

SUNDAY PLUS

Open your heart

Holier than thou?

by Phil Ferguson

The MP climbed out of his car on the first day back in Westminster after the summer recess. He saw his friend, gave a broad smile of welcome and, without a second thought from either, shook hands. It was a lovely, spontaneous gesture of friendship – except that it happened during Covid-19 restrictions and in full view of the cameras and journalists. The volcano of criticism suddenly erupted and self-righteous indignation gushed forth for all to see on television and in the newspapers.

This Sunday's Gospel tells a similar story. The Pharisees washed their arms as far as the elbow before sitting down to eat from dishes which had also been washed according to the prescribed regulations. They found



Jesus and some of his disciples eating with dirty hands – and found an opportunity to complain. For a start, how did they know that Jesus hadn't washed his hands? Had they been watching him, looking for a chance to make a fuss?

Of course, in a country where water is often in short supply, one could ask how the Pharisees

behaved when they were travelling. Perhaps they also merely rubbed their hands sort-of clean against their clothing before sitting down to eat?

The MP shook hands with a friend during the days of heightened Covid-19 anxiety but perhaps the watching journalists and camera crews had also unthinkingly infringed their own social

distancing requirements? During lockdown, was I extra-dramatic while rubbing in the shop's hand sanitiser, so everyone knew how thoroughly decent I am?

Jesus complained of the Pharisees' lip-service which ignored the needs of the heart. Do I imitate Jesus or the Pharisees?

Phil Ferguson is a former teacher.

The heart sees

Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Have you ever stood in front of the bathroom mirror first thing in the morning, dishevelled, unwashed, bleary-eyed with uncombed hair and seriously thought that you are gazing at the most wonderful, most beautiful sight that the world has ever seen? Possibly not!

On the other hand, haven't you sometimes hoped that someone might notice the "beautiful belongings that nobody else had looked quite far enough to find", those precious bits and pieces which can be seen by the eyes of the heart?

It takes love for someone to recognise your inner loveliness – and tell you what they've seen.

Yet that's what God does. God isn't bothered about externals, couldn't

care less about your qualifications, talents and achievements. Neither is God bothered about your mistakes, shortcomings, repeated failures, employment record, debts...

"A saint is the person who kept on trying when everyone else gave up." Perhaps, when you look in the bathroom mirror, you and God see a saint (even if nobody else does!).

Sr Janet Fearn is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

My Lord and my God,
I love you and I adore
you.  Amen.

Follow Jesus

by Paul Higginson

Do you ever have doubts? Is your faith sometimes a bit shaky? Don't forget that those disciples who knew Jesus, who listened to his teaching, walked away. If those who actually met Jesus left him, then it is not surprising that those of us who have "not seen and yet believe" have periods of doubt and uncertainty, or even times when we also "walk away" from Jesus.

Following Jesus is not a one-off event: it's an ongoing commitment to follow his example and live out his teachings in our daily lives. All of us know, deep down, that the material things of this world can never truly satisfy the deepest spiritual longings of our heart – to love and to be loved – the route to inner peace.

When we see the world as Jesus sees it, our rather humdrum, predictable life becomes filled with hope and surprise.

We either follow the crowd or follow Jesus. In Jesus we find our home - and he finds his home in us.

Having recently retired from teaching, Paul Higginson is a catechist at the Sacred Heart church in Bushey.

"Jesus is our hope.
Nothing — not even
evil or death — is able
to separate us from the
saving power of his
love."

Pope Francis

Today:
Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8
James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27
Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Monday:
1 Thessalonians
4:13-18
Luke 4:16-30

Tuesday:
1 Thessalonians
5:1-6, 9-11
Luke 4:31-37

Wednesday:
Colossians 1:1-8
Luke 4:38-44

Thursday:
Colossians 1:9-14
Luke 5:1-11

Friday:
Colossians 1:15-20
Luke 5:33-39

(E): St Gregory the Great (Feast)
1 Thessalonians 2:2-8
Matthew 16:13-19

Saturday:
Colossians 1:21-23
Luke 6:1-5

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 35:4-7
James 2:1-5
Mark 7:31-37