



# Fulfilled in your hearing

St. Oscar Romero (1917-1980) was a "Salvadoran Roman Catholic archbishop who was a vocal critic of the violent activities of government armed forces, right-wing groups, and leftist guerrillas involved in El Salvador's civil conflict (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)." As a voice of the voiceless, he was an outspoken champion of the poor who were the ones most affected by the civil unrest and violence. His advocacy provoked several attempts on his life. Nonetheless, St. Oscar Romero was convinced that before all else his faith in the resurrected Christ and the values of the Gospel trumped any earthly concern or worry. He walked with complete confidence and trust. On March 24, 1980, St. Oscar Romero was assassinated while celebrating Mass. Such is often the fate of those who challenge the socio-political agendas of the day.



## 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

[He said to them], "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" - Lk 4:21-22

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We may look at the example of witness of St. Oscar Romero as something extraordinary. In one sense it is. Through the power of God, an ordinary human being did extraordinary things. But, in and of himself, St. Oscar Romero was simply a humble, loving servant of God. Oscar knew not only the power of love but the risk that comes when loving unconditionally. The beauty of God's message was able to shine in and through him

because he was able to step out of the way and be a vessel. One can assume that for St. Oscar Romero, one's earthly life has no merit when faith, integrity, conviction, zeal and love are jettisoned. Fear and apprehension had no grip on this man who not only saw but spoke the truth.

Do we speak the truth? It makes us feel good to speak of God as love. But have we ever considered the ramifications of this radical message? There are assaults on

human life occurring daily. More and more the value and worth of a human being is being reduced and minimalised. We are becoming widgets in the production of life. In our whole simple humble ways, we too are called to be prophets. Knowing who you are and what is within your means to do, how can you make God's love real, stand up for what is right, and give witness to the sacredness of all that is around you?

## Living the Paschal Mystery

Whose side do we want to be on? The winners, of course! But unwittingly the people in the gospel story choose to be on the wrong side! At first they "all spoke highly of" Jesus. But then they heard him say what they didn't like and turned on him. "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." However, more than one Scripture passage is being fulfilled in this gospel. The words and deeds of Jesus fulfil the Scripture passage from Isaiah about the coming of salvation: glad tidings for the poor, liberty for captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed. The

words and deeds of the people fulfil the Scripture passages about rejecting and killing God's prophets: they question Jesus' origins, become furious at his words, and act to destroy him. The people choose the wrong side! Which Scripture passages do we hear? Which do we fulfil?

When Jesus challenges the people's narrowness with the examples of Elijah's and Elisha's outreach to Gentiles (Sidon and Syria), they grow furious. Jesus challenged the crowd because the Good News is always broader than selective preferences or limited understanding—yes, salvation

would be for Gentiles as well as Jews. While the gospel is always good news, it is not always comfortable because it ever stretches us beyond where we are now. Which Scripture passages do we hear? Which do we fulfil?

The demise of the prophets came about because they forced choices; the challenge of the gospel is also that it forces choices. The comforting thing about God's word is that we have always had the reassurance that God will protect and deliver us (see first reading). The disturbing thing is that the protection and deliverance don't always come as quickly as we might like or

in the way we might like. Jeremiah ended up in a cistern and some of the prophets were killed; Jesus ended up on the cross. Prophets may be rejected and destroyed, but God's word is always enduring. One symbol of this is that Jesus does escape the crowd in this gospel, demonstrating that, like God's word, the gospel will prevail. And what is our response to the challenge of the gospel? Amazement or fury? Welcoming Jesus or expelling him from our midst? Growing in discipleship or stagnating in narrowness? Choosing the winning ways of the gospel or the losing ways of narrow-mindedness? Which Scripture passages do we hear? Which do we fulfil?

If we never meet doubt or opposition over values in our daily living, then we must examine how committed to the Gospel we are. Most of us aren't called "professionally" to preach the Good News. All of us, however, because of our baptism, are committed to living it. Living the Gospel is what must shape our everyday choices and responses. This means, for example, that if the chatter around the water-cooler at work grows uncharitable or coarse, we have the courage to walk away. Another example: if prejudice exists among our friends and acquaintances, we have the courage to extol the dignity of the minority. Dying to oneself means that we place Gospel values before any others and are willing to stake our lives on them. We might not always concretely experience God's protection and deliverance in the given moment; but we know from Jesus' life that God is there when it really counts—leading us to Life everlasting.

## Everyday Stewardship

### First Corinthians and the Stewardship of Social Media

"Love is patient, love is kind..." As familiar as these words are, they never seem to stray into the territory of becoming trite or silly. At their core they communicate a truth about us and about our Creator that never fails to inspire.

But despite the fact that you've probably heard it at many weddings over time, First Corinthians isn't just for newlyweds. It wasn't written for married folks. It's for every single one of us, in every state of life and every social situation, in every country and culture and language across the globe.

Which means that First

Corinthians is even for the online world. It's for Facebook and Twitter and Instagram and all the other platforms I'm forgetting (there seems to be a new one every day, doesn't there?).

A sense of division — whether rooted in politics, culture or anything else — is growing in our world, and it's never more obvious than when we observe interactions online. It is far easier, after all, to remember what love is when a human being of flesh and blood stands before us. When all we see is an avatar or a profile picture on a screen — especially accompanied by an opinion with which we vehemently

disagree — even the most loving Christians can throw First Corinthians out the window.

As everyday stewards we know that we are charged to be not only gracious but grateful. We receive others but we also give thanks for what they bring to us — even if that's an opportunity to "strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts."

So before the next time you post anything online, I suggest giving First Corinthians a read — and remember, love never fails.

— Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

## Live the Liturgy



Prophets possess an intimate knowledge of God and act on their experience of

God. Prophetic messages usually challenge the status quo and draw us up and out

of ourselves, focusing us on the bigger picture. We often think of ourselves and our own needs first. When we listen to someone speak, we judge the merit of the message by its degree of usefulness. If the message or vision contains no personal benefit or profit but a call to stretch and grow, we can become indignant. Prophets are usually the ones whose message challenges us and calls us to see things

differently and love more perfectly and deeply. God is love. When listening to St. Paul speak about love we witness the unfolding of this type of unconditional, other-centered, self-sacrificial perfect God. It is an invitation to life, freedom, and happiness that can be offered to us only by God. Jesus, who is God and Love incarnate, calls us to this richer expression of love. Are we ready to listen and be challenged and stretched?



**First Reading**

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you. (Jer 1:4-5)

**Psalm:**

My lips will tell of your help. (Ps 70[71])

**Second Reading:**

So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor 13:13)

**Gospel Acclamation:**

Alleluia, alleluia! I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, says the Lord; No one can come to the Father except through me. Alleluia!

**Gospel:**

And he said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place." (Lk 4:24)

# This Week

**30 FOURTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (C)**

Jer 1:4-5, 17-19/Ps 71:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 15-17 [cf. 15ab]/1 Cor 12:31-13:13 or 13:4-13/Lk 4:21-30  
10:30 **Mass** St Mary's Shaun Dover (RIP)  
17:00 **Mass** St Mary's People of the Parish

**31 Monday**  
St John Bosco

2 Sm 15:13-14, 30; 16:5-13/Ps 3:2-3, 4-5, 6-7/Mk 5:1-20  
09:00 **Breakfast with God** Mercy Chapel  
12:05 **Requiem Mass** St Mary's Aine Warren

**1 Tuesday**

2 Sm 18:9-10, 14b, 24-25a, 30—19:3/Ps 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6/Mk 5:21-43  
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Ints of Joan Blyth  
17:30 **Chosen Tuesday** Upper Room

**2 The Presentation of the Lord**

Mal 3:1-4/Ps 24:7, 8, 9, 10/Heb 2:14-18/Lk 2:22-40 or 2:22-32  
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Ints of P & C Maggioro  
12:45 **Wednesday Walk** Upper Room

**3 Thursday**  
St Blaise

1 Kgs 2:1-4, 10-12/1 Chr 29:10, 11ab, 11d-12a, 12bcd/Mk 6:7-13  
10:00 **Confessions** St Cecilia's  
10:00 **Open House** St Mary's Catholic Centre  
10:30 **Mass** St Cecilia's John & Catherine McConville (RIP)  
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Dinah & Gilbert Burns (RIP)  
17:00 **Evening with Jesus and Friends** Mercy Chapel

**4 Friday**

Sir 47:2-11/Ps 18:31, 47 and 50, 51/Mk 6:14-29  
12:05 **Mass** St Mary's Gerry Early (RIP)

**5 Saturday**  
St Agatha

1 Kgs 3:4-13/Ps 119:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14/Mk 6:30-34  
10:15 **Confessions** St Mary's  
11:00 **Mass** St Mary's Robert Anderson (RIP)  
11:45 **Confessions** St Mary's  
18:00 **Vigil Mass** St Cecilia's Sheila Ward (RIP)

**6 FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (C)**

Is 6:1-2a, 3-8/Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8 [1c]/1 Cor 15:1-11 or 15:3-8, 11/Lk 5:1-11  
10:30 **Mass** St Mary's William (Billy) Curran (RIP)  
17:00 **Mass** St Mary's People of the Parish

# Announcements

**White Flower Appeal**

Thank-you for your donations of £284.24 at last week's appeal.

**Confirmation for Adults**

Bishop Robert is coming to the parish to confirm some of our young people on Tuesday, 15 February.

There are many adults in the parish who, for one reason or another, missed out on the opportunity to receive this important sacrament when they were younger. We'd like to invite you to consider receiving this sacrament and complete your Christian Initiation. If you've been meaning to do something about this for a long time but just haven't gotten around to it, this is your chance. Take the hint from the Holy Spirit.

Fr Philip will have a few short meetings in preparation. If you'd like to join give your details to one of the clergy, email us or phone and we'll let you know when we're meeting.

**Parish Retreat**

This week we started planning for our parish retreat. There'll be more details coming up in the weeks ahead, but we wanted to give you a sense of what we're planning.

The retreat will be from 27 March to 2 April. Unlike a parish mission, which you might be more familiar with, this retreat will be individually guided. What that means is that everyone who takes part will be appointed a trained and qualified prayer guide whom they will meet with for about half an hour a day during the retreat. This can be face-to-face or online.

The prayer guide will suggest methods of prayer and passages of scripture to help you get in touch with where God is calling you in that moment. How you use the time and what you share with your guide remains confidential and you decide what to talk about.

It might sound a little daunting, but it is really more like a friendly conversation with someone who helps you hear the voice of God. The members of the Parish Pastoral Council met with a prayer guide individually when they were discerning the parish mission statement.

On three evenings during the week there will be an opportunity to gather for prayer and worship and to hear some input on different types of prayer.

The retreat is a great blessing that God is giving to Our Lady of Mercy this year and he's inviting individually each one of us to come and spend a week listening to him. Are you going to accept? More information to follow!

**Sick and Housebound**

Do you know someone who would like to receive Holy Communion or a visit at home? We're trying to form a new 'sick list' post-Covid.



Bernadette, Jean Maureen, Christopher, Paula, Peter, Emilia, Jean, Teresa, Cath and Norman, the sick sisters at Oaklea, David, Marion, Dave, Neil, Paul, Andrew, Jacob, Stella, David, Alisa, Susan, Clive, Mary



Marjorie Balmer  
Aine Warren  
Matthew Laws

Patrick Deehan

Let us know if you would like a name added to our prayer list.

# Questions for the Week

**First Reading:** In his call to be

a prophet, the Lord informs Jeremiah of both the human resistance and the divine providence that lies ahead for him. When have you felt God's presence in the midst of turmoil in your life?

**Second Reading:** Paul eloquently defines the spiritual virtue of "love" for the Christians in Corinth. How well do you live by the standards of love as defined

by Paul?

**Gospel:** The people of Nazareth were "filled with fury" at Jesus' words to them. How do you imagine Jesus reacted to being rejected by those in his hometown of Nazareth?

# Why do we do that?



**Question:** I've heard people call Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit being "immaculately conceived." Is that what the Immaculate Conception is?

**Answer:** While these two events are often confused, they are not the same thing. We celebrated the conception of Jesus on March 25th, the feast of the Annunciation. While that was surely miraculous, it isn't what we refer to as the "immaculate conception." The Immaculate Conception is Mary's conception, and we typically celebrate it on December 8th. If the 8th

happens to be a Sunday, the Church moves the feast to December 9th. It is a holy day of obligation. Why does the Church consider it so important to celebrate?

Mary's conception is immaculate because she was conceived without original sin. The angel Gabriel acknowledges this when he hails Mary as "full of grace" (Luke 1:28). Scripture scholars identify several theological ideas that confirm this. In the Old Testament, the sacred, pristine Ark of the Covenant held the presence

of God. The presence of God is now held within a new "arc" — the womb of Mary. Genesis 3 also prophesies of a woman who would oppose the devil and whose child would crush the devil's head. Christ is the "New Adam." This passage sets up Mary, then, as the "New Eve." Jesus and Mary are the beginnings of a new creation, one we all can participate in through the grace of our baptism. After all, God's love is more "original" than our sin!



You may be familiar with the annual "blessing of throats"

# Saint of the Week

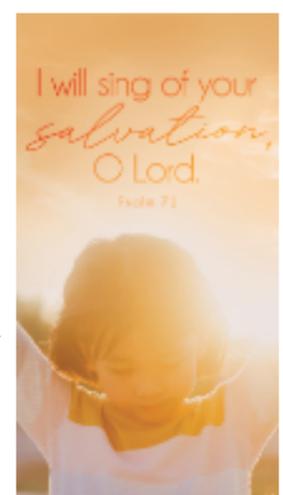
that many parishes use to commemorate the beloved bishop and martyr. St. Blaise lived in the fourth century in Turkey and Armenia. Due to religious persecution, he was forced to flee and hide in a cave in the back country in order to save his life.

History has it that one day a group of hunters stumbled upon where St. Blaise was living. They found the bishop kneeling in prayer, surrounded by wolves, lions and bears that he had tamed. The legend has it that as the hunters

dragged Blaise off to prison, a mother came with her young son who had a fish bone lodged in his throat. At Blaise's command, the child was able to cough up the bone and thus lived.

Today we remember the saint on his feast day by taking two candles, crossing them against the throat, and saying the following prayer:

*Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from ailments of the throat and from every other evil. In the*



*name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

# Flock Notes

In the north of Uganda, in a district called Kotido, you'll find St Joseph's Parish, Panyangara. Like Our Lady of Mercy, Sunderland, St Joseph's is entrusted to the pastoral care of the Mill Hill Missionaries.

We're really happy to announce that we're going to form a special bond with St Joseph's. You'll start seeing pictures from the parish in our churches and on the website and social media. Over time we hope that we can get to know them and they can get to know us.

The first thing we're asking everyone in Our Lady of Mercy to do is to start praying for St Joseph's, Panyangara. (Perhaps we'll also have to work on pronouncing that name!) They'll also be doing the same for us.

We'll be exploring ways of giving some practical support to our sisters and brothers in St Joseph's. With Lent not too

far away we thought that might make a great lenten project.

St Joseph's already runs a project to help young mothers with 'eco stoves'. Most cooking is done on open wood fires. Not only does this produce smoke harmful to their babies and children, it also leads to deforestation, loss of habitat and desertification in an already arid part of Uganda. Eco stoves require much less wood, so less time is spent gathering fire wood and more trees are saved. They also produce far less smoke so they're more healthy in addition to being more efficient.

We thought this would be a great project for us to support this Lent. We need help, though. Can you join our mission team to develop this link with St Joseph's Panyangara? Fr Philip would love to hear from you if you can!



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