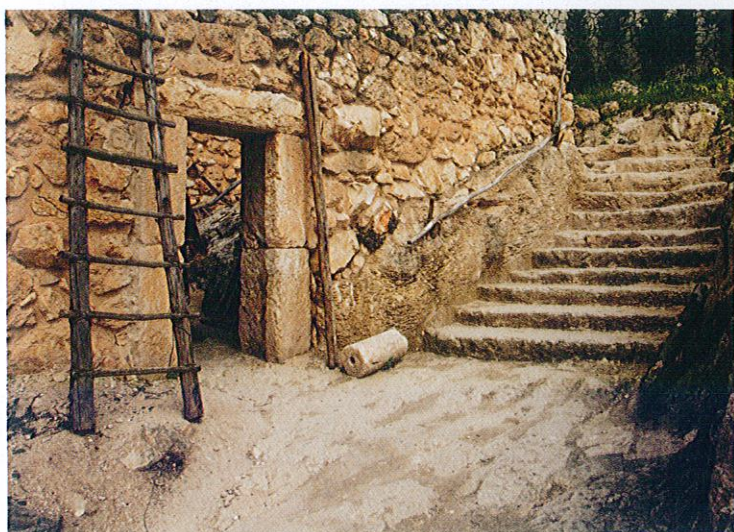


SUNDAY PLUS

Look for answers

Facing the locals



Old Nazareth

by Fr Denis McBride C.Ss.R.

When people from obscure backgrounds suddenly emerge as important public figures, journalists and television crews often seek out the family and neighbours of the new star to discover what they think of the local hero. Mixed impressions are usually given: delight is shown, congratulations are forthcoming, surprise is admitted, polite disbelief is registered and resentment is uncovered.

In today's Gospel Jesus returns to his home place of Nazareth. This is not a social visit: like other towns in Galilee, Nazareth has to hear the Good News of the kingdom. When Jesus teaches in the local synagogue, many of the townspeople are astonished at the performance. They wonder at the origin of Jesus' teaching and the nature of his wisdom, as well as the miracles that are done through him. From the unanswered

questions about Jesus' wisdom, the neighbours move to more familiar territory and focus on what they do know about Jesus. Whatever their wonder, they are not going to allow Jesus' wisdom to interfere with their memories of him.

Jesus' experience of rejection in Nazareth renders him powerless to do any miracle among his own people. This is an extraordinary statement about the human Jesus: people's lack of trust limits his ministry. Jesus is profoundly affected by the way people react to him. He is not a robot, programmed for flawless performance, indifferent to all responses. Distrust disables him. So he moves elsewhere, refusing to be enslaved by his failure to reach his own people.

And he never returns to Nazareth again.

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

The local prophet?

by James Gallogly

Celebrating a Service of Word and Sacrament in the Segregation Unit is an auspicious privilege. It is a reminder that the Good Shepherd will go to any length to be with his sheep. This member of the flock has strayed far from the path. By grace he knows this and welcomes any help that might lead to the narrow gate.

Any farmer, educator or parent knows that growing goes on out of sight. Chaplains know this too. Sharing the Eucharist in a very ordinary meeting room is a strange field. Yet the fertile ground of God's kingdom is so often beyond us.

That same communicant has continued to accept the support

of God in his life. He has sustained growth in the Lord by accepting the demand to move away from the past into a new life. News of his rehabilitation is a glimpse of God's work where we might least expect it.

James Gallogly is a Catholic lay chaplain in a UK prison.

Loving Lord, you have the answers to my questions. Help me to listen and to take you seriously. ☩ Amen.

God's instrument

by Bridie Stringer

Today's reading from Mark's Gospel describes Jesus on a visit home and the fact that his old friends and neighbours think he has got above himself. He is, after all, just a carpenter albeit, it would appear, a wise one. I find the end of the account rather ironic. On what might have been regarded as an "off day" because of local opposition, he could only cure a few sick people!

I suppose that the lesson for us all is not to make assumptions about people because of their background, their appearance, or the way they speak. Holy wisdom can sometimes be found in children as well as clerics.

I am reminded of a conversation with a toddler some years ago who

asked why the bells of the local cathedral were ringing. I told him that people were inside singing and saying prayers. He suggested that churches were places where God holds meetings. I agreed.

Bridie Stringer is a mother, grandmother and pastoral theologian.

"The world tells us to seek success, power and money; God tells us to seek humility, service and love."

Pope Francis