**OLAS SCRIPTURE COMMENTARIES FEBRUARY 2025**

**YEAR C**

Sunday 2nd February **The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple**

**1st Reading Malachi 3: 1-4** - The background is the scene in Judah and Jerusalem some years after the return from the Babylonian Exile in the sixth century before Christ. The hopes and ideals have not been realised, the high standards in life and religious service demanded by God's Law are being disregarded. The priests in particular are lax in their duties. We don't know who Malachi was - his name might simply mean "The Messenger" but his message is surely damning. The write introduces the idea of "The Day of Reckoning": a day of judgement for those who go through the motions of invoking the Lord but neglect his demands. Yes, Malachi says, the Lord really will enter His Temple and sort them all out (does this remind us of Jesus driving out the marketeers from the Temple?). Although it isn't mentioned in this reading, Malachi predicts that this Day of Judgement will be preceded by the return of the prophet Elijah - a notion to be picked up much later in the Gospel when Jesus is questioning his disciples about the current ideas regarding the coming of the Messiah.

**2nd Reading Hebrews 2: 14-18** - We don't know who wrote this document (calling it a letter doesn't really do it justice) but it's obvious from the content that it was composed as an encouragement to a group very familiar with Temple worship, so it's reasonable to suppose they were of the priestly class (we shouldn't confuse "priest" with the clergy we Christians are familiar with. The Jewish priests held hereditary duties in the Temple and were supposedly descendants of Aaron and of the clan of Levi. Luke's gospel mentions the father of John the Baptist as being one of them). So in trying to understand the "Letter to the Hebrews" we need to think of a group - perhaps the more liberal minded of the priestly clan - who had found inspiration in this new Jesus movement but were devoted to their traditional religious practices and were perturbed by the activities of people like Paul who were opening membership of the movement to non-Jews. Perhaps we could see a similar dilemma in today's Catholic Church, between those who find comfort in the old familiar ways of worship and leadership and others who see the future of the Church in a more communal cooperative way.

**Gospel Luke 2:22-40** - Today's long reading is an essential part of Luke’s prologue to his Gospel. It is a very different prologue to the one written in Matthew but with a similar purpose - to prefigure in story form the life and mission of the Saviour. The style is also very different from the main body of the Gospel and draws a good deal on Old Testament imagery. The infant is brought by his parents - Joseph is as much his father as Mary is his mother - to the Temple that represents God's presence among his people. They are obedient to the Law, fulfil all the regulations. And the child is recognised by the humble people who dedicate their lives to the service of God - and will be a source of dissension. Surely the writer was aware of Malachi's prophecies we have just been listening to.

Sunday 9th February 5**th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**1st Reading Isaiah 6:1-6 -** This all about being commissioned to speak and bear witness to God. The inner sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple was God’s throne, the sign of his presence among his people. In his dream, Isaiah’s lips are cleansed with a burning ember taken from the altar of sacrifice. This is the only mention in the Old Testament of “Seraphim” – the name means “burning ones”. The imagery is borrowed from Middle Eastern mythology and depicts awesome beings in attendance on the throne of God. Although the language is foreign to us (I'm reminded of passages in the Book of the Apocalypse), the overall impression is one of the utter strength and conviction by which Isaiah establishes his credentials as God's messenger at a time when the existence of the nation was threatened.

**2nd Reading I Corinthians 15:1-11 -**Paul is very concerned lest his recent converts fall into dispute amongst themselves and misinterpret the teaching he gave them. He reminds them of the origins of his authority and gives a brief résumé of the teaching he gave them. Some of the people who knew Jesus are still able to witness, others having died (does he mean that some have abandoned their faith?) and he concludes with a touchingly intimate reference to his own experiences. It is the grace of God working in him, rather than any merit of his own, that has achieved whatever success he has had.

Interestingly, his testimony conflicts directly with the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection appearances. He was writing long before any of the Gospels were written and the best way of understanding the conflicting accounts is to accept that they all bear collective testimony to a real event. Sorry if this seems trivial but try to imagine for a moment four members of the same family telling their children about a momentous event in their family history. Now you ask the children what happened, and they all have different versions of who said what to whom and when and where. It doesn't mean the event never occurred: in fact, if they all told you word for word the same story, you'd probably think they'd been brainwashed!

**Gospel: Luke 5:1-11** This story of the catch of fish is deeply symbolic: this is at the start of Jesus' recruitment drive and these fishermen are going to bring a haul of people into the community of the believers. Simon, the boss of the enterprise (perhaps he already had the nickname of “Rocky”, to which Jesus was to give a special meaning), objects. They have laboured in vain all the night, but then he expresses his faith in Jesus - he will do as this guy says. When the net is full to the point of bursting Simon is overawed, only to be reassured that he has a mission to accomplish. Without Jesus, his disciples can achieve nothing but with his enabling word they can accomplish miracles. And so, to the dramatic conclusion: they leave everything to follow him. Fish seem to have a particular significance: remember the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus' request at his post resurrection appearance to his disciples, asking for something to eat? The writers of John's Gospel would later adapt today's story as a *conclusion* to the Resurrection events when Jesus has a barbecue of fish on the beach waiting for them. It might be just a coincidence that the letters of the Greek word for fish, *Ichthus,* spell out the initials of the Greek words that translate as Jesus *Christ Son of God Saviour.*

Sunday 16th February **6th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**1st Reading Jeremiah 17:5-8 -** "He's a proper Jeremiah" used to be a way of described a misery-guts. Jeremiah had the misfortune to tell the truth as he saw it. The kingdom was threatened by great foreign powers, and he saw there was no future in trying to resist their military might. Anyway, the calamity was the result of the leaders straying away from the path of righteousness. The prophet contrasts two sorts of life. The life of the worldly man is useless – can’t see good when it’s staring him in the face, his life is barren. The one who puts his trust in God has a life worth living, produces good things

**2nd Reading 1 Corinthians 15:16-20 -** Conservative Judaism, as expressed by the Sadducees, didn’t have any belief in resurrection from the dead. It seems odd that there might have been some in the Jesus Movement who were of that party in the community in Corinth: the message Paul preached was entirely founded on the fact of Christ’s rising from the dead – which Paul saw as the promise for all believers. If the resurrection of Jesus is not real – if our Christian attitude is confined to this present life only - then the whole structure of belief is a waste of time. But the Resurrection is the belief that in the here and now we share in the Risen Life of Christ, however problematic that life in this wonderful, messy, dangerous world may be. The essential is we make the most of it and help others to do the same.

**Gospel Luke 6:17, 20-26 -** Traditional Judaism considered the good man’s reward was wealth, health and happiness. In today’s reading Jesus sets out a rather different stall before an audience Luke describes his audience as coming from far and wide, even from Tyre and Sidon, outside the Jewish territory, as if to emphasise the universal significance of this manifesto. It’s a message which would have resonated with the first readers, many of whom would have experienced precisely the hardships Jesus described. Who said being good was easy!

Sunday 23rd February **7th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**1st Reading: I Samuel 26:2,7-9,11-13,22-23** - The Biblical David is wreathed in legend: the nearest I can think of in our history stories is perhaps King Alfred. If you read behind the legends, David emerges as something like a guerrilla who fights to succeed the anointed King Saul. In this story David is waging war against Saul. He has him at a disadvantage and is urged by his military adviser to make a night attack and kill the king. He refuses because Saul is the anointed king. Instead, he carries out a symbolic attack, coming into the sleeping king’s tent and removing his water bottle and his spear. The story serves to paint David whiter than white: an upright brigand respecting the dignity of the man who is his enemy. It's a rather weird story to introduce today's Gospel reading!

**2nd Reading: I Corinthians 15:54-58 -** The Biblical story of Adam is a kind of theology, a poetic way of describing humanity’s relationship (or lack of relationship) with God. But Paul would have thought of the Creation story as literal history and he used it to make a contrast between the earthly and the divine. We don't need a fundamentalist view of religion to understand that humanity is flawed, capable of great good and enormous evil, as a five-minute trawl through the day's news confirms, from a knifing in Dudley to the massacre of innocents in current warfare in Gaza. What the message of Christianity offers is a share in the divine nature of Christ for those who are brave enough to accept it and take on the burdens it entails.

**Gospel: Luke 6:27-38 -** After the challenging message expressed in last week’s gospel, Jesus offer a code for living whose key word is compassion. Jesus calls on his disciples for their goodness to mirror God’s goodness. Goodness like this can’t be mercenary - I’ll scratch you back if you’ll scratch mine - but has to be for its own sake. This is what will make the disciples sons and daughters of God. What is the message for us? We talk of baptism as being the entry into that divine relationship, but we have to admit that, for a baby, baptism isn't anything like the voluntary act of the early Christians. Parents and the wider family can help but in the end it's a bit like an arranged marriage where the parents hope the couple will grow into a fruitful relationship. Infant baptism began because of a fear that the unbaptised child would miss out on the eternal love of God. I sometimes think Christians tend to have a very weird concept of God, seemingly only loving towards those who have been baptised and accepted Jesus as their life source, and too bad for all those generations of the rest of humankind also, presumably, created by the same loving God.