

SUNDAY THOUGHTS



The Year of God the Father

1999

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Advent Season

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|-------------------------|--|
| First Sunday of Advent | Let us walk in the light of the Lord |
| Second Sunday of Advent | The God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ |
| Third Sunday of Advent | God is coming to save you |
| Fourth Sunday of Advent | God-is-with-us |

Christmas Season

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|----------------------------|--|
| Christmas Day | The Word was made flesh |
| Holy Family | Giving thanks to God the Father |
| Second Sunday of Christmas | He chose us in Christ |
| The Epiphany | Today you revealed... your eternal plan |
| Baptism of the Lord | This is my Son |

Ordinary Time [1]

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| Second Sunday of the Year | He is the Chosen One of God |
| Third Sunday of the Year | Wise words... would make the Cross pointless |
| Fourth Sunday of the Year | Blessed are the poor in spirit |
| Fifth Sunday of the Year | Share your bread with the hungry |
| Sixth Sunday of the Year (Temperance) | Life and death |

Lenten Season

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|-----------------------|--|
| First Sunday of Lent | You must serve him alone |
| Second Sunday of Lent | This is my Son |
| Third Sunday of Lent | Worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth |
| Fourth Sunday of Lent | Children of light |
| Fifth Sunday of Lent | Let him go free |
| Passion (Palm) Sunday | God raised him high |

Easter Season

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|-------------------------------------|--|
| Easter Sunday | On the first day of the week |
| Second Sunday of Easter | God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ |
| Third Sunday of Easter | Living away from your home |
| Fourth Sunday of Easter (Vocations) | I am the good shepherd |
| Fifth Sunday of Easter | To see the Father |
| Sixth Sunday of Easter | The Father will give you another Advocate |
| The Ascension | What hope his call holds |
| Pentecost | As the Father sent me |

The Most Holy Trinity

A God of tenderness and compassion

Body and Blood of Christ

I draw life from the Father

Ordinary Time [2]

Eleventh Sunday of the Year

We have been reconciled

Twelfth Sunday of the Year

Do not be afraid

Thirteenth Sunday of the Year

Welcome the one who sent me

Fourteenth Sunday of the Year

Revealed to mere children

Fifteenth Sunday of the Year

One great act of giving birth

Sixteenth Sunday of the Year

Mild in judgement

Seventeenth Sunday of the Year

He sells everything he has

Eighteenth Sunday of the Year

The love of God made visible in Christ

Nineteenth Sunday of the Year

The sound of a gentle breeze

The Assumption

My spirit exults in God my Saviour

Twenty First Sunday of the Year

How rich are the depths of God

Twenty Second Sunday of the Year

Let your behaviour change

Twenty Third Sunday of the Year

I shall be there with them

Twenty Fourth Sunday of the Year

Not seventy but seventy seven times

Twenty Fifth Sunday of the Year

My ways are not your ways

Twenty Sixth Sunday of the Year

Which of the two?

Twenty Seventh Sunday of the Year

The peace of God

Twenty Eighth Sunday of the Year

He will destroy death for ever

Twenty Ninth (Mission) Sunday

There is no other God

Thirtieth Sunday of the Year

The greatest commandment

Thirty Second Sunday of the Year

Not like the people that have no hope

All Saints

How happy are the poor in spirit

Thirty Third Sunday of the Year

Well done, good and faithful servant

Christ the King

God will be all in all

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Let us walk in the light of the Lord (First Reading)

At the beginning of Creation, God says, 'Let there be light' (Gen 1:3). St James calls God 'the Father of all light' – everything that is good and perfect comes from him (Jas 1:16, 17). The Father's light shows up what is empty and selfish, 'the things we prefer to do under the cover of the dark'. But it draws us towards the dawn of an eternal day when we will need no lamplight or sunlight, because God's light will be shining on us (Rev 22:5).

*Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark and I am far from home –
Lead thou me on!
(Cardinal Newman)*

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Second Reading)

There are many descriptions of God in the Old Testament. God is Lord, Saviour, Holy One, Creator. In the New Testament there is an entirely new description – God is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". We understand God in a new way because "the only Son who is close to the Father's heart has made him known" (Jn 1:18).

*Father, we are preparing to celebrate the birth of your Son, Jesus.
He is our Brother; in him we become your sons and daughters.
In the year that lies ahead,
help us to grow in union with Christ and with one another,
so that we may learn to know you as our Father.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

God is coming to save you (First Reading)

John the Baptist asks whether Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus points to the healing he brings. That is the sign that God is coming as he promised. He is the Healer, the one who saves from every kind of pain, weakness, and fear. God is 'Father' not only because he is the origin of everything but because he *is* goodness and care for us. God is the perfect source of all fatherhood and motherhood. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 237).

*The Lord gives sight to the blind,
raises up those who are bowed down.
The Lord protects the stranger
and upholds the widow and orphan.
Come, Lord, and save us. (Cf. Responsorial Psalm).*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

God-is-with-us (First Reading, Gospel)

When he was Archbishop of Milan, Pope Paul VI spoke about how the truths of faith could become a kind of habit. They need to become fresh again, he said. We must be ready to marvel. There could never be anything more marvellous than that God who made the Universe is with us in his eternal Son. A little child is the perfect image of the invisible God. Ahaz had no idea of the wonder that was being promised by the Lord.

*In his love Christ has filled us with joy
as we prepare to celebrate his birth,
so that when he comes he may find us watching in prayer,
our hearts filled with wonder and praise.* (Preface)

CHRISTMAS DAY

The Word was made flesh (Gospel, Day Mass)

In the child of Bethlehem, God makes himself known in a new way. God the Father 'speaks' all that he is in the Word which from eternity is equal to the Father in everything. That Word was made flesh and lived among us. One could not conceive of a more perfect revelation of God. And so the Child can be called 'Mighty God, Eternal Father (1st Reading Midnight Mass).

*Lord Jesus Christ, Word of the Father,
through whom the invisible God is made visible
and the inexpressible mystery is spoken,
grant that we may hear the voice of your Father
and follow the way which you both show and are.*

THE HOLY FAMILY

Giving thanks to God the Father (Second Reading)

Parents are the first representatives of God to their children. The language of faith draws on the experience of family life when we call God 'Father'. But God's Fatherhood is neither male nor female. God's parental love can also be expressed not only by the image of fatherhood but also by the image of motherhood (e.g. Is 66:13). God's love is free from the fallibility and weakness that sometimes mars the relationship between children and parents. God is the source of all that is good in human parenthood.

*For this reason we bow our knees before the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.
We pray that, according to the riches of his glory,
he may grant that we be strengthened in our inner being
with power through his Spirit
and that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith (Cf. Eph 3:15-17).*

SECOND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS

He chose us in Christ (Second Reading)

Today, January 3rd, is the day when we usually celebrate the feast of Saint Munchin and the beginnings of Christian life in Limerick. This year we look even more deeply at our beginnings. God the Father chose us to be his sons and daughters in Christ 'before the world was made'. We owe everything to God the Father, our existence and our hope of living forever with him. That is his free gift to us in Christ.

*Most loving Father,
we wholly depend on your loving care.
Allow us to know the deepest hunger of our souls
which you alone can satisfy,
through Jesus Christ your Son.*

THE EPIPHANY

Today you revealed... your eternal plan (Preface)

Today's feast celebrates "the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Saviour of the world" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 528). In Christ, the Father makes known the mystery unknown to anyone in past ages (2nd Reading). "He spoke everything to us at once in this sole Word – and he has no more to say... He has now spoken all at once by giving us the All who is His Son" (St John of the Cross, quoted in *Catechism* 65).

*Father,
you revealed your Son to the nations
by the guidance of a star.
Lead us to your glory in heaven
by the light of faith.* (Opening Prayer).

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

This is my Son (Gospel)

As Jesus begins his public life he insists on receiving the baptism of John, placing himself among the sinners whom he has come to save. The Father endorses his mission, anointing him with the Holy Spirit and proclaiming that he is with Jesus. But Jesus is not just a messenger, he is the only Son of the Father: "God has never said to any angel: You are my Son... When he brings his First Born into the world, he says: Let all the angels worship him" (Heb 1: 5,6).

*Blessed are you, Lord, Father in heaven,
who, in your infinite mercy,
stooped down to us in our distress,
and gave us Jesus, your Son, born of a woman,
to be our Saviour and friend, our brother and redeemer.*
(From the Prayer for the Year of God the Father, Pope John Paul)

SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

He is the Chosen One of God (Gospel)

The Father chose a people, the Jews. He also chose individuals to play a special role in fulfilling his plan – Abraham, Moses, David. But Jesus is **the Chosen One** – in his Father's plan, everything is to be united in him (Eph 1:10). Now, everyone who is chosen by God is chosen in him. God chose us in Christ before the world was made (Eph 1:4).

*Father, you have chosen us to
be your sons and daughters in Christ your Son.
Keep us united in him
and keep us faithful to the role you have given us –
to bring his Gospel to the world.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Wise words which would make the cross pointless (Second Reading)

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). The Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth reveals himself to us, but not in the way that any human mind would have predicted. The all-powerful God comes in a helpless Baby, in a travelling Teacher with nowhere to lay his head, in a Man dying in agony, mocked by the crowd, abandoned by most of his friends.

*Father of all,
open our minds to see your folly
which is wiser than human wisdom
and your weakness
which is stronger than human strength. (I Cor 1:25).*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Blessed are the poor in spirit (Gospel)

The prophets tell God's people to be humble and lowly (1st Reading) – not that poverty and humiliation are good things. Rather we are being told that reliance on ourselves, our achievements and our possessions can blind us to the awesome heritage of glory and joy which Jesus promises in the Beatitudes to those who trust in the coming of his Father's kingdom.

*Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
may your Son live in our hearts through faith,
so that, knowing his love,
we may be filled by you, our God,
with your utter fullness. (cf. Eph 3:17-19)*

FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Share your bread with the hungry (First Reading)

How we treat one another – especially the poor, the refugees, the marginalised – is not just a matter of social policy. It is a matter of whether we are in harmony with the will of the Father who tells us to share our bread with the hungry. He “requires from people clearcut attitudes which express themselves in actions or omissions towards one’s neighbour” (Pope John Paul, *The Church and Social Concern* 36).

*Father, you have given all peoples one common origin,
and your will is to gather them as one family in yourself...
By sharing the good things you have given us
may we secure justice and equality for every human being,
and end to all division and a human society built on love and peace.*
(Opening Prayer, Mass for the Progress of Peoples)

SIXTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR

Day of Prayer for Temperance Life and death (First Reading)

The gift of freedom allows us to choose whether we will foster God’s gift of life, or whether we will abuse it. God promises what is beyond any human mind (Second Reading). We can get lost in lesser, ultimately deceptive attractions – the abuse of drink and drugs, obsession with possessions. Living well means loving God wholeheartedly, and love is kept whole and uncorrupted by temperance which provides balance in our attitude to the good things of creation (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1809).

*Father, may the lure of greed not impede us from the joy
which moves the hearts of those who seek your Son.
May the darkness not blind us to the vision of the wisdom
which fills the minds of those who seek him.*
(From the Opening Prayer, Second Sunday of Advent)

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

You must serve him alone (Gospel)

The power of God is without limit. But it is not to be confused with Satan’s notion of power. Jesus resists the temptation to use power to make life easy for himself, to overwhelm people by a spectacular show, to coerce them into following him. God’s limitless power needs no such weapons. He sends his Son among us as one who serves (Lk 22:27).

*Father, you sent your Son among us
not to be served, but to serve.
May we learn to serve not ourselves,
but you, and one another,
so that we may live as your sons and daughters
in your Son Jesus Christ.*

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

This is my Son (Gospel)

Jesus is the final revelation of God's presence in the world. In the Transfiguration the glory of God is seen in him – insofar as human eyes can see it: "The whole Trinity appeared: the Father in the voice; the Son in the man; the Spirit in the shining cloud" (St Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Catechism of the Catholic Church 555). This is the end of a long process by which God revealed himself in the history and the prophets of Israel, signified by the presence of Moses and Elijah.

You were transfigured on the mountain, and your disciples, as much as they were capable of it, beheld your glory, O Christ, our God, so that, when they should see you crucified they would understand that your Passion was voluntary, and proclaim to the world that you truly are the splendour of God. (Byzantine Liturgy, quoted in Catechism of the Catholic Church 555).

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth (Gospel)

The Father wants to be honoured by worship that springs from the presence of the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, enabling us to call him *Abba*, Father (Rom 8:15). He wants to be honoured by worship that is made in union with his only Son who described himself as 'the Truth' (Jn 14:6). He wants to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

*Through Christ, with him, in him,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour is yours, almighty Father,
for ever and ever.*

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Children of light (Second Reading)

God the Father lives in inaccessible light (1Tim 6:16), which no human eye can see. The Word made flesh, who was with God in the beginning, is "the real light that gives light to everyone" (Jn 1:9). We have been shown the truth which is the meaning of our lives and of all creation. That light should guide every aspect of our life. We are on a journey to where there is no need of sunlight, because the Lord God will be shining on us (Rev 22:5).

*Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
who alone live in eternity and inaccessible light...
open for me the gates of justice on which I knock,
and when I enter, I will offer praise to the Lord.
(St. Augustine).*

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Let him go free (Gospel)

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was to show the glory of God (Jn 11:4,40). Jesus is the resurrection and the life; he has come so that we may have life to the full (Jn 10:10). The life which he brings is the life of God the Father himself: "The life which Jesus promises and gives is 'eternal' because it is a full participation in the life of the 'Eternal One' (Pope John Paul, *The Gospel of Life*, 37).

*Lord Jesus, you wept at the grave of your friend Lazarus,
and set him free from death.
At the end of time, call us by our names
into the life without beginning or end
which you live with your Father and the Holy Spirit.*

PASSION (PALM) SUNDAY

God raised him high (Second Reading)

Jesus emptied himself (Second Reading). He shows the depth of his love by giving everything without reserve. That offering was an expression in his human life of the unlimited, eternal love which the Son gives to the Father. The Father, in turn, gives his whole being to the Son, giving him his own divine name which is above all other names. All of this takes place in the unity of the Holy Spirit. In Holy Week we celebrate the love of Father, Son and Spirit made visible for us so that we may share in it.

*Almighty and ever-living God...
Help us to bear witness to you
by following your Son's example of suffering
and make us worthy to share in his resurrection.*
(From Opening Prayer of the Mass)

EASTER SUNDAY

On the first day of the week (Second Reading)

The risen Christ is the living sign of God's mercy. In his human life, he experienced God's mercy, the love which is stronger than evil or death. Christ who, 'in the torment of the Cross did not obtain human mercy, has revealed in his Resurrection the fullness of the love that the Father has for him and, in him, for all people' (Pope John Paul, *Rich in Mercy*, 8).

*He who bore all pain and loss
Comfortless upon the Cross,
Lives in glory now on high,
Pleads for us and hears our cry.*

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Second Reading)

God is often called 'Father' in the Old Testament (e.g. Dt 32:6) and even in pagan religions. But only in Jesus Christ do we recognise God as Father of an only Son who was one with him before time began. Only in Jesus do we recognise that the Father has given us a new birth as children who are to share our Brother's risen life which can never fade away (Second Reading).

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in Christ
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world
to be holy and blameless before him in love (Eph 1:3,4).*

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Living away from your home (Second Reading)

We acknowledge God as our Father. But our family home is not here. We are on a journey to the house of our Father where Jesus awaits us. The road is often hard. Like Jesus we have first to suffer and so enter that glory (Gospel). We travel in hope because God has made known the way of life to us and will fill us with gladness through his presence (First Reading).

Our homeland is in heaven and it is from there that we are expecting a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure this wretched body of ours into the mould of his glorious body (Phil 3:20,21).

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Vocations Sunday

I am the good shepherd (Alleluia Verse)

In the Old Testament, God the Father had promised that he himself would shepherd his people. He would rescue them, pasture them, feed them, search for them, and bandage their wounds (Ezek 34). Jesus, the perfect image of the Father, is the good shepherd who calls his sheep and whose sheep follow him because he leads us to the fullness of life (Gospel).

*God, our Father,
grant that your Church may be blessed
with vocations to the priesthood.
May those whom you call, respond generously
and may they serve your people
as shepherds after the image of your Son.*

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

To see the Father (Gospel)

Philip, whose feast day is tomorrow, asks to see the Father, the goal of our life's journey. Jesus reproaches him: 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?' The Father's love and mercy are SEEN in the life and death of his Son. The Father's power over death and evil are SEEN in his raising of Jesus to a life beyond death and suffering.

*Jesus, you are King of Saints,
unconquerable Word of the Father,
support in the struggle,
eternal joy,
saviour of the human race (St Clement of Alexandria).*

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

The Father will give you another Advocate (Gospel)

In the resurrection of Jesus, the new creation, that is new life beyond suffering and death, has already begun. In us, the journey is still going on. We need to learn the truth about how unlimited and unshakeable our Father's love is. We need to learn that in the joys and in the sorrows of our lives. In that journey towards the whole truth, the Spirit of truth leads us.

*Come, Holy Spirit, pitch your tent within me and dwell in me,
never separate yourself from me, remain with me until the end...
so that, at my death, and after my death,
I may be found in you and reign with you over all things.
(Simeon the New Theologian)*

ASCENSION OF THE LORD

What hope his call holds (Second Reading)

Modern technology offers great potential for solving problems of poverty in the world. The power at our disposal is a great responsibility. It may also blind us to how powerless we really are. Millions of those who suffered cruel injustice are already dead. The Father's promise offers rich glories to those who could never be reached by our efforts. Jesus has gone before us into the rich glory which the Father promises to all who follow Christ.

*Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks...
Christ... has passed beyond our sight,
not to abandon us but to be our hope,
Christ is the beginning, the head of the Church,
where he has gone, we hope to follow.*

(Preface of the Ascension)

PENTECOST

As the Father sent me (Gospel)

The Good News is that the Father has sent his Son into the world and has raised him, in his humanity, to a life beyond death. That is how our Father shows us what his love is like. The Holy Spirit in our hearts enables us to recognise that truth and to say "Jesus is Lord" (Second Reading). We are to bring the Good News to the world as the apostles did (First Reading).

*God our Father, pour out the gifts of your Holy Spirit on the world.
You sent the Holy Spirit on your Church
to begin the teaching of the Gospel:
Now let the Spirit continue to work in the world
through the hearts of all who believe* (Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit).

TRINITY SUNDAY

A God of tenderness and compassion (First Reading)

In the life of Jesus we see that God is Father in a previously unimagined sense. His very Being is to give himself entirely to a Son who exists with him from all eternity. In his human life, Jesus returns that gift without reserve by giving up his life and so his humanity enters the glorious life which Father, Son and Spirit live eternally. We know that God the Father is love. Loving is not just something he does. It is who he is.

*I arise today
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness
of the Creator of Creation.
(St Patrick's Breastplate, tr Kuno Meyer)*

THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

I draw life from the Father (Gospel)

When we receive Communion, God feeds us on our pilgrim journey as he fed his people with manna in the desert. The Father pours his whole being into the Eternal Son. We in turn draw life from Jesus by eating his body and drinking his blood. 'It is the Lord in person who invites us to come to him in the Eucharist and to receive him' (One Bread One Body 54).

*O sacred feast, in which we partake of Christ:
his sufferings are remembered,
our minds are filled with grace*

and we receive a pledge of the glory which is to be ours.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY

We have been reconciled (Second Reading)

Christ died for us while we were still sinners (Second Reading). This is what the love of our Father is like. God is absolutely faithful to his promises. He loves, not because we deserve it, but because that is who he is – the merciful, utterly reliable giver of life and love. Jesus, the Good Shepherd came not to condemn us but to reconcile us to his Father. We are invited to meet that unchanging love in the Sacrament of Penance.

In the frequent reception of this sacrament, the Christian experiences divine mercy and in turn is able to forgive and love. May the approach of the Jubilee awaken in every believer an active interest in this sacrament... (Pope John Paul).

TWELFTH SUNDAY

Do not be afraid (Gospel)

The scale of world suffering can leave us feeling helpless. We cannot conquer evil by our own resources. We cannot forgive ourselves. We cannot undo all the sufferings of human history. Millions of victims are already dead. But all is in the hands of our loving Father. Through the 'abundant free gift' (Second Reading) of his love, evil in ourselves and in the world is overcome.

Awareness of our own sinfulness, including that which is inherited, is the first condition for salvation; the next is the confession of this sin before God, who desires only to receive this confession so that He can save... (Pope John Paul)

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY

Welcome the one who sent me (Gospel)

Today's readings speak of welcoming God's messenger – in the First Reading, the prophet Elisha, in the Gospel Jesus himself. 'Those who welcome me', he said, 'welcome the one who sent me'. In the history of God's People, and above all in Jesus his Son, God the Father, whose mysterious life no one has ever seen, speaks to us. In Jesus we welcome the truth of God which alone can set us free.

By this revelation, the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his friends, and lives among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company... And so, the most intimate truth both about God and about human salvation, by means of this revelation, shines for us in Christ... (II Vatican Council, Constitution on Divine Revelation).

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY

Revealed to mere children (Gospel)

Experience can dull our capacity for wonder – “been there; done that”, we say. Disillusionment can weaken our readiness to trust. A little child’s sense of wonder is infectious. Parents feel humbled by the total trust in the eyes of their child. The child’s view is ultimately truer than the adult’s. The Father, source of everything that exists, is infinitely wonderful and utterly trustworthy.

*To a person who sees the Creator of all things,
every created thing seems very little. (Julian of Norwich)*

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY

One great act of giving birth. (Second Reading)

We believe in the Father, maker of heaven and earth. Creation is an act of God’s Fatherhood. Everything is created in his Son, through his Son, for his Son (Col 1:16). The whole of creation is growing towards the freedom of God’s children. We hope to be born to eternal life as sons and daughters in the Son when the final purpose of creation is achieved.

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children in Jesus Christ...

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY

Mild in judgement (First Reading)

The Father is infinitely powerful, but his sovereignty makes him lenient (First Reading). Mercy is “the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and Redeemer” (Pope John Paul). Like every other attribute of God, his mercy is infinite, without limit. In the Sacrament of Penance each of us can experience that mercy in a personal way.

*Our Father does not wish the sinner to die but to turn back to him and live. He loved us first and sent his Son into the world to be its Saviour. May he show us his merciful love and give us peace.
(Adapted from the Rite of Penance)*

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY

He sells everything he owns (Gospel)

To recognise God as God means loving him with all our heart and soul and might. God is not just one person among the many whom we love. From him we receive all that we have and are, to him we ought to offer all that we have and are. In the life of Jesus, he expresses his love for the Father by offering even his life -- "so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14:31).

*For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
Let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand. (Psalm 95, 3,6)*

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY

The love of God made visible in Christ (Second Reading)

The highest act of love is to die for another person. In pouring out his blood Jesus gives his whole self without reserve to the Father. In raising Jesus to his right hand the Father gives his whole self to the Son and they pour out the Spirit on the world. In dying and rising for us, Jesus not only makes visible the Father's love for us. He also makes visible the eternal, total interchange of love which is the life of the Blessed Trinity.

... there is a certain similarity between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of God's children in truth and love. It follows...that ... human beings... can fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving.

(Vatican II Gaudium et Spes 24).

NINETEENTH SUNDAY

The sound of a gentle breeze (First Reading)

Elijah discovered that one has to listen carefully in order to hear the voice of God. Faith comes from receiving the word of God and pondering it in our hearts as Mary did. The temptation in our time is not to listen attentively enough. So we may fail to hear the assurance of the Father's presence with us. Perhaps that is why we sometimes feel that we are floundering, like Peter!

Father, we often cry out, like Peter, 'Lord, save us for we are sinking!' Help us to listen for your voice which speaks like a gentle breeze telling us not to be afraid; help us to reach out for your hand which holds us securely; bring us safely to the shore where you await us in your eternal home.

ASSUMPTION OF THE BYM

My spirit exults in God my Saviour (Gospel)

Mary's praise of God the Father is also a statement about who God is. God is great. God is saviour, and does great things for the humble, God is holy and merciful. Mary makes this prayer because God the Father has revealed these attributes in an entirely new way in her, making her the Mother of his Son. Because of what God has done in her, all generations will call her blessed.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. (Lk 1:47-50).

TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY

How rich are the depths of God (Second Reading)

From earliest times, Christians have added words of praise to conclude the Lord's Prayer. These words take up again the first petitions, for the coming of the Father's kingdom, the doing of his will and the glorification of his name. At the end of the prayer we proclaim, this time "as adoration and thanksgiving, as in the liturgy of heaven" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2855), that the kingdom, the power and the glory are already his now and always.

All that exists comes from you, Father.

All is by you and for you.

To you be glory for ever! Amen

(Adapted from Rom 11:36)

TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY

Let your behaviour change (Second Reading)

What Jesus preached was a new way of seeing the world, a 'new mind' (Second Reading). The apostles were scandalised when he spoke of the Cross. But his Father's reign changes everything. It breaks every mould, defeats even death. Would someone looking at our lives ever suspect that we believe that the deepest human longings will be fulfilled in our Father's house?

*The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and of civilisation, the centre of humanity, the joy of all hearts, the fulfilment of all aspirations. It is he whom the Father has raised from the dead, exalted and placed at his right hand... (Vatican II *Gaudium et Spes* 45).*

TWENTY THIRD SUNDAY

I shall be there with them (Gospel)

We often think of the Church as buildings and structures, the 'institutional church'. All of that is secondary. The Church is the presence of Jesus in the world. Wherever people meet in his name, Jesus is there revealing God his Father, speaking God's word, drawing people into God's love.

*Renew by the light of the Gospel the Church of Limerick.
Strengthen the bonds of unity between the faithful and their pastors,
that together with John Paul our Pope and Donal our bishop,
and the whole college of bishops, your people may stand forth
in a world torn by discord and strife as a sign of oneness and peace.*
(Eucharistic Prayer for Various Needs and Occasions, A)

TWENTY FOURTH SUNDAY

Not seven but seventy seven times (Gospel)

The words of the Lord's Prayer are so familiar that we may miss the challenge. We ask to be forgiven **as we forgive others**. Our refusal to forgive is absurd when contrasted with the fact that the Creator of the universe "is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy" (Responsorial Psalm).

In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2840)

TWENTY FIFTH SUNDAY

My ways are not your ways (Second Reading)

The Gospel parable teaches two lessons. Those who have been followers of Christ from the beginning are reminded not to think of God's love as something they have earned -- it is the Father's free gift. Those who are on the margins, who see themselves as outsiders, are told, 'It is never too late; God is generous beyond your expectations'.

*All that is good, all that is perfect, is given us from above;
it comes down from the Father of all light...
By his own choice he gave birth to us by the message of the truth
so that we should be a sort of first fruits of all his creation* (James 1: 17,18).

TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY

Which of the two? (Gospel)

One thing can be said for the son who refused to obey his father and then thought better of it. His first response was uncooperative, but he could recognise his own failings and see the need to change. That is the first thing our Father wants of us -- to change, to turn to him. He wants us wholeheartedly to welcome his plan for us, as Jesus did (Second Reading).

*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'
will enter the kingdom of heaven,
but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. (Mt 7:21)*

TWENTY SEVENTH SUNDAY

The peace of God (Second Reading)

Shalom, peace, is the flourishing of all God's gifts. It is the fulfilment of every human longing. The Father not only offers that gift, he pursues us and repeatedly draws us back. "What could I have done... that I have not done? (First Reading) But people can refuse the gift. For those who seek God's peace with prayer and thanksgiving, there is no need to worry. The peace of God is so much greater than we can understand.

*Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your apostles,
I leave you peace, my peace I give you.
Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church,
And grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom
Where you live for ever and ever.*

TWENTY EIGHTH SUNDAY

He will destroy death forever (First Reading)

In the Resurrection of Jesus, the Father shows how great is the power he has exercised for us (Eph 1:19). The Resurrection is the beginning of a new kind of human life -- where tears are wiped away and death is destroyed. We cannot imagine that glory. We need to stretch our minds to think about the day when we will say, "this is our God in whom we hoped".

*Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who in his great mercy has given us a new birth into a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead
and into a heritage that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away.
(1 Pet 1:3)*

TWENTY NINTH SUNDAY

There is no other God (First Reading)

Jesus told the Pharisees to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's. But everything in the universe belongs to God! We do not have other gods in the form of idols whom we worship. But are there things in our lives which occupy the place that belongs to God? "Do I live for myself or for God? Do I try to do his will or my own?" (The Rite of Penance)

Father in heaven,

It is right that we should give you thanks and glory:

You are the one God, living and true.

Through all eternity you live in unapproachable light. (Eucharistic Prayer IV)

THIRTIETH SUNDAY

The greatest commandment (Gospel)

Morality is not a multiplicity of unconnected obligations and prohibitions. The whole of morality for the Christian comes back to one central question: "How do I respond to the generous love of God my Father?" Jesus tells us that we do so by loving God wholeheartedly and loving our neighbours as ourselves. All other moral obligations are consequences of that great commandment to love the Father who loved us first.

Do you understand your Lord's meaning?

Understand truly: Love was his meaning.

Who revealed it to you? Love.

What did he show you? Love.

Why did he show it? For love. (Mother Julian of Norwich)

THIRTY FIRST SUNDAY

You have only one Father (Gospel)

It is foolish to think oneself better than others. All Christians ought to recognise that they fall short of what they profess. We know that we all depend on God's mercy as we travel towards our Father's house. He gives us all that we hope for, all that we have and are. None of us can possess or teach or accomplish anything that is not God's gift to us.

Carry each another's burdens that is how to keep the law of Christ. Someone who thinks himself important, when he is not, only deceives himself. But everyone is to examine his own achievements, then he will confine his boasting to his own achievements, not comparing them with anybody else's (Gal 6:2-4)

THIRTY SECOND SUNDAY

Not like the people who have no hope (Second Reading)

Christian hope is not just a feeling that things will turn out well. It is, first of all, a deep trust in the Father. "There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). The Father will bring us with Jesus whom he raised from the dead. The wise person is alert and ready for that promise to be fulfilled.

Lord, my God, my only hope, hear me.

Do not allow weariness to prevent me from seeking you.

May I always eagerly seek your face.

Give me the strength to seek you, who have caused me to find you and have given me the hope of finding you more and more. (St Augustine)

ALL SAINTS

How happy are the poor in spirit (Gospel)

God the Father calls us to his house, to share in his happiness. This promise is addressed to each individual. It is the promise by which the whole Church lives. God has put the desire for happiness in our hearts in order to draw us to him; he alone can fulfil every human desire (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1718-1719). Today we remember the people of every race and nation for whom the promise is fulfilled.

We, who are only a portion of your creation, wish to praise you.

You prompt us to take delight in praising you,

because you made us for yourself

and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. (Adapted from St Augustine)

THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY

Well done, good and faithful servant (Gospel)

The hope of entering God's house should not lead to complacency. The fruits of our efforts to recognise and respect human dignity are what God gathers into his eternal home. "We will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom" (VATICAN II, *The Church in the Modern World*, 39).

We cannot and must not disregard the... questions concerning justice, liberation, progress and world peace. If we disregard these we are likewise disregarding the teaching of the gospel about the love of our neighbour who is suffering and in want. (Pope Paul VI)

CHRIST THE KING

God will be all in all (Second Reading)

God the Father promised to care for his flock (First Reading). He sent his Son into the world and raised him from the dead as the new Adam, the first fruits of a new creation. Through the work of Holy Spirit, Christ, the Good Shepherd, overcomes all that is evil, even death itself. Then comes the end when he hands the kingdom to God the Father (Second Reading).

(God's plan) flows from 'fountain-like love', the love of God the Father... He generously pours out, and never ceases to pour out, his divine goodness so that he who is creator of all things might at last become 'all in all' (VATICAN II, Decree on Missions, 2)

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ (2nd Reading)

The Jewish people waited centuries for the coming of the Messiah to be sent by God, their Father and their Redeemer (1st Reading). We are about to begin a year of remembering the two thousandth anniversary of his coming. In Advent we recall that we are waiting for him to be revealed at the end of time. Are we 'ready to greet him when he comes again'? Do we 'wait in joyful hope'?

*Lord Jesus,
fullness of time and Lord of history,
prepare our minds to celebrate with faith
the great Jubilee of the year 2000
so that it might be a year of grace and mercy.*

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Make his paths straight (First Reading, Gospel)

The Lord is patient, wanting everyone to change their ways (Second Reading). The end of every year is a time of looking back, partly with regret, on the events of the year. We make, or at least think of making, New Year resolutions because we want to do better. The end of the 1900s is a call to renewal of our lives.

Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and prepares us to meet them. (Pope John Paul II, Tertio Millennio Adveniente [on Preparation for the Jubilee Year].)

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

A witness to speak for the light (Gospel)

The Good News is to be brought to the poor, the broken hearted, the captives. Every Christian is a bearer of the Good News. It should be possible for people to see that the Gospel makes a difference to our lives – bringing joy (First Reading), peace and holiness (Second Reading), making straight God's paths by renewal of our lives (Gospel).

Sometimes, lay men and women do not seem to appreciate to the full the dignity that is theirs as lay people. No, there is no such thing as an 'ordinary lay person'. As God's holy people you are called to fulfil your role in the evangelisation of the world. (Pope John Paul II, in Limerick)

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Do not be afraid, Mary (Gospel)

At the beginning of his pontificate, Pope John Paul spoke the words "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ." He wished those words to set the tone of his ministry as Pope. In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, he already looked towards the year 2000 as "the year of a great Jubilee. At the end of this week, on Christmas Day, we begin our celebration of that Jubilee.

*Every time Christ exhorts us to have no fear... he means:
Do not be afraid of God, but invoke him with me: 'Our Father'.
Do not be afraid to say 'Father'!
(Pope John Paul, Crossing the Threshold of Hope, p. 6.)*