

Sat: 13<sup>th</sup> March

Lk 18, 9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get." The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'

God looks at the heart...at how much love we put in our prayers, our fasting, our almsgiving, our words to others, etc. Today, Jesus regards the tax collector as being true to himself and sincere with God. Thus, the poor public sinner went home at peace with himself and God. On the other hand, the boastful Pharisee focussed only on the external deeds he did, but his heart was full of self-righteous and no compassion for others or love for God. He went home, simply full of himself.

Which character do I identify myself with? Am I self-righteous and full of myself, even when I am in front of God? Am I like the tax collector... do I know who I am in front of God and who he is for me?

*Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!*

#### Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sun: 14<sup>th</sup> March

Lk 15, 1-3; 11-32

... A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him in the farm to feed the pigs.... While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I



no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began

to celebrate. Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and

dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come," replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property-he and his women- you kill the calf we had been fattening." The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found."

The hero of this story is the father, not because he was rich man or that he had power to chastise or relent, rather because he loved. He gave in to the younger son's outrageous request for his share of inheritance. He divided the property between the two sons and was left, most likely, penniless and dependence on the elder son.

He welcomed the younger son back even when the latter had lost all the money. He celebrated and rejoiced over the return of his son. He came out of the house and called the elder son to enter and rejoice over his brother's return. He invited the elder son to open his heart so as to forgive and love his brother, not to condemn and judge.

This father of the story reflects the Father that we have. God our Father is a hero because he loves. In parts of our life, we can be like the younger son...wild, irresponsible, running away from God... or we can also be like the elder son...working and doing things in church without enjoying the Father's love, distant, judgemental, self-righteous.

No matter what, God continues to call us to return to him because it is in Him that we will have inner peace and joy.

This Lent, let us journey towards God...not away.

Mon: 15<sup>th</sup> March

Jn 4, 43-54

...He went again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a court official there whose son was ill at Capernaum and, hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went and asked him to come and cure his son as he was at the point of death. Jesus said, 'So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!' 'Sir,' answered the official 'come down before my child dies.' 'Go home,' said Jesus 'your son will live.' The man believed what Jesus had said and started his way; and while he was still on the journey back his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. 'The fever left him yesterday' they said 'at the seventh hour.' The father realised that this was exactly the time when Jesus had said, 'Your son will live', and he and all his household believed.

'So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!'

The official apparently received harsh words from Jesus when he requested Jesus to heal his sick son. However, those words were meant for those around Jesus who needed to see signs and wonders before they could take the leap of faith. By the fact that the official went to Jesus and asked him the request shows that he had faith in Jesus. He saw Jesus as a prophet from God...a man of God.

After Jesus said those words, the official did not give up but he persevered by simply asking again, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.' Instead of following him, Jesus told him 'Go home, your son will live.' With just these words, the official believed in Jesus' words alone, never though he did not have any guarantees. He believed that Jesus could heal his sick son without going to his house.

When he heard that his son truly recovered, the official 'believed'. He knew who Jesus was and accepted him for who he was.

As we enter into the fourth week of Lent, let us examine our faith. Do we believe? Is our faith as strong and steadfast as the official? Do we know who Jesus is and accept him as he is?

*Jesus, I believe!*

Tue: 16<sup>th</sup> March

Jn 5, 1-16

...One man there had an illness which had lasted thirty-eight years, and when Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been in this condition for a long time, he said, 'Do you want to be well again?' 'Sir' replied the sick man 'I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way, someone else gets there before me.' Jesus said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk.' The man was cured at once, and he picked up his mat and walked away. Now that day happened to be the Sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the Sabbath; you are not allowed to carry your sleeping-mat.' He replied, 'But the man who cured me told me...' 'They asked 'Who is this man...' The man had no idea who it was since Jesus had disappeared into the crowd that filled the place. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said, 'Now you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you.' The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had cured him. It was because he did things like this on the Sabbath that Jesus began to persecute Jesus.

Jesus saw the man and his heart was filled with love for him. He took the initiative and asked the man whether he would want to get well. Looking at our lives, what would we say if Jesus would come and ask us if we want to be healed from our sickness, an addiction, a dark shadow in our life that is

haunting us, etc? Sometimes, we have grown accustomed to our 'disability' that we prefer the pain, hurts, habits we have rather than to embrace changes and new responsibilities.

The man expressed his desire to get well and Jesus helped him beyond how his imagination. Yet, the man did not know who healed him when the Jews asked him. Jesus took the initiative and told him his name. Upon hearing the name, the man went to the Jews and betrayed Jesus. The man, even after experiencing the healing touch of Jesus and was healed physically, was closed and remain in ignorant of the real identity of Jesus. He was caught between the Jewish leaders and Jesus...he chose to go against Jesus for the sake of pleasing the Jewish leaders and saving his skin.

What about us? Do we have enough faith to keep choosing Jesus even if it means that we have to go against opinions of others, pleasing them, etc?

This Lent, we have to make the choice! Let us be open and allow Jesus to enter fully into our hearts so that his love can seduce us to keep choosing him.

**Wed: 17<sup>th</sup> March Jn 5, 17-30**

**Jesus said to the Jews: 'My Father goes on working, and so do I.' But that made the Jews more intent on killing him, because, not content with breaking the Sabbath, he spoke of God as his own Father, and so made himself God's equal. To this accusation Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing; and whatever the Father does the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself, and he will show him even greater things than these, works that will astonish you...I tell you solemnly, whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life; without being brought to judgement he has passed from death to life...**

*'The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing...'*

Jesus the Son is a mirror-image to the Father. He loves the way the Father loves. He cares for the lowly ones in society the way the Father cares for them. He reaches out to the poor and the weak, he forgives, he gives his time, he teaches, he heals... All because Jesus mirrors the heart of God the Father.

How beautiful if we ourselves can say the same words of Jesus- *'I can do nothing by myself, I can do only what I see the Father doing.'* That is why we need to pray everyday...because it is in the silence of prayer that we listen to the Father and know what he wants us to do each day. Let us be mirror-images of the Father today in this

world where there are so many values that disfigure the real meaning of love, of life.

*Jesus, I want to be a reflection as the Father's love so that I can reveal that He is alive to many people I meet.*

**Thu: 18<sup>th</sup> March Jn 5, 31-47**

**... You study the Scriptures, believing that in them you have eternal life; now these same scriptures testify to me and yet you refuse to come to me for life! As for human approval, this means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you. I have come in the name of my Father and you refuse to accept me; if someone else comes in his own name you will accept him. How can you believe, since you look to one another for approval and are not concerned with the approval that comes from the one God? ....**

Jesus addressed these words to the Pharisees... those Jewish leaders who were full of themselves...self-righteous and pride themselves with following external rituals and knowing the scriptures well. However, Jesus, who looked at the hearts of them all, knew that they had no love of God in them. Instead, their hearts were full of their own egoistic ambitions and desires. Being so full of themselves, they were closed to Jesus, the One sent by God...the Source of Life...the Word-made- flesh.

What is the state of my heart, Lord? Do I have some love for you? Do I simply go through prayers, mass, etc as mere routines that I have to do?

God wants people with hearts that love him above all else... he does not want machines to perform rituals or robots who can reiterate passages after passages.

Today, let us ask the Holy Spirit to increase our love for God...and to go to Him as our Source of Life.

*Come, Holy Spirit, lead me closer to God. Help me to love God above all else.*

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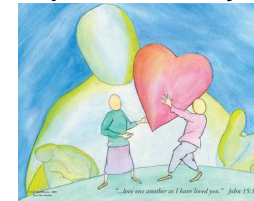
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# Prayer for Living

**Fri: 12<sup>th</sup> March Mark 12, 28-34**

**One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to question him any more.**



Our Christian commandment is summed up with just one word: LOVE. Our whole life is a journey of loving God more and of growing in our awareness of who our neighbours are and to love them as children of God.

Who are our neighbours? The person who lives next door? Our family members? Our relatives? Friends? Colleagues? Parishioners? Community members? Our neighbours are those with whom we live with, relate to, socialise with and work with. Each person we encounter becomes a holy thing, a neighbour, only when we look at him/her as the PROPERTY OF GOD and that Jesus himself had given his life for that person. Our neighbours- the people around us- contain the presence of God in them. Thus, when we love our neighbours, we love God their Owner, their Creator.

St Teresa of Avila wrote: *Though we do not have our Lord with us in bodily presence, we have our neighbour, who, for the ends of love and loving service, is as good as our Lord himself. How can I love you more, Lord? I know that I cannot separate you from the people around me. To love the people around me is to be patient, understanding, generous, kind...to them. Lord, I want to love you...I want to love them.*