

SUNDAY PLUS

Jesus in our midst

One of us

By Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Today's Gospel shows an interesting cultural slant on Jesus' life and experience. We hear those who have probably known him all his life naming his brothers and sisters. Does this mean that Mary and Joseph had other children and that Jesus was only the first? Over the centuries, people have vigorously debated the significance of naming Jesus' siblings and yet there could possibly be no divisive issue whatsoever.

For many of us, the words "brother" and "sister" mean – to use a common African expression – "same father, same mother". Yet, to others, as I learned during thirteen years in Africa, they simply mean a close familial relationship or deep friendship. The words "brother" and "sister" often include the children born to the mother's family, whereas a "cousin" is someone born to the father's relatives.

Similarly, to call somebody one's mother or father might simply be a respectful way of addressing or describing someone of one's parental age-group.

"Grandparents" include older, non-family members with the wisdom of experience and deserving of the respect due to their years.

The word "firstborn" does not mean there were subsequent children. Instead, it's an honorific description given to every first child of its parents.

There are also special names reserved for twins. The Bemba people of Zambia always call the older twin, whether male or female, "Mpundu", and the younger, "Kapya". The child born after twins is "Chola".

When Mark wrote his Gospel, he did not plan to offer opportunities to celebrate our cultural heritage – but he did. Isn't life fascinating!

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.



God comes to meet the men and women of all times and places, in their real-life situations.

Pope Francis

All around us

By Paul Higginson

Have you ever looked for something and then found it right under your nose? In today's Gospel, Jesus isn't recognised by many in his hometown. It's not supposed to be difficult to find Christ. He isn't playing hide and seek with us. Sadly, we often enclose God in our churches, rituals and worship, and we never get to see him anywhere else. Yet he is everywhere in creation; he

can't make himself more visible – our world is suffused with the splendour of God.

According to St. Bonaventure, "God's fingerprints are everywhere." Human love, forgiveness and compassion are divine love, forgiveness and compassion. Our concerns and joys are God's concerns and joys; our journey is God's journey. This is the incarnation today: Christ enfleshed in the ordinary moments of our day, connecting with us in all our human experiences. God isn't somewhere else, he's all around us, for those with eyes to see.

Paul Higginson is a retired teacher and author of Doing Christianity: How religion is about what you do, not what you believe. Columba Books, Dublin, 2023.

Feast of the week

Thursday 11 July

St Benedict (480-547)

Considering the Benedictine impact on Europe, it's easy to understand why St Benedict is its patron saint. Benedictine monks drained marshes, farmed, built monasteries, promoted the arts and cared for travellers, poor people and the sick. They built schools and preserved ancient learning during periods of conflict and suppression. Their illuminated manuscripts enrich the entire world. St Bede, an eighth century Benedictine, wrote the first English history – and apparently gave Rome's Colosseum its modern name.

St Benedict's various patronages include not only Europe, students, architects and civil engineers, but also people suffering from fever, gallstones, kidney disease and nettle rash. Why nettle rash? Why is he the patron saint of servants who have broken their master's belongings?

Benedict's life story inevitably included talents and events which have been forgotten over time. Was he merciful towards a servant who broke something valuable? Did he discover the link between nettle rash and dock leaves? "History's the story of people and things..."

Lord, you are with all people at all times. Be our joy, our strength, our wisdom and our hope. Let us love each other as you love us. Amen.

Today:
Ezekiel 2:2-5
2 Corinthians 12:7-10
Mark 6:1-6

Monday:
Hosea 2:16-18, 21-22
Matthew 9:18-26

Tuesday:
Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13
Matthew 9:32-38

Wednesday:
Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12
Matthew 10:1-7

Thursday:
Proverbs 2:1-9
Matthew 19:27-29

Friday:
Hosea 14:2-10
Matthew 10:16-23

Saturday:
Isaiah 6:1-8
Matthew 10:24-33

Next Sunday:
Amos 7:12-16
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:7-13