

Wednesday, 1st August, St. Alphonsus Liguori
Jeremiah 15:10,16-21, Matthew 13:44-46

Jesus said to the crowds: 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.'

Seek and you will find

"You may ask me: How does one find the Kingdom of God? Each of us has a particular journey; each of us has his path in life. For some the encounter with Jesus is awaited, desired, long sought, as it is revealed to us in the parable of the merchant who travels the world in search of something valuable. For others it happens suddenly, almost by chance, as in the parable of the farmer. This reminds us that God allows Himself to be met, because He is the first who desires to encounter us and the first to seek that encounter with us: he came to be "God with us". And Jesus is among us, He is here today. He said: when you are gathered in my name, I am among you. The Lord is here, He is with us, He is in our midst! It is He who seeks us, it is He who lets Himself be found even by those who do not seek Him. At times He allows Himself to be found in unusual places and at unexpected times. When one finds Jesus, that person is captivated, overcome, and it is a joy to leave our usual lifestyle, sometimes desolate and apathetic, to embrace the Gospel, to let ourselves be guided by the new logic of love and of humble and unselfish service. I'll ask you a question, but I don't want you to answer: How many of you read a passage of the Gospel every day? How many of you, perhaps, rush to finish work so you don't miss a TV programme... To have the Gospel in your hands, to have the Gospel on your bedside table, to have the Gospel in your pocket, to open it and read the Word of Jesus: this is how the Kingdom of God comes. Contact with the Word of God draws us near to the Kingdom of God. Consider this: a small Gospel always at hand, ready to open when the opportunity arises, ready to read what Jesus says; Jesus is there."
(Pope Francis)

Jesus is our treasure, our precious pearl that nobody and nothing can take away from us. Having Him, we are ready and willing to sell everything and enter into His new way of life and love. Our lives can never remain the same after each encounter with Jesus. Like the man who found the hidden

treasure and the man who got the precious pearl, we too will experience the deep joy of having the presence of Jesus in our lives.

Today, let us always be ready and open to find Jesus who is always never far from us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is Jesus my treasure, my precious pearl?
- 2) How do I live with Jesus today?

Thursday, 2nd August

Jeremiah 18:1-6, Matthew 13:47-53

Jesus said to the crowds: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in a basket and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Have you understood all this?' They said, 'Yes'. And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old'. When Jesus had finished these parables he left the district.

A Love that draws us into life

Jesus talked always about life, and not complicated concepts and abstract ideas. He used simple words and common life's experiences to open the eyes of His listeners to see God in the depths of their lives.

In today's passage, Jesus used a very familiar imagery of fishermen casting a dragnet into the sea. Hence, the crowds listening to him would appreciate what Jesus had to say. It was a common sight to see fishermen pulling their nets full of catch to shore and collecting the good ones in a basket and throwing away those that were of no use to them.

Using this simple image, Jesus led the people to be more receptive to God's reign. *"This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace..."*

These are very strong words from Jesus. God, who is love, calls each person to be in a personal relationship with Him. His love does not exclude or divide

any one. However, we are the ones who separate ourselves from God when we deliberately choose to live a life contrary to the Gospel, despite knowing God and experiencing His love. When we turn away from God, we exclude God from our lives.

Today, we are called to become like a scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom. A scribe is a teacher of the law who studies the laws, and scrupulously keep the laws without entering into a loving relationship with God Himself. However, a scribe who becomes a disciple is one who allows Jesus to bring a deeper experience of God, and live His life in a completely different way, Jesus' way. Let us then enter into the parable and let its power transform us today. We are called once more to choose to enter into a relationship with God and live a life for Him and with Him.

Question for reflection:

1) How has Jesus' words affected and changed me to live life differently?

Friday, 3rd August

Jeremiah 26:1-9, Matthew 13:54-58

Coming to his home town, Jesus taught the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were astonished and said, 'Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? His sisters, too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?' And they would not accept him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country and in his own house', and he did not work many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Just a carpenter's son

Jesus went to His home town and taught the people in the synagogue. They were impressed by the way He spoke and taught. However, they rejected Jesus because He was, in their eyes, 'the carpenter's son', a poor working peasant. They despised Jesus because they knew His background, His family, His childhood. How familiarity can breed foolish contempt! Because of their lack of faith, Jesus could not work any miracles.

Today, God continues to use ordinary people to be messengers of His Good News to us. Often, we fail to recognise God's voice just because He is speaking through our friend, spouse, parent or child. We do not listen

because we want God to use impressive preachers or eloquent speakers to give us the message we want to hear. God can also use common events and daily circumstances to speak to us.

If only we humble ourselves and listen attentively to the voice of God in the messengers He sends along our way. Let us always be open and allow God to speak to us in the way He desires.

Lord, help me always to be open to you!

Saturday, 4th August, St. John Vianney
Jeremiah 26:11-16,24, Matthew 14:1-12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the reputation of Jesus, and said to his court, 'This is John the Baptist himself; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him'. Now it was Herod who had arrested John, chained him up and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John had told him, 'It is against the Law for you to have her'. He had wanted to kill him but was afraid of the people, who regarded John as a prophet. Then, during the celebrations for Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and so delighted Herod that he promised on oath to give her anything she asked. Prompted by her mother she said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head, here, on a dish'. The king was distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he ordered it to be given her, and sent and had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought in on a dish and given to the girl who took it to her mother. John's disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went off to tell Jesus.

I must continue to bear testimony to truth

John the Baptist was sent to prison and later was brutally murdered all because he told Herod: *"It is against the Law for you to have her."* Herod took his brother's wife unlawfully. John the Baptist stood up against Herod's and Herodias' adulterous relationship and had the courage to defend the sacred dignity of marriage. He paid the price for telling the truth. What about us? Do we dare to stand for the truth or simply remain silent? When we witness a dishonest deed done by a fellow colleague, will we stand for the truth? When a close friend is living in a lie, will we speak the truth? When an injustice is done to the poor, will we bear witness to the truth?

As Christians, we must always choose to stand up for the truth and not to be afraid of rejections or criticisms of others. Today, let us always tell and live the truth with love.

“Truth alone will endure, all the rest will be swept away before the tide of time. I must continue to bear testimony to truth even if I am forsaken by all. Mine may today be a voice in the wilderness, but it will be heard when all other voices are silenced, if it is the voice of Truth.” (Mahatma Gandhi)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I the voice of Truth in situations where lies and dishonesty are present?
- 2) What prevents me from speaking and standing up for what is the truth?

**Sunday, 5th August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Times
Exodus 16:2-4,12-15, Ephesians 4:17,20-24, John 6:24-35**

When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ Jesus answered: ‘I tell you most solemnly, you are not looking for me because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.’ Then they said to him, ‘What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?’ Jesus gave them this answer, ‘This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent’. So they said, ‘What sign will you give to show us that we should believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat’. Jesus answered: ‘I tell you most solemnly, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’. ‘Sir,’ they said ‘give us that bread always.’ Jesus answered: ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst.’

I am the Bread of Life

Among the people who went looking for Jesus, some were opportunists

while others were sincere in following this great Rabbi. Jesus knew the hearts of each person in the crowd, and thus, He said to those absorbed with their material gains, "You are not looking for me because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat."

Why do we follow Jesus? Do we search and go to Jesus for what we could get out from Him?

Many times, we say to Jesus in our prayers, 'Lord, if you answer my prayer, I will go for mass everyday and donate money to the poor.' or 'Lord, you must take care of my family, I will then be nice to those around me.' If this is our constant prayer, then we are not following Jesus in faith.

Jesus is telling us the same words he told the crowd, "Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life."

What does that mean for us today?

Jesus is the Bread of Life that comes to offer Himself as the eternal feast that will never make us hunger or thirst for things which do not last forever. Jesus is the Bread of Life whose love will always provide for us all that we need. He asks from us one thing- 'Believe in me.'

Let us come to Jesus, not looking to satisfy our personal agendas, but to listen and believe with sincere heart that He is our Bread of Life.

Question for reflection:

1) Why do I want to follow Jesus, the Bread of Life?

**Monday, 6th August, The Transfiguration of the Lord
Daniel 7:9-10,13-14, 2 Peter 1:16-19, Mark 9:2-10**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus: 'Rabbi,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'. He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them anymore but

only Jesus. As they came down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

Entering into Prayerful Silence

Jesus knew the odds of a violent end. He knew that He would soon approach His suffering and death as He continued the journey to Jerusalem. Jesus withdrew into solitude with God in prayer, as He sought to draw strength and comfort for His impending end.

What about us? In our struggles with the many responsibilities and difficulties in life, do we set time and space for prayer? Today, as we contemplate on Jesus praying on the mountain, let us increase our desire for prayer where we let ourselves be deeply loved and truly guided by God.

"The most generous choices, especially the persevering, are the fruit of profound and prolonged union with God in prayerful silence." (St. John Paul II)

On the mountain, Jesus had a deep spiritual experience where He encountered Elijah and Moses who appeared in their glory. These two great personages of Israel stood by Jesus' side to give Him consolation. In the end, Jesus continued the journey with more determination and remained single-minded to the end.

"This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him."

Jesus is the one on whom we need to fix our eyes and follow with greater faithfulness, even in the midst of challenges and difficulties. Jesus is the one to whom we need to listen as He guides us to walk on with determination and single-mindedness in our journey of faith.

Let us stay close to Jesus and listen to what He has to say to us.

Tuesday, 7th August

Jeremiah 30:1-2,12-15,18-22, Matthew 14:22-36 or 15:1-2,10-14

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he would send the crowds away. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there

alone, while the boat, by now far out on the lake, was battling with a heavy sea, for there was a head-wind. In the fourth watch of the night he went towards them, walking on the lake, and when the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were terrified. 'It is a ghost' they said, and cried out in fear. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.' It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' 'Come' said Jesus. Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but as soon as he felt the force of the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord! Save me!' he cried. Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'Man of little faith,' he said 'why did you doubt?' And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God'. Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the local people recognised him they spread the news through the whole neighbourhood and took all that were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were completely cured.

All will be well

Jesus' disciples were caught in a storm; they were trying their best to battle the strong wind and waves. They were afraid of the storm, yet there was something else that added to their fear. They saw something beyond their ability to understand. A figure walking towards them on water. They were terrified and shouted, *"It is a ghost"*. At once, Jesus called out to them, saying *"Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid."* Jesus calmed their fears with His presence and gave them courage to go on despite the storm.

There are many moments in life where we experience that all is going well. However, when storms of troubles and difficulties come by our way, we suddenly realise that our faith is not so deeply rooted in God as we thought. We, like the disciples, start to become afraid. In such situations, we might either look for God even more or blame Him for all our problems. Let us find consolation that Jesus is always coming towards us, and calming our fears with these words, *"Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid."* It is for us to look for His presence in the midst of our storms and find peace in Him alone.

In the gospel passage, Peter, ever so impulsive, wanted to walk on water towards Jesus. In the beginning, Peter's eyes were fixed firmly on Jesus, and he steadily walked on water, with trust and love that Jesus would never let him down. However, he soon took his eyes off Jesus, looked at the wind and

waves and started to sink. Jesus at once held onto Peter and helped him to emerge again.

Our eyes must be constantly fixed on Jesus alone. When we lose focus of Him, that is when we start to feel overwhelmed with the demands of life, expectations of people, problems and trials that come along our way. Look at Jesus! Hold our gaze firmly on Him! He will never let us down because His love for us is too great.

Today, let us be in constant awareness that we are not alone as we journey through life. Jesus is with us, and so we have no need to fear.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) When difficulties and hardships come my way, how do I react?
- 2) What is Jesus inviting me to do today?

Wednesday, 8th August, St. Dominic
Jeremiah 31:1-7, Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Then out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he answered her not a word. And his disciples went and pleaded with him. 'Give her what she wants,' they said 'because she is shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel'. But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet. 'Lord,' she said 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs'. She retorted, 'Ah yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table'. Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

A beautiful humble faith

"Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil."
A Canaanite woman came to Jesus, desperately asking for help on behalf of her beloved daughter. Her heart suffered as she witnessed her daughter being tormented and in pain. Strangely, Jesus did not utter a word in response. Adding to her humiliation, the disciples urged Jesus to send her away.

Jesus' answered this woman rather curtly, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel"*. With such an answer, this woman could have simply walked away. However, she persisted, "Lord, help me."

How fervent her request was! How strong her faith in Jesus was! She believed that only He could save her beloved daughter and she would not let Him go until He helped her.

From the start, Jesus perceived that this woman believed in Him with her whole heart, mind and strength. He wanted to use this opportunity to teach His disciples and those following Him a lesson on genuine faith.

Thus, Jesus told her, *"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the houndedogs"*. It seemed as though Jesus was insulting this woman, but He was actually stating a cultural truth. The Jews during Jesus' time regarded the Gentiles as dogs, and they were not supposed to eat at the same family table. The woman did not react with anger but with humility. In her humility, she recognised her nothingness as well as her great dependence on God and His mercy. She asked for nothing but a small crumb of bread from the Master's table. Jesus rejoiced in her beautiful faith and granted her request.

There are moments in life when we pray for ourselves and for others' needs. However, God seems to be silent and distant. Do we walk away from God in anger? Can we imitate the simple and humble faith of the Canaanite woman who asked and waited patiently to be heard? Is our faith that great and beautiful like the Canaanite woman?

May we trust God and know that He will answer us in His time and His ways.

Thursday, 9th August, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
Jeremiah 31:31-34, Matthew 16:13-23

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'. 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God'. Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the

underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.’ Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. ‘Heaven preserve you, Lord;’ he said ‘this must not happen to you’. But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God’s way but man’s.’

A Suffering Christ

When Jesus asked His disciples the crucial question, “Who do you say I am?” Peter spontaneously answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Peter, like many of the disciples, recognised that Jesus was not a mere rabbi or prophet, but He was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus praised Peter for speaking the truth, and was given the task to be the Rock on which the Church would be built. What a glorious moment for Peter!

Yet, the very next instance, Peter fell from his pedestal when Jesus reproached him for being a stumbling block, an obstacle in his path. This was because Peter had taken Jesus aside and remonstrated with Him regarding His talk on suffering and death. Peter could not personally accept a suffering Messiah, a rejected Messiah. He wanted a glorious Saviour without the cross. Jesus, however, knew that He had to walk the path of passion and death first before His resurrection. Are we too afraid of suffering?
Can we love Jesus, the suffering Christ?

Friday, 10th August, St. Lawrence
2 Corinthians 9:6-10, John 12:24-26

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life will lose it; anyone who hate his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him.’

A grain of wheat

We celebrate the feast of a very little known saint, St. Lawrence. Let us look at his life and see how we can follow the example of this great saint.

St. Lawrence, from Spain, was appointed 'archdeacon of Rome' by Pope Sixtus. In the time of persecution in Rome, St. Lawrence was asked by the prefect of Rome to hand over the treasures of the Church, he obediently did just that. He brought to the Roman prefect the treasures of the church by lining the poor, the lame, the lepers, the widows, the orphans. He said bravely to the prefect, *"The Church is truly rich, far richer than your emperor."* The Roman prefect was so angry that he had St. Lawrence put to death by roasting him over fire. Without losing his sense of humour even in a time of intense suffering, St. Lawrence said to his torturers, *'It is well done. Turn me over!'*

St. Lawrence was the grain of wheat that fell to the ground and yielded a rich harvest. He died for Christ because he knew that Christ died for him first. Today, let us imitate this great Saint! We might not be asked to give our lives as martyrs. However, we can still give our lives by dying to ourselves: our selfishness, greed, impatience, temper, pride, etc, and instead, let Christ's life become stronger.

The story of St. Lawrence or any other stories of our favourite Saints are not just for us to listen and admire, but it is for us to listen and emulate.

Today, let us ask for God's grace to follow the examples of so many holy men and women who have given their lives for Christ!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What prevents me from being a grain of wheat that chooses to fall to the ground and die so that I can give life?
- 2) How can I express my love for Jesus today?

Saturday, 11th August, St. Clare
Habakkuk 1:12-2:4, Matthew 17:14-20

A man came up to Jesus and went down on his knees before him. 'Lord,' he said 'take pity on my son: he is a lunatic and in a wretched state; he is always falling into the fire or into the water. I took him to your disciples and they

were unable to cure him.’ ‘Faithless and perverse generation!’ Jesus said in reply ‘How much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.’ And when Jesus rebuked it the devil came out of the boy who was cured from that moment. Then the disciples came privately to Jesus. ‘Why were we unable to cast it out? they asked. He answered, ‘Because you have little faith. I tell you solemnly, if your faith were the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mountain, “Move from here to there”, and it would move; nothing would be impossible for you.’

Faith and Prayer

The disciples were puzzled because they tried to do what Jesus did but they failed to do so. Jesus told them the reason, *“Because you have little faith...”*

What Jesus is asking from His disciples is a living faith that seeks to empty themselves of themselves in order to be filled with God and His presence of love. His disciples tried to cure the man’s son, but they depended on their own strength and capabilities, and not on God.

Jesus, on the other hand, was a man of prayer. His heart was constantly turned towards God the Father, with child-like trust and dependency. He did everything with God and for God.

What about us? How is the depth of our faith? A deep and mature faith comes from being with God in prayer. Thus, we should ask ourselves first: how is the level of our prayer life? Is it simply a verbal repetition of prescribed prayers with hearts far from God? Or is prayer an intimate encounter with God in silence and solitude?

Through prayer, we are drawn by Love always into a mature relationship of trust and dependency.

“Throughout history there have been many men and women who have chosen to imitate Jesus as he withdraws into the desert... To pass time in the desert means to create a little emptiness and silence around us, to rediscover the road to our heart, to remove ourselves from the noise and external distractions, to enter into contact with the deepest source of our being and our faith.”

(Fr. Cantalamessa)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I grow more as a person of prayer, like Jesus?

Sunday, 12th August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Times
Kings 19:4-8, Ephesians 4:30-5:2, John 6:41-51

The Jews were complaining to each other about Jesus, because he had said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven'. 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph' they said. 'We know his father and mother. How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' Jesus said in reply, 'Stop complaining to each other. No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets: They will all be taught by God, and to hear the teaching of the Father, and learn from it, is to come to me. Not that anybody has seen the Father, except the one who comes from God: he has seen the Father. I tell you most solemnly, everybody who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that a man may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

A gift for others

When we contemplate Jesus in the Eucharist, what do we see? In the Eucharist, we contemplate the greatest self-giving love that gives Himself so that we might live forever. In the Eucharist, Jesus continues to call each one of us to make our life as gifts for others. This is because our lives are lives for others. Yet, this is something we consistently forget.

We make our life as gifts to others when we offer to others our joy, peace, hope and love.

Are we willing to share our life with others?

Jesus shares His Body and Blood so that we, who receive Him, can become a living Christ in this world. What is stopping us?

One thing that we need to have in order to give ourselves away is the gift of generosity. Being generous is not a spontaneous act for many of us because we tend to be calculative and impose limits to our giving. Look and contemplate on the total self-giving of Jesus in the Eucharist. Jesus never holds back His love, but generously gives Himself out of pure love for us. Let

us learn from Him how to give ourselves in the same way He gives Himself to us.

Generosity cannot come from obligation or guilt. Rather, it comes from hearts who are free to love like Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) How can my life be a gift for others today?

**Monday, 13th August, Ss. Pontian and Hippolytus
Ezekiel 1:2-5,24-28, Matthew 17:22-27**

One day when they were together in Galilee, Jesus said to his disciples, 'The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the power of men; they will put him to death, and on the third day he will be raised to life again'. And a great sadness came over them. When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half shekel came to Peter and said, 'Does your master not pay the half-shekel?' 'Oh yes' he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, 'Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?' And when he replied, 'From foreigners', Jesus said, 'Well then, the sons are exempt. However, so as not to offend these people, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that bites, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for you.'

Living as God's children in this world

Some Jewish tax collectors approached Peter and asked if his master paid the tax of half-shekel for the up keeping of the temple. Peter answered, "Oh yes." and went into the house.

Jesus knew what took place between Peter and the tax collectors. He wanted to use this incident to teach Peter an important lesson about living as God's children in the midst of the world.

Jesus posed a question to Peter, "From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?" Peter's obvious answer was, "From foreigners." Children of the kings are not required to pay taxes because of the reality of their kinship.

Likewise, Peter and all those who believed in Jesus have entered into a new and personal

relationship with God. Thus, as God's children, Jesus and His disciples should not pay the Temple tax. However, Jesus wanted to avoid any possible scandal so he told Peter to catch the Jewish tax collector and pay the tax.

We pay taxes in order to make our contribution to the needs of our society. However, we must never forget that our fundamental identity is that we belong to God, not to this world. Therefore, we must never compromise on the Gospel values like truth, justice and peace. Building God's Kingdom here on earth should be our main priority.

Interestingly, Jesus told Peter to catch the first fish and he would find the money to pay the tax. As children of God, we must never be afraid that God will never provide for us. When we are concerned with doing God's work of love and service, He will supply us for our needs.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I aware of my identity as God's child living in this society?
- 2) Have I experienced God's providential care? How can I learn to trust in Him more?

**Tuesday, 14th August, St. Maximilian Kolbe
Ezekiel 2:8-3:4, Matthew 18:1-5,10-12-14**

At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' So he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. Then he said, 'I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven. 'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? I tell you solemnly, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.'

To live in the present

The issue of being the greatest was the disciples' concern. Is this our concern as well?

Jesus made it clear to His disciples as well as to us that it is not a matter of becoming great, but about changing and becoming like little children.

Little children live simply in the present moment with a sense of joy and wonderment. They do not live in the past or worry about the future. They laugh, play, love, dance, sing without wondering about the opinions of others. They are who they are, without pretence.

Jesus invites us to become like little children and live in the present moment. It is in the present moment where God reveals Himself. In the present moment, we come to be aware that God is with us and that He cares for us. We need to plan and work for a better future, but without missing the present moment. We take delight in life itself with all its goodness and wonderment. Living in the present, we learn how to love the people around us rather than focus on past resentments or the many expectations we have of them. Becoming like little children leads us to let God be God, let others be others and let ourselves be ourselves.

Jesus invites us to enter into the process of *metanoia* (Greek), which means literally to change our mind. Our mind controls all and has the power to pull us to live in our memories of the past or the anxieties of the future. Our mind judges and labels others, and prevents us from appreciating others as they are. On our own, we cannot change our minds. The Holy Spirit who lives in us is constantly at work in us, and helps us to encounter God's presence in the present moment. It is a constant journey of opening ourselves to let go of our past and future, and live at peace with God, others and ourselves each moment of today. This is where life begins!

**Wednesday, 15th August, The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Revelation 11:19,12:1-6,10, 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, Luke 1:39-56**

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.' And Mary said: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and

my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy -according to the promise he made to our ancestors-of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’ Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

A Moment of Togetherness

Both Mary and Elizabeth did not understand fully what was happening to them and their families. Both were pregnant. Both were somewhat perplexed. Mary, a young unwed girl, faced the scandal of her pregnancy. Elizabeth, an old woman defied nature and carried a baby in her womb. Moreover, her husband, Zechariah was struck dumb and nobody could make sense of all that had happened.

Today’s passage is a passage about the gift of friendship. When Mary and Elizabeth met, they both found solace and comfort in each other’s presence. Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, affirmed Mary, *“Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? ... ”*

Mary, being affirmed and understood, gave praise to God by singing the song of Magnificat. In the simple moment of togetherness, Mary and Elizabeth could truly celebrate, even though the future seemed bleak.

We can identify ourselves with Mary and Elizabeth too. In moments when we feel misunderstood, fearful and confused, we have friends whom we can go to as places of solace and to be comforted again, be loved again, be affirmed again. We need friends in this journey of life.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption, let us rejoice at Mary’s journey of life - one that was full of uncertainties, yet full of moments of blessing and celebration.

Questions for reflection:

1) Can I give thanks to God for the people who have journeyed with me

through the ups and downs of my life? Who are they?

2) How can I not take people in my life for granted?

Thursday, 16th August, St. Stephen of Hungary
Ezekiel 12:1-12, Matthew 18:21-19:1

Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. And so the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet. "Give me time" he said "and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. "Pay what you owe me" he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, "Give me time and I will pay you". But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. "You wicked servant," he said "I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.' Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and he left Galilee and came into the part of Judaea which is on the far side of the Jordan.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is difficult because it makes us appear weak and vulnerable. Jesus invites us to live in this reality of forgiveness that is a mark of inner strength and love.

"Forgiveness is not about forgetting. It is about letting go of another person's throat... Forgiveness does not create a relationship. Unless people speak the truth about what they have done and change their mind and behaviour, a

relationship of trust is not possible. When you forgive someone you certainly release them from judgment, but without true change, no real relationship can be established.....Forgiveness in no way requires that you trust the one you forgive. But should they finally confess and repent, you will discover a miracle in your own heart that allows you to reach out and begin to build between you a bridge of reconciliation.....Forgiveness does not excuse anything.....You may have to declare your forgiveness a hundred times the first day and the second day, but the third day will be less and each day after, until one day you will realize that you have forgiven completely. And then one day you will pray for his wholeness.....”

(Wm Paul Young)

Forgiveness sets us free when we allow the past to be in the past, and not carry it with us like a heavy chain that chains us and prevents us from being free. Today, Jesus invites us to let go of any bitterness and resentment that we might still carry with us in our hearts.

Let Jesus infuse us fully with His unconditional mercy. Only from a personal experience of His love towards us, can we have the desire to let go of another person's throat and build bridges of reconciliation instead. The journey to forgive is long. However, we can take a small step towards it.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there someone whom I cannot forgive?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Friday, 17th August

Ezekiel 16:1-15,60,63 or 16:59-63, Matthew 19:3-12

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and to test him they said, 'Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?' He answered, 'Have you not read that the creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man must leave father and mother, and cling to his wife, and the two become one body? They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide'. They said to him, 'Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?' 'It was because you were so unteachable' he said 'that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: the man who divorces his wife - I am not speaking of fornication - and marries another, is

guilty of adultery.’ The disciples said to him, ‘If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is not advisable to marry’. But he replied, ‘It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born that way from their mother’s womb, there are eunuchs made so by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.’

Unity comes from God

‘So then, what God has united, man must not divide’

Disunity comes when we put ourselves as the centre of our world. Disunity does not come from God because God always unites, not divides. Look at our families, our parishes, our communities, our friendships - Is there unity or division?

In today’s gospel passage, some Pharisees went up to Jesus and asked Him whether it was against the Law for a person to divorce His wife. Jesus was very clear that God unites, never divides. Thus, since the beginning of time, God has created human beings for unity, not separation. Be it in the context of marriage or any other relationships, we have the capacity to welcome one another, to love and forgive one another and to work for reconciliation. Going back to marriage, the love that binds a man and woman together comes from God. Thus, they no longer become two but one. By staying as one, they form families that are signs of God’s love to this fragmented and divided world.

In whatever state of life we are in - as singles, married or religious - we are called to a daily conversion where we put aside our self-centred egos and let God’s love transform us from within to become like Him. Let us remain united in God so that we can be united with one another.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I allow God’s love to be the unifying factor in the way I relate with others in my family, at my workplace/school, in the parish, in my community?

Saturday, 18th August

Ezekiel 18:1-10,13,30-32, Matthew 19:13-15

People brought little children to Jesus, for him to lay his hands on them and say a prayer. The disciples turned them away, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs'. Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

A simple and humble heart is what pleases God

Listen attentively to Jesus' words: *"Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."*

What is it with little children that Jesus seems to be attracted to them?

It is the simplicity of a little child's heart that Jesus is deeply pleased with. Jesus Himself chose to be born as a little child in a manger, instead of coming as a spectacular adult king living in a grand palace. Jesus grew but His heart remained simple, uncomplicated and humble.

Today, Jesus continues coming to us in simple and humble ways. He comes to us in the silence of our hearts. He gives Himself to us in the Sacraments. He speaks to us through His Word. Jesus is all about simplicity.

"This is all that I have learned: God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated." (Ecclesiastes 7:29)

Today, Jesus calls us again to let simplicity be the style in which we live, we relate, we think, we desire, we make decisions. He also calls us to look for Him, not in grand and spectacular events, but in the ordinariness of daily life.

"Our Lord needs from us neither great deeds nor profound thoughts. Neither intelligence nor talents. He cherishes simplicity." (St. Terese of Lisieux)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I cherish this virtue of simplicity? Why?
- 2) How can I live this day being less complicated and simpler?

Sunday, 19th August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Proverbs 9:1-6, Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the crowd: 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I

shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.’ Then the Jews started arguing with one another: ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ they said. Jesus replied: I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me. This is the bread come down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.’

Nourished in order to Give

Today as always, people hunger for God. We are in the world in order to be bridges to connect God to people, and people to God. We, as a student, a parent, a retiree, a worker, etc, can bring God’s life through the concrete options we make, the lifestyle we live, the jobs we do, the words we say.

Today, Jesus invites each of us to be nourished once more by *“this living bread that has come down from heaven.”* Jesus is our source of nourishment as we face this arduous but beautiful mission of bringing God to the people we meet and encounter.

Today, let Jesus be our Living Bread. With him, we will never be afraid to live as Christians in this modern world with its many challenges.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live with more awareness that I am sent to bring the Good News of God’s love to the people I encounter each day?

Monday, 20th August, St. Bernard Ezekiel 24:15-24, Matthew 19:16-22

There was a man who came to Jesus and asked, ‘Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ He said, ‘Which?’ ‘These:’ Jesus replied ‘You must not kill. You must not commit adultery. You must not bring false witness. Honour your father and mother, and: you must love your neighbour as yourself’ The young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these. What more do I

need to do?’ Jesus said, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me’. But when the young man heard these words he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

A Series of Small Steps towards Jesus

In today’s gospel passage, a young man eagerly went up to Jesus to know what he had to do in order to gain eternal life. He was a morally upright man who had been doing good all his life. Now, he was searching for something more.

When Jesus told him to go, sell all what he had and give the money to the poor; and then to follow Him, he hesitated. This young man understood one thing, that is authentic discipleship went beyond mere actions. In order to possess the spiritual joy and fullness of life that he so yearned for, he needed to let go of his material securities, i.e. his great wealth. In his nothingness, he had to turn to God and learn to depend on Him alone. This young man felt the attraction of Jesus’ invitation but he was too attached to his wealth. He went away from Jesus, sad.

Jesus calls each of us to let go of the things that hold onto us so tightly that prevent us from truly following Him. Why are we afraid to let go of our ‘great wealth’, of laziness, of certain addiction, of pride, etc? Why do we not trust more in Jesus who can give us the fullness of love that we long for?

“What seemed to impress people was the realization that this story does not imply a huge leap from everything to nothing but rather a long series of small steps in the direction of love... It is not so much a question of detachment as it is a question of fully trusting and following the voice of love.” (Henri Nouwen)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What message do I get from praying with the story of the young rich man?
- 2) Why do I find it hard to let go of my ‘great wealth’ and learn to trust more in Jesus?

Tuesday, 21st August

Ezekiel 28:1-10, Matthew 19:23-30

Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you solemnly, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.' When the disciples heard this they were astonished. 'Who can be saved, then?' they said. Jesus gazed at them. 'For men' he told them 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.' Then Peter spoke. 'What about us?' he said to him 'We have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?' Jesus said to him, 'I tell you solemnly, when all is made new and the Son of Man sits on his throne of glory, you will yourselves sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life. Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

Sharing and not hoarding

"The world tells us to seek success, power and money; God tells us to seek humility, service and love." (Pope Francis)

Today, let us ask ourselves: Can we detach ourselves from the surplus of riches that we have accumulated? Can we give up our surplus with glad and generous hearts to give to those in need?

Those who are rich in God's sight are those who allow their success, power and money to be their Masters, and selfishly hoard everything for themselves and give little or even nothing to the poor. Those who are rich in God's sight are those who fail to share the surplus of money, food, possessions, time and even talents with those around them.

In the world we live in, we have been brought up with this mentality that it is every person for himself/herself. Thus, we live focusing on our own success and benefits. Like Jesus, if we seek humility, service and love, we would look out of our own small world to the needs of our brothers and sisters. We would then give and keep giving according to our abilities.

Today, Jesus invites us to detach and free ourselves from the surpluses of our wealth - money, possessions, time, talents - and share with the poor and the needy around us. This is the requirement for us who desire to truly follow Jesus.

Wednesday, 22nd August, The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Ezekiel 34:1-11, Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard. Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage". So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because no one has hired us" they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too". In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first". So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner. "The men who came last" they said "have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?" Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

Generous love

"Why be envious because I am generous?"

It is generosity that made the landowner to keep going out to the marketplace and call workers to work in his vineyard. It is generosity that moved him to pay every worker, no matter the hours he had worked, the full wage.

In the same way that the owner of the vineyard was generous, God too is generous. God, out of His compassion, always gives and gives with open hands. God, out of His faithfulness, always calls us at various moments of our lives to bring us back into His love.

Entering into His vineyard, we are with God and will start to recognise the inner dignity we have as His children. We will then work for the Kingdom, not as labourers seeking for compensation, but as His children seeking only to

please Him and love Him. When we know who we are for God, we will then also recognise our fellow workers in the vineyard as God's children and as our brothers and sisters too. We will then rejoice at God's generous love showered on our brothers and sisters. We will be delighted at what others receive from God, instead of being resentful or envious of them.

Today, God comes to us and calls us once more to enter into His vineyard so that we can encounter His love again. From there, we start to see ourselves and others in a new light.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I experienced God coming to me at different points of my life and bringing me back to His love?
- 2) Am I happy with God's generosity in my life? Am I happy with His generosity in others' lives? Why?

Thursday, 23rd August, St. Rose of Lima
Ezekiel 36:23-28, Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus began to speak in parables once again to the chief priests and elders of the people: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants. "Tell those who have been invited" he said "that I have my banquet all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the crossroads in the town and invite everyone you can find to the wedding". So these servants went out on to the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth". For many are called, but few are chosen.'

Enter into this Feast!

One thing that we like most is to be invited by our friends for feasts where we know that there will be good company, great fellowship and, of course, fantastic food. Today, Jesus invites us to the most grand feasts of all - i.e. to enter into a daily fellowship with God. In this intimate relationship with God, our hearts will never be empty of love and affection. Today, Jesus calls us to not wait but come and join in the feast of love. Like the king in the passage, God invites everyone, good and bad, to come and enjoy living a life with Him. It is time to stop our excuses, "I am not worthy enough for God to love me." "I am a mess and so I am not good enough." etc., but to have the desire to want a relationship with God. This is the Good News of our Christian faith - God always loves us no matter what we have done and not done.

The gospel passage today has a twist. There was a man who had responded to the king's invitation and came for the feast. However, he did not bother to change his clothes which reflects the indifference of his inner heart - he is being indifferent about changing his attitudes, habits, and behaviour.

Yes, God invites all, the good and the bad, to the feast of having a relationship with Him. However, we have to get rid of our bad habits, our old way of thinking and judging, the resentments and anger we carry in our hearts, etc. We need to put on new clothes and discard our old ones.

St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians explained clearly the clothes we need to put on every day in order to truly come to the feast of love.

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection." (Colossians 3:12-14)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What 'wedding garment' do I want to put on today?
- 2) Am I eager to be with God and feast on His unconditional love He has for me?

Friday, 24th August, St. Bartholomew
Revelation 21:9-14, John 1:45-51

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, the one about whom the prophets wrote: he is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth'. 'From Nazareth?' said Nathanael 'Can anything good come from that place?' 'Come and see' replied Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There is an Israelite who deserves the name, incapable of deceit'. 'How do you know me?' said Nathanael 'Before Philip came to call you,' said Jesus 'I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel'. Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. So You will see greater things than that.' And then he added 'I tell you most solemnly, you will see heaven laid open and, above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending'.

Under the Fig Tree

Nathanael or Bartholomew was a man who hungered for God and waited for the Promised Messiah to come true. He was, as Jesus said, an Israelite who deserved the name 'incapable of deceit'. Nathanael was 'incapable of deceit' because he, like every faithful Jew, knew his Scriptures by heart. Yet, he remained restless. He wanted, not just to know, but to have a personal relationship with God.

One of lines that seems abstract to many of us, yet it was the turning point for Nathanael is: *'I saw you under the fig tree.'* What does this mean? The fig tree was a general place for faithful Jews to sit and meditate the Scriptures. Nathanael was most likely sitting under the fig tree meditating the Scriptures with a heart waiting for a deeper experience of love. When Nathanael heard Jesus say those words, he sensed himself to be known by Jesus. It was as though Jesus was revealing to him all his secret desires, his years of searching, his yearning to know God personally, etc.

Jesus told Nathanael that his search was over because Jesus Himself would lead Him deeper into God. Jesus would be the ladder, the stairway (reference to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28) that would bring heaven to his heart. That encounter changed the sceptic man into a faithful disciple of Jesus.

Am I in touch with my most innermost desire, yearnings? Many times, I live so distracted with what the world has to offer to me- money, more money... latest technologies... big cars... exotic holidays... Many days, I live consumed by my worries about making ends meet, health issues, growing old, family

problems. These distractions and anxieties make me lose touch with my most innermost yearnings that cry out for greater love, greater joy, greater meaning which only you, Jesus, can satisfy. I want, like Nathanael, to have a personal relationship with you. Lead me, Jesus, to a new relationship with you. Using the words of St Augustine, I say to you: My heart is restless until I rest in you, O Lord!

**Saturday, 25th August, St. Louis of France and St. Joseph Calasanz
Ezekiel 43:1-7, Matthew 23:1-12**

Addressing the people and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted.'

It is about You, Jesus!

The Pharisees and the scribes were religious leaders who did not practice what they preached. Rather, many of them used religion to elevate themselves and they, and not God, became the focus of all what they did and said.

"Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real." (Thomas Merton)

Today, Jesus has the message for us who desire to follow Him faithfully - *"It is not about me!"* This has to be our daily mantra, *"It is not about me!"* This has to be our daily exercise of dying to our pride and making humility our daily habit.

We waste our time and energy when we focus solely on ourselves and seek

to be somebody. In our pursuit for our own greatness and self-fulfilment, we find ourselves living life running around in circles and without horizon.

Jesus lived His life by focussing on loving and serving others. He healed, taught, forgave sins and dined with sinners. He brought joy to others with His friendship, His words and deeds. In helping, loving and serving others, Jesus exalted God, and not Himself.

Today, let us desire to have the heart of Jesus!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I struggle to embrace humility and let go of my pride?
- 2) How can I exalt God in all that I do and say today?

**Sunday, 26th August, Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
Joshua 24:1-2,15-17,18, Ephesians 5:21-32, John 6:60-69**

After hearing his doctrine many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this upset you? What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him'. After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Do you want to go away?

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

In our faith journey, we all have our roller-coaster rides with Jesus. Sometimes, we are high with enthusiasm and joy. Other times, we go all the way down pursued by our lack of faith, doubts, etc. Despite all this, will we follow Jesus faithfully to the end?

Some followers of Jesus could not accept His hard teaching. They stood away from Him and started to complain, 'This is intolerable language. How could

anyone accept it?' The more they complained and grumbled among themselves, the more their hearts were hardened against listening to the voice of Love. Thus, they walked away.

When we face doubts, difficulties and crisis in life, do we stand aside from Jesus? Or do we stand beside Jesus?

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He bids us to die to our tendency to take the easy way out, to our fears and anxieties, to our laziness, etc.

Today, Jesus asks us a personal question, "What about you? Do you want to go away too?"

"If following Jesus seems difficult, don't be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) Jesus says: "What about you? Do you want to go away too?" What is my response to Him today?

Monday, 27th August, St. Monica

2 Thessalonians 1:1-5,11-12, Matthew 23:13-22

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who shut up the kingdom of heaven in men's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go in who want to. Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when you have him you make him twice as fit for hell as you are. Alas for you, blind guides! You who say, "If a man swears by the Temple, it has no force; but if a man swears by the gold of the Temple, he is bound". Fools and blind! For which is of greater worth, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? Or else, "If a man swears by the altar it has no force; but if a man swears by the offering that is on the altar, he is bound". You blind men! For which is of greater worth, the offering or the altar that makes the offering sacred? Therefore, when a man swears by the altar he is swearing by that and by everything on it. And when a man swears by the Temple he is swearing by that and by the One who dwells in it. And when a man swears by heaven he is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who is seated there.'

Word and life

Strong words from Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees because they failed to live out what they preached. What about us? Jesus' words today help us to reflect on our own lives and the way we ourselves behave as Christians in our families, in our parishes, in our workplaces/schools and in society.

Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that they shut the Kingdom of heaven in people's faces by their bad examples and behaviour. They said one thing and did another. Their hypocritical ways prevented people from growing closer to God.

We as parents, teachers, members of parish groups, grandparents, siblings, aunts/ uncles, priests, religious can also become stumbling blocks that prevent people from getting close to Jesus by our behaviour and options in life. It is important to be aware that we too can be hypocritical in some ways. We tend to say one thing and do another.

However, it is not for us to be harsh with ourselves for not living up to the fullness of truth. Jesus does not call us to be perfect but to strive to live a life of loving God and others, as well as to be consistent in what we say and do. If we fail, we must always get up quickly and root ourselves in God's merciful love once again.

God will never shut His Kingdom from us but always opens His heart to us. Let us enter and live with Him today so that we can live a life of coherence, and not of hypocrisy.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I tend to shut God's kingdom in my life as well as for others?
- 2) How can I live my life closely with God today?

Tuesday, 28th August, St. Augustine

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3,14-17, Matthew 23:23-26

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who pay your tithe of mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law - justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practised, without neglecting the others. You blind guides! Straining out gnats and swallowing camels! Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside

full of extortion and intemperance. Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that the outside may become clean as well.'

The weightier matters of faith

'The sign that we are far from the Lord is hypocrisy. The hypocrite does not need the Lord, he is saved by himself - so he thinks - and he disguises himself as a saint...What makes people hypocrites?... they disguise themselves, they disguise themselves as good people: they make themselves up like little holy cards, looking up at heaven as they pray, making sure they are seen - they believe they are more righteous than others... they despise others' (Pope Francis)

Today, Jesus calls us to throw away all the accumulated masks we have that make us appear to be externally good, righteous and virtuous. To be true Christians is not a matter of formality and actions that placate God. Rather, it is about putting into action the weightier matters of what our Christian faith should be about: Justice, mercy and good faith. These are the benchmark to ensure that we are living a true Christian life.

"Clean the inside of the cup and dish first so that the outside may become clean as well."

Jesus invites us to examine our intentions for doing what we are doing. Sometimes, we can be following external rituals and rules but our hearts are filled with judgements and condemnation of others.

Today, let us draw close to Jesus and allow Him to encounter us again so that His light of love can shine all the hidden dark corners of our hearts and make us to love with freedom and honesty.

Jesus, you know what I carry in my heart. Purify my heart so that I can love you and others with sincerity.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How often do I tend to live for external appearances and forget the weightier matters of what my faith in Jesus is all about?
- 2) What is my resolution at the end of today's prayer?

Wednesday, 29th August, The Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist
Jeremiah 1:17-19, Mark 6:17-29

Herod had sent to have John arrested, and had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife'. As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him; but she was not able to, because Herod was afraid of John, knowing him to be a good and holy man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you'. And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom'. She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist' The girl hurried straight back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, here and now, on a dish'. The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. So the king at once sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Which voice is directing me?

Today, we commemorate the feast of the Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist. What does this feast speak about our lives, our realities?

Herod married His brothers' wife, Herodias. Herod lusted after Herodias' daughter. Herodias was deeply resentful of John for speaking against her union with Herod and waited for the moment when she can take revenge. Herod, drunk with wine, made a foolish oath to Herodias' daughter after she did a dance for him and his guest. The young girl listened to the advice of her vindictive mother and requested for the head of the prophet. Herod, against his better judgement, gave in to her request and had the prophet beheaded.

It is easy to point fingers at the characters involved in the senseless death of St. John the Baptist. What about us? Do we allow lust, anger, resentment, etc. to control and lead us to 'behead' a friend, a family member, a colleague for speaking and witnessing the truth to us? Do we stop listening to the voice of our conscience?

Today, let us draw close to Jesus because we need every single day to fix our eyes on Him, and not on our anger, jealousy and lust.

Thursday, 30th August

1 Corinthians 1:1-9, Matthew 24:42-51

Jesus said to his disciples: 'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. What sort of servant, then, is faithful and wise enough for the master to place him over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Happy that servant if his master's arrival finds him at this employment. I tell you solemnly, he will place him over everything he owns. But as for the dishonest servant who says to himself, "My master is taking his time", and sets about beating his fellow servants and eating and drinking with drunkards, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.'

Live as though today is your last

"If you live each day as if it were your last, someday you'll be right. Every morning I looked in the mirror and asked myself: If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I do today?" (Steve Jobs)

This world is not our permanent home. It was never meant to be our lasting home. We are here just for a short stay on the way to God. Yet, what we do each day is important. God has placed us in our specific family, parish, friends, workplace, school, country as His faithful servants with hearts set on Him alone and to consistently carry out our responsibilities as Catholic parent, friend, spouse, child, worker and citizen. Like the faithful servant in the parable today, we too can feed our household, our parish, our community and our society with God's love, which is the best food of all. When we strive to live with integrity, we are also helping others to also live their commitment to God faithfully each day.

There can be moments when we feel the temptation to backslide in living our Christian faith faithfully and live a rather superficial lifestyle of pursuing temporal things that the materialistic world offers us. Let us be wise and see that the temporal things offer us immediate gratification and nothing else. Choosing to live as God's faithful servants by seeking to serve God at every moment of every day is what will bring us happiness here, now and forever.

Therefore, if today were to be our last day, would we do what we do today?

Friday, 31st August

1 Corinthians 1:17-25, Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this: Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones did take their lamps, but they brought no oil, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him." At this, all those bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out". But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves". They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other bridesmaids arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said "open the door for us." But he replied, "I tell you solemnly, I do not know you". So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.'

The oil of love

"What he asks of us is to be ready for the encounter — ready for an encounter, for a beautiful encounter, the encounter with Jesus, which means being able to see the signs of his presence, keeping our faith alive with prayer, with the sacraments, and taking care not to fall asleep so as to not forget about God. The life of slumbering Christians is a sad life, it is not a happy life. Christians must be happy, with the joy of Jesus. Let us not fall asleep!" (Pope Francis)

In today's gospel passage, we have ten bridesmaids awaiting the return of the Bridegroom. When the Bridegroom finally returned, the five sensible ones, who had prepared ahead of time, brought enough oil and so they were

able to trim and light their lamps. The five foolish bridesmaids did not plan ahead and had no more oil. Though they begged to borrow some oil from the others, the five sensible ones would not share because they would all not have enough oil. The five foolish ones hurried off to buy some more oil. Meanwhile, the Bridegroom arrived. He and the five wise bridesmaids entered into the wedding feast, and the door was shut.

How can this parable relate to our lives?

The oil in today's parable symbolizes good works that we do each day that make the light of faith shine brightly. The oil can be our little drop of patience, forgiveness, offering of peace, love, faithfulness, silence and encouraging words. Drop by drop, our faith will burn bright in each ordinary moment of today. When the Bridegroom comes, we are ready to encounter Him.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I keep my lamp of faith burning bright today?