

**First reading Acts 9:26-31****Barnabas explained how the Lord had appeared to Saul on his journey**

When Saul got to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him: they could not believe he was really a disciple. Barnabas, however, took charge of him, introduced him to the apostles, and explained how the Lord had appeared to Saul and spoken to him on his journey, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Saul now started to go round with them in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord. But after he had spoken to the Hellenists, and argued with them, they became determined to kill him. When the brothers knew, they took him to Caesarea, and sent him off from there to Tarsus.

The churches throughout Judaea, Galilee and Samaria were now left in peace, building themselves up, living in the fear of the Lord, and filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

**Responsorial Psalm 21(22):26-28,30-32****You, Lord, are my praise in the great assembly.**

My vows I will pay before those who fear him.  
The poor shall eat and shall have their fill.  
They shall praise the Lord, those who seek him.  
May their hearts live for ever and ever!

All the earth shall remember and return to the Lord,  
all families of the nations worship before him;  
They shall worship him, all the mighty of the earth;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust.

And my soul shall live for him, my children serve him.  
They shall tell of the Lord to generations yet to come,  
declare his faithfulness to peoples yet unborn:  
'These things the Lord has done.'

**Second reading 1 John 3:18-24****The commandment of faith and love**

My children, our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active; only by this can we be certain that we are children of the truth and be able to quieten our conscience in his presence, whatever accusations it may raise against us, because God is greater than our conscience and he knows everything. My dear people, if we cannot be condemned by our own conscience, we need not be afraid in God's presence, and whatever we ask him, we shall receive, because we keep his commandments and live the kind of life that he wants.

His commandments are these: that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another as he told us to.

Whoever keeps his commandments lives in God and God lives in him.

We know that he lives in us  
by the Spirit that he has given us.

**Gospel Acclamation Jn15:4,5****Alleluia, alleluia!**

Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.  
Whoever remains in me bears fruit in plenty.

**Alleluia!****Gospel John 15:1-8****I am the vine, you are the branches**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more.

You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you.

Make your home in me, as I make mine in you.

As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.

Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it.

It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.'

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**Feast Days this Week**

**Monday 29th April:** St Catherine of Siena

**Tuesday 30th April:** St Pius V

**Wednesday 1st May:** St Joseph the Worker

**Thursday 2nd May April:** St Athanasius

**Friday 3rd May:** Sts Philip and James

**Saturday 4th May:** The English Martyrs

**The Cycle of Prayer****Human Work**

Especially on St Joseph the Worker — 1 May

**Background**

The commemoration of St Joseph the Worker on 1 May was instituted by Pius XII in 1955. It proposes the example and intercession of Joseph as worker and provider.

**Prayer**

*God our Father, creator and ruler of the universe,  
in every age you call men and women  
to develop and use their gifts for the good of others.*

*With St Joseph as our example and guide,  
help us to do the work you have asked  
and come to the rewards you have promised.*

**Roman Missal (adapted)**

*In the Catholic tradition, a Homily, interprets the readings, shining a light on the present and asking each one of us what we must change in our lives, from today. The challenge is not so much about recounting the history or retelling the story, but living the gospel.*

**More than just a code to guide us**

*People's fascination with the history of ancient Egypt and its Pharaohs is not only for the wonderful buildings and sculptures they left behind, but also from the social point of view. For here we had a whole people organised for one purpose, to secure the continuation of the Pharaoh in the next world. They surrounded their rulers' burial with such detailed customs, laws and rituals, the purpose of which was to create the impression that the Pharaoh was still alive. They even placed food in his tomb, together with his favourite furniture, chariots, games and weapons. But the striking thing about mummies, whether royal or not, is that they are very, dead indeed. Religion too can degenerate into code and cult, just a set of laws to be kept and rites to be fulfilled, but such a religion will in time become dry and musty, and like the mummies utterly devoid of life. A celebrity was asked on a TV religious programme about the place of religion on his life, and if he could easily do without it, and he answered, "Yes, maybe, but then it is always a guide to help one keep in line." For him religion was a code to help him regulate his conduct. People of that mindset often want religion to be mummified, like a static signpost in their lives. But, if it means anything, Christianity must be a living, a vibrant force in one's life. Not only does Christ live on in the community of believers, but through them, he carries on his mission of ministering to people in need of his mercy and love.*

*In those who spread the words of the gospel to others, whether in the mission fields, in the parish, in our schools, we have the fulfilment of Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper, "That they may know the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." In every instruction in the faith, given and received, we have a figure of Christ restoring his sight to the poor man, who at first beheld people dimly, as if they were trees, and then came to see clearly. In every sinner who comes to repentance we see, as it were, Lazarus raised once more from the dead, casting off the shroud of sin that enveloped him. In every coming together around the Table of the Eucharist, we, like the Apostles are witnesses before the whole world to the task, entrusted to us by Christ, of proclaiming his death and resurrection until he comes at the end of time. Christianity is not, and never should be, mere code or mere cult.*

*If you see Christianity as a code — "you must do this, you must avoid that, you must be present at this Mass" — is one often heard — then it is possible to begin to credit your account before God by claiming, "I attend Mass, I observe this law, I have progressed so much on the way you require of me." It is possible to reach the stage where you begin to see yourself as being perfect, with no further need of a saviour. But, alas, such an assessment of one's standing before God is precisely that of the Pharisees, of whom Christ said to his listeners, "I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). True Christianity is the vision of ourselves as being encompassed by God's love, that despite our faults, God loves us to the point of foolishness, to the point of death on a cross. If we believe in Christ, God is ready to regard us as his children and friends. Friends do not ask for literal commands, but from their personal acquaintance with the one that loves them, they try and understand his half-words. From love of him they try and anticipate his wishes.*

*If we see our lives as a response to the immense love God has for us, then there will no longer be constraint. Rather will religion have a liberating effect in our lives. We will enjoy what scripture describes as "the liberty of the children of God." But then again, so great is the love of God for us that we will see our efforts at responding to that love as always falling short of what we desire. The trouble with those who see their lives as blameless is that they have limited vision. They do not raise their eyes above themselves. Why should we continue to strive after something which seems beyond us? The answer from St Augustine is that we must do so because we have an inbuilt need for God, and nothing short of him will ever satisfy that inner seeking which is with us all our lives.*

**False Prophets**

*Admirers have suggested that the brilliance of Oscar Wilde's plays was only surpassed by that of his conversation. He was a superb raconteur whose conversational offerings were heavily laced with irony. He had a particular penchant for parables, often recounting them in the style of the gospel narrative. Here is one of them. "One day, an unknown man walked down the street. It was the first hour of daylight and people had not yet gathered in the market place. The man sat down by the wayside and, raising his eyes, he began to gaze up to heaven. And it came to pass that another man who was passing that way, seeing the stranger, he too stopped and raised his eyes to heaven. At the second and third hour, others came and did likewise. Soon word of this marvellous happening spread throughout the countryside and many people left their abodes and came to see this stranger. At the ninth hour, when the day was far spent, there was a great multitude assembled. The stranger*

*lowered his eyes from heaven and stood up. Turning towards the multitude, he said in a loud voice: "Amen, amen- I say unto you. How easy it is to start a religion!"*

*To start a religion, as Wilde observed, may not be that difficult, but to ensure its survival is quite another matter. People are gullible. Futurists predict a growth in religious activity in the 21st century. For them it forms part of the leisure industry which is expected to expand dramatically. Whether one should greet this prediction with joy or apprehension is a matter for debate. A purely statistical increase in church membership is a dubious gain. What counts for Christianity — indeed, what ensures its survival — is not external but internal growth. What is required is not more members of the Catholic Church, but better disciples of Jesus Christ.*

*Mere membership and full discipleship are worlds apart. Christianity has always suffered from a surfeit of members and a shortage of disciples. Humans are social animals and crave to be associated. In a world grown cold and depersonalised the churches offer a comfortable ambiance of friendship and security. Often the gospel is diluted to accommodate the prejudices and lifestyle of the parishioners. Few preached fearlessly enough, like St Paul, to risk their livings, let alone their lives. The radical Christ is made into a benign bishop and the collection plate registers members' approval. Too many withered branches remain un-pruned.*

*St John tries gently to prod us into discipleship. "My children, our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active." You won't meet Christ in your Sunday liturgy, if you haven't rubbed shoulders with him in the office, in the factory or in the kitchen. You won't hear his message from the altar, if you were deaf to his call at your office desk. Jesus put it simply and bluntly: "It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and then you will be my disciples."*

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