

SUNDAY PLUS

Expectation and hope

A chain reaction



By Paul Higginson

In today's Gospel we hear how John the Baptist is expecting and hoping for great things from

Jesus. He asks his disciples to go and find out exactly who this Christ is. Jesus' reply tells us that spirituality is not primarily about what you understand, it's about what you do. For Jesus, actions

always speak louder than words. He simply says, "Go back and tell John the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear and the dead are raised to life". In effect, Jesus is saying to John, "you will know me by my fruits".

We "do" Christianity rather than simply believe in it. The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus was less worried about instilling in his disciples a system of beliefs and more concerned with changing their behaviour. In the words of the Church Father Maximus the Confessor, "faith is made manifest in action". Jesus' actions were to have a ripple effect, like a stone tossed in a pond. Every encounter, every

healing, every transformation, ripples out to touch the lives of countless numbers of people. What concerns Jesus is how we act; he urges us to be generous, compassionate, and to pursue social justice and the way of peace. We are called to demonstrate our faith by what we do. Our good works, however small, set off a chain reaction for others, helping us to share in Christ's work of making "thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven".

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.

Christmas tree legends

Legend says that one Christmas Eve, in a forest in Germany, a poor forester and his family huddled by their log fire, trying to stay warm. A small boy, bitterly cold, alone and lost, knocked at their front door. There was very little to spare, but the family made space beside the fire as the child gulped down a bowl of hot broth. Soon it was bedtime.

Very early next morning, Christmas Day, singing angels woke the family from their sleep.

They then discovered that their young visitor was the boy Jesus. In thanks for their hospitality, Jesus gave the forester and his family a freshly-cut branch from a fir tree – and thus began the custom of having a Christmas tree in the home.

Another legend tells that the boy Jesus found a poor family who could not afford to decorate their Christmas tree. He solved their problem by taking some spiders' webs and changing them into silver thread – the first tinsel.

Feast of the week Monday 12 December

Our Lady of Guadalupe

We're familiar with the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but did you know that every aspect of the cherished picture holds a catechetical traditional symbol which would have been immediately understood by sixteenth-century Aztecs?

For instance, Mary stands in front of the sun, with the greatest Aztec god, Huitzilopochtli, declaring that she is announcing the God who is

greater than their sun god. Her feet rest on the black crescent moon representing the evil deity Quetzalcoatl whose eclipse hid the light of the sun from a pre-scientific people. Mary has crushed and defeated the god who would threaten to destroy life. Mary's hands, joined in prayer, declare that she is not God whilst her finger points to the cross on her brooch: there is One who is greater than herself.

It's easy to miss the ways in which Our Lady comes into our own times and spaces. Perhaps we could ask her to open the eyes of our heart?

Lord, it's easy to hear the voices of those who make the most noise. Let me listen for the whispers of the people who are really in need of my love and support.
✚ Amen.

All his life John waited for the Messiah: his lifestyle, his very body is shaped by this expectation. This is also why Jesus praises him with those words: no one is greater than him among those born of a woman. Yet he too had to convert to Jesus. Like John, we too are called to recognise the face that God chose to assume in Jesus Christ, humble and merciful.

Pope Francis

Today
Isaiah 35:1-6, 10
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

Monday
Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17
Matthew 21:23-27

Tuesday
Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13
Matthew 21:28-32

Wednesday
Isaiah 45:6-8, 18, 21-25
Luke 7:18-23

Thursday
Isaiah 54:1-10
Luke 7:24-30

Friday
Isaiah 56:1-3, 6-8
John 5:33-36

Saturday
Genesis 49:2, 8-10
Matthew 1:1-17

Next Sunday
Isaiah 7:10-14
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-24