

Sat 26th Jun

Mt 8, 5-17

When he went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this.'

Jesus knows that his word, his will, alone can heal us. Yet many times, we see him going to the sick and touching them for healing. He knows that our human perception needs to see action in order to believe that something has been done. The Roman soldier, however, recognises the divine power of Jesus. He accepts Jesus' authority over the lives of all peoples. That is why he did not beg Jesus to go to his servant, but rather just give the command for his healing.

To Jesus, no one was too distant for him to love. He would go out of his way for the servant of a non-Jew. As his followers, then, we also must not limit our love and concern to people who are easy to love, who are close to us. If God sends us to a difficult colleague, an unpopular neighbour, a naggy relative, etc, let us not be too quick to say no. It is easy to excuse ourselves because we are too busy, too short-tempered, too "unholy", too impatient... We need first to remember that God is calling us to give His love to His people, not our own love. We are to be his faithful followers who bring His light and joy to the people He sends us to.

Do we accept Jesus' authority over our lives? Are we willing to accept his word without asking for signs? Every time we repeat the centurion's words during mass, let us make the decision to exercise our faith in Jesus as he did.

Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.

Sun 27th Jun

Lk 9, 51-62

Another to whom he said, 'Follow me,' replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first.' But he answered, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.' Another said, 'I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.' Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

Jesus sounds like such a harsh teacher, not allowing the people he calls to tend to their families. But he is not inviting

them to abandon their families; rather, Jesus is calling them, and us, to a deeper love for them.

In not wanting them to go and "bury" and "say good-bye" to the families, Jesus is saying to the people to leave behind old ways and priorities. These focus on the external, on superficial things. For Jesus, focusing only on the externals eventually lead us to death. All things external are transient and fade away some day.

Following Jesus, we learn instead to focus on the internal, on the heart, on making our love authentic – like His. Authentic love requires us to be compassionate and kind, even no one else is looking, when no one will praise and reward us. Jesus goes even further – he gives his love and kindness to outcasts, provoking the criticism and rejection of the respectable people. Are we willing to go that far for love? Are there people in our midst that no one wants to love?

Today, let us converse with Jesus and ask him where he calls us to follow him to. We will find that he leads us, not away, but so much closer to the needs and dreams of the people we love.

My Lord, teach me to love like you.

Mon 28th Jun

Mt 8, 18-22

When Jesus saw the crowd all about him he gave orders to leave for the other side. One of the scribes then came up and said to him, 'Master, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.' Another man, one of the disciples, said to him, 'Lord, let me go and bury my father first.' But Jesus said, 'Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead.'

'...the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head...'

Jesus' response to the scribe seems to be turning him away. He understood that the scribe was well-respected among the Jews and expected to earn greater stature in following Jesus. Jesus tells the scribe that he does not promise wealth, security and comfort as understood by the world. Following Jesus does not guarantee us a comfortable home, a healthy savings account, good food, enviable job, etc. The wealth and security that Jesus promises are spiritual, not physical. He promises us his friendship forever, and inner peace and joy that spring from knowing His love for us. Our wealth comes from the gifts the Holy Spirit pours out freely to us – gifts that we do not earn or even deserve.

Are we willing to accept the conditions of discipleship? Following Jesus could lead us to situations where we give up our comfort, step out of our "safety zone" to stand up for others, or make the option to live with less... But discipleship is not pure suffering. On the contrary, Jesus leads us to pure joy, when we receive joy from the true source that does not deceive nor run out.

With an open heart that is eager to follow where Jesus leads, we can truly say to him, *'Master, I will follow you wherever you go.'*

Tues 29th Jun

2Tm4, 6-8,17-18 Mt16, 13-19

Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul

I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come for me now is the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his appearing.

Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'



On the feast day of 2 of Jesus' greatest disciples, we look at these men he chose. Although Paul had never met Jesus face to face, he had a very personal encounter with Jesus. After the encounter, Paul got to

know the personal love of Jesus for him, through prayer, and through the Christian community. All his life, Paul sought earnestly to serve God, and God answered his desire by revealing Himself to him.

Peter was a simple fisherman, chosen by God to recognise the divinity of Christ. We see that he was very human, with his fears, his pride, his doubts... but God saw in him the capacity to love profoundly – like Christ.

Though these men were very different from one another, the call of Jesus united them. Their lives after knowing Jesus and saying 'Yes' to his call, followed the same path of bringing his love to people. This mission caused Peter and Paul much sufferings, yet we can see in their writings that living God's mission filled their lives with meaning and joy.

When they were called by God, Paul left his persecution of the Christians, Peter left his boat and nets behind. They walked away from what they were familiar with to live the lives that God dreamt for them. Today, our God calls us as

well. He calls us to walk away from our fears, our prejudices, our slaveries, our limitations, so that we can live the life that He created us to live. There will be sufferings and hardships, but we can live with the peace that comes from knowing we have lived to the full.

Some day, we will say with St Paul, "*I have fought the good fight to the end...*"

Loving Jesus, following your way required me to give up my way. Give me the strength and conviction to entrust my life to you today!

Wed 30th Jun

Am5, 14-15, 21-24

Seek good and not evil so that you may survive, and Yahweh, God Sabaoth, be with you as you claim he is. Hate evil, love good, let justice reign at the city gate... "I hate, I scorn your festivals, I take no pleasure in your solemn assemblies. When you bring me burnt offerings, your oblations, I do not accept them and I do not look at your communion sacrifices of fat cattle. Spare me the din of your chanting, let me hear none of your strumming on lyres, but let justice flow like water, and uprightness like a never-failing stream!"

Have we ever imagined God could speak so harshly to us? Speaking through prophet Amos centuries ago, His message was to tell the people not to worship Him only in the externals. Our God takes no pleasure in our offerings and even devout chanting and singing if our hearts are not truly in love with Him and His people.

How, then, can we worship God in a way that is acceptable to Him? "*... let justice flow like water, and uprightness like a never-failing stream...*"

In our lives, how can justice and uprightness flow? God's justice is unlike our world's justice, where the wrongdoers are punished until they have suffered all they deserve. In God's system of justice, there is room for compassion, for mercy, for forgiveness and reconciliation. Through love and acceptance, the hearts of sinners are changed. To promote God's justice, we are to be givers of His love to the people we live and interact with daily.

Thur 1st Jul

Mt 9, 18

He got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his home town. And suddenly some people brought him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Take comfort, my child, your sins are forgiven.' And now some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is being blasphemous.' Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, 'Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the

Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' then he said to the paralytic, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go off home.' And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for having given such authority to human beings.



Seeing their faith...

Jesus needs our faith in order to work through our lives. He could not extend his gift of forgiveness, of peace, to the scribes because their hearts were closed to faith. They needed to see proof, to have God manifest Himself in the manner they expect Him to. On the other hand, the faith of the people enabled Jesus to heal their paralytic friend.

Our faith in Jesus gives us the conviction, the perseverance, the patience, to keep offering to others the love of God. We do this because we believe that God's love completes us. It is the only thing in the world that gives lasting joy and meaning to our lives! Even when the world lives by a different set of values, we must not give up on following Jesus. The people around us are depending on our faith to encounter the healing love of Jesus!

Sometimes, we can also behave like the scribes, the "experts". When we see God touching others and blessing them with gifts, talents, healing, etc, we are critical and doubtful. While we guard against charlatans, let us not close our hearts to the wonders of God's ways. Let God surprise us in His works on the most stubborn hearts, in the lives of people we least expect Him to work miracles in.

Lord, strengthen my faith so that I can bring others to know your love. Grant me wisdom so that I can recognise you at work in the people around me.

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Prayer for Living

Fri 25th Jun

Mt 8, 1-4

After he had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. Suddenly a man with a virulent skin-disease came up and bowed low in front of him, saying, 'Lord, if you are willing, you can cleanse me.' Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, 'I am willing. Be cleansed.' And his skin-disease was cleansed at once. Then Jesus said to him, 'Mind you tell no one, but go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering prescribed by Moses, as evidence to them.'



The leper was shunned by his community and made to live as an outcast. It must have taken a lot of courage and determination for him to approach Jesus while he was surrounded by large crowds. Yet he did. He was tired of being with the skin

disease, of being avoided by others, of being unwell. How about us? Do we live with a 'disease' that causes us to be unwell, ashamed and unhappy? We may struggle with stress, discontentment, being judgemental, unforgiving, angry, envious, anxious, etc...These conditions eat away at our souls and prevent us from living fulfilled and joyful lives. Are we ready to get rid of these diseases of the soul?

When we, like the leper, are willing to face any societal objections and approach Jesus to ask for healing, we know for certain that he will be there for us. Let us put aside our pride and fears, to approach Jesus, knowing he is willing to cleanse us, to set us free from everything that keeps us bound to slavery.

Lord, if you are willing, please cleanse me of my iniquities. Let me be free to follow you.