

SUNDAY PLUS



You are invited...

A Year of the Word

God's invitation

by Patrick van der Vorst

This painting by Pieter Breughel of 1567 is probably one of my favourite wedding paintings. Called *The Peasant Wedding*, it shows a party in full swing, set in a barn in summertime. We can see the bride sitting in front of a green textile hanging, wearing a crown, but oddly enough she is sitting there passively, not participating in the eating or drinking taking place around her. She is almost statuesque, like a sculpture of Our Lady. The wooden tables and chairs are roughly fashioned and the foods on offer appear to be bread, porridge and soup. Humble food is being served in a humble setting. The painting serves as a warning against the deadly sin of gluttony, as almost every

guest (with the exception of the bride), seems to be preoccupied with eating. The bride being reserved, the painting depicts humility versus the gluttony which surrounds it.

God is inviting everyone to the wedding with great generosity. All we have to do is to accept the invitation and fill the place there that is set for us. It is an invitation to the kingdom of heaven which is sent out to everyone. But as with any invitation, we are free to accept that invitation or not. We are free, every day, to say yes or no. But as generous and all-inviting as God's invitation is, it is not to be taken for granted. We should feel privileged that we are invited and love God all the more for it.



Patrick van der Vorst has left behind the world of art and antiques in order to study for the priesthood at the Pontifical Bede College, Rome. His website is www.christianart.today.

The Peasant Wedding by Pieter Breughel the Elder (1525-1569) © Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Unexpected guests

by James Gallogly

As you settle down to pray in our chapel, in the Long Term High Security Estate, you notice that you cannot see any bars. Of course they are there, just purposefully hidden. It is a rare and pleasant experience in a prison setting. For the duration of the service a sense of normality reigns, one could be in any church, anywhere.

Responding to the invitation to attend Holy Mass is often something we habitually take for granted. Inside, a little more effort is required to sign up and ensure you hear the call to move. All are welcome – but all arrive at the same time or they do not attend.

In our chapel all walks of life are thrown together: no-one judges

– that has already been done. Instead all are united in a desire to worship and praise together. Awaiting the Body of Christ, we become a body in Christ, to love and to serve.

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

“It is easy to be at peace with those we love and with those who do good for us; but it is not easy to be at peace with those who have wronged us, who do not love us. Ask the Lord, in silence, for the grace to give everyone, good and bad, the gift of peace.”

Pope Francis

RSVP

by Gerlinde Symons

I have recently been actively involved in reaching out to the registered Catholics in the prison who, for one reason or another, are not engaging with the chaplaincy. My plan of action has been to invite a speaker to come and share their faith story; to send personal invitations to every Catholic in the prison, offer coffee and cake and hope for the best – and it seems to be working!

In today's Gospel, the wedding banquet symbolises God's kingdom: those accepting the invitation receive salvation while those who decline are rejected.

Many people in prison respond to God's invitation to come and eat at the table of life because they recognise their need for God's forgiveness. Jesus reminds us that God chooses to be close to those in need: the addicts,

the homeless, the bereaved, the sick, the prisoners.

So what about us – do we need God's forgiveness? Is there space for God in our hearts? When we invite God into our lives, divine healing leads to real freedom and the work of building the heavenly kingdom begins.

Gerlinde Symons is a lay Catholic chaplain in two UK prisons.

Loving Lord, there are many people behind bars whose crimes you have forgiven but society hasn't. So often, their innocent families are also sentenced to unbearable suffering, unseen by the people around them. Watch over, protect and bless prisoners and their families. Amen.

Today:
Isaiah 25:1-10
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20
Matthew 22:1-14

Monday:
Galatians 4:22-24, 26-27, 31 – 5:1
Luke 11:29-32

Tuesday:
Galatians 5:1-6
Luke 11:37-41

Wednesday:
Galatians 5:18-25
Luke 11:42-46

Thursday:
Ephesians 1:1-10
Luke 11:47-54

Friday:
Ephesians 1:11-14
Luke 12:1-7

Saturday:
Ephesians 1:15-23
Luke 12:8-12

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 45:1, 4-6
1 Thessalonians 1:1-5
Matthew 22:15-21