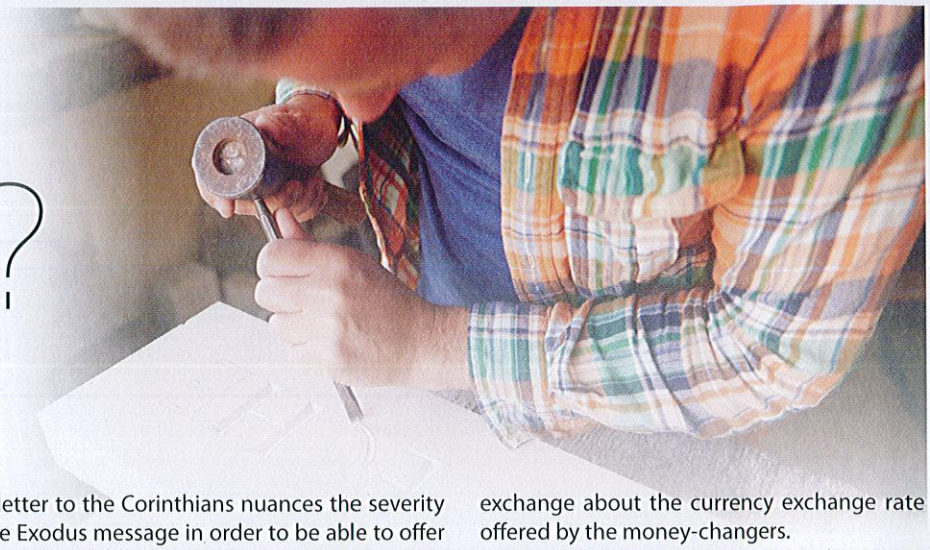
7 March 2021

SUNDAY PLUS

Be indestructible!

Carved in stone?



by Bridie Stringer

The seventeenth-century poet Alexander Pope started one of his poems with the line: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing..." to which a contemporary satirist might add: "... but many people have no cause for alarm!" The stipulations of the Law given in today's reading from the book of Exodus could not be plainer. There are rules and the breach of them has dire consequences. We use the expression that things are "not set in stone", meaning that there is some flexibility in their interpretation, not forgetting, of course, that the rules of Exodus were indeed set in stone. St Paul, however, in his first letter to the Corinthians nuances the severity of the Exodus message in order to be able to offer the crucified Christ as the power and wisdom of God. What looks like destruction is not destruction at all, but the manifestation of the greatness of a God who can also be humble. John's account of the behaviour of an angry Jesus in the Temple challenges the received wisdom of what good Temple practice looks like. The Temple as they know it will be irrevocably changed and it is only afterwards that the disciples are able to make sense of what had seemed to be simply an angry verbal exchange about the currency exchange rate offered by the money-changers.

The final line of today's Gospel passage challenges us too. If Jesus rightfully trusts himself to us, what are our motives in doing what we do? Do we carve our messages in stone and use those stones as weapons or can we place our wisdom at the service of the God whose weakness is stronger than human strength?

Bridie Stringer is a mother, grandmother and pastoral theologian.

Beyond the pandemic

Natasha Pritchard

In today's Gospel we see Jesus destroying what had come to be accepted as normal – the use of the holy Temple as a market place.

During the first weeks of lockdown, we may have felt at a loss for all of the things we had come to accept as normal in our lives. Our lives quietened and many trivial worries or distractions disappeared. It was as if Jesus took a whip to drive out all of the clutter in our lives and perhaps we learnt to use that space for something more meaningful. How many of us used our new-found free time to watch Mass on the television, spend time in silence or change the way we pray? Did we spend more time speaking to or helping our neighbours and friends? Did our priorities change?

For all that was lost in the pandemic, perhaps there was also something precious to be gained.

Natasha Pritchard, a lay Catholic chaplain in a Liverpool hospital, worked to support patients, families, carers and all who needed support during the Covid-19 lockdown.

"Christ redeemed the whole person, and he wishes to restore in each of us the capacity to enter into relationship with others."

Pope Francis

Hold on to hope

by Canon Paul Douthwaite

For over a thousand years, until finally destroyed in AD 70, the Temple had stood in Jerusalem. It was the centre of Jewish worship, the heart of the faith and a sign to them that God dwelt with his people. From its destruction until today, the Jewish people have prayed three times a day that a third Temple be erected.

In John's Gospel, unlike the others, the Temple scene is placed at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In challenging the authorities to destroy the Temple and in promising that he will raise it up in three days, Jesus aligns himself to the Temple and predicts his own passion, death and resurrection.

The Jewish people hold onto the hope that another Temple will be erected, that God will once again dwell with his people. Jesus, in his death and resurrection, gives us the hope that we can dwell with him for all eternity.

Canon Paul Douthwaite is the National Catholic Chaplain for Prisons and HMPPS Roman Catholic Faith Adviser.

Loving Lord, it is hard to be good and yet, more than anything, I want to be close to you for ever and for always. During these days of Lent, help me on my journey towards you. ✝ Amen.

Today:	Monday:	Tuesday:	Wednesday:	(S) St John Ogilvie (Feast):	Thursday:	Friday:	Saturday:	Next Sunday:
Exodus 20:1-17 1 Corinthians 1:22-25 John 2:13-25	2 Kings 5:1-15 Luke 4:24-30	Daniel 3:25. 34-43 Matthew 18:21-35	Deuteronomy 4:1. 5-9 Matthew 5:17-19	Isaiah 50:5-9 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 John 12:24-26	Jeremiah 7:23-28 Luke 11:14-23	Hosea 14:2-10 Mark 12:28-34	Hosea 5:15 – 6:6 Luke 18:9-14	2 Chronicles 36:14-16. 19-23 Ephesians 2:4-10 John 3:14-21

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