

BIBLICAL RESOURCES



Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 96 (95); 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee

John 2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This is the opening act of the ministry in the Fourth Gospel. As such, it corresponds in some manner to accounts we find in Mark 1:14 or Luke 4:16-31. It is a foundational *tableau*, which sets the scene for the unfolding of Jesus' identity in John's gospel. In ancient tradition, the Epiphany, Baptism and Cana were all regarded as one combined revelatory event; hence John 2 is read today instead of Luke (the Gospel for the year).

KIND OF WRITING

This story is the Johannine reception and interpretation of chiefly nuptial imagery, taken from the Hebrew Bible and the ministry and teaching of Jesus.

There are historical and even theological problems with taking the story literally.

(i) It has no corresponding miracle in the Synoptic tradition. (ii) It does not follow the usual pattern of problem, encounter, request, word, healing, proof. (iii) The vocabulary is entirely Johannine. (iv) The theological "tone" is purely Johannine, with a link to the call stories, as well as a link with the Woman at the Well. (v) The role of the unnamed mother is entirely exceptional and invites reading at another level.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The gospel passage uses three metaphors familiar from the Old Testament and the wider Jewish literature of the time: feast, wedding and wine.

i. Feast

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain. (Isaiah 25:6-10) Cf. Amos 9:13-14; Jer 31:12. Prov 9:1-6; Sir 24:19-21.

Also, some intertestamental literature is a help, such as:

And in those days the whole earth will be worked in righteousness, all of her planted with trees, and will find a blessing. And they shall plant pleasant trees upon her - vines. And he who plants vine upon here will produce wine for

Thought for the day

The (extra)ordinary experience of "everyday" love is itself a sacrament. As such, it mediates the love of God and gives us both an experience and a language by which we make speak of God, God who is love itself.

Prayer

Open our eyes to recognise you at the heart of the "everyday" love which sustains and inspires us: whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in them!

plenitude. And every seed that is sown on her, one measure will yield a thousand (measures) and one measure of olives will yield ten measures of presses of oil. (1 Enoch 10:18-19)

For at that time I shall only protect those found in this land at that time. And it will happen that when all that which should come to pass in these parts has been accomplished, the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. And Behemoth will reveal itself from its place, and leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left. The earth will also yield fruits ten thousand-fold. And on one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine. (2 Baruch 29:2-5; 1 cor = 230 litres!)

ii. Wedding

Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I

abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:4–8; cf. Is 62:4–5; Jer 2:2. Hosea 1–2; Jer 3:1–12; Ezekiel 16 and 23; Song of Songs *passim*).

iii. Wine

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. (Amos 9:14; cf. Num 13:23; Is 16:10; 24:7–12; Jer 48:33; Joel 1:5, 7, 11–13; Psalm 4:7; 104:15; Amos 9:14; Is 25:6–8. Wine and love: Song 1:2,4; 2:4, 10; 5:1; 7:10; 8:2.

NEW TESTAMENT FOREGROUND

We recall the many parables which use the language of wedding, feast and vineyard.

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." (Mark 2:18–22)

He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. (John 3:29) Cf. John 4 (a nuptial scene) plus the burial of Jesus, with echoes of the Song of Songs (19:38–42)

Marriage symbolism is taken up in John 2–4 with an important echo at the burial of Jesus.

ST PAUL

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. (Eph 5:31–32)

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verse 1 The time doesn't quite link up with the other "days" and represents in some fashion the time of salvation (Ex 19:11; Gen 22:4; Hos 6:2). It may link to the "very soon" of the previous scene. The mother is present in this Gospel in symbolic role, that is, representing the mother religion (as also at the crucifixion in the Fourth Gospel only).

Verse 2 The disciples are important "witnesses" at the start and at the end. Their presence at the start and at the end also links this story to the previous call story in a significant way.

Verse 3 Lack of wine = lack of true joy. In the eyes of the writer and his community, the mother religion has run out of the source of true joy (a big theme in John and 1 John).

Verse 4 A hesitation (rejection?) is found also in the story of the royal official. Yet, the initial refusal is overcome. The hour is a strong Johannine theme and links immediately with the events of salvation. Cf. *Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. (John 4:21) "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. (John 5:25) Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. (John 7:30) Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. (John 13:1)*

Verse 5 Notice again that the principles (bride and groom) are not involved.

Verse 6 These enormous ritual containers stand for the Jewish faith as received and practiced. It matters that they are jars precisely for Jewish rites of purification.

Verse 7 To fill has a special use in this Gospel as well: *So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. (John 6:13) This makes a link between the wine and the bread.*

Verse 8 To draw (as in water) is a rare word in the NT: *A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (John 4:7) The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." (John 4:15) This makes an important link with the other "meeting your future wife at a well" scene in this Gospel.*

Verse 9 Where it came from (*pothen*, in Greek): this is a key word and topic across the Fourth Gospel regarding the apparent and real origins of Jesus: "*Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.*" (John 7:27–28) "*We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.*" (John 9:29–30) *Pilate entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" (John 19:9).* The servants (= disciples) know the true origin of Jesus. It seems clear at this point Jesus himself is the real bridegroom.

Verse 10 The now is the now of salvation: *But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. (John 4:23)*

Verse 11 First (= *archē*, meaning source); sign (*sēmeion*, the word for miracle in the Fourth Gospel); glory (*doxa*, a huge theme in the Gospel. To believe is a vast theme too, occurring some 99 times: 98 times as a verb, never as a noun (interestingly) and only once as an adjective: *Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."* (John 20:27 lit. "be not unbelieving but believing").

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The marriage imagery puts all the emphasis on love, an emphasis found richly in this Gospel, in St Paul and, of course, in Jesus' own teaching. Go back to significant experiences of being loved and how these have opened your own heart to receive and to give in love.

2. The wine symbolises true joy in believing—a bit of a challenge these days, but central nevertheless and even life-giving. Where do you find your springs of joy?

3. "Do whatever he tells you" is a strong invitation to conformity to Christ on the path of discipleship. What have been the important points on that path? And where am I now?

PRAYER

God of wonders, at Cana in Galilee, you revealed your glory in Jesus Christ and summoned all humanity to life in him. Show to your people gathered on this day your transforming power and give us a foretaste of the wine you keep for the age to come. Amen.

Now there are varieties of gifts, the same Spirit

1 Cor 12:4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

It may seem odd that, at the effective start of Year C, we plunge into chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians without further notice. It is likely that the choice was inspired by the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, providing us with very fitting reflections this Sunday and next Sunday from St Paul.

CONTEXT IN THE COMMUNITY

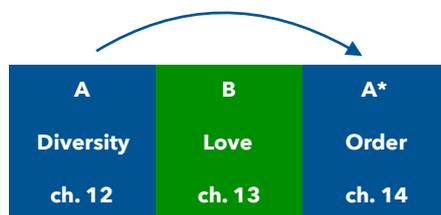
The context in Corinth seems to have been a highly developed sense of competition among the few Christian Corinthians. This showed itself particularly in the spiritual gifts. Those with the more exuberant expressions of prayer were apparently regarded more highly. In Paul's mind, this is simply dangerous, attaching far too great an importance to the external manifestation of an internal reality. Furthermore, it is leading to divisions and to scandal. Why scandal? In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul imagines a case where a non-believer attends the worship of the community. If it is all tongues etc., this poor visitor will be left flummoxed and will leave without having heard helpful word for his or her life (see below under related passages).

KIND OF WRITING

From time to time, Paul lays out his argument in a concentric patterns. Over chapters 12-14 this happens *more than once*. It happens over with each chapter, 12 and 14 being the outside and 13 be-

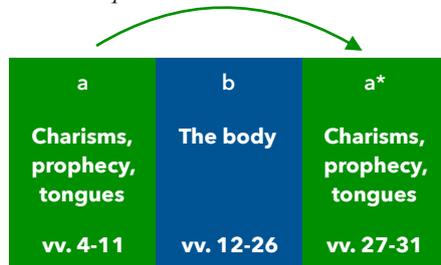
ing the inside. But it also happens within each of the chapters. Becoming aware of this is not a matter of literary games but rather attaining a grasp of the clear sequence of complex ideas. Thus:

Overall plan of 1 Cor 12-14



In this scheme, the key to the solution is really chapter 13, occupying a central place in two senses. The *issue* is raised in 12; the *criterion* is explored in 13; the criterion is *applied* in 14. So the argument is both concentric and linear.

Within chapter 12



In this scheme, the disorder of competitiveness is resolved using the metaphor of the body, showing that differences should ideally be complementary. Again, the argument is both concentric and linear: the *issue* raised in vv. 4-11 is *resolved* in vv. 27-31 in light of the *principle* in vv. 12-26.

Our reading from the lectionary sensibly matches the divisions outlined above.

RELATED PASSAGES

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. (1Corinthians 12:1-3)

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or out-

sider who enters is reproved by all and called to account by all. After the secrets of the unbeliever's heart are disclosed, that person will bow down before God and worship him, declaring, "God is really among you." (1Corinthians 14:23-25) Gift lists: Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:27-27.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

Verses 1-3 "Jesus is Lord" is the foundational acclamation common to all, relativising all other status-raising "spiritual" claims.

Verse 4-6 "Varieties" would be better rendered "apportionings" to suggest allotting by God. Paul prefers the word "charisms" (*charismata*) to "spiritual gifts" (*pneumatika*) because the latter is associated with status rivalry, whereas charism means gift. Already, diversity is secondary to unity. Notice the trinitarian frame, pointing to the one God as giver.

Verse 7 The argument begins with this practical application of a general principle.

Verse 8 Wisdom can be pejorative in this letter; here it means wisdom *from God*. Knowledge is also tricky; here it means a word spoken under God's inspiration, and hence positive in the context.

Verse 9 Faith here *cannot* mean the saving faith that all believers enjoy. It means some extraordinary "feat" of faith *for the benefit of others*. NB. 1 Cor 13:2!

Verse 10 These different gifts return in ch. 14 when Paul considers the good order of worship and the relative importance of tongues.

Verse 11 This first argument is concluded and framed by a reference back to the one Spirit who gives to all. The vocabulary synthesises the principles and gifts mentioned in vv. 4-10. Finally, the Spirit's *choice* annuls any claim to status on the basis of one's "spirituality."

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. All gifts are precisely gifts and not grounds for status or self-congratulation.
2. All gifts are for the community as a whole and not first of all for the individual.

PRAYER

Gracious giver of all the gifts, guide us to recognise you at the heart of all our energies and talents; help us to use all you have given for the benefit of others.

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God

Is. 62:1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
 and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
 until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
 and her salvation like a burning torch.
 2 The nations shall see your vindication,
 and all the kings your glory;
 and you shall be called by a new name
 that the mouth of the LORD will give.
 3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
 and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
 4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
 and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
 but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
 and your land Married;
 for the LORD delights in you,
 and your land shall be married.
 5 For as a young man marries a young woman,
 so shall your builder (*b-n-k*) marry you,
 and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
 so shall your God rejoice over you.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

As the extended comment on John 2:1-11 makes clear, this passage is a rich illustration of “nuptial symbolism” from the Hebrew Bible. It is also a thrilling example of both biblical poetry and the theology of love.

ORIGIN OF THE READING

The reading comes from Third Isaiah, written very probably after the return from Exile. It was a challenging time because the rebuilding did not happen as quickly as some had hoped. We might even call it a period of “failed reconstruction,” not unlike our own.

KIND OF WRITING

The excerpt shows the usual marks of biblical poetry: parallelism and metaphors. The parallelism is especially clear. Apart from the matrimonial / love metaphors, there is nature (dawn), royalty (crown, diadem) and construction/engineering (builder).

The full context is all of chapters 61:1-62:12, closing with a resumption of the earlier metaphors: They shall be called, “The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord”; and you shall be called, “Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken.” (Is 62:12)

Chapter 62 divides as follows:

62:1-5 Jerusalem as a bride

62:6-9 The sentinels of the city

62:10-12 The city welcomes the victor

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

The OT and intertestamental background is as given above for John 2:1-11. In addition: jewellery.

O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of jewels, and all your wall of precious stones. (Is 54:11-12)

Also we may note, there are many points of contact with Isaiah 49, 51-52 and 54.

BRIEF COMMENTARY

The poem as a whole celebrates the vindication and restoration of Jerusalem.

Verse 1 Why the concern with “vindication” at this point? The JB uses “integrity” for the same Hebrew word usually translated as justification. The great promise of Isaiah 61 is grounded in the specific history of the Israelites. The promise of general justice is made real in God’s restoration of Israel, now raised up as a light for the nations.

Zion, a part of the city, stands for Jerusalem as a Davidic city (destroyed in 587 BC). The speaker is unable to hold in the good news any longer. The dawn, a measure of her future beauty, symbol-

ises the salvation to God, just as the torch suggests victory over darkness. The king as both bridegroom and as the sun is culturally very ancient.

Verse 2 A new name in the Bible always suggests a new reality, a new relationship with God. Cf. Is 60:14-17, 61:3, 6; 62:4, 12. The giving of the new name is so that she will be recognised. The restoration will be a public vindication and a fulfilment of the promises in Isaiah 61:5-7.

Verse 3 The royal imagery evokes the Davidic monarchy. Cf. *Come out. Look, O daughters of Zion, at King Solomon, at the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.* (Song 3:11)

Verse 4 The key here is the contrasting terms: forsaken and desolate, like an abandoned wife, in contrast with the newly married status of “my delight is in her” and “married.” This reflects the marriage of the deity and the city, common in the religious practice of the time. For abandoned, see Is 49:14; 54:1, 4; 60:15. For desolate, see Is 49:8.

Verse 5 In this verse, God is explicitly identified as the bridegroom. The imagery is very free and full of joy. Some translations (JPS, NIV) read “your sons (*bānāyik*) shall marry you” which is contrary to the sense and culturally inappropriate. With the NRSV and the lectionary, we read builder (*bōnēk*).

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The writer has wonderful news and can’t keep it in. When did you last feel like that? This happens to us too, not only on “ordinary” experience, but also in faith and leads to the desire to spread our good news.

2. In the past, perhaps you have experienced the life-giving transition from feeling forsaken to being loved. A prayer of relief and thanksgiving.

3. Perhaps we do not think often enough of God rejoicing over us. It is a wonderful image and may help restore some of the joy in believing

PRAYER

God, our great lover, we believe that you brought us into being, that you love us and that you take delight in us.

Open in our hearts as great a love for you and as joyful a delight in our God, in whom we live and move and have our being. Amen.

THE LITURGY

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 96 (95); 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; John 2:1-11

READINGS 1 AND 3

The first reading is an ideal preparation for understanding the Cana story against its biblical background. In particular, the notes of joy and delight are taken up in the Gospel scene.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The psalm picks up the joy and the royal imagery of the first reading.

SUNDAY INTRODUCTIONS

First reading

Isaiah 62:1-5

How can we talk about God? Our human experience of love provide the basis in experience for talking about God as love.

Second reading

Corinthians 12:4-11

Today, we start reading from 1 Corinthians, beginning with chapter 12. Paul uses the image of the physical body to meditate on the gifts in the Christian community.

Gospel

John 2:1-11

This reading calls for special attention. Even if we read it literally, the meaning is at another level, because the writing is contrasting the mother religion, Judaism, and the offspring, Christianity.

WEEKDAY INTRODUCTIONS

Monday 21 January

St Agnes, virgin

Hebrews 5:1-10

There is an important echo of Gethsemane in this reading. In the original, a double meaning emerges: he prayed to the one who was able to save him from / out of death. Jesus was saved not from death, because he did indeed die, but he was saved out of death in his resurrection.

Mark 2:18-22

Why did Jesus feel so free to break with tradition and received practices? Partly because of *what* he said but really be-

cause of *who* he was. This radically new reality called for correspondingly new practices. There *is* a lesson for today's church!

Tuesday 22 January

St Vincent, deacon and martyr

Hebrews 6:10-20

Does God keep his promises? Here the writer gives a resounding yes, based on the story of Abraham.

Mark 2:23-28

There are really two parts to our story today. The first part is an argument from Scripture: David did what was forbidden and, Jesus, the son of David, may do likewise. There is more. As a common sense observation, Jesus notes that Sabbath regulation was *for the sake of believer* and not the other way around. Finally, the claim to be able to alter the Sabbath is really a claim to being equal to God.

Wednesday 23 January

Hebrews 7:1-3,15-17

The writer of Hebrews knew that Jesus was not a levitical priest. As a result, he had to seek out an alternative model, which he found in Melchizedek. Apart from his name etc. this figure suited because he was without origin or issue, without beginning (he comes from heaven) and without end (in the resurrection).

Mark 3:1-6

Our conflict story is again about the Sabbath but it is more intense because *they were watching him*. The Sabbath was meant to mark creation and liberation: what better gesture than to heal a man? And yet, tradition gets in the way.

Thursday 24 January

St Francis de Sales, bishop and doctor

Hebrews 7:25-8:6

The writer compares two kinds of the priesthood, that of the OT and that of Jesus. He strikes a note of continuity and discontinuity. The OT priesthood was a foreshadowing of the one to come, and consequently, lost its significance once he had brought the perfect priesthood.

Mark 3:7-12

Jesus the healer comes to tremendous

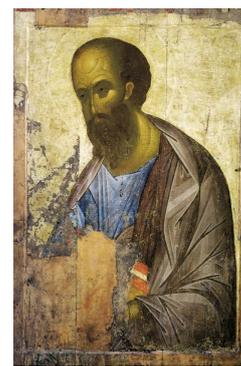
profile in this Gospel passage and there is an impression of widespread popularity and immense demand and intense pressure. It makes for a very dynamic portrait. Does it speak us to today? We too can bring our need of healing before the same Lord, present among us

Friday 25 January

The Conversion of St Paul

Acts 22:3-16

The conversion of St Paul had huge consequences for early Christianity. He was a man of terrific energy and physical courage, inspired by a deep desire to do God's will.



His encounter

with Jesus placed his great gifts of intellect and spirit at the service of the Christian movement, to its lasting enrichment up to today. He himself tells of his conversion in his own words in Galatians 1.

Mark 16:15-18

Note: this passage comes from one of several proposed endings to Mark, none of which comes from the hand of the evangelist.

Our reading today is chosen for the very first words which capture something of the ministry of Paul, who went out to the whole known world of his time, that is, the Roman Empire around the eastern Mediterranean.

Saturday 24 January

St Timothy and Titus

2 Timothy 1:1-8

The tone of encouragement is always needed and today, more than ever, we need the reminder *to fan into a flame* the gift of God.

Mark 3:20-21

This brief gospel is quite explosive. It means that the close relatives of Jesus did not really understand who he was—on the contrary, they thought him mentally deranged.