

Sunday, 1st July, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 1:13-15, 2:23-34, 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15, Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered round him and he stayed by the lakeside. Then one of the synagogue officials came up, Jairus by name, and seeing him, fell at his feet and pleaded with him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her to make her better and save her life.' Jesus went with him and a large crowd followed him; they were pressing all round him. While he was still speaking some people arrived from the house of the synagogue official to say, 'Your daughter is dead: why put the Master to any further trouble?' But Jesus had overheard this remark of theirs and he said to the official, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith'. And he allowed no one to go with him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. So they came to the official's house and Jesus noticed all the commotion, with people weeping and wailing unrestrainedly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and crying? The child is not dead, but asleep.' But they laughed at him. So he turned them all out and, taking with him the child's father and mother and his own companions, he went into the place where the child lay. And taking the child by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha, kum!' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up'. The little girl got up at once and began to walk about, for she was twelve years old. At this they were overcome with astonishment, and he ordered them strictly not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

With Jesus, Hope persists

Jairus, a man of prestige, came and fell at Jesus' feet as a desperate father whose daughter was in the verge of death. Jesus went with him but Jairus' world came crashing down when his servants came with the report that his beloved daughter had died. With his daughter dead, there was no more hope, but despair.

Yet, Jesus comforted Jairus and said, "Do not be afraid; only have faith."

With Jesus, even in the midst of death, there is always hope. Jesus entered the house, took the hand of the little girl and tenderly told her to get up. What joy Jairus and his wife had when they saw their beloved child up and alive!

We are going to end this time of reflection with a beautiful story entitled, 'The four candles': *"This is a story of four candles lit in a room. The ambiance was so soft you could hear them talking. The first one said, "I am PEACE, however, nobody can keep me lit. I believe I will go out." Its flame rapidly diminishes and goes out completely. The second one says, "I am FAITH. Most of all I am no longer indispensable, so it does not make any sense that I stay lit any longer." When it finished talking a breeze softly blew on it putting it out. Sadly, the third candle spoke in its turn. "I am LOVE. I have not gotten the strength to stay lit. People put me aside and don't understand my importance. They even forget to love those who are nearest to them." And waiting no longer it goes out. Suddenly a child entered the room and saw three candles not burning. "Why are you not burning you are supposed to stay lit till the end." Saying this the child began to cry. Then the fourth candle said, "Don't be afraid, while I am still burning we can re-light the other candles, I am HOPE." With shining eyes, the child took the candle of Hope and lit the other candles. The flame of Hope should never go out of our life and that each of us can maintain Hope, Love, Peace and Faith always."*

Monday, 2nd July

Amos 2:6-10,13-16, Matthew 8:18-22

When Jesus saw the great crowds 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 replied, '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 his disciples, said to him, 'Sir, let me go and bury my father first'. But Jesus replied, 'Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead'.

A radical call for all Christians

Are we ready to follow Jesus unconditionally?

Jesus does not make sales talk and sugar coat His words to attract people to follow Him. Instead, He lays his cards on the table and states clearly what it means to be His disciples. His call is radical. His call is decisive.

In today's gospel, one of the scribes went to Jesus and declared, *"Master, I will follow you wherever you go."* Jesus warned him that following Him implied giving up worldly securities and living a simple life as He did. Jesus had less security than even the foxes and birds because He had no house to call His own. By becoming His disciple, the scribes must dare to live as He lived, and simply be at the service of those in need.

The next man came up to Jesus and asked to bury his father first, which was a common expression which means to look after his father until his death. Jesus, however, challenged this man to have the courage to leave his family which might be an obstacle for his following. Thus, Jesus simply said, *"Follow me."*

Is Jesus asking for too much?

This is something that each of us has to answer from our heart. As baptised Christians, all of us are called to follow Jesus radically. We too are called to live a life of simplicity as Jesus did. We are to put our securities not in honour or worldly possessions, but in God alone. We are called to leave our families too because they do not come first, but God. When God is in the centre of our lives, then we can truly love and serve our family *better with freedom and truth.*

The disciple simply burns his boats and goes ahead. He is called out... The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity... out of the realm of the finite...into the realm of infinite possibilities."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Lord, your call is too difficult and radical. Yet, I desire to follow you with total love and faithfulness today.

Tuesday, 3rd July, St. Thomas, Apostle
Ephesians 2:19-22, John 20:24-29

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe'. Eight days later the disciples were in the house again

and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

Doubt no longer!

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Apostle Thomas, who unfortunately, is famous for his doubting. Yet, this Doubting Thomas is the first disciple to put into words the truth that Jesus is Lord and God. This Doubting Thomas, as tradition states, was the Apostle who brought the Good News of Jesus to present-day Iraq, Iran and later to India.

What does doubting Thomas have to say to us today on his feast day?

St. Thomas was a natural pessimist who viewed things always with negativism and gloom. After Jesus died, Thomas was probably depressed and simply wanted to be left alone. Yet, Jesus did not give up on those He called and chose. Jesus patiently approached Thomas. He did not rebuke him for his pessimistic doubts. Instead, Jesus, the Patient Lover, breathed forgiveness and spoke words of encouragement to reawaken Thomas' faith. At the end, Thomas was gently led into mature faith.

Doubts might make us look away from Jesus, and lead us to be preoccupied with our own negativism. Let us, with faith, look at Jesus and allow Him to speak to us, to love us and to strengthen us.

Help me Jesus to overcome my doubts and strengthen my faith so that my experience like St. Thomas can be an inspiration to others to come closer to You.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What does today's gospel mean for me in my own journey of faith?
- 2) How can my faith story help others who are struggling with doubts?

Wednesday, 4th July

Amos 5:14-15,21-24, Matthew 8:28-34

When Jesus reached the country of the Gadarenes on the other side, two demoniacs came towards him out of the tombs - creatures so fierce that no one could pass that way. They stood there shouting, 'What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the time?' Now some distance away there was a large herd of pigs feeding, and the devils pleaded with Jesus, 'If you cast us out, send us into the herd of pigs'. And he said to them, 'Go then', and they came out and made for the pigs; and at that the whole herd charged down the cliff into the lake and perished in the water. The swineherds ran off and made for the town, where they told the whole story, including what had happened to the demoniacs. At this the whole town set out to meet Jesus; and as soon as they saw him they implored him to leave the neighbourhood.

Pigs and Demons

Jesus was met by two men possessed by demons who shouted at Him, "What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the time?" Ironically, the demons could recognise Jesus' real identity while His closest disciples were still grappling with who He was. Jesus, moved with compassion, by the plight of the two men, ordered the demons out, and they went straight to the herd of pigs. The whole herd of pigs could not bear the presence of the evil spirits that they rushed down to the sea where they died.

Interestingly, many heard the whole story and rushed to see for themselves what had happened. Most likely, many of the people who went were the owners of the pigs. These people knew the men who now had been cleansed from the demons, but they could not rejoice over their healing. Instead, the people from the town implored Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. They were too overwhelmed with the loss of the pigs that they could not rejoice at the presence of Jesus and the great deed He had done.

What about us?

We can be so caught up with our gains and losses that we fail to see Jesus' presence with us. We are blinded by our own problems that we do not see the great deeds He has done in our lives and the lives of others.

May we see Jesus and His actions of love in our lives and the lives of those around us so that we can live this day with great joy!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I welcome Jesus into my daily life or do I reject Him?
- 2) How can I learn to see the big and small miracles today through eyes of faith?

Thursday, 5th July, St. Elizabeth of Portugal
Amos 7:10-17, Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his own town. Then some people appeared, bringing him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Courage, my child, your sins are forgiven'. And at this some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming'. 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,' – he said to the paralytic - 'get up, and 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 giving such power to men.

Your sins are forgiven

In today's gospel, Jesus saw the paralytic man and he immediately said, "Courage, my child, your sins are forgiven." Surely the people who brought the paralytic as well as the man himself might be feeling disappointed because they expected him to stand up and walk immediately.

Jesus saw beyond the physical ailment and recognised the sins that crippled the man's heart from living in peace with God, others and himself. Thus, Jesus forgave the man and made Him free from the enslavement of sins.

Today, Jesus also wants to reach out and touch whatever is making us become slaves of sins, instead of truly living in freedom as children of God. Do we allow Him to enter into our lives and unleash His forgiving power of love in us?

"The joy of God is the joy of forgiveness. It is the joy of the shepherd who finds his lost sheep; the joy of the woman who finds her lost coin; the joy of the father who welcomes home his lost son. This is all the Gospel, here; this is Christianity! But this is not sentimentalism or bland 'do-goodism'; on the

contrary, mercy is the true force that can save man and the world from the 'cancer' of sin, from moral and spiritual malaise. Only love can fill the gaps, the negative abysses that evil opens up in our hearts and in history. Only love can do this, and this is the joy of God." (Pope Francis)

Today, let us come to encounter Jesus and experience His joy of forgiveness. Like the paralytic man, let us get up and walk through life again.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What are the sins that paralyse me and prevent me from walking through life with joy and love?
- 2) What is Jesus' message to me in this time of prayer?

Friday, 6th July, St. Maria Goretti
Amos 8:4-6,9-12, Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, 'Follow me'. And he got up and followed him. While he was at dinner in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'

Friend of sinners

Jesus called Matthew, who was a socially despised sinner because he was a tax-collector, to follow Him. Out of joy at being called and chosen by Jesus, Matthew invited his friends to celebrate. Jesus was one of the guest in Matthew's house. There, Jesus shared table with tax collectors and sinners because He was a friend of sinners. This action of Jesus was considered to be scandalous by the upright Pharisees.

This was because to sit at table with a person was a sign of respect and friendship for the Jews.

It meant belonging to the same group of people. Thus, the beggars with the beggars, the righteous with the righteous, the gentiles with the gentiles.

However, Jesus seemed to eat with anyone. Why? For Jesus, God's love does

not separate but unites, and no one feels left out. Each person, the weakest to the strongest, has a place at God's open table.

Today, Jesus calls us not to exclude, but to include. As His followers, our tables, our homes, our parishes, our communities must be open to welcome the weak and the strong, the young and the old, the outcast and the loved.

Lord, open my heart so that mercy will reign in my life!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I tend to include or exclude people in my life?
- 2) Who is the 'Matthew' today in my life whom I need to extend my love and friendship to?

Saturday, 7th July

Amos 9:11-15, Matthew 9:14-17

Then John's disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants would never think of mourning as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on to an old cloak, because the patch pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; if they do, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine into fresh skins and both are preserved.'

Happiness is....

"Happiness is not having what you want. It is wanting what you have."
(Unknown)

In today's gospel passage, John the Baptist's disciples were upset that they were fasting but Jesus' disciples were not. They wanted to know the reason why they were not fasting. Jesus told them that His disciples should not fast because the Bridegroom was with them. Thus, it was a time of rejoicing and feasting, not of grieving and fasting.

"Jesus came to bring joy to everyone in every age." (Pope Francis)

Jesus, the Bridegroom comes to bring us joy! Our faith in Him makes us joyful

people. Stop and look within ourselves: Am I a happy Christian? Am I happy because of Jesus in my life?

With Jesus in our lives, we perceive things, people, routines, jobs and even ourselves with newness. In the same way that old wineskin cannot contain new wine because the new wine would give off fermenting gases that caused the brittle wineskin to split. Jesus is our new wine. We cannot remain in our old mindset, habits and attitudes that might block Jesus and all the newness that He wants to bring to our lives.

Jesus does not want to be merely a patch. He does not want just to fix our tears that appear in our lives. He wants to be our new Way, our new Life, our new Love. He wants to recreate and make all things new once again, but He needs our cooperation.

Today, let us ask for the grace to approach Jesus with the desire for newness in our lives. He can make us new people and to live life with more joy!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I happy at this stage of my life?
- 2) Do I desire deeply for something new in my life? Can I allow Jesus to be that something new so that He can form me into someone new?

**Sunday, 8th July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ezekiel 2:2-5, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Mark 6:1-6**

Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, though he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Familiarity breeds contempt

The people of Nazareth were first impressed by the teaching that they heard from Jesus. They knew Jesus' family background and wondered at His wisdom. However, the moment Jesus spoke critically against them, they started to take offense, became angry and even tried to kill Jesus. Perhaps if Jesus were not from the same town, the people would most likely listen respectfully. As the saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt". They closed their ears and hearts against Jesus' words because He now no longer impressed them.

What about us?

We can take many things for granted because we too fall into the trap of 'familiarity breeds contempt'. Thus, we are no longer impressed with the messengers whom God sends in our life. We even become bored with listening and reflecting on Scriptures because we think that there is nothing new to excite or inspire us.

The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus, and so, He could not share with them the message of the Good News. How sad if we too repeat the same mistake as the people of Nazareth just because we grow contemptuous of Jesus and His message.

Let Jesus be the one renewing us internally so that His message can be powerful in our life again.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I allow familiarity to breed contempt?
- 2) How can I let go of my own judgement and pride and allow God to actively work in my life?

Monday, 9th July, St. Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions Hosea 2:16-18,21-22, Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus was speaking, up came one of the officials, who bowed low in front of him and said, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved'. Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him. Then from behind him came a woman, who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years, and she touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, 'If I can only touch his cloak I shall be well again'. Jesus

turned round and saw her; and he said to her, 'Courage, my daughter, your faith has restored you to health'. And from that moment the woman was well again. When Jesus reached the official's house and saw the flute-players, with the crowd making a commotion he said, 'Get out of here; the little girl is not dead, she is asleep'. And they laughed at him. But when the people had been turned out he went inside and took the little girl by the hand; and she stood up. And the news spread all round the countryside.

Get out of here

Let us journey with Jesus into the official's house. We hear the flute-players' mournful tune. We see the crowds who are most likely professional mourners and wailers weeping loudly. We sense the deep grieve of the little's girl's family as reality sets in about her death.

Amidst the commotion, Jesus walks in with calmness and says, *"Get out of here; the little girl is not dead, she is asleep."*

Immediately, we are surrounded by the people chortle with deep laughter. They know that the girl is dead and there is no doubt about it.

Jesus enters the room and takes the little girl by the hand; and she becomes alive once more.

What message is there for us as we enter into this passage?

Faith. Have more faith in Jesus than all the noisy scorners who placed doubts and fears into our hearts. Each of us have scorners who laugh at us and make us look at ourselves negatively, *"Who are you to think that you can do it?"*, *"You are a lousy person. Look at you!"*, *"You have to proof yourself, loser!"*, *"Your life is a mess!"*, etc.

Listening to these inner voices kills our energy to hope, our strength to rejoice, and makes lose our vigour to live. Let Jesus enter and tell these scorners of negativism, *"Get out of here."* Let Jesus take us by our hands and bring us from agony to freedom, through despair to peace, through misery to hope. Jesus wants so much to bring new life into all the dead parts of our lives so that we can start taking steps to walk with greater faith and deeper love.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' message for me today?

Tuesday, 10th July

Hosea 8:4-7,11-13, Matthew 9:32-38

A man was brought to him, a dumb demoniac. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke and the people were amazed. 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel' they said. But the Pharisees said, 'It is through the prince of devils that he casts out devils'. Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest'.

Moved by compassion

Jesus' heart was moved constantly to reach out and do good to those who needed His help. The dumb demoniac man was brought to Him and He immediately healed him. Crowds of people came to Him and He immediately felt compassion for them. What moves our hearts and makes us take action?

Instead of rejoicing at goodness in Jesus, the Pharisees were jealous and afraid because they saw crowds flocking to be with Jesus. Thus, they started to accuse rather than praise; to slander rather than honour. They twisted Jesus' loving works into acts of the devil.

Today, let us not let jealousy, fear, pride blind us from recognising God's presence in others and in the good that they do. We need humility to put aside our own agendas and see with a new vision of faith that only Jesus can give to us.

Only with a new vision of faith, can we have the same heart of Jesus and be moved constantly by compassion for the people. There are many people around us who are still searching for a God who loves and forgives them.

God needs us to be His hands and feet in the places where we are.

Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which he looks

Compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,

Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.

*Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours. (St Teresa of Avila)*

Wednesday, 11th July, St. Benedict
Hosea 10:1-3,7-8,12, Matthew 10:1-7

Jesus summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.'

Chosen to bring lost sheep back home

Jesus chose twelve ordinary persons to be His disciples. These ordinary individuals became extraordinary because they lived, worked, suffered and died, not for an ideal, but for a person. Judas was a sad exception because He chose to live for an ideal and failed to love the Person who chose him for a greater purpose, a higher calling.

Today, He calls and chooses us, ordinary as we are, to be His disciples and continue His great mission. However, we must first stay close to Him and follow Him faithfully. Jesus has to be someone real and personal. From our personal encounter with Jesus as our Master and Friend, we are capacitated for the mission.

With Jesus in us, we are to go and proclaim just one message: The Kingdom of heaven is close at hand. God is here. God is love. God cares for us. God forgives. God lives in us.

“Cry the gospel with your whole life.” (Charles de Foucauld)

Whom are we supposed to cry the gospel with our whole life to?

In today’s gospel passage, Jesus told the Twelve to go to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Jesus wanted the Good News to be shared first with the Jews who were very thick-headed so that they can be open to the Good News, but their hearts were hardened with arrogance and stubbornness.

Who is the ‘lost sheep’ that we are called to share the Good News with?

It is sometimes easier to share our faith with non-Catholics rather than with Catholics because of their hunger for God, for faith. However, there are also many lost Catholic sheep that have wandered away from God and the Church. They need our guidance, patience, prayers, good examples, etc. We need to be out there to bring them back to Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who is the lost sheep that I can try to bring Jesus to him/her?
- 2) How can I strengthen my love for Jesus so as to live my life more for Him and with Him?

Thursday, 12th July

Hosea 11:1-4,8-9, Matthew 10:7-15

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: ‘As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with a few coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the workman deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you go into, ask for someone trustworthy and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, let your peace descend upon it; if it does not, let your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. I tell you solemnly, on the day of Judgement it will not go as hard with the land of Sodom and Gomorrah as with that town.’

Receive and give

“You received without charge, give without charge.”

The statement above means that we give ourselves to this mission without conditions and expectations. Why? This is because we have received freely from the Giver the gift of life, the air we breathe, the intellect we have, the talents and gifts, etc. We receive and so we give.

With this in mind, Jesus sends us to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. Who are the sick, dead, lepers, possessed of today? When we are rooted in Jesus, He opens our eyes to see the reality around us. There are people who are sick with depression and overworked. There are others who are walking zombies with no hope and joy. There are some who are suffering from spiritual leprosy. There are many who are possessed by addiction to pornography, alcohol, gambling, etc.

Jesus comes to us and gives Himself to us without charge. His unconditional love forgives us again and again. His presence brings hope and joy back to our hearts whenever we feel burdened with heavy loads. We ourselves have experienced being loved by Jesus.

How can we remain silent and not share with someone in need of Jesus' touch of love and mercy? How can we not encourage someone that change is possible? How can we not be there for someone who has lost his/her way?

Today, we indeed have a beautiful message to share: God's love is boundless and has no limits.

Friday, 13th July, St. Henry
Hosea 14:2-10, Matthew 10:16-23

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Remember, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as serpents and yet as harmless as doves. Beware of men: they will hand you over to sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the pagans. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name; but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved. If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you

in that, take refuge in another. I tell you solemnly, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.'

Be God's microphone

It is our privilege to follow Jesus. It is also our privilege to suffer for Jesus (Philippians 1:29).

Oppositions and rejections will surely come from people who cannot accept or welcome the Good News that we share and live. When persecutions come our way, we must stand firm to the end and not lose our trust in God.

Archbishop Oscar Romero stood firm to the end and courageously gave his life to defend the simple poor people of El Salvador. In his three years as Archbishop, Romero became the voice of the poor. He spoke the truth without fear. He condemned the military for their violence - senseless tortures and killings of the common people. He spoke out against the rich for exploiting the defenceless poor. On 24th March 1980, Romero was shot while celebrating mass.

'Each one of you has to be God's microphone. Each one of you has to be a messenger, a prophet.

The church will always exist as long as there is someone who has been baptized...Where is your baptism? You are baptized in your professions, in the fields of workers, in the market. Wherever there is someone who has been baptized, that is where the church is. There is a prophet there. Let us not hide the talent that God gave us on the day of our baptism and let us truly live the beauty and responsibility of being a prophetic people' (Archbishop Oscar Romero)

Let us never be afraid to be God's microphone, His messenger, His prophet. It is an honour to live and suffer for God!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I ever experienced rejections and oppositions because of Jesus and His Good News?
- 2) How can I be God's microphone today?

Saturday, 14th July

Isaiah 6:1-8, Matthew 10:24-33

Jesus said to his apostles: 'The disciple is not superior to his teacher, nor the slave to his master. It is enough for the disciple that he should grow to be like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they not say of his household? Do not be afraid of them therefore. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows. So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

Do not be afraid!

Even Jesus, our Master and Teacher, could not persuade or convince those who refused to accept His words and deeds. As His disciples, we are not superior to Jesus, so we cannot expect everyone to welcome the Good News, neither can we avoid persecutions because of our faith! If the people during Jesus' time would dare to call Jesus, 'Beelzebul' (Prince of the demons), what will they not call or accuse us who are following Him?

The early Church faced much persecution and even today there are countries where Christians are still being persecuted. Even in countries where there is freedom of religion, Christians tend to face ridicule and discrimination.

Jesus, however, assures us that these people can only harm the body, not the soul. This is because God our Father cares and loves us. He will stay with us when we stand up for our faith. He will give us strength when we face misunderstandings and rejections from others because of what we believe. *"Now it is our turn; and all ministering spirits keep silence and look on. O let not your foot slip, or your eye be false, or your ear dull, or your attention flagging! Be not dispirited; be not afraid; keep a good heart; be bold; draw not back; you will be carried through...O children of a heavenly Father, be not afraid!"* (John Henry Cardinal Newman)

Let us not be afraid!

Questions for reflection:

1) Am I afraid to share the gift of faith with others? Why?

**Sunday, 15th July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, St. Bonaventure
Amos 7:12-15, Ephesians 1:3-14, Mark 6:7-13**

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals but, he added, 'Don't take a spare tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust under your feet as evidence to them.' So they set off to proclaim repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

Pass on the gift of faith

By virtue of our baptism, we, as parents, grandparents, teachers, lawyers, retirees, students, are all called to be missionaries. We are missionaries ready to go out and share the Good News of Jesus with those around us.

"We cannot keep to ourselves the words of eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus

Christ: they are meant for everyone, for every man and woman...it is our responsibility to pass on what, by God's grace, we ourselves have received."
(Pope Benedict, Verbum Domini)

Today, Jesus is telling us - His missionaries - to travel light in mission and not to be complicated but simple. Many times, we think that we need an in-depth knowledge of the Church's doctrines as well as the ability to quote all verses in the Bible in order to share the Good News. It is, of course, good to know about the teachings of the Church and to be familiar with the Bible, but more than these, we ourselves need to deepen our personal prayer life with Jesus. At times, we complicate ourselves with expectations, time lines, etc that we impose on others. We become frustrated when we see people not welcoming us or refusing to listen to us. We forget that we are just workers labouring in this harvest.

'No bread, no haversack, no coppers...' The message behind these words is:

TRUST. We need to trust and to depend on Jesus, and not just on ourselves. Why? Jesus is the point of our message. We need to introduce to people the Person of Jesus so that they can enter into a personal relationship with Him, in their own time and ways. If someone is not ready to listen to us, then we just need to let go, walk away and shake the dust from our feet as a sign that we will leave the person, perhaps for a little while so as to give him/her some space and time. We continue then to pray for him/her to be open to Jesus our Master. In this mission, we need to depend on Jesus, and He will give us the right words to speak, He will show us opportunities to love, He will show us when to walk away and the moment to re-enter again.

Jesus, give me a missionary heart! Help me to pass on the treasure of your friendship with those around me, but help me to do so with you, not on my own.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I see that I have the responsibility to pass on what I have received to others?
- 2) How can I allow Jesus to use my life to be His instrument today?

Monday, 16th July, Our Lady of Mount Carmel
Isaiah 1:10-17, Matthew 10:34-11:1

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household. Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a holy man will have a holy man's reward. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.' When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

Peace, not sword

We might read today's gospel passage and feel uncomfortable with Jesus' words of sword, division, not being worthy of Him, etc.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, does not come into our lives to bring the sword of division. Rather, the attitudes of people towards Jesus and His Good News can become causes of division when they close their hearts to understand and accept. What do we do then? Do we continue to hold onto Jesus and let His Good News be our guiding light? Or do we simply follow the crowd's conflicting opinions regarding our faith?

Jesus challenges us to examine our hearts and see if we love Him more than our family and friends. This is because there is consistently a great temptation for us to follow those among our family members and friends who might have different values, beliefs, understanding, etc from us. It is easier sometimes not to get involved in conflicts and to blend into the crowd instead.

We belong to God and it is Him that we need to love first. From loving Him with our heart, mind and strength, we can then love each and every person in our lives. From having Him as the centre of our lives, we can then stand firm in our faith and not be swayed by the moods, opinions and demands of others.

Jesus, my Prince of Peace, enter into my heart today. I want to lose my life for Your sake so that I can truly find my true life in You.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I open my eyes and perceive the needs of those around me?
- 2) How can I continue the good work of the Good Samaritan today?

Tuesday, 17th July

Isaiah 7:1-9, Matthew 11:20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent. 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. And still, I tell you that it will not go as hard on Judgement day with Tyre and Sidon as with you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be exalted as high as heaven?

You shall be thrown down to hell. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have been standing yet. And still, I tell you that it will not go as hard with the land of Sodom on Judgement day as with you.'

A daily transforming encounter with Jesus

The people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum encountered Jesus in their midst. Yet, their lives remained unchanged. This was the cause of Jesus' grief. They continued their lives as though they did not experience God's presence in their lives and in their communities.

Unlike the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, there are others like Peter, Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Andrew, Martha, etc. who encountered Jesus and were attracted to Him and His ways. These people made the choice to allow Jesus to transform their lives. They followed Him faithfully to the end.

Others, like the Pharisees, the young rich man, scribes, Pilate, Judas encountered Jesus but their hearts were filled with fear, jealousy, sadness, etc. Some rejected Him and others walked away from Him.

Whether it is attraction or repulsion, no one remained the same after an encounter with Jesus.

This is the Good News for us today! No one encounters Jesus and leaves the encounter, unchanged. With Jesus, there is no more sitting on the fence for us anymore. Instead, we need to make a choice and be receptive to changes.

An encounter with Jesus is not a one-off event, but we are called daily to meet Him in prayer and the ordinariness of life.

"I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord". The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: 'Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace'." (Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How has Jesus provoked a radical deep change in my life?
- 2) Do I desire to encounter Him today and am I open to let Him transform my thoughts, my feelings, my lifestyle, my habits and my relationships with others?

Wednesday, 18th July

Isaiah 10:5-7,13-16, Matthew 11:25-27

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

God desires simplicity, not complexity

Who were the people who accepted Jesus and followed Him? They were not the Pharisees or scribes, the learned people, but 'mere children', his disciples. They were like 'children' because they were humble and open to listen and learn. The learned ones, on the other hand, took pride in themselves as intellectuals, and thus their minds were closed to Jesus' message.

Pride is the root of all vice. It makes us overestimate our knowledge and value. Being the centre of ourselves, we shut God out. There is no place in our hearts to trust God because we believe in ourselves more.

On the other hand, child-like simplicity and humility open the door of our hearts to more of God. We are always ready to encounter God in the silence of prayer, in the busyness of life, in the sufferings of others, etc.

Jesus desires to reveal God's love to us today. What He needs from us is a heart that is simple and humble to receive His love.

Jesus, help my heart to be simple and humble so that I can perceive Your presence in my daily life. A simple heart is one that is open to You and others as well. A humble heart is one that is always loving You and others as well. I

am not ashamed, Jesus, to know that I need You. Without You, I am nothing. I give my life to You today!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What prevents me from opening my heart more to God and live trusting in Him alone?
- 2) How can my heart be more simple and humble?

Thursday, 19th July

Isaiah 26:7-9,12,16-19, Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Come to me!

Let us listen attentively to Jesus' gentle invitation to each one of us: "Come to me".

"Come" is an appeal that reveals the intense desire of Jesus for us to come to Him. Jesus does not want anyone to walk away from Him, but to come and believe in Him, come and surrender to Him, come and trust in Him, come and follow Him.

"To" expresses the intimacy of friendship.

"Me" is Jesus Himself. It is not to go to an idea or a sentiment we have of Jesus, but to Him as a living Person. We can never enter into a relationship with an idea or a sentiment. We can and must enter into an intimate and loving relationship with Jesus who loves us first.

This is the fundamental reality of Christianity: It is an intimate relationship with Jesus. Jesus invites all who labour and are overburdened to find rest in Him. He alone can give us the rest that we need. It is a rest that rejuvenates and refreshes us. It is a rest that transforms us from within with His presence of peace.

When we go to Jesus, He invites us to take His yoke. We might wonder why is Jesus putting a yoke on us when we are already tired and overburdened? What is a yoke in the first place? A yoke is a wooden harness that is made to specifically attach two oxen together so that they can plough the field easily.

Jesus knows that we carry several heavy yoke of responsibilities. He puts His yoke on us so that He can attach Himself to us, and walk through life with us always.

Today, let us give thanks to Jesus for the gift of His love - a love that never lets us walk through life alone.

Jesus, our Friend, is waiting patiently for us to go closer to Him so that He can give us the inner rest that we need. In Him, we find peace. With Him, we have someone to partner us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I willing to respond to Jesus' invitation to me, "Come to me"?
- 2) Today, how can I open myself to let Jesus love me more?

Friday, 20th July, St. Apollinaris

Isaiah 38:1-6,21-22,7-8, Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus took a walk one sabbath day through the cornfields. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the sabbath'. But he said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry - how he went into the house of God and how they ate the loaves of offering which neither he nor his followers were allowed to eat, but which were for the priests alone? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the sabbath day the Temple priests break the sabbath without being blamed for it? Now here, I tell you, is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of Man is master of the sabbath.'

Jesus' freedom

The Pharisees, witnessing Jesus' disciples picking ears of corn and eating them on a Sabbath, immediately confronted Him on the issue of keeping the Sabbath law. The Jewish religious leaders upheld the Sabbath law rigidly and had a 'holier than thou' attitude to those who failed to do so.

Jesus knew the hearts of the Pharisees. They observed the Jewish laws strictly, and were secured in their rituals and habits. They appeared strong and faithful Jews on the outside, but their hearts were far from God.

“What I want is mercy, not sacrifice”

Today, Jesus invites us to see what is the most essential, which is not the laws but the needs of the people. It is not for us to feel ‘holy’ or appear good Christians just because we follow rituals and customs. Rather, it is for us to have a truly loving heart for others, especially the needy. Showing mercy and kindness in response to human need is what God desires from us.

Today, let us allow Jesus to set us free from the spirit of rigidity and inflexibility. May we be Christians with a big heart to love others and God with freedom and truth!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I apply the words of Jesus to my life: “What I want is mercy, not sacrifice”?
- 2) Do I love God in the way I love those around me, especially the ones in need?

Saturday, 21st July, St. Lawrence of Brindisi
Micah 2:1-5, Matthew 12:14-21

The Pharisees went out and began to plot against him, discussing how to destroy him.

Jesus knew this and withdrew from the district. Many followed him and he cured them all, but warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: Here is my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, the favourite of my soul. I will endow him with my spirit, and he will proclaim the true faith to the nations. He will not brawl or shout, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break the crushed reed, nor put out the smouldering wick till he has led the truth to victory: in his name the nations will put their hope.

Courage and simplicity

The Pharisees started to plot on how to destroy Jesus because they had already deep-seated hatred for Him. Nothing He did or said would change their hardened hearts against Him. In the gospel passage, Jesus knew this and chose to withdraw from the district. He could have tried to justify His actions or directly confront the Pharisees. He chose instead to carry on loving and putting Himself at the humble service of those who needed Him. Jesus

decision to withdraw does not mean resignation, but courage and determination. This is an attitude we too must learn to have in our own life. Regardless of the opposition and prejudices we receive from others, we must never stop doing good.

Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. He is the chosen servant, the Beloved. He brings God's tender love to people. He does not reject the weak or treat them with contempt. He gives hope to those who are hopeless. He is always ready to bring people to have a true relationship with God.

Ironically, the Pharisees were too blind to perceive Jesus as God's servant, God's Beloved. The simple people perceived Jesus as a Man of God, and they followed Him and went to Him with their needs.

Today, let us have the simplicity to perceive Jesus, God's servant, God's Beloved, alive and active in our own lives. He brings faith, hope and love to us. With Jesus, we choose to courageously love and do good, even in the face of opposition and misunderstandings.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How do I deal with confrontations and rejections? Do I continue standing up for God's truth and love, and choose to carry on doing good?
- 2) Do I desire for a simple heart that perceives Jesus in my life today?

Sunday, 22nd July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jeremiah 23:1-6, Ephesians 2:13-18, Mark 6:30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many could guess where; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

Come away

"You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while."

In this lonely place with Jesus, we are internally renewed by His steadfast love for each of us. Whatever concerns we might be burdened with, whatever our experiences of life, Jesus wants to stay with us.

Are we willing to come away and stay with Jesus?

If we do not make time to be with Jesus every day, we will end up working, rushing, being busy. The disciples, in today's gospel passage, had been busy with mission and they were caught up in the excitement of healing and teaching. Yet, Jesus invited them to stop and come away to a lonely place to be with Him again. This is because, like the disciples, our real journey in life is the constant withdrawal from the busyness of life, and entering into the interior space within us where we can be in solitude with Jesus. Here, we grow, we deepen, we surrender. In this sacred place within, we encounter ourselves to be deeply loved and truly guided by Jesus our Good Shepherd.

"Solitude begins with a time and a place for God, and God alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that God is actively present in our lives - healing, teaching and guiding -- we need to set aside a time and space to give God our undivided attention. (Matt 6:6)"
(Henri Nouwen)

Today, let us come away to a lonely place within and spend time with the One who loves us so much. Come away because it is from Jesus that we find our life, our hope, our strength.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I make time and space to come away and be with Jesus in solitude?
- 2) What is the one thing that I lack in my life to make prayer a daily commitment?

Monday, 23rd July, St. Bridget of Sweden
Micah 6:1-4,6-8, Matthew 12:38-42

Some of the scribes and Pharisees spoke up. 'Master,' they said 'we should like to see a sign from you.' He replied, 'It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. On Judgement day the men of Nineveh will stand up with

this generation and condemn it, because when Jonah preached they repented; and there is something greater than Jonah here. On Judgement day the Queen of the South will rise up with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here.'

No sign needed!

The scribes and Pharisees witnessed the many signs that Jesus performed: Jesus healing the blind and lame, raising the dead, calming the storm, etc., but they still wanted something more, something extraordinary. They wanted Jesus to prove Himself to be who He claimed to be. However, another miraculous sign, no matter how extraordinary or spectacular, would not change their minds or open their hearts to Jesus.

Who is Jesus? Is He an idea, a concept for us? Or is He a person with whom we enter into a daily relationship?

These questions are essential for us to ask ourselves and reflect deeply. This is because who Jesus is for us will determine how we live our lives daily.

We do not need any signs because we have the sign of Jesus' resurrection. With His resurrection, He continues living in us and with us. Therefore, we experience the power of Christ's resurrection working in our lives, and giving us new life, new horizon and new hope.

Today, let us ask for a deeper faith to perceive Jesus' presence in our daily life. With Him living, moving and acting in us, what external signs do we need?

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I like the scribes and Pharisees asking constantly for a sign? Or do I recognise and stay close to the living presence of Jesus in me?
- 2) How can I increase my faith in the Person of Jesus?

Tuesday, 24th July

Micah 7:14-15,18-20, Matthew 12:46-50

Jesus was speaking to the crowds when his mother and his brothers appeared; they were standing outside and were anxious to have a word with him. But to the man who told him this Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother? Who

are my brothers?’ And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.’

Belonging to God’s family

Jesus stretched out His hand towards His disciples and said, *“Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.”*

Jesus was not rejecting His family but He wanted to make a point to those listening to Him that He sees them all as His family based on their desire to do God’s will. Though not united by ties of blood, God’s new family is intrinsically bonded by His love and their love for one another and for humanity.

God’s will is to love as He loves. God’s love never compromises, never disheartens, never ignores, never puts conditions and limits. His love is merciful, compassionate, patient, unwavering, faithful and honest. It is in His very nature to love. St. John the evangelist aptly states that God is love (1 John 4: 16). God is nothing else but pure love. God creates us in His love and gives us the capacity to love as He loves.

As Christians, we belong to God’s family where we root ourselves firmly and deeply in God’s love. From His love, we love others. We build relationships of trust, honesty, faithfulness, compassion, kindness, truthfulness, peace with others around us. *We, out of love for God, choose to become servants to one another.*

“Pure love.... knows that only one thing is needed to please God: to do even the smallest things out of great love - love, and always love.” (St. Faustina)

May we always love without counting the cost but with only one desire to please God alone.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In my daily life, do I seek always to do God’s will and please Him alone?
- 2) How can I put love into action today?

Wednesday, 25th July, St. James
2 Corinthians 4:7-15, Matthew 20:20-28

The mother of sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom'. 'You do not know what you are asking' Jesus answered. 'Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can'. 'Very well,' he said 'you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.' When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

St. James, the Apostle

James and John desired to be great and powerful in the Kingdom of God. The rest of the disciples also wanted the same and so they were upset and indignant with the sons of Zebedee.

What did Jesus say to His disciples?

Jesus told them, *'This is the way of the world. Do not act like them. If you want to be first, then you must serve.'*

Today, the world continues to consider people great and mighty because of their power, success, fame and wealth. Yet, Jesus does not consider these as things to be considered for greatness. What counts for greatness and power is when we serve God and others with love and humility.

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. James who learned from Jesus, his Master what greatness and power really meant. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, St. James served the early church with passion and dedication. In the end, he was the first among the apostles to suffer martyrdom (Acts 12:1-2).

Today, let us learn from this great Saint and take the step to desire and choose to be great in God's sight.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I serve God and others with more love and humility today?

Thursday, 26th July, Ss. Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Jeremiah 2:1-3,7-8,12-13, Matthew 13:10-17

The disciples went up to Jesus and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?' 'Because' he replied 'the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are revealed to you, but they are not revealed to them. For anyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. So in their case this prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled: You will listen and listen again, but not understand, see and see again, but not perceive. For the heart of this nation has grown coarse, their ears are dull of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, for fear they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and be converted and be healed by me. 'But happy are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! I tell you solemnly, many prophets and holy men longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'

Perceive and believe

Jesus spoke in parables and not everyone would understand them. It is not because His listeners were not intellectually capable of understanding the parables. Jesus' parables are not meant to be understood with the mind, but to grasp the deeper meaning with hearts of faith.

"The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding...."

Jesus knew that there were people among the large crowds who saw Jesus and heard Him speaking but they simply remained on the surface. Their hearts remained closed and they could not perceive Jesus' identity and authority. For these people, they looked and looked but failed to perceive a deeper truth.

Only those with simple and humble hearts can truly go deeper and grasp the deeper meaning behind Jesus' words. Only those with open and receptive

hearts dare to allow the Word of God to confront, challenge and transform their lives.

“For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

Today, let us open our hearts to Jesus and allow His Word to enter deep into our hearts so that we can perceive Him in our reality and allow Him to lead us to live with a greater purpose.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I take God’s Word for granted?
- 2) How can I allow His Word to be alive and active in me?

Friday, 27th July

Jeremiah 3:14-17, Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘You are to hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart; this is the man who received the seed on the edge of the path. The one who received it on patches on rock is the man who hears the words and welcomes it at one with joy. But he has no root in him, he does not last; let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, and he falls away at once. The one who received the seed in thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this world and the lure of riches choke the word and so he produces nothing. And the one who received the seed in rich soil is the man who hears the word and understands it; he is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.’

An Open and Receptive Heart

God continues to sow the seed of His Word constantly, daily in our lives. When we allow His Word to enter and take root in our heart, we will never remain the same. This is because His Word has power to transform and bring us to live a more meaningful life of love.

St Augustine of Hippo is an example of a receptive heart that was opened to receive God’s word. Before he converted to Christianity, St. Augustine was a person who searched for meaning in all kinds of teachings and philosophies.

He was also a person who loved parties and fun time with his friends. Yet, he was never satisfied. In his search for something more in life, he met St. Ambrose, who was then the Bishop of Milan. He enjoyed the eloquent sermons of this great bishop. His desire to know the Christian God became stronger each day. One day, St. Augustine felt the weight of all his sins and 'wild' living. He became upset and troubled. He rushed to the garden, and cried: *'How long? How long, Lord? Is it to be tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour put an end to shame?'* At that moment, Augustine heard a child's voice singing *'Tolle lege! Tolle lege!'* (Take up and read! Take up and read!) Augustine felt the need to take up and read the Bible. He opened the book and the first words that caught his eyes were Romans 13, 13-14, and these words provoked him to conversion. Months later, he described that moment of conversion with these words: *'Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! You were with me, and I was not with you.... You called me, You cried out and have pierced my deafness. You have touched me, and I am on fire with the desire of your embraces.'* (Taken from 'Confessions')

St. Augustine allowed the seed of God's word to be planted in his heart. He was the good soil that yielded fruit for eternity. Today, we too can choose to grow more and more to become like good fertile soil that allows the seed of God's message to take root and bear fruits in our lives.

Question for reflection:

At this point of my life, how do I identify myself with the parable of the sower?

Saturday, 28th July

Jeremiah 7:1-11, Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, the darnel appeared as well. The owner's servants went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" "Some enemy has done this" he answered. And the servants said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and

at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn.”

Be a good wheat

What is the meaning of Jesus’ parable regarding the wheat and the darnel? A darnel is a toxic and fatal weed that is similar to a wheat in the early stage of its growth. Thus, the darnel might appear harmless but it has the power to harm the good wheat by cutting precious nourishment from it.

In today’s gospel passage, the owner refused to let the servants weed the darnel out but simply told the servants to let both grow.

Within us, we all have darnels and wheat growing together. We have our talents as well as our failures, our goodness as well as our sins, our light as well as our darkness. We experience inconsistencies and divisions within ourselves. We want many times to get rid of the darnels in us because we are afraid to face our human frailty. Many times, we focus so much on our darnels that we forget that we have been created to be good wheat. We have the inner capacity of goodness, love, kindness and compassion. Instead of fearing or rejecting our darnels, we are invited today to continue to work to be good wheat and trust that God is working with our frailties and limitations. All that matters is that we focus on God’s love and continue to develop all the positives that we have in us. We need to trust and live in His presence always.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What are the darnels that I have within me that I can offer and surrender to God?
- 2) How can I focus on being a good wheat today?

Sunday, 29th July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Kings 4:42-44, Ephesians 4: 1-6, John 6:1-15

Some time after this, Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee - or of Tiberias - and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave by curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside, and sat down there with his disciples. It was shortly before the Jewish feast of Passover. Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, ‘Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?’ He only said this to test Philip; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, ‘Two hundred

denarii would only buy enough to give them a small piece each'. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'There is a small boy here with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that between so many?' Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down'. There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and gave them out to all who were sitting ready; he then did the same with the fish, giving out as much as was wanted. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing gets wasted'. So they picked them up, and filled twelve hampers with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. The people, seeing this sign that he had given, said, 'This really is the prophet who is to come into the world'. Jesus, who could see they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, escaped back to the hills by himself.

Take, Lord, receive!

Jesus saw the large crowd coming to Him, and was moved with pity because He saw their hungry faces. He knew that they had no food with them. Thus, He decided to feed them Himself. His disciples, on the other hand, were eager to send them away as they saw that their scanty food supply was not enough even for themselves.

It was a little boy who surrendered his five loaves and two fish for Jesus to do with them as He desired. It was the simple trust of this little boy in Jesus that made the miracle possible. Jesus took that small gift and multiplied it by five thousand.

What is the message from this gospel passage for us today? Do not hold back our five loaves and two fish i.e. our small gifts, talents and abilities. Instead, let us imitate the trust of the little boy who simply surrendered and that made a difference to so many people. If Jesus can feed five thousand people out of a meagre offering of five loaves and two fish, He too would make much out of the little we give to Him. All we can humbly say is *"Lord, take the little I have and the nothingness that I am, and use me to bring goodness to this world."* Let Jesus use our small gifts to make a real difference to the people in our life.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I trust Jesus that He can use my small gifts, talents and abilities for the benefits of others?

Monday, 30th July

Jeremiah 13:1-11, Matthew 13:31-35

Jesus put another parable before the crowds, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest shrub of all and becomes a tree so that the birds of the air come and shelter in its branches.' He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through'. In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfil the prophecy: I will speak to you in parables and expound things hidden since the foundation of the world.'

Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed

Jesus could have chosen to speak about a majestic cedar tree, a magnificent fig tree or a grandiose palm tree. Yet, He chose to use a humble and insignificant mustard seed which is the smallest of all seeds to teach the people about the Kingdom of God. Why?

For Jesus, the reign of God does not display itself in big, great and powerful events. Instead, the Kingdom of God can be seen in seemingly small and insignificant ways, just as a bush growing from a tiny seed.

In the Old Testament, there is a beautiful story of Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of Israel. He looked for God in the furious wind, in the powerful earthquake, in the burning fire but God was not present in these happenings. Instead, it was in the quiet gentle whispering of a voice that God revealed Himself to Elijah. (1 Kings 19:11-13)

We, like Elijah, have the tendency to look for God's actions in the external spectacular events of our life, and fail to recognise Him acting quietly through the inner core of our own lives. Jesus wants us to open our hearts to grasp God and His saving presence in our ordinary life. He wants us to constantly be surprised by God who works beyond our understanding and limitations.

Let us allow the Kingdom of God to reign in our hearts today!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I open to watch for God and His actions in the small and ordinary events of today?
- 2) What is Jesus' message for me in this time of prayer?

**Tuesday, 31st July, St. Ignatius of Loyola
Jeremiah 14:17-22, Matthew 13:36-43**

Leaving the crowds, Jesus went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain the parable about the darnel in the field to us'. He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the evil one; the enemy who sowed them, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that provoke offences and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the virtuous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Listen, anyone who has ears!'

The parable continues...

The disciples could not understand the parable of the darnel and wheat. They asked Jesus to explain to them the significance of it. With great patience of a good Master, Jesus opened the minds of His disciples to grasp the parable's deeper meaning.

Let us sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him explaining the parable to us. Let us allow His words to confront and challenge us to a deeper transformation, to become His real followers.

Jesus is the sower who sows goodness in our hearts when we welcome His Good News of God's love. With hearts full of love, we spread goodness, compassion and mercy by our words and actions into this world and transform it into God's kingdom.

However, there are also people who open their hearts to the seeds of divisions, hatred, jealousy, anger, etc. They too live in this world and might even be present in the church. We should not be startled to find the presence of such seeds in our midst. Rather, we should focus on staying close to Jesus and allowing Him to help us to keep growing to be good wheat. At

the same time, we should practice love by praying for those people who are living contrary to Gospel values. We must never give up hope on anyone because God is constantly at work and they might open themselves to His merciful love and be converted to become good wheat.

Let us continue to draw close to Jesus and receive from Him the nourishment we need to keep growing to become good wheat.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the significance of this parable of the wheat and darnel for me?
- 2) How can I continue to keep growing to become good wheat and help others around me to always grow to become good wheat?