

# FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> January 2023

## Saints this week

### 12<sup>th</sup> January

*St Ælred of Rievaulx, Abbot*

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**St Ælred** (1109-1167) was born at Hexham and joined the Cistercian community at Rievaulx in Yorkshire. He was Abbot at Revesby in Lincolnshire and then at Rievaulx, where he became known as a preacher and spiritual writer. The topic for which he is best remembered is his thinking on the subject of friendship.

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### Collect

**O GOD**, who endowed Saint Ælred, Abbot of Rievaulx, with the gift of fostering Christian friendship and the wisdom to lead others in the way of holiness: grant to your people, we pray, that same spirit of fraternal affection, so that, in loving one another, we may know the love of Christ and rejoice in the eternal possession of your supreme goodness. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

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# 13<sup>th</sup> January

*St Hilary, Bishop and Doctor of the Church*

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**St Hilary** (c315-368) was brought up as a pagan and, after he was converted to Christianity, became de Bishop of Poitiers and a leading voice in the campaign against Arianism (which denied that Christ is co-existent and consubstantial with God the Father). Though he was exiled to Phrygia by the Arian Emperor Constantius, he was recognised as a doctor of the Church in 1851. His name is particularly well-known in Oxford because his feast day normally marks the beginning of the new academic term, which is known as 'Hilary Term'.

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## **Collect**

**GRANT**, we pray, almighty God, that we may rightly understand and truthfully profess the divinity of your Son, which the Bishop Saint Hilary taught with such constancy. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

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# Week 1 (Year I)

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## Collect

**ATTEND** to the pleas of your people with heavenly care, O Lord, we pray, that they may see what must be done and gain strength to do what they have seen. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

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## Monday of Week 1(I)

### Reading

*Hebrews 1:1-6*

*God has spoken to us through his Son*

<sup>1</sup>In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup>He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.

<sup>5</sup>For to what angel did God ever say,

**'You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you'?**

Or again,

**'I will be to him a father,  
and he shall be to me a son'?**

<sup>6</sup>And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says,

**'Let all God's angels worship him.'**

## Reflection

**THE LETTER** to the Hebrews was widely thought to be by St Paul, though no longer, and its destination Rome, though nowadays other places have been suggested. The audience seems to be second generation Christians undergoing hardship and persecution. It may have begun life as a letter – perhaps with the opening paragraph of address lost – but, equally, in type though not in content, it is perhaps typical of the kind of homily one might hear in a synagogue. It certainly has midrash-like characteristics, a midrash being the rabbis' approach to interpreting Scripture.

Hebrews may have been written by Paul but Apollos is a possibility too. As for when, the letter is quoted in AD96 by Clement of Rome and some have argued that it must have been written before AD70 when the temple was destroyed, since so much of the discussion is round themes of temple, priesthood, and sacrifice. Others have taken the opposite view and said that its preoccupation with these themes indicates a date after the destruction of the temple.

The Exordium (the beginning of the book) is highly-polished and presents the Son as one who 'reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power'. This Son is higher than the angels and, before taking his place 'at the right hand of the Majesty on high', 'made purification for sins', which is a priestly – indeed high priestly – task as we shall see. Meanwhile we should note – rather than take for granted – that we encounter and are encountered by a God who spoke, and speaks, to the human race, through prophets and eventually through his Son. This is far from the only – or even the most obvious – conclusion which, left to ourselves, we would draw from reflecting on the world and our own existence, but it is the conclusion which we draw from God's self-disclosure. It is not that reason contradicts revelation, still less that revelation contradicts reason. Hebrews not only tells us what God has done and is doing – revelation – but also gives us arguments to organise our thoughts – reason.

# Tuesday of Week 1

## Reading

*Hebrews 2:5-12*

*It was appropriate that God should make perfect through suffering*

<sup>5</sup> For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. <sup>6</sup> It has been testified somewhere,

**'What is man that you are mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that you care for him?**

**<sup>7</sup> You made him for a little while lower than the angels,  
you crowned him with glory and honour,**

**<sup>8</sup> putting everything in subjection under his feet.'**

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. <sup>9</sup> But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.

<sup>10</sup> For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. <sup>11</sup> For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, <sup>12</sup> saying,

**'I will proclaim your name to my brethren,  
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.'**

## Reflection

**I THINK** we can be confident that, when the author says 'testified somewhere', he is employing a literary device rather than confessing that he does not know that these are verses from Psalm 8. At the end of today's passage, he similarly quotes from Psalm 22, without mentioning the source.

We are wrestling with the paradox that man is 'lower than the angels' but that the Son, who became man, is higher than any angel. It is the mystery of condescension: God stooping to share our humanity, and thus ducking below the angelic orders. The reason for this condescension is so that the Son experiences 'the suffering of death', whereby he tastes 'death for every

one' and, as the 'pioneer of [our] salvation is made perfect in suffering'. 'He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin', the Saviour and the saved are 'brethren'. Perfection is a key idea in Hebrews. It is what Jesus does – by offering himself as an atoning sacrifice – and what this self-offering does for those who believe in him.

We are dealing with several puzzling ideas here. As well as the idea of God becoming lower in rank than the angels – think, perhaps, of a Field Marshall becoming a Private Soldier, or a Brain Surgeon a Hospital Cleaner – we are faced with suffering and death as inevitable. Why is this so? We are also faced with suffering as a way of becoming perfect and as a way of making things holy and putting things right. All of these ideas are part of our experience. None of them is new to us. But it isn't immediately obvious why any of them should be the case.

## **Wednesday of Week 1**

### **Reading**

*Hebrews 2:14-18*

*It was essential that Jesus should share the same flesh and blood*

<sup>14</sup> Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. <sup>16</sup> For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. <sup>17</sup> Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

### **Reflection**

**FOLLOWING** on from yesterday, we continue to ponder the mystery that God chose to share our human nature and thus wage war on sin and death. He is not concerned with angels, we are told, but with 'the descendants of Abraham'. Narrowly speaking, these descendants are 'the Hebrews', those to whom the book is apparently addressed. More widely, we see ourselves among those who look back to Abraham and therefore, since Christ died for everyone, the whole human race. The revolutionary message of the Gospel – very different from what other religions teach – is that human

beings become 'brethren' of God, brothers and sisters. God comes to our rescue because he shares our flesh and blood, has himself suffered and been tempted. We now begin to explore the idea of the 'merciful and faithful high priest', a major theme of Hebrews. Priests in Israel spoke prophetically through casting lots (Lev 16:8; Deut 33:8). They were in charge of the sanctuary (Num 3:38) and of ritual purity (Lev 13 - 15). They offered sacrifices (Lev 16:6, 15; Deut 33:10) and were usually based in the sanctuary. So, as well as seeing Jesus as God incarnate, taking our human nature, we see him as expressing and fulfilling the role of priest. More than that: 'of high priest'. More than that: 'a merciful and faithful high priest'. The other high priest - the chief functionary of the Jewish temple - falls short of what is offered to us in Christ.

## Thursday of Week 1

### Reading

*Hebrews 3:7-14*

*As long as this 'today' lasts, keep encouraging one another*

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,

**'Today, when you hear his voice,  
<sup>8</sup> do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,  
<sup>9</sup> where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.  
<sup>10</sup> Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, 'They always go astray in their hearts;  
they have not known my ways.'  
<sup>11</sup> As I swore in my wrath,  
"They shall never enter my rest."'**

<sup>12</sup> Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end,

### Reflection

**JUST** before this morning's reading, there was a comparison drawn between Jesus and Moses. Moses was faithful but a servant of God. Jesus,

by contrast, is God's Son. It is as different as the difference between the house builder and a house. We continue with a comparison between the time of Moses and the time of Jesus. In the earlier time, the people of Israel were disobedient, with hearts hardened, and the warning now is not to follow that example. Those who turn against God do not enter his rest – the Promised Land – and that gives us every incentive to stay on the strait and narrow and to support one another in the journey of discipleship.

## Friday of Week 1

### Reading

*Hebrews 4:1-5, 11*

*We must do all that we can to reach this place of rest.*

<sup>4</sup> Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it. <sup>2</sup> For good news came to us just as to them; but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers. <sup>3</sup> For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

**'As I swore in my wrath,  
"They shall never enter my rest,"'**

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. <sup>4</sup> For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' <sup>5</sup> And again in this place he said,

**'They shall never enter my rest.'.....**

<sup>11</sup> Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience.

### Reflection

**HEBREWS** is severe in tone. Today's passage gives us dire warnings about not responding to the Good News as preached. The response required is the response of faith, putting one's trust in God. Those who believe will enter God's rest, the Promised Land. 'God's rest' is the Sabbath, the seventh day in the Creation story, by which time God's work is complete. Although the response required is 'faith', failure to respond is 'disobedience'. We therefore conclude that the act of faith – belief and trust



in God – is basically an act of obedience. This is a very Hebrew perspective. The Old Testament story is told very much in terms of obedience to the Covenant and the consequence of disobedience.

## Saturday of Week 1

### Reading

*Hebrews 4:12-16*

*Let us be confident in approaching the throne of Grace*

**12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

**14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.



## Reflection

**WE HAVEN'T** always looked, week by week, at the Saturday reading but it would be a shame not to notice the reading set for today. It includes not one but two 'purple passages'. The first is a glorious reflection on the Word of God, something vital and penetrating, able to open up and disclose the depths of our being. 'Living' in Hebrews is a participle describing God himself: hence, the Word of God here means the Word spoken by God, the Word which brought about Creation. It also refers to Holy Scripture which itself is inspired by God and, in that sense, uttered by God. The second 'purple passage' is the 'great high priest' passage, inviting us to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as one who is able to sympathize fully with us, having shared our human existence and been tempted, as we are, yet without sinning. We have confidence then in drawing near to the throne of grace, trusting in his mercy and help.

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