

Sundays in January, February, March 2026

Maria Power and Raymond Friel

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Sunday 4 January 2026
Second Sunday of Christmas
Ecclesiasticus 24.1–2,8–12
Psalm 147.12–15,19–20
Ephesians 1.3–6,15–18
John 1.1–18 or John 1.1–5,9–14

If John's Gospel were made into a film, the Prologue would test the creative skills of the director to the limits. This is the Christian account of creation, echoing the account in Genesis, which also begins, 'In the beginning' (Gen. 1.1). The same phrase in Greek – transliterated *en arche* – is used in both texts. In Genesis, God's word is generative: 'God said, "Let there be light" and there was light' (Gen. 1.3). The Christian account tells us that the word of God was the Word, which Tradition would later call the second person of the Trinity. God's Word is generative, 'all things were made through him' (1.3). In created things, God reveals himself. As St Oscar Romero said, 'In the magnificence of things, in the order and greatness and beauty of all creation, we feel God's footprint, his Word, his echo.'

In one of the most stunning lines in all of Scripture, John describes the turning point at the heart of Christianity: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (1.14). In the ancient world, the divine was seen as separate from the corruption of humanity. We see this sense of separateness in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet here God plunges into humanity, takes on everything about the human condition, except sin. As we read in *Gaudium et Spes*, 'For by his incarnation the Son of God united himself in some sense with every human being. He laboured with human hands, thought with a human mind, acted with a human will, and loved with a human heart' (22). The dignity of the human person is rooted in being made in the image and likeness of God. In Christian revelation, it is rooted in the incarnation: the divine likeness, deformed by sin, is restored by Christ and human nature was 'raised to a surpassing dignity' (22).

This revelation is not just something for us to admire, as if we were watching a film on the large screen. This great sweeping poem comes right down to us, in the present moment. The Word is now, as it was in the beginning, as it was in the life of Jesus. To all who receive him – and that includes us – there is 'the right to become children of God' (1.12), to take part in the new creation, to be restored in the divine likeness. If we do believe, we become light-bearers of the Word in the darkness.

Sunday 11 January 2026
The Baptism of the Lord (Feast)
Isaiah 42.1–4,6–7
Psalm 28(29).1–4,9–10
Acts 10.34–38
Matthew 3.13–17

In the first reading from Isaiah we hear a description of the Lord's servant at odds with the wrathful depiction by John the Baptist in the Gospel passage just before the one we hear today. This servant will not break the bruised reed; it's a portrayal of gentleness and encouragement as opposed to the Baptist's vision of axes aimed at trees. Isaiah does of course have this dimension too,

but it disappears as soon as Jesus appears on the scene. The other dimension of Isaiah's servant which is relevant to the Gospel is that 'he will bring forth justice to the nations' (Is. 42.1).

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, 'to be baptised by him' (3.13). There's an intentionality which we don't find in the other Gospel accounts. Jesus is obedient to God's pre-ordained divine plan of salvation. There has been speculation among scholars that the baptism of Jesus by John was an embarrassment for the early Church. Why would Jesus need to be forgiven for sins? He was without sin. However, Jesus gives John another reason for being baptised, 'to fulfil all righteousness' (3.15). The word 'righteousness' lands awkwardly on modern ears, not does it sound especially Catholic, so to speak. In some translations the word 'justice' is preferred. Indeed, the same word in Greek as an adjective is used of Joseph, who is described in chapter 1 of Matthew's Gospel as a 'just man' (1.19). Justice in the Bible is understood as the fullness of right relations, as opposed to our recent understanding of rights- and duties-based justice. In the Old Testament, justice is God's 'approval' of human conduct which aligns with his will and embraces mercy and the preferential option for the most vulnerable.

Jesus is in right relationship with God, human beings and creation itself when he submits to the full immersion of 'baptism' in the human condition. When he comes out of the waters of the Jordan, evoking the waters of the flood, the waters of chaos and sin, he knows himself as the 'beloved Son' (3.17) of God. He will go about doing good, preaching the good news of peace and restore humanity to right relations with God and humanity by his life, death and resurrection.

Sunday 18 January 2026
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 49.3,5–6
Psalm 39(40).2,4,7–10
1 Corinthians 1.1–3
John 1.29–34

In St John's Gospel we don't have an account of the baptism of Jesus, but we hear about its effects on John the Baptist. He bears witness to the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove on Jesus and remaining with him. It is revealed to the Baptist

that Jesus is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit, the transformative power of God at work in human history. Jesus is the connecting channel between God and humanity, the Word through whom all things were made (Jn 1.3), the one who will restore the broken relationship between God and creation.

John the Baptist speaks with the authority of revelation in John's Gospel when he points to Jesus and declares, 'Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (1.29). Lambs were sacrificed in the temple as a sin offering to re-establish relationship with God (Lev. 32–35). Jesus is the 'lamb of God'. He frees the temple animals (Jn 2.13–22) as they are no longer needed. Jesus once and for all takes away the sin of the world by his death and resurrection.

The sin referred to is not individual transgressions, but the sin of the world, the pervasive condition which St Paul refers to in his letter to the Romans and which the Tradition refers to as Original Sin, the rupture of our relationship with God through the 'grasping' of Adam and Eve, the breaching of the limits God set down for human beings to flourish as he intended.

This sin is at work not only in individual hearts, but is solidified in institutions and systems in the form of 'structures of sin'. St Oscar Romero taught that the mission entrusted to the Church was 'to uproot sin from history, to uproot sin from politics, to uproot sin from the economy, to uproot sins from wherever they are'. We are called to see where sin is embedded in systems, such as the prison system, the benefits system, the asylum system, and speak out for justice. Pope Leo XIV, in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, turns to this theme when he says that 'we need to be increasingly committed to resolving the structural causes of poverty' (94). We are urged to make our voices heard, even at the risk of appearing foolish or naive. We are part of God's redemptive work when we challenge sin in all its manifestations.

Sunday 25 January 2026
Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Sunday of the Word of God)
Isaiah 8.23 – 9.3
Psalm 26(27).1,4,13–14
1 Corinthians 1.10–13,17
Matthew 4.12–23 or Matthew 4.12–17

In 2019, Pope Francis issued a *motu proprio*, *Aperuit Illis*, instituting the Sunday of the Word of God, to be observed on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time. This day was to be devoted in a special way 'to the celebration, study and dissemination of the word of God' (3). Pope Francis gave us a number of practical suggestions for this Sunday, including that in the Eucharistic celebration the sacred text be enthroned, or that readers might be commissioned, a Bible could be provided for the congregation to show the importance of praying daily with sacred Scripture, especially through the practice of *lectio divina*. Making copies of the *motu proprio* available – with its rich and succinct account of the rediscovery of Scripture at the Second Vatican Council, especially thanks to the Dognatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* – might also be a fitting way to mark the day.

In today's Gospel, we settle into Year A and the reading of St Matthew's Gospel, with its emphasis on the ministry of Jesus as the fulfilment of Torah, the law of Moses. John the Baptist has been arrested; the temperature is high. Jesus does not hide from the enflamed Herod but goes deep into his 'kingdom' of Galilee to bring light into darkness, to proclaim a different kind of kingdom: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' The calls to discipleship seem abrupt, as if to emphasise the change that is necessary, a leaving behind of comfortable routines and identity. The activity of Jesus is summarised as teaching, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing physical ailments. The Kingdom of God brings life and restoration. The stage is set for the next three Sundays when we take a deeper look into this Kingdom and its disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

Today also sees the conclusion of the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity. The Gospel reminds us how much Christian denominations have in common: an understanding that conversion is the first step in discipleship, a belief in the saving power of Jesus Christ in history and a commitment to the building up of the Kingdom of God in this life. As St Oscar Romero said in his homily on this Sunday in 1978, 'Today it is most helpful for Christians to work together in the cause of human dignity, in the promotion of peace and justice, in the social application of the Gospel.'

Sunday 1 February 2026
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Zephaniah 2:3:12–13
Psalm 145(146).6–10
1 Corinthians 1:26–31
Matthew 5:1–12a

In the first reading, from the prophet Zephaniah, we meet the 'humble of the land'. This is the remnant of Israel, the people chastened by Exile who have come through their addictions to idolatry and material prosperity. They have learned dependence on God and their behaviour flows from that. They will 'do no injustice and speak no lies'. We find this emphasis on humility in the Beatitudes, the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. To emphasise that he is the new Moses, Jesus went up the mountain. But he is not relaying commandments from God; he is speaking with the *imprimatur* of God; he is God among us.

We now begin to hear in depth about the kingdom of God introduced in last week's Gospel, about the types of people who will characterise this new reign. There is the same tone of humility we heard from Zephaniah. God blesses the 'poor in spirit', the ones who know their need for God, who have grown beyond self-sufficiency and self-absorption. That is why the Church – at its truest – has no interest in getting along with the powers of the earth. They hold on to their powers through injustice and lies. In this teaching of the reign of God, Jesus 'is sowing a long-term moral revolution which will take effect to the extent that we human beings are converted' (St Oscar Romero).

Nor should the humility of the disciples of this kingdom be confused with passivity. The characteristics of the 'blessed' include the action-oriented seekers after righteousness and peace. The *Jerusalem Bible* translated righteousness as 'those who hunger and thirst for what is right' (5.6). The *Sacra Pagina* commentary on the Gospel of Matthew tells us that 'righteousness refers first to God's justice and then to human relationships and behaviour'. Pope Francis, in his commentary on the Beatitudes in *Gaudete et Exsultate*, cautions us not to give justice too general or abstract a meaning, in case 'we forget that it is shown especially in justice towards those who are most vulnerable: "seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the

widow" (Is 1:17). On this Sunday in particular we consider how we can be advocates in our communities for racial justice.

Sunday 8 February 2026

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 58.7–10

Psalm 111(112).4–9

1 Corinthians 2.1–5

Matthew 5.13–16

The Sermon on the Mount continues with two of the most memorable images used by Jesus to describe his disciples: salt and light. Jesus says to his disciples, 'you are the salt of the earth'. This 'you' is the same disciple described in the Beatitudes. All that is brought forward in this 'you'. We now have two metaphors to develop the picture. Metaphors resist simple interpretation, but they do have a 'ground', an overlap between the two things being compared. In this case, the overlap is a catalytic and transformative presence. The disciples of Jesus are called to be the preserving and seasoning agent of salt and the illuminating presence of light.

How they should be like this in the world is spelled out by Jesus. Lest we fall into the temptation of spiritualising our role as agents of change, Jesus says that it is our 'good works' that will be salt and light. Not works that bring us glory or attention – we are warned elsewhere about being 'benefactors' for our own enhancement – but that give glory to our Father who is in heaven. It is God who is working to make creation new and we are his instruments, his salt and light.

The readings taken together make it clear to us that the good works Jesus refers to are for the sake of the poor. In the first reading from Isaiah we hear the condemnation of a religiosity that is self-serving, only concerned with ostentation. The 'fast' – religious observance – that God wants is about loosening the bonds of injustice, letting the oppressed go free, feeding the hungry, welcoming the poor to your home. It is a very physical expression of care for those made poor by exploitation and injustice. Piety is redefined as love and care for our neighbour, 'our own flesh'. Today we remember especially victims of human trafficking and consider how we can raise awareness of that acute need in many of our communities.

With the salt image, Jesus warns his disciples that they can lose interest in this kind of religion; they can lose their saltiness, their commitment to the transformative and healing effect of good works. Pope Francis was acutely aware of this temptation in the Church. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he wrote, 'Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness' (270).

Sunday 15 February 2026

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Ecclesiasticus 15.16–21

Psalm 118(119).1–2,4–5,17–18,33–34

1 Corinthians 2.6–10

Matthew 5.17–37 or Matthew 5.20–22,27–28,33–34,37

Preachers and teachers usually focus on the Gospel reading for their homily or celebration of the word in school. A connection is often made with the Old Testament reading, which is chosen to link with the Gospel reading, but a connection is not often made with the second reading. This is understandable since these readings are not chosen to harmonise with the other readings. However, as the Homiletic Directory reminds us, 'it is legitimate to preach primarily on the second reading occasionally and perhaps even devote several Sundays to one of the Letters' (148), while commenting that this is best done in Ordinary Time.

St Paul's Letter to the Romans forms a major part of Year A's second readings, from the 9th to the 25th Sunday, which in 2026 begins with the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time on 14 June. Preachers may wish to prepare for this and consider a focus for several weeks on Paul's magisterial letter. The First Letter to the Corinthians is spread over three years at the beginning of Ordinary Time. Preachers who focus on the second reading today (1 Cor. 2.6–10) may wish to go back over the second readings from the third, fourth and fifth Sundays, for context (see *The Jerusalem Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 1588–93).

St Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world – and the wisdom of the rulers of the world – with the wisdom of God, which is seen in the paradoxical

power of the cross. For people who lived in the ancient world this form of execution was a sign of ignominy. Pope Benedict XVI, in *Deus Caritas Est*, said that 'Christ took the lowest place in the world – the Cross – and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid' (35). The Homiletic Directory stresses that the fundamental purpose of the homily is to lead 'the people of God into the heart of the mystery of Christ's life, death and Resurrection which becomes present in the liturgical celebration' (149). This is what St Paul is modelling for all preachers in this passage, with a particular emphasis on plain speech, not impressive worldly rhetoric.

The backdrop to this letter seems to be tensions in the Christian community between those of low social status and those of high status. The latter may have been drawn to the eloquent preaching of Apollo, while St Paul seems to have been more at home with the Christians of low rank, probably the majority. Pope Leo XIV, in his first exhortation, *Dilexi Te*, warns the Church about the worldliness of opting 'for pastoral work with the so-called elite, since rather than wasting time on the poor, it would be better to care for the rich ... so that with their help real solutions can be found and the Church can feel protected' (114).

Sunday 22 February 2026

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2.7–9; 3.1–7

Psalm 50(51).3–6,12–14,17

Romans 5.12–19

Matthew 4.1–11

Vatican II spoke of the twofold character of Lent – a reminder of baptism and a time of penance, making us ready to celebrate the Easter mystery, as we 'listen more attentively to the word of God and set aside time for prayer' (SC 109). We're also reminded – and a point perhaps we often lose sight of – that penitence for the offences against God is not just an individual matter but 'should go together with a sense of the consequences of sin in society' (SC 109). What 'structures of sin' in our society need reparation? In which systems are injustice and indignity embedded? In the workplace, in the wages and conditions of workers?

The first reading reminds us of the biblical account of the origin of sin, when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, in other words broke

through the limits which God had set down for human flourishing. God's vision for human freedom was never a license to do as we wish. It is this 'grasping' (Gen. 3.22) which is at the root of sin. Pope Francis explained it this way: 'Our sin lies in failing to recognise value, in wanting to possess and exploit that which we do not value as gift. Sin always has this same root of possessiveness, of enrichment at the expense of other people and creation itself' (*Let Us Dream*, p. 34).

At his baptism, Jesus came up out of the water, a second Adam, come to restore human beings to right relationship with God in a new creation. The Holy Spirit rested on him and the voice of the Father said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased' (Mt 3.17). He knows who he is; in the next scene the Spirit leads him into the wilderness to explore what this identity will look like in his ministry. The devil whispers that the messiah should be one who provides for the physical needs of the people, who dazzles with incredible feats, who rules the kingdoms of the world, like the old Adam. Jesus rejects this identity. Being beloved means living by the word of God. It means going to the heart of people and urging change there, then making a difference in the physical realm. Being beloved is not an exemption from suffering but immersion into the waters of the human condition, to lift it from sin at the resurrection.

Preaching on this Sunday in 1978, St Oscar Romero warned the Church against succumbing to the desire for applause and celebrity, the temptations of the world. 'More valuable,' he said, 'is the road of humility and simplicity, the road of duty and love, the road of prayer, the road of justice, the road of the Gospel.'

Sunday 1 March 2026

Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12.1–4

Psalm 32(33).4–5,18–20,22

2 Timothy 1.8–10

Matthew 17.1–9

On the seventh day on the holy mountain, God spoke to Moses out of the midst of the cloud (Ex. 24.16). St Matthew's account of the Transfiguration begins: 'And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and he led them up a high mountain'

(Mt 17.1). We lose this in the lectionary to the *incipit*, 'At that time...', and lose the reference to Jesus as the new Moses and, with the seventh day, a reference to the new creation which Jesus is inaugurating.

The mountain is the place where Moses and Elijah met God and were energised in their mission. Peter and the inner circle of James and John are led by Jesus on to the mountain after a bad run of form. No sooner had Peter made his foundational confession of faith (16.16) than he gets it all wrong when he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him for talking about being killed (he seems not to have heard the resurrection). He is seeing Jesus in terms of exemption and privilege, not yet understanding that Jesus is fully immersed in human suffering and injustice and will rise from that to breathe the forgiveness and reconciliation of the new creation on his disciples.

On the mountain, Peter is still not there yet. In response to the shining vision of Jesus, Moses and Elijah, he wants to keep them there, build tents and lock the moment in time. He doesn't understand that the purpose of the mountain is to give energy for the plain. The voice from the cloud seems directed at Peter, at all of us when we pursue our own version of the faith: 'This is my Beloved Son ... listen to him' (17.5). Now they are overwhelmed by the divine reality, their own small plans are consumed in the overwhelming light, and it terrifies them. Only in Matthew's account of the Transfiguration do we have detail of Jesus touching them and saying, 'Rise, and have no fear' (17.7). The purpose of the mountain is to re-engage confused and fearful disciples with the experience of divine life, which is loving and reaches out to us to lift us up for the journey on the plain, our mission as disciples.

Sunday 8 March 2026
Third Sunday of Lent
Exodus 17.3–7
Psalm 94(95).1–2,6–9
Romans 5.1–2,5–8
John 4.5–42 or John 4.5–16,19–26,39–42

John does not have a liturgical year of Sundays like Matthew (Year A), Mark (Year B) and Luke (Year C). St John's Gospel features throughout the liturgical year, especially at Christmas time, Easter time, and for three Sundays in Lent. The scholar

Raymond E. Brown reminds us that 'for many centuries, dating back to the ancient Jerusalem liturgy, the church has singled out stories from John to be read with special solemnity during Lent'. These three stories – the woman at the well, the healing of the blind man, the raising of Lazarus from the dead – all appear in Lent in Year A, although there is a provision for them to be read also in Years B and C. These are dramatic stories of encounters with Jesus and faith responses, which are fitting for the Lenten preparation of catechumens for baptism.

Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. It is noon, in broad daylight, unlike the nighttime encounter with Nicodemus who is not open to the teaching of Jesus. The woman comes to the well and Jesus breaks through conventions by speaking to her, 'Give me a drink' (4.7). This gives us the insight captured in the Catechism that God thirsts for us: 'The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us' (CCC 2560).

The unfolding story of the woman at the well shows how difficult it can be for us to encounter Jesus due to the obstacles in the way. We all come to the well with the 'baggage' of complicated lives. The woman initially only sees the cultural barriers: Jesus is a man and a Jew. We're in the world of tribal division. Jesus does not tackle these cultural issues but goes straight to 'the gift of God' (4.10) that is on offer. He does not tell the woman to go and sort out her complicated life and then come back to him, he offers her grace to help her change. In a sign that she has moved on from the preoccupations of the physical dimensions of life, she leaves her empty jar behind and rushes off into town to tell everyone that she thinks she's met the Messiah. The disciples, meanwhile, seem to be stuck in the physical dimension, going and buying food, thinking only of resources outside of themselves, not welling up from within.

Sunday 15 March 2026
Fourth Sunday of Lent (Laetare Sunday)
1 Samuel 16.1–6,7–10–13
Psalm 22(23)
Ephesians 5.8–14
John 9.1–41 or John 9.1,6–9,13–17,34–38

In the second Lenten narrative of encounter from John's Gospel, Jesus heals the man born blind. He is the light of the world, this is what he does. Unlike in the synoptic Gospels, there is no dialogue prior to this miracle, or 'sign' as John calls them. The blind man says nothing, he has no voice, no agency. We find our later he was a beggar. He has no resources or status in society. It is Jesus who sees him and begins the encounter. John Shea points out that the man is *anthropos* in Greek. A human being. Jesus sees the essential human condition – 'blind from birth' – that he's been sent to liberate.

Having dismissed the belief that the man's condition might have had anything to do with his or his parents' sin – that is not the God that Jesus is revealing – he spits on the ground and makes mud with his saliva to anoint the man's eyes. This is another echo of creation, when God formed Adam from the clay of the ground (Gen. 2.7). The work of God from the beginning has been to bring light into the darkness – 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1.3). Jesus is continuing the work of creation, a new creation, by opening spiritual eyes, unbinding human beings from whatever – and whoever – ties them down. He is restoring Adam to the image and likeness of God.

In his journey of enlightenment, the blind man goes from mute instrument of God's works by the side of the road to witness to the 'translation', as the Council of Trent called it from 'a child of Adam, to the state of grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam Jesus Christ' (*Decree Concerning Justification*). This is the journey of all disciples, in faith, by the power of God's grace. We are called to be images of God in the world ('I am the man' – *Ego eimi* (9.9). We are called to witness to this new life in the face of hostility, the Pharisees stuck in 'structures of sin' who would cast us out.

Sunday 22 March 2026
Fifth Sunday of Lent
Ezekiel 37.12–14
Psalm 129(130)
Romans 8.8–11
John 11.1–45 or John 11.3–7,17,20–27,33–45

This Gospel is the last of three Lenten narrative encounters of faith in John's Gospel and the last of the seven signs in that Gospel. The signs bring disciples to belief, they are manifestations in the physical world of the spiritual strength of love, the power of God to transform human beings, to lead

us from thirst to refreshment, from darkness to light, from death to life.

Lazarus, who lived with his sisters Martha and Mary in Bethany, is ill. Bethany literally means 'house of affliction' and may hint at a ministry to the needy on the main route from Jericho to Jerusalem which explained Jesus' affection for the place. It could also be a sign of the human condition, a concentration of the sick and needy, a place where the compassion of God can be manifest.

Jesus delays his journey to Bethany not through any lay of urgency, but because he is on God's time, working according to God's plan to reveal God's power. When he arrives, he asks where they've laid Lazarus. They replied 'Come and see', in a poignant echo of the invitation to the disciples at the beginning of the Gospel (1.46). This time it is humanity inviting the Messiah – attested in this Gospel by Martha, not Peter – into the human world of death, grief and separation. In a remarkable line which scholars believe to be historically accurate – why else would the evangelist include this – it says that 'Jesus wept' (11.35). This is the full truth of the incarnation. The Word was made flesh and entered into our condition, into our grief and loss, into death itself.

But that is not the end of the story. Jesus has come to liberate us from the power of death. The resuscitation of Lazarus by the life-giving power of the Word – 'Lazarus, come out' (11.43) – is a sign that Jesus is the resurrection and the life and will himself come through death and invite us into the life of the new creation.

Sunday 29 March 2026
Palm Sunday
Matthew 21.1–11
Isaiah 50.4–7
Psalm 21(22).8–9,17–20,23–24
Philippians 2.6–11
Matthew 26.14 – 27.66

Palm Sunday represents a challenge for the preacher. There is so much to choose from in the readings, so much going on as we begin Holy Week. How can the preacher find one thread in this rich tapestry especially, as the Homiletic Directory reminds us, 'pastoral considerations suggest a rather short homily' (77). The Directory points to the second reading as the key, the beautiful hymn from

St Paul's Letter to the Philippians, which sums up the whole Paschal Mystery, the self-emptying and rising of Jesus Christ. The homilist is encouraged to remind the people that as we enter Holy Week we will experience that Mystery 'in a way that speaks to our heart' (77) and more than that, in a way which deepens our faith. As St Oscar Romero said on Palm Sunday in 1978, 'Here we are not simply remembering that twenty centuries ago Christ entered Jerusalem. The liturgy is all about presence and present-day realities.'

Christ is forever entering our reality, our communities, our lives, in humility, in poverty. In Matthew's Gospel, the emphasis is often on the fulfilment of Scripture, in this case Jesus entering Jerusalem as the Davidic Messiah entering his capital in a way which highlights his meekness and nonviolence (Mt 11.19). This contrasts with alternative stories of rulers entering a city on

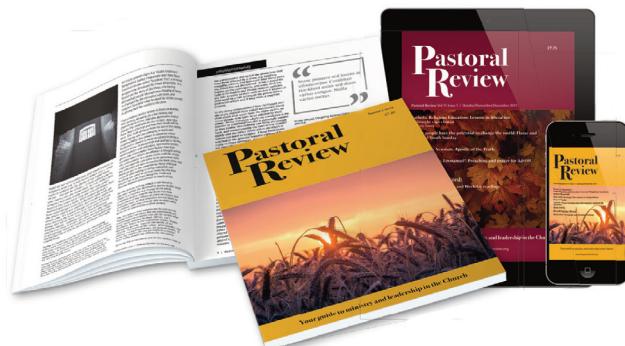
powerful warhorses. Jesus is the king of peace who will take the way of the cross for our forgiveness and redemption. We are invited not just to remember what Jesus did, but to take part in his dying to self – to our own attachments to power and greed and envy – and rising to the life of the new creation, to build a new civilisation, a civilisation of love.

St Oscar Romero asked his congregation to consider what Christ finds today when he enters our communities and 'what is expected of us, his people, as a result of our faith in this Christ who continues to redeem our nation and the world'.

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