889, aged 49.

Today:
Acts 13:14, 43-52
Apocalypse 7:9, 14-17
John 10:27-30

Monday:
Acts 11:1-18
John 10:1-10

Tuesday:
Acts 11:19-26
John 10:22-30

Wednesday:
Acts 12:24-13:5
John 12:44-50

Thursday:
Acts 13:13-25
John 13:16-20

Friday:
Acts 13:26-33
John 14:1-6

Saturday:
Acts 1:15-17, 20-26
John 15:9-17

Next Sunday:
Acts 14:21-27
Apocalypse 21:1-5
John 13:31-35