



TIMES OF THE LITURGY

Sunday - 7.45am - Lauds | 8.15am - Low Mass | 9.15am - Dominican Rite Mass (Extraordinary Form) | 11am - Sung Conventual Mass | 6pm - Low Mass | 7pm - Vespers.

Monday - Friday - 7am - Lauds | 7.30am - Conventual Mass | 6.15pm - Devotions and Meditation | 6.30pm - Vespers. [N.B. First Fridays of the month, Vespers in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament with a period of Adoration from 6.15pm.]

Saturday - 9am - Lauds | 9.30am - Conventual Mass | 4.30-6pm - Confessions | 6.15pm - Sung Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary | 6.30pm - Vespers.

THIS WEEK

Sun 14 **SUNDAY XV**

Mon 15 St Bonaventure

Tue 16 *feria*

Wed 17 *feria*

Thu 18 *feria*

Fri 19 *feria*

Sat 20 Our Lady on Saturday

Sun 21 **SUNDAY XVI**



Radio Maria England will be holding a Game Night on Friday 19th July from 6 to 9pm at St Laurence's Catholic Church, Cambridge. To book your tickets scan the QR code.

There will be a Pilgrimage of Reparation & Prayer for the Sanctity of Life to Walsingham, Saturday 3 August, to be led by Bishop David Oakley of Northampton. Please consider joining this pilgrimage, if possible in person, or online at <walsingham.org.uk/live-stream/>. The need for prayer to support life has been great since the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act. It is now increasingly needed as the pressures to allow abortion up to birth grow, along with a swelling campaign to introduce Assisted Suicide. Pope Saint John Paul II urged everyone to join in the 'great prayer for life'.

The Medjugorje Apostolate Annual Pilgrimage to Walsingham will take place on Bank Holiday Monday 26th August 2024. The day will begin at 1.15pm with a talk by Fr Zvonimir Pavičić OFM followed by Mass at 3.45pm.



Lauds, Mass, and Vespers are broadcast daily on Radio Maria.

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SAMSON, THE FIRST SUPERHERO

The word 'hero' is a Greek word, describing mythological figures of the past who appear to be stronger and faster than human beings of the present. So it would seem reasonable to see the superheroes of the comic books, comic book being the standard term for American comics, as an attempt to create stories which bring mythology into modern times. This was how the first superheroes were presented. The first one of all, Superman, was described as having the strength of Hercules by his creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Superman started in 1938 and was rapidly followed by other superheroes, such as Captain Marvel, who was a young boy, gifted with the power of the Greek Gods. Superheroes have now become a common form of fiction, but this has more to do with the popularity of superhero films in recent years. Up until 1959, American periodicals, including comic books could not be imported into Britain, and what was sold after that for many years, were basically reprints with a price in Pound sterling rather than dollars.

To understand the origin of the phenomenon of comic superheroes, we have to go back to their first appearance in 1938 with Superman, and Batman, in 1939. These early stories were mostly written by Jewish writers based in and around New York, and although superficially like the ancient Greek heroes, they were really following a Jewish tradition going back to the first superhero who I would suggest was Samson, the hero in the book of Judges, chapter 13 to 16.. The Greek heroes were more powerful than ordinary human beings for the simple reason that it was believed that this was how it had been in the past. Greek mythology assumed that the world was doomed to a gradual degeneration, which seems to follow the logic of human artifacts which decay with age. Hesiod, a poet from the 8th century BC, depicts a series of ages, the Golden, the Silver, the Bronze, the age of Heroes and the Iron age, which was the age in which Hesiod saw himself as living. The great figures of these ages were Aristocrats, by no means immortal but they lived longer than contemporary human beings and showed greater strength and agility. This story of degeneration can also be seen as in some way a story of development because as human beings became less powerful by nature, they had to turn to technology of various sorts to compensate for their growing weakness. The Roman version of this degeneration but

compensatory growth, would stress the simplicity of the ancient age, where human beings were less greedy, being content to live with a great deal less of the amenities of the modern age. The reason this Greek and Roman world of heroes existed, at least in the imagination, is because it was a way of explaining the limitations of humanity. It was a bleak view, with inevitable decay, only mitigated by the hope that time was circular, so that the Golden age would return again. If this was so, it would be small comfort since the cycle of decay would also return.

There are hints of the idea of inevitable decay in the Book of Genesis, with the first human beings living to a great age. The paradox that human technological development was bound up with human depravity can also be seen. Cain, the first murderer, founds the first city, others introduce metal work, flute playing and so forth, but it is all finally destroyed by the flood. From Chapter twelve of Genesis, with the call of Abraham, we find that human beings are now just that, ordinary human beings and if they have any powers, these powers are manifestations of the power of God. The modern superheroes tended to be human beings who were given special powers through circumstances, such as Captain America, who is given a serum which transforms him into a super soldier. The one exception is Superman, but he is more like one of the angels in the Old Testament, who might appear human but is really a visitor from a greater reality. The Jewish nature of the superheroes is shown by the fact that they were fighting the Nazi's even before the attack on Pearl Harbor brought America into the war. This is what Samson was. He was one of the Judges, the leaders of the descendants of Abraham, after they escaped from Egypt but had not yet consolidated their control over the Promised Land. Like all the great figures of the Old Testament, Samson has no intrinsic powers, but when he does miraculous works, it is God working through him. When he kills a lion with his bare hands, we are told,

Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat (Judges 14:6).

It is the Spirit of the Lord which gives him his great strength against the Philistines. He is also rather more prone to use cunning as his weapon, setting fire to the Philistine fields by tying burning torches to the tails of foxes. In this he is following the tradition of Jacob who tricks his father into bestowing the birthright upon him and who achieves his fortune by tricking his uncle Laban too. Samson likes to tell riddles, promising a reward to those who solve them, but no-one ever does. Samson is finally defeated by Delilah, the Philistine woman who persuades him to reveal the secret of his great strength. This is his refusal to cut his hair, and Delilah duly calls in a barber to cut his hair. This might seem like an absurd weakness, but it is not the loss of hair which weakens Samson but rather the implied failure to keep his covenant with God. Samson is blinded but his hair grows back, and he is finally allowed to inflict a great defeat on the Philistines by destroying the pillars which hold up their palace. The pattern of the defeat of a chosen hero of God, followed by an unexpected victory is repeated in the Old Testament, in King David and the prophets but some of the heroes end up in failure, such as King Solomon. The prophets who come later in the history of the monarch are increasingly seen to be defeated by violence. This culminates with the coming of Christ, the ultimate hero who appears to be defeated yet whose victory over evil is assured.

...so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar (Matthew 23:35).

Samson then is a story of a hero in the Jewish mold, one who fights for his people but is also his own worst enemy. This too is the story of people of the Old Testament, where every great promise seems to fall into defeat. Yet unlike the Greek heroes, there is no sense of an unavoidable fate. Instead, God leads his people on, until in Christ we see that defeat can be a greater kind of victory. We read the story of Samson as a memory of an older way of fighting for the survival of Israel. Later the hope of Resurrection suggests a different form of kingdom.

'Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."' (John 18:36).

Superheroes are fantasies, but Christ is the true hero, who wins the kingdom for us, in what seems to the world like a defeat.

ST BONAVENTURE



Born at Bagnoreggio in Italy in about the year 1218, Bonaventure became a Franciscan Friar in 1243 and his intellectual ability was soon recognised by his Order and by the Church. At the age of thirty-six he was elected

Minister General of the Franciscans and virtually re-founded the Order, giving it a stability in training and administration previously unknown. He upheld all the teachings of St Francis except in the founder's attitude to study, since Francis felt the Order should possess no books. He clearly saw, with Francis, that the rôle of the Friars was to support the Church through

its contemporary structures rather than to be an instrument for reform. He also believed that the best conversions came from the good example of those anxious to renew the Church, rather than by haranguing or passing laws. He was appointed a cardinal-bishop against his will, and kept the papal messengers waiting while he finished the washing up. He brought about a temporary reunion of East and West but, before it was repudiated, he died on this day at Lyons in the year 1274.

THE PRIORY OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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