

Sat: 20th March

Jn 7: 40-53

Some of the people in the crowd heard him say this and said, "This man is really the Prophet!" Others said, "He is the Messiah!" But others said, "The Messiah will not come from Galilee! The scripture says that the Messiah will be a descendant of King David and will be born in Bethlehem, the town where David lived." So there was a division in the crowd because of Jesus...

The guards answered, "Nobody has ever talked the way this man does!" "Did he fool you too?" the Pharisees asked them...."are you also from Galilee? Study the Scriptures and you will learn that no prophet ever comes from Galilee."

It is interesting to observe that the place, the school or the social background we come from greatly influence people's judgement of us. This was true even in the times of Jesus. The people were divided and reacted negatively because Jesus came from Nazareth. While they argued intently on the origins of the Messiah, they fail to see that Jesus' true origin is the Heavenly Father who sent him because they do not know the father. They were learned in the Scriptures and were concerned with keeping the laws rather than having a relationship with the Father.

In this period of intense preparation for the celebration of the paschal mystery, let us be reminded that God neither expects nor wants us to argue about the finer points of Scripture. We should instead be like the simple guards and recognise in the words and deeds of Jesus, the true greatness of God-His undying love for us. And imitate this love through a daily dialogue with Jesus in prayer.

Do I recognise my true origin and my neighbours'- the migrant workers, domestic maids? Jesus, help me to seek and to see that we all come from the Father and belong to him alone. Let me be conscious of my commonality and universality with everyone I meet.

Sun: 21st March

Jn 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early the next morning, he went back to the Temple. All the people gathered around him, and he sat down and began to teach them. The teachers of the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery and they made her stand before them all. "Teacher, they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now, what do you say?" They said this to trap Jesus, so that they could accuse him. But he bent over and wrote on the ground with his finger...he straightened up and said to them, "Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her."...When they heard this,

they all left, one by one... He straightened up and said to her, "Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?" "No one, sir," she answered. "Well then," Jesus said, "I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again,"

In the scene of the adulterous woman, the Pharisees thought they had laid a perfect trap for Jesus. If he opted for leniency, he would be accused of breaking the Law of Moses; and if he opted for the Law and its death penalty, he would lose his credibility as a compassionate man. Instead of answering the questions laid before him, Jesus opted to challenge his questioners at the level of the heart rather than the law. We see Jesus "bent over" the ground, at the same level as the terrified adulterous woman while the self-righteous stood above these two figures, ready to condemn and to kill. Jesus, who always stood in solidarity with the downtrodden, the outcasts and sinners, once again drew a clear line between sin and the sinner. He was able to condemn adultery and in the same breath forgive the adulterer and challenge her to a holier life. Many times in our lives, we too will find ourselves observing the sins and mistakes of our fellow brothers and sisters. Who do we resemble then? The Pharisees or Jesus? *Lord, help me to remember that we are all sinners. Let me then not judge or condemn anyone who falls but let me instead show Christ-like compassion.*

Mon: 22nd March

Jn 8:12-20

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. "I am the light of the world." he said. "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness." The Pharisees said to him, "Now you are testifying on your own behalf; what you say proves nothing. "No," Jesus answered, "Even though I do testify on my own behalf, what I say is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. You do not know where I came from or where I am going. You make judgments in a purely human way; I pass judgment on no one. But if I were to do so, my judgment would be true, because I am not alone in this; the Father who sent me is with me...I testify on my own behalf and the Father who sent me also testifies on my behalf." "Where is your father?" they asked him. "You know neither me nor my Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."...

Jesus reveals himself as the "light of the world" during the Jewish feast of Tabernacles, a celebration of the late harvest where the entire city is lighted by torches and candles. On this occasion, Jesus reveals himself as the true light. He

replaces the feasts and traditions of the Jews. He offers himself as the true light that not only gives physical sight but restores spiritual sight to mankind. His words and teachings open our eyes, the eyes of our hearts, to see with his perspective. To recognise that in Jesus, we meet the Father who longs for us to experience true peace and joy. The God who, through his brief life on earth, shows us that Love of God is inseparable from the Love of Neighbour - we cannot love God without first loving our neighbour.

Jesus, come and shine in me and show me the dark corners of my heart. I want to live in light forever!

Tues 23rd March

Jn 8: 21-30

...Jesus answered, "You are from this world, but I am not from this world. That is why I told you that you will die in your sins. And you will die in your sins if you do not believe that "I Am Who I Am." "Who are you?" they asked him. Jesus answered, "What I have told you from the very beginning. The one who sent me, however, is truthful, and I tell the world only what I have heard from him." They did not understand that Jesus was talking to them about the Father. So he said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I do nothing on my own authority, but I say only what the Father has instructed me to say. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases him." Many who heard Jesus say these things believed in him.

Jesus knew that there were many things that the people who listened to him, could not understand until they experienced his death and resurrection.

It is also the same with us. We can argue, discuss and question many things about God, about Theology and dogmas; but only when we experience Jesus' love, his friendship and self-giving for us, we will be able to believe; to understand not only with our mind but also with our heart, and to accept in our lives, his life as the way for us to live.

Lord, help me not to philosophize with your words but to accept them and receive your love when I live them out, when I put them into practice.

Wed: 24th March

Jn 8:31-42

So Jesus said to those who believed in him, "If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." "We are the descendants of Abraham," they answered, "and we have never been anybody's slaves. What do you mean, then, by saying, 'You will be free'?" Jesus said to them, "I am telling you the truth: everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave does not belong to a family permanently, but a son belongs there forever. If the Son sets you free,

then you will be really free. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me because you will not accept my teaching. I talk about what my Father has shown me but you do what your father has told you." .., "If God really were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own authority but he sent me."

The world knows and acknowledges that slavery is a terrible sin that brings about untold misery and pain. Yet today, we often fail to realise that many of us are still slaves- willing slaves to the false promises and values of the world. The glitter of fame, the seduction of human adoration and the "freedom" to do as we please is the relentless call of our World. Today, Jesus is asking us, are you really my disciples or slaves to your own desires and the voices of the world? Do we obey all his teachings or do we pick and choose those that we personally "like" or are more naturally inclined towards. Jesus says that if we obey his teachings, the truth will set [us] free and he reiterates, "I am telling you the truth." This is because a truly free life is a spiritual life that is based not on created things but in God who is everlasting love. The former, however good, is transient, while God is forever and eternal. *Help me Jesus to break away from the chains of worldly slavery so that I may truly be joyful and free!*

Thurs: 25th March

The Annunciation of the Lord

Lk 1: 26-38

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. He had a message for a girl...The girl's name was Mary...Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message and she wondered what his words meant. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!" Mary said to the angel, "I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God... For there is nothing that God cannot do." "I am the Lord's servant," said Mary; "may it happen to me as you have said." And the angel left her.

Mary's "Yes!" presents an example of the complete acceptance of God's Will, however demanding and

fearsome it might appear at first sight. Like Jesus who offers to God his body and will as a sacrifice: "I have come to do your will, O God.", Mary too offers to God her body and will: "May it happen to me as you have said." Both accepted to be stretched by God. Their painful stretching resulted in the salvation of the world and eternal happiness for us all with God. How is God stretching us today? Is he calling us to a journey that we want to turn away from? It could be an illness, loss of employment, disillusionment with our spouse/friend. Can we, like Mary, say "YES!", embrace our suffering with trusting hearts and embrace the pruning in hand of the Master Gardener, the compassionate potter and find, paradoxically, true peace, true joy and our true self at the end of the journey. May we too be able to say, "And in his will is our peace." *Lord, help me to let go of my own dreams and to trust and know that you have the perfect dream meant just for me since the day I was planted in my mother's womb.*



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Fri: 19th Mar

Mt 1:16, 18-21, 24

Jacob [became] the father of Joseph, who married Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was called the Messiah. This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was a man who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus-because he will save his people from their sins." So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to.

Only one man could teach Jesus how to be a man. Joseph, the man of few words but of utter fidelity, courage and obedience, was that man. Joseph, like Mary, was chosen through all the ages to be the guardian of God's 2 greatest treasures- Mary and Jesus. He is to be the formator of God's only begotten Son. What a daunting task it must have been. But like Mary, Joseph too said "Yes!" to God; even when the circumstances before him appeared impossible to comprehend and foolish. Today, like Joseph, we too are called to be the father, parent or formator of someone precious to God. It could well be our own children, our nephews or nieces, our subordinates or neighbours. It may even be our aged parents or in-laws for that matter.

Can we imagine what will become of God's plan for mankind if Joseph had ignored the voice of God through His angel and acted according to his own human understanding? Do we realise that, like Joseph, we too have a role in God's Salvation plan. We are all asked to pass on the gift of our faith to our loved ones; to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit through the living example of our relationship with Jesus. *Lord, help me to see the eternal impact of my words and actions on those closest to me.*