

Thursday, 1st November, All Saints'

Revelations 7:2-4,9-14, 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: 'How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage. Happy those who mourn: they shall be comforted. Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied. Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Happy the pure in heart: they shall see God. Happy the peacemakers: they shall be called sons of God. Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 'Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.'

Saints in the making

Today, as we celebrate the feast of All Saints' Day, we remember many holy men and women who had run a good race and fought a good fight to the end. What made them saints? Miracles they did? Writings they left behind? Inspirational lives they lived? Saints are ordinary people who lived their lives as true friends of Christ.

We are called to live our lives with the aim of becoming saints too. We are ordinary people, but despite our flaws and limitations, we are on this journey to grow deeply and profoundly in our friendship with Jesus.

Today, Jesus presents to us the Beatitudes as the rule of life that helps us to lead good and holy lives, but the reward will not always be seen in our lifetime. The saints lived the Beatitudes. For example, St. Francis of Assisi had a special love for inner poverty. He gave up his external wealth and emptied his heart from self-love in order to gain Christ.

Another example is Cardinal Nguyen Van Tuan who was beatified in 2013. This faithful servant of God was imprisoned for 13 years. Yet, he never lost his faith but increased the faith of the other Catholic prisoners by using his sparse means to celebrate mass in his cell.

We are all saints in the making as we journey through life by living the Beatitudes. When we try to emulate just one of the beatitudes in our life-

time, the rest of the beatitudes will follow. The more faithful we are in living the beatitudes, the more happiness we will experience here and now, and forever.

Questions for reflection:

1) Who is my favourite saint? How can I follow his/her footsteps so that I can live as Jesus' true friend?

Friday, 2nd November, All Souls'

Isaiah 25:6-9, Romans 5:5-11, Mark 15:33-39,16:1-6

When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, 'Listen, he is calling on Elijah'. Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink saying, 'Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down'. But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, 'In truth this man was a son of God'. When the sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James and Salome, bought spices with which to go and anoint him. And very early in the morning on the first day of the week they went to the tomb, just as the sun was rising. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb? But when they looked they could see that the stone – which was very big – had already been rolled back. On entering the tomb they saw a young man in a white robe seated on the right-hand side, and they were struck with amazement. But he said to them, 'There is no need for alarm. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified: he has risen, he is not here. See, here is the place where they laid him.'

Death gives birth to life

As we celebrate All Souls' Day, we remember our loved ones who have gone ahead of us. While we remember the departed and pray for them to be with God, let us not forget that we are also called to the same preparation of our hearts today. We are invited and called to the same total transformation of our minds and our hearts each day.

In the process of transformation, we will also experience many moments of 'dying'; dying to our ego, our laziness, our desire to stay in our comfort zone, our desire to compare against others...As we live out our process of transformation in the daily moments, we may experience moments where we cry out '*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*'. We may also experience moments of uncertainty and anxiety, just like the women who were worried and anxious about the stone that was at the entrance of the tomb.

As we continue on our faith journey, let us not be alarmed or afraid to be continually transformed by Jesus. Even in the moments of darkness, we can take each step in trust and peace knowing that our search for Jesus does not end in an empty tomb but in an encounter with Jesus, the person who is alive. If we continue to follow Jesus, to meet him each day in prayer, we will find the risen Christ alive in our hearts, walking alongside us in each moment. Our daily encounters with Jesus will renew us in our faith journey.

'Encounter with the Lord (is) this transformation. It is the fire that burns away our dross and re-forms us to be vessels of eternal joy' (Pope Benedict XVI).

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I searching for Jesus in an empty tomb?
- 2) How is Jesus inviting me to be transformed by His life today?

**Saturday, 3rd November, St. Martin de Porres
Philippians 1:18-26, Luke 14:1,7-11**

Now on a sabbath day Jesus had gone for a meal to the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely. He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honour. He said this, 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man". And then, to your embarrassment, you would have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, "My friend, move up higher". In that way, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'

Going down, not up

Jesus went for a meal to a Pharisee's house, and he noticed the drama of life being played out before His eyes. The guests were busy trying to get the best seats by sitting near the most important person in the room. They wanted the honour of being seen with him.

As in today's gospel passage, some of us might not desire the honour of being seen with an important person. However, there are different varieties of honour. There is the honour of being the best. It gives us the constant need for being applauded and praised. There is also the honour of being self-righteous. It is the desire to be morally and spiritually superior to others. This creates in us a snobbish attitude of looking down on others whom we deem to be less holy, less perfect. There is also the honour of being right all the time. In our relationships with others, we always fight to have the last word. Moreover, there is the honour of being in control and having power over others. This leads us to take over everything under our command.

"Don't do anything only to get ahead. Don't do it because you are proud. Instead, be free of pride. Think of others as better than yourselves."

(Philippians 2:3)

For Jesus, the way up is down. Jesus invites us to follow Him to walk the downward path of humility and love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Deep in me, do I desire to be somehow honoured for what I do and who I am?
- 2) How can I learn from Jesus that the way up is down?

Sunday, 4th November, Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time

Deuteronomy 6:2-6, Hebrews 7:23-28, Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to

love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice.' Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God'. And after that no one dared to question him anymore.

Love God, Love Others

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

Who are our neighbours? The person who lives next door? Our family members? Our relatives? Friends? Colleagues? Parishioners? Community members?

Our neighbours are those whom we live with, relate to, socialise with and work with. Each person we encounter becomes a neighbour when we recognise them as children of God.

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

Let us allow ourselves first to be loved by God, and then to take small steps to love God back by showing love to His people.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I love God more today?

Monday, 5th November

Philippians 2:1-4, Luke 14:12-14

Jesus said to his host, one of the leading Pharisees 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again.'

Never accept pay for a kindness

Why did Jesus tell His host that he should invite those who could not repay him in kind? Did his host invite Jesus in order to be honoured and praised by others?

Jesus looked at the Pharisee's heart and knew his intention. He invited people with the selfish expectation of gaining more in return.

Jesus did not mean that we cannot invite our friends and relatives for a good meal. However, He wants us to look at our hearts and truly give, share, care and help others without the desire of being paid back in kind. As His disciples, we should also show mercy and generosity to those in the periphery of our society. There is a story that goes like this:

One day, a poor homeless boy was very hungry. He decided to knock on the door of a house and beg for food. However, he lost his nerve when a young woman opened the door. Instead of a meal, he asked for a glass of water. She thought he looked hungry and so she gave him a large glass of milk. He drank it slowly, and then asked, "How much do I owe you?" "You don't owe me anything," she replied. "Mother has taught us never to accept pay for a kindness." He said, "Then, I thank you from my heart." As the boy left that house, he not only felt stronger physically, but his faith in God and humanity was strong too. Years later, the young woman became critically ill. The local doctors were baffled. A specialist, Doctor Howard Kelly, was called in for consultation. Dr Kelly saw the woman and was determined to do his best to save her. After a long struggle, the battle was won. The woman was very happy. She was, however, concerned about how she could pay Dr Kelly for his service. When she received the bill, she was afraid to open it as she was sure that it would take the rest of her life to pay for it all. Finally, she looked, and something caught her attention at the bottom of the bill. She read the following words: "Paid in full with one glass of milk. Signed, Dr. Howard Kelly." (Unknown)

True giving comes from a heart full of love. Let us give freely without expectations for personal gain and benefit.

Questions for reflection:

1) How can I give freely and joyfully to those in need of my help today?

Tuesday, 6th November

Philippians 2:5-11, Luke 14:15-24

One of those gathered round the table said to Jesus, 'Happy the man who will be at the feast in the kingdom of God!' But he said to him, 'There was a man who have a great banquet, and he invited a large number of people. When the time for the banquet came, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, "Come along: everything is ready now". But all alike started to make excuses. The first said, "I have bought a piece of land and must go and see it. Please accept my apologies". Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please accept my apologies". Yet another said, "I have just got married and so am unable to come". The servant returned and reported this to his master. Then the householder, in a rage, said to his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame". "Sir" said the servant "your orders have been carried out and there is still room". Then the master said to his servant, "Go to the open roads and the hedgerows and force people to come in to make sure my house is full; because I tell you, not one of those who were invited shall have a taste of my banquet"'.

Excuses, excuses!

In today's parable, a man had a big banquet and invited a large number of people according to the Jewish custom, the host would first invite his guests way before the actual date of the banquet. The number who accepted the invitation would be noted and the host would then start preparing for it. When the feast was ready, he sent his servants to call those who had accepted the invitation. It was the duty of the guests to turn up for the banquet since they said they would.

In the parable, however, one by one, the guests made excuses. One person just bought a field and needed to look at it. One bought five oxen and needed to try them out. Another just got married and was not able to join the feast. All these were simply excuses. Who would buy a field without first inspecting it? Likewise, who would invest a fortune to purchase five oxen without checking them first? The last excuse was also a rather lame one. If that person knew that he had just gotten married during the period of the banquet and would like to spend time with his wife, why would he, in the first place, accept the invitation?

"Come along: everything is ready now." This is the cry of God today to each one of us. He invites us to His banquet of love where we enter into a relationship with Him. God calls. It is up to us to respond. We can procrastinate and make excuses not to be with Him. Or we can enter and enjoy the great feast of His love. It is only when we are with God that we find true meaning and joy in doing what we do.

In the parable, the name was hurt for being rejected. God, however, will always open His door and keep calling till we take the steps to enter into the feast of His love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I make this day with all that I have to do to be meaningful?

Wednesday, 7th November

Philippians 2:12-18, Luke 14:25-33

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on his way and he turned and spoke to them. 'If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 'And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, the onlookers would all start making fun of him and saying, "Here is a man who started to build and was unable to finish". Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who advanced against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions.'

Jesus, No. 1

Jesus offers Himself to all, but He is also very honest to us as to what following Him would involve. To be a disciple of Jesus is to have Jesus as the first priority. That is why we are called to hate our *'father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters'* and even our own lives too. The point of Jesus is that no other relationships should be placed first before Him. Thus, Jesus uses the word *'hate'* figuratively in order to emphasize the need to put Jesus

in the No. 1 place in our hearts.

There are many Christians who go along with Jesus depending on their time and convenience. Jesus is calling us not just to go along with Him, but to commit ourselves to truly follow Him. He is our No. 1, and the rest comes after Him.

Like the man building the tower and the king going to war, we too must count the cost of our action of following Jesus. Will we follow Jesus faithfully to the end? Or will we give up half-way?

Jesus does not want just a portion of our life. He wants our whole heart, mind and will. Thus, He calls for us to count the cost and be determined to follow Him to the end. If we want to be Jesus' disciples, let us be real and authentic ones!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is having a relationship with Jesus my main priority?
- 2) What holds me back from following Jesus?

Thursday, 8th November

Philippians 3:3-8, Luke 15:1-10

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man' they said 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them: 'What man among you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbours? "Rejoice with me," he would say "I have found my sheep that was lost." In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine virtuous men who have no need of repentance. Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbours? "Rejoice with me," she would say "I have found the drachma I lost." In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.'

Lover of the lost

The shepherd left the ninety-nine in the wilderness in order to search for the one lost sheep. Didn't the shepherd ever consider the risk of the ninety-nine roaming off, being eaten by a wolf or being stolen by a thief? In the real world of profit and loss, nobody would look for the one lost sheep.

The woman lost one drachma, a day's wages for a common labourer in Jesus' time. For this woman, this one drachma was valuable for her even though she had nine other drachmas. She lit her lamp, used a broom to reach to places that might be inaccessible to her and searched diligently until she found her lost coin. In a throwaway culture where people and items are easily discarded as waste, nobody would bother to search for one lost drachma.

In God's world, one lost sheep is worthy and one lost drachma is valuable. This is the Good News! Our God is the God of the lost. Our God is the God who is in love with each one of us. He has a special place in His heart for those who are lost and forgotten. As Jesus' disciples, we too are called to be friends of the lost, the forgotten, the insignificant, the poor and the outcasts.

Today, let us follow Jesus by being seekers and lovers of the lost.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In my life, have I experienced being lost and found by God?
- 2) How can I step out of my comfort zone and be a seeker of the lost today?

Friday, 9th November, The Dedication of the Lateran Basilica Ezekiel 47:1-2,8-9,12, 1 Corinthians 3:9-11,16-17, John 2:13-22

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market'. Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up'. The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it

up in three days?’ But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said.

Belonging to God

In today’s gospel passage, Jesus drove away the people selling cattle, sheep and pigeons as well as the money changers. He said, “Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father’s house into a market”

What does this passage mean to us today?

St Paul wrote, ‘Don’t you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and who was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourselves but to God; he bought you for a price. So use your bodies for God’s glory.’ (1 Cor 6: 19-20)

We are the temple where God is pleased to dwell. Thus, we do not belong to ourselves anymore, but to God. Dare we believe that we belong to God?

If we dare to believe that we belong to God, we will realise that our lives are special and that we are loved by Him with an unconditional and unlimited love.

We do not need success, popularity and power to make us worthy. Jesus wants to clear away the ‘sheep’, ‘cattle’, ‘moneychangers’, and all other things that make us deaf to God’s voice of love.

Today, let us dare to trust in God’s love for us. We belong to Him, and this is where we need to root our lives in.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What are the things in me that make me forget that I belong to God?
- 2) How can I root my life more on God’s love?

Saturday, 10th November, St. Leo the Great
Philippians 4:10-19, Luke 16:9-15

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I tell you this: use money, tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into the tents of eternity. The man who can be trusted in little things can be

trusted in great; the man who is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in great. If then you cannot be trusted with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own? No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.’ The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and laughed at him. He said to them, ‘You are the very ones who pass yourselves off as virtuous in people’s sight, but God knows your hearts. For what is thought highly of by men is loathsome in the sight of God.’

Life with God, my master

Who is the master that rules my heart and controls my mind?

“No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.”

Today, let us look at our lives in the light of God’s love, and see the real master that is in charge of our lives.

If we look with honesty, we might recognise that God is not the only Master of our lives. We can be driven by many different kinds of masters - money, material possessions, popularity, success, power, lust. All these masters, lead us to live a self-centred life that ultimately makes us separate ourselves from others and God. Serving these worldly masters will only make us sad and empty within.

As Christians, we have God as our only Master. By serving Him, we experience an internal freedom to love God as well as serve Him in our brothers and sisters. Free from pursuing personal interest and ambition, we serve and love for the sake of unity and communion.

“Life with Christ is a wonderful adventure.” (St. John Paul II)

Let the adventure begin...!

Questions for reflection:

1) Who is the master / the driving force who directs my will, heart and mind

every day?

2) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Sunday, 11th November, Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 17:10-16, Hebrews 9:24-28, Mark 12:38-44

In his teaching, Jesus said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets; these are the men who swallow the property of widows, while making a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.' He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'I tell you solemnly, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on'.

The poor widow

Many wealthy people were dropping their contributions in the temple treasury, and Jesus was watching them. Among these people, Jesus saw a poor widow who went and put in two small coins. He, who knew the heart of every person, knew that this poor widow gave her all to God. She gave all because she loved God and trusted that He would take care of her.

What are our two small coins today? Do we hold tightly to them or do we have love in our hearts to let go and give them away?

*There is a story that goes like this: A wise woman who was travelling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveller who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveller saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveller left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman. "I've been thinking," he said, "I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone."
(Unknown)*

With God in our hearts, we can give without counting the cost or putting the limits. Today, may we follow the footsteps of this poor widow who gives from the little that she had, from a heart that truly loved.

Monday, 12th November, St. Josaphat
Titus 1:1-9, Luke 17:1-6

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Obstacles are sure to come, but alas for the one who provides them! It would be better for him to be thrown into the Sea with a millstone put round his neck than that he should lead astray a single one of these little ones. Watch yourselves! If your brother does something wrong, reprove him and, if he is sorry, forgive him. And if he wrongs you seven times a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I am sorry", you must forgive him.' The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith'. The Lord replied, 'Were your faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you.'

A bag of potatoes

"A teacher once told each of her students to bring a clear plastic bag and a sack of potatoes to school. For every person they refuse to forgive in their life's experience, they chose a potato, wrote on it the name and date, and put it in the plastic bag. Some of their bags were quite heavy. They were then told to carry this bag with them everywhere for one week, putting it beside their bed at night, on the car seat when driving, next to their desk at work. The hassle of lugging this around with them made it clear what a weight they were carrying spiritually, and how they had to pay attention to it all the time to not forget and keep leaving it in embarrassing places. Naturally, the condition of the potatoes deteriorated to a nasty smelly slime. This was a great metaphor for the price we pay for keeping our pain and heavy negativity! Too often we think of forgiveness as a gift to the other person, and it clearly is for ourselves!" (Unknown)

In today's gospel passage, Jesus invites us to be continuously loving and forgiving. We have surely in different moments fallen out with a friend, parent, a sibling. We feel that we have been treated unfairly and become resentful towards the other person.

Yet, Jesus calls us to forgive because to pardon others is a gift to ourselves. When we forgive, we free ourselves from the heaviness of anger and

bitterness. To forgive continuously, however, is something that is humanly impossible. By ourselves, we do not have the capacity to forgive others again and again.

Real forgiveness starts from God's love. It comes from an ever-deepening friendship with God. In communion with God, we draw strength and courage to forgive.

"Lord, increase our faith!" The apostles knew that they needed it. Today, may we also cry out to Jesus, *"Lord, increase my faith! I need your help to set myself free from the heavy bags of potatoes that I am still holding on."*

Question for reflection:

1) What strikes me in this passage that challenges me to love differently?

Tuesday, 13th November

Titus 2:1-8,11-14, Luke 17:7-10

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, "Come and have your meal immediately"? Would he not be more likely to say, "Get my supper laid; make yourself tidy and wait on me while I eat and drink. You can eat and drink yourself afterwards"? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say, "We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty".'

We are God's servants

"The servant owed the master his complete availability; and the master did not think himself obligated to him if he carried out his orders. Jesus makes us aware that, before God, we find ourselves in a similar situation: we are God's servants; we are not his creditors but we are always debtors in relation to him because we owe him everything, because everything is his gift. Accepting and doing his will is the way that we must live every day, in every moment of our life. Before God we must not present ourselves as those who believe that they have done a service and deserve a great recompense. This is an illusion that can arise in everyone, even in persons who do much work in the Lord's service, in the Church. We must instead be aware that we never do enough for God. We must say, as Jesus suggests: 'We are useless servants. We did what we were obliged to do' (Luke 17:10). This is an attitude of humility that

truly puts us in our place and permits the Lord to be very generous with us.”
(Pope Benedict XVI)

In every moment of our life, we are called to be at the service of God as well as to God through others. Everything we give to Him is simply a small part of all what He has already generously given to us.

However, there are some moments that we find ourselves in our comfort zone of laziness. Laziness makes us seek to be served rather than to serve. It makes us to do something only when it is convenient for us. *“If this person calls to talk to me about her problem, I will make some excuses...”, “If my colleague comes to me, I will try to avoid...”, “Today, I do not feel like helping and being kind to others...”*- these are some voices of laziness which can pull us away from being at the service to God and to others.

We can also reject to be servants because we want to be masters instead. We want people to serve us. We even want God to do as we tell Him to do. Pride makes us forget to put ourselves in our proper place in front of God.

Each of us struggle with different obstacles that make us put limits and conditions to our service to God and to God through others.

Today, Jesus presents Himself as the servant who comes to our life to serve and love us. He waits on us so that we can follow and imitate His humble service of love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the struggle that I have that prevents me from seeking to serve God and others with humility and love?
- 2) How can I be God’s servant today?

Wednesday, 14th November
Titus 3:1-7, Luke 17:11-19

Now on the way to Jerusalem Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered one of the villages, ten lepers came to meet him. They stood some way off and called to him, ‘Jesus! Master! Take pity on us.’ When he saw them he said, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests’. Now as they were going away they were cleansed. Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw

himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. This made Jesus say, 'Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner.' And he said to the man, 'Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.'

Gratitude

"Gratitude goes beyond the 'mine' and 'thine' and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy" (Henri J.M. Nouwen)

The Samaritan, who went back to Jesus after he was healed from his leprosy, acknowledged that the gift he had received from Jesus was given to him as a gift of love. Thus, he was able to celebrate his new life with joy.

What about us? Are our hearts filled with gratitude that we acknowledge all that we are and have is given to us as a gift of love? Do we give thanks to God? Do we give thanks to those who share their blessings with us?

Let us learn to cultivate a heart of gratitude, and to be thankful for every good thing that comes to us. We give thanks continuously! We celebrate life with joy!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I identify myself like the nine other lepers or the Samaritan leper who came back to give thanks to Jesus?
- 2) Am I thankful to God and others for all the gifts of love I have received in my life?

Thursday, 15th November, St. Albert the Great Philemon 7-20, Luke 17:20-25

Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was to come, Jesus gave them this answer, 'The coming of the kingdom of God does not admit of observation and there will be no one to say, "Look here! Look there!" For, you must know, the kingdom of God is among you.' He said to the disciples, 'A time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man

and will not see it. They will say to you, "Look there!" or, "Look here!" Make no move; do not set off in pursuit; for as the lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of Man when his day comes. But first he must suffer grievously and be rejected by this generation.'

Look!

The Pharisees wanted to know when the kingdom of God was to come. They were, most likely, waiting and expecting the arrival of a Messiah-King who would set Israel free from the Romans' oppression. Jesus, however, told them that they could not go around looking for external signs and say, *"Look here! Look there!"*

Rather, Jesus told them that the kingdom of God was already among them because He is the incarnation of God's love. Jesus had healed the sick, raised the dead, had compassion and mercy for the sinners, welcomed the outcasts, taught with authority. All these were clearly pointing to God's reign of love present in the person of Jesus. However, the Pharisees refused to believe in Him.

We can also be like the unbelieving Pharisees and look at others, at ourselves, at events in life with blinkers on. Today, Jesus invites us to put on a new vision and to see with eyes of faith. When we put on this new vision of faith, we are able to see reality as it truly is. We can perceive love, goodness, forgiveness, kindness and faithfulness in ourselves as well as in others around us. Where there is love, the Kingdom is present.

The reign of God is here among us. It is in our ordinary moments of choosing to love, in the ordinary people we encounter, in the ordinary routines of life that we can experience God's Kingdom of love. Thus, since God is with us, there is nothing that we should fear.

"Faith is to believe what you do not; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe."

(St. Augustine)

Question for reflection:

1) How does Jesus reveal His Kingdom to me today?

Friday, 16th November, St. Margaret of Scotland

2 John 4-9, Luke 17:26-37

Jesus said to the disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it also be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It will be the same as it was in Lot's day: people were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but the day Lot left Sodom, God rained fire and brimstone from heaven and it destroyed them all. It will be the same when the day comes for the Son of Man to be revealed. When that day comes, anyone on the housetop, with his possessions in the house, must not come down to collect them, nor must anyone in the fields turn back either. Remember Lot's wife. Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it; and anyone who loses it will keep it safe. I tell you, on that night two will be in one bed: one will be taken, the other left; two women will be grinding corn together: one will be taken, the other left.' The disciples interrupted. 'Where, Lord?' they asked. He said, 'Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather'.

Carpe diem

Routines of life goes on day in, day out: eating, drinking, marrying, buying and selling, planting and building. Yet, we will never know the day and time when we are brought back to God.

In a movie, Dead Poet's Society, the English teacher, John Keating asked his class of young students to look at various photographs of past students of long ago. He said, *"They are not that different from you, are they? Same haircuts. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they're destined for great things, just like many of you, their eyes are full of hope, just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because you see gentlemen, these boys are not fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in. Listen, you hear it? -- Carpe--hear it? Carpe, carpe diem, seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary."* (Dead Poet's Society)

None of us know when our final day will be. However, all we know is that we have this very moment to be prepared and ready by seizing the day!

What must we do in order to live fully? The answer is: Love. When we finally meet God face-to-face one day, He will not ask to see all our achievements

and bank accounts nor to hear all the good praises from people. He will ask to see our hearts, and He will ask: Have you loved?

Today, carpe diem! Make our lives extraordinary by simply loving.

Saturday, 17th November, St. Elizabeth of Hungary

3 John 5-8, Luke 18:1-8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. 'There was a judge in a certain town' he said 'who had neither fear of God nor respect for man. In the same town there was a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, "Maybe I have neither fear of God nor respect for man, but since she keeps pestering me I must give this widow her just rights, or she will persist in coming and worry me to death".' And the Lord said 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them? I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?'

Asking and waiting

In the gospel passage today, a widow went to the judge and asked him incessantly to intervene on her behalf. This widow wanted justice for the wrongs she had suffered. This widow did not give up in her attempts even when the judge refused for a long time. She asked and waited for the judge to give her a favourable reply. Finally, after much waiting, the widow got a response from the judge.

How do we pray? Do we pray and set time limits for God to answer our prayers? Do we get angry and frustrated when our prayers are not answered?

Prayer means asking but also waiting. It is not easy for many of us to wait. We are always in a mad rush to get what we want. We want immediate answers for our unknown future. We want direction to what we should do next. We want everything to make perfect sense. We expect God to respond to all these soon and often on our terms.

Yet, waiting implies faith. Faith which opens our hearts to discover God's

presence in our daily lives. Faith which leads us to trust in God's time, not ours. We need a quiet spirit to do nothing, but simply entrusting our needs to God with hope.

"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."
(Psalm 27:13 – 14)

Questions for reflection:

1) What kind of faith will Jesus find in me? A faith that asks and waits? Or a faith that asks and demands?

Sunday, 18th November, Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Daniel 12:1-3, Hebrews 10:11-14,18, Mark 13:24-32

Jesus said to his disciples: 'But in those days, after that time of distress, the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness, the stars will come falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory; then too he will send the angels to gather his chosen from the four winds, from the ends of the world to the ends of heaven. Take the fig tree as a parable: as soon as its twigs grow supple and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that he is near, at the very gates. I tell you solemnly, before this generation has passed away all these things will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son; no one but the Father.'

Hope

Jesus was talking to His disciples about the coming reign of God. He used rather frightening images such as the darkening of the sun and moon, falling of the stars from heaven, etc. However, Jesus' intention was not to strike fear into the hearts of his disciples. Instead, He wanted to encourage them to hope and never to give up on their faith.

Fig trees were common in Jesus' time. These trees only sprout leaves in late spring. Thus, this is the sign for people to know that summer is near.

Jesus wanted the disciples to respond with hope even if they were to notice signs of the impending end of the world. God is still in charge, and He has not abandoned His people. Heaven and earth will pass away, but God's love will never end.

"...know that he is near, at the very gates."

In the same way, Jesus wants to inspire hope in us. When we face hardships and darkness of life, we have the hope to cling on the assurance of being loved, which is the rock on which we build our life. When we see wars and disasters happening around us and wonder if the end of the world is near, we must continue to hope that God is near and will never abandon us.

"The more a person loves God, the more reason he has to hope in Him. This hope produces in the Saints an unutterable peace, which they preserve even in adversity, because as they love God, and know how beautiful He is to those who love Him, they place their confidence and find all their repose in Him alone." (St. Alphonsus Liguori)

Monday, 19th November

Revelation 1:1-4,2:1-5, Luke 18:35-43

As Jesus drew near to Jericho there was a blind man sitting at the side of the road begging. When he heard the crowd going past he asked what it was all about, and they told him that Jesus the Nazarene was passing by. So he called out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me'. The people in front scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me'. Jesus stopped and ordered them to bring the man to him, and when he came up, asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Sir,' he replied 'let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Receive your sight. Your faith has saved you.' And instantly his sight returned and he followed him praising God, and all the people who saw it gave praise to God for what had happened.

An instrument of faith

A blind man knew who Jesus was and had heard of His healing powers. He knew that Jesus could meet his deepest need of seeing again. The blind man started shouting as Jesus was passing by. The crowd got irritated with the blind man's persistent shouting and told him to keep quiet. The blind man did not keep quiet but shouted even louder.

Jesus stopped and told the people to bring the blind man to Him. In our lives, Jesus uses people as His instruments to bring faith to us. It is through our parents, mentors, teachers, grandparents, friends that we come to know and love Him. It is also through us that others will come to encounter Jesus and grow in their faith in Him. We can be instruments of faith or obstacles of faith for others. May we, through our words and actions, always strive to bring people to Jesus, and Jesus to people.

Imagine the joy of the blind man when he heard Jesus' gentle voice asking him, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* This was the moment that he was waiting for. He responded to Jesus, *"Sir, let me see again."*

Today, Jesus asks us the same question, *"What do you want me to do for you?"* Not just today but Jesus asks us this question every single day of our lives. What will our response be? What do we really want from Jesus?

The blind man asked for his sight and got it from Jesus. What about us? Can we see? Can we see and perceive Jesus' presence in our life? Can we see where He is leading us? Today, we can also echo the words of this blind man, *"Lord, I want to see again. I want to see clearly where You are leading me. I want to see and follow You closely. I want to see You in this dark tunnel of pain that I am going through. Lord, I want to see You again!"*

After receiving His sight, the man followed Jesus and praised God. May following Jesus and praising God be the journey of our life!

Tuesday, 20th November

Revelation 3:1-6,14-22, Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the town when a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him: 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.' And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, 'Look, sir, I am

going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost'.

A changed life

Zacchaeus was a prominent person in Jericho. He was, not just a tax collector, but a chief tax collector. Yet, Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus that He did the most undignified thing for a man of his status. He climbed and hung on a sycamore tree just to catch a glimpse of Jesus. Why did Zacchaeus want to see Jesus so desperately? Was he merely curious? Or was there a deeper need in his life that made him climb and hang onto a tree?

Deep within him, Zacchaeus wanted a change of heart. He longed to change his dishonest way of making money and to live a new life. However, he did not have the motivation or courage to take the step. He realised that by himself this would be impossible as he felt powerless to break the chain of greed. When Jesus entered his house, Zacchaeus' life was never the same again.

The first thing Zacchaeus stood to proclaim was that he would give half of his property to the poor and repay four times the amount to those he had cheated. Something in Jesus and His words liberated Zacchaeus from being slave to his greed.

Many times, we want to change something in our life - an addiction, a temper, a fear, etc. Yet, we feel powerless to make that change.

Jesus sees our hearts in the same way He saw Zacchaeus' inner longing. He wants to bring us to take that step of freedom. Let us, like Zacchaeus, seek Jesus and let Him enter our house, our lives. Let us grow in our friendship with Jesus. It is this friendship with Jesus that gives us the inner strength and motivation to change for the better.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there something in my life that I long to be free from?
- 2) What must I do to change for the better?

**Wednesday 21st November, Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Revelation 4:1-11, Luke 19:11-28**

While the people were listening, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and they imagined that the kingdom of God was going to show itself then and there. Accordingly he said, 'A man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and afterwards return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds. "Do business with these" he told them "until I get back." But his compatriots detested him and sent a delegation to follow him with this message, "We do not want this man to be our king". Now on his return, having received his appointment as king, he sent for those servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made. The first came in and said, "Sir, your one pound has brought in ten". "Well done, my good servant!" he replied "Since you have proved yourself faithful in a very small thing, you shall have the government of ten cities." Then came the second and said, "Sir, your one pound has made five". To this one also he said, "And you shall be in charge of five cities". Next came the other and said, "Sir, here is your pound. I put it away safely in a piece of linen because I was afraid of you; for you are an exacting man: you pick up what you have not put down and reap what you have not sown." "You wicked servant!" he said "Out of your own mouth I condemn you. So you knew I was an exacting man, picking up what I have not put down and reaping what I have not sown? Then why did you not put my money in the bank? On my return I could have drawn it out with interest." And he said to those standing by, "Take the pound from him and give it to the man who has ten pounds". And they said to him, "But, sir, he has ten pounds . . ." "I tell you, to everyone who has will be given more; but from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away. "But as for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and execute them in my presence.'" When he had said this he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Life is about giving

*"It's only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth – and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up, we will then begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had."
(Elisabeth Kubler-Ross)*

In this limited time here on earth, each of us has special gifts which God has

given to us. Let us ask ourselves: How are we using these gifts for the benefit of those around us?

The last servant, in today's gospel passage, did not use what he was given. Instead, he clung onto what he had. The other two servants faithfully gave all that they had and they gained even more.

Today, Jesus invites us to live a life in which we use our gifts for others - the gift of time, friendship, money, talents, intelligence, etc. We are here, not to amass and accumulate more, but to share all that we have in order to build others up and help them also to invest their gifts for others.

What will we gain when we give?

We gain a sense of deep fulfilling joy, a joy that the world can never give to us.

As we pray, let us ask Jesus for the faithfulness to use our gifts for the good of others. We are here not to stand still and be indifferent but to give and keep giving.

"You and I, we are the Church, no? We have to share with our people. Suffering today is because people are hoarding, not giving, not sharing. Jesus made is very clear. Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do it to me. Give me a glass of water, you give it to me. Receive a little child, you receive me." (Mother Teresa)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which servants do I identify myself with? The two servants who gave all or the one who kept all?
- 2) How can I live this day to the fullest?

Thursday, 22nd November, St. Cecilia
Revelation 5:1-10, Luke 19:41-44

As Jesus drew near and came in sight of the city he shed tears over it and said, 'If you in your turn had only understood on this day the message of peace! But, alas, it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls

to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you- and all because you did not recognise your opportunity when God offered it!

A quiet goodness within

“If you in your turn had only understood on this day the message of peace! But, alas, it is hidden from your eyes!”

What is peace? What will bring us peace?

We are used to associate ‘peace’ with the absence of internal and external conflict and anxiety. This is not the peace that Jesus is speaking about. Peace, in the bible, is a quiet goodness within us that is untouched by what happens on the outside. Therefore, we might be surrounded externally by storms of conflicts or misunderstandings, but we can still have peace inside.

Jesus is the source of this peace. He is the Peace that calms the deepest fears. He is the Peace that stills the calms of all storms. He is the Peace that sings even when there is no more song. His voice always tells us, *“I am with you.”*

Jesus gives us His peace. We, however, have the freedom to embrace His gift of peace or to reject it.

Today, will we open our hands and receive His peace? Will we open our eyes to perceive His guiding light in the moments of darkness and confusion?

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Question for reflection:

1) Is Jesus the source of my peace as I face the ups and downs of life?

Friday, 23rd November, St. Clement I
Revelation 10:8-11, Luke 19:45-48

Jesus went into the Temple and began driving out those who were selling. ‘According to scripture,’ he said ‘my house will be a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a robbers’ den’. He taught in the Temple every day. The chief priests and the scribes, with the support of the leading citizens, tried to

do away with him, but they did not see how they could carry this out because the people as a whole hung on his words.

A house of prayer, not a den of robbers

“My house will be a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a robber’s den.”

God dwells in our hearts, and He wants to cleanse us from all the robbers and idols of greed, lusts, selfishness, etc that make us unfaithful to His love. Our infidelity to God makes us live with a lot of guilt and takes away the joy of being Christians. God wants us to know that He loves us in spite of all our sins and limitations. He desires to be the God of our lives.

Letting go of all our idols and letting God be the owner of our hearts requires a daily conversation. In this time of prayer, let us recognise that God is in our lives and He wants our hearts to be His Home where He can dwell.

Saturday, 24th November, St. Andrew Dung-Luc and Companions Revelation 11:4-12, Luke 20:27-40

Some Sadducees-those who say that there is no resurrection-approached Jesus and they put this question to him, ‘Master, we have it from Moses in writing, that if a man’s married brother dies childless, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Well then, there were seven brothers. The first, having married a wife, died childless. The second and then the third married the widow. And the same with all seven, they died leaving no children. Finally the woman herself died. Now, at the resurrection, to which of them will she be wife since she had been married to all seven?’ Jesus replied, ‘The children of this world take wives and husbands, but those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and if the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die, for they are the same as the angels, and being children of the resurrection they are sons of God. And Moses himself implies that the dead rise again, in the passage about the bush where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive.’ Some scribes then spoke up. ‘Well put, Master’ they said -because they would not dare to ask him any more questions.

Children of the resurrection

The Sadducees did not believe in the teaching related to the resurrection. Yet, they asked Jesus a question regarding resurrection because they attempted to compromise His authority.

Jesus affirmed that there was the resurrection but it was not as they thought it would be. In our human mind, we, like the Sadducees, think that life in the age to come will somehow be similar to the present age. There will be similarities but there will be differences too. Marriage, for example, will be similar yet different. Those who are married will recognise their husband/wife in the afterlife but there will not be any institution of marriage.

When our human life ends, we will recognise our loved ones in heaven, but our relationships become more profound and purer than those on earth. This is because we will all be bonded by fullness of God's love, and no longer burdened by sins of judgement, envy, anger, addictions, etc.

What comfort is it for us to know that we have a God of the living. He is with us here with us in this present life as well as in the life to come. He loves us now and will continue to love us when our journey on earth is over. We are to love the people in our lives deeply and purely so that our love continues on in the next life.

Our God is the God of the living and so death is not the end of the story.

Question for reflection:

1) What does it mean for me to believe in the reality of the Resurrection?

Sunday, 25th November, Last Sunday in Ordinary Time, Christ the King Daniel 7:13-14, Revelation 1:5-8, John 18:33-37

'Are you the king of the Jews?' Pilate asked. Jesus replied, 'Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others spoken to you about me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? It is your own people and the chief priests who have handed you over to me: what have you done?' Jesus replied, 'Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being surrendered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this kind.' 'So you are a king then?' said Pilate. 'It is you who say it' answered Jesus. 'Yes, I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to

bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.'

Whose voice do I listen to

Today, as we celebrate the feast of Christ the King which marks the end of the liturgical year, let us ask ourselves: Whose voice are we listening to?

Time and again, we allow ourselves to be defined by others. If our children are doing well in their schools, then we must be good parents. If we are praised in the office for a job well done, then we can truly feel that we have worked hard. If we make mistakes and fail to meet others' expectations, we become dejected.

In today's gospel passage, Pilate asked Jesus to state his identity according to the general opinions of the crowds. Twice, Pilate asked, "Are you a king?" Jesus did not bow to the way others saw Him. Instead, Jesus replied, 'Yes, I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.'

Jesus did not define Himself according to the expectations and perceptions of others. He lived in the complete truth of who He was for God: The Son of God.

Today, let us listen to Jesus to tell us who we truly are: Children of God. Being children of God, we are unconditionally and eternally loved. As we celebrate this feast of Christ the King, let us give thanks to Jesus for being the voice of truth that leads us to live life in freedom and love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Whose voice do I tend to listen to?
- 2) How can I let Jesus be the King of my life so that I can live with the complete truth that He brings?

Monday, 26th November

Revelation 14:1-5, Luke 21:1-4

As Jesus looked up he saw rich people putting their offerings into the treasury; then he happened to notice a poverty-stricken widow putting in two small coins, and he said, 'I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more

than any of them; for these have all contributed money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in all she had to live on.'

Two small coins

Jesus observed rich people going into the Temple and putting their offerings into the treasury. They, however, did not impress Him. In the midst of the crowd, one poor widow caught Jesus' attention. Her two small coins was her expression of her love for God, and Jesus was moved by her total surrender of herself.

Today, we are called to give our two small coins as expressions of our love to God and to others. In this new day, we have many opportunities to place our two small coins of sacrifices: praying for someone in need, making efforts to be patient with a difficult person, saying words of encouragement, etc. Our two small coins given out of love will not go unnoticed. Jesus sees and He rejoices.

"I do not agree with the big way of doing things. Love needs to start with an individual." (Mother Teresa)

Love starts with one child, one colleague, one parent, one friend. Let us not hold back but give our two small coins and know that we can make a difference to a person's life.

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus inviting me to live this day?

Tuesday, 27th November

Revelation 14:14-19, Luke 21:5-11

When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, 'All these things you are staring at now-the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed'. And they put to him this question: 'Master,' they said 'when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that this is about to take place?' 'Take care not to be deceived,' he said 'because many will come using my name and saying, "I am he" and, "The time is near at hand". Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen but the end is not so soon.' Then he said to them, 'Nation will fight against

nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.'

For Christ

"Do not be frightened..."

This is the message of hope that Jesus offers to us today. Hope does not mean that we deny the sufferings or the natural disasters that come along the journey of life. Our illness, loss, rejections, floods, earthquakes are real but we must never let fear drive us to lose our faith. We can stand firm even when everything around us crumble because of Jesus' enduring presence with us.

We must never be afraid to be proud of our faith in Jesus. The reason for our courage is because Jesus walks with us in our journey.

"Faith is a flame that grows stronger the more it is shared and passed on, so that everyone may know, love and confess Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and history (c.f. Romans 10:9). Careful, though! Jesus did not say: "if you would like to, if you have the time", but: "Go and make disciples of all nations." Sharing the experience of faith, bearing witness to the faith, proclaiming the Gospel: this is a command that the Lord entrusts to the whole Church, and that includes you; but it is a command that is born not from a desire for domination or power but from the force of love, from the fact that Jesus first came into our midst and gave us, not a part of himself, but the whole of himself, he gave his life in order to save us and to show us the love and mercy of God. Jesus does not treat us as slaves, but as free men, as friends, as brothers and sisters; and he not only sends us, he accompanies us, he is always beside us in our mission of love." (Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What keeps me from sharing my faith with those around me?
- 2) How can I be part of this mission of love that Jesus has lovingly entrusted to me?

Wednesday, 28th November

Revelation 15:1-4, Luke 21:12-19

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Men will seize you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring you before

kings and governors because of my name - and that will be your opportunity to bear witness. Keep this carefully in mind: you are not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your endurance will win you your lives.'

Today is the time to bear witness

"...that will be your opportunity to bear witness"

When we watched a fantastic musical or ate an out-of-this-world value for money buffet, we will surely start sharing with our friends and family members what we had enjoyed and even persuade them to go and give it a try.

Today, Jesus calls us to be His witnesses to our family members and friends by being living signs of His presence of love in the environment we are in. People need to see us as Christians in love with Jesus and show them that it is joyful to follow Him.

'Faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.' (Pope Benedict XVI)

The world today needs credible witnesses and not inconsistent witnesses. This is impossible without a personal friendship with Jesus. We are true credible witnesses only if we spend time in daily prayer and encounter Jesus in the stillness of our hearts.

Today, there will be many simple opportunities where we can be Jesus' living signs to a child, a spouse, a friend, a stranger. As Christians, we need to make a powerful statement, through our words and deeds, that Jesus is our friend, our love, our life. May we never miss any opportunity to bear witness and open the hearts of many to Jesus! Let us never be inconsistent witnesses who speak about Jesus but whose lives are far from His!

Jesus, fill me with courage to be a living sign of Your love!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is my life a credible sign of Jesus' loving presence?
- 2) What can I do today in order to be a witness of Christ to those around me?

Thursday, 29th November

Revelation 18:1-2,21-23;19:1-3,9, Luke 21:20-28

Jesus said to his disciples, 'When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you must realise that she will soon be laid desolate. Then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in country districts must not take refuge in it. For this is the time of vengeance when all that scripture says must be fulfilled. Alas for those with child, or with babies at the breast, when those days come! For great misery will descend on the land and wrath on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive to every pagan country; and Jerusalem will be trampled down by the pagans until the age of the pagans is completely over. There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'

Take courage

"I am your friend and my love for you goes deep. There is nothing I can give you which you have not got, but there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take. No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in today. Take heaven! No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness could we but see - and to see we have only to look. I beseech you to look!

Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by the covering, cast them away as ugly, or heavy or hard. Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendour, woven of love, by wisdom, with power.

Welcome it, grasp it, touch the angel's hand that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty, believe me, that angel's hand is there, the

gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing presence. Our joys, too, be not content with them as joys. They, too, conceal diviner gifts.

Life is so full of meaning and purpose, so full of beauty - beneath its covering - that you will find earth but cloaks your heaven. Courage, then, to claim it, that is all. But courage you have, and the knowledge that we are all pilgrims together, wending through unknown country, home. And so, at this time, I greet you. Not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem and with the prayer that for you now and forever, the day breaks, and the shadows flee away.” (A letter from Fra Giovanni Giocondo to his friend)

When we experience sufferings in life, the temptation is to have our heads bowed down and our shoulders slumped as we brace ourselves for pain. Yet, faith tells us that Jesus is there; He is always there in the midst of our struggles and anxieties. Jesus is waiting to give us new hope to walk on. Therefore, the posture for people of faith is always this: standing erect and with heads held high.

By standing firm in our faith, we too can help others, who are bound by fears and anxieties, to find new hope and courage In Jesus.

Today, Jesus Himself comes to us and tells us, *“I am your friend and my love for you goes deep. Take heaven! Take peace! Joy is within your joy! Have courage!”*

Let us draw close to Him and have the courage to lean on Him today! Fear is useless, what we need is to have a heart of courageous trust.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In what kind of situation do I find myself losing courage? Where is Jesus?
- 2) How can I help others to live life with courage and not lose hope?

**Friday, 30th November, St. Andrew
Romans 10:9-18, Matthew 4:18-22**

As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast in the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men’. And they left their nets at once and followed him. Going on from there he saw another pair of brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they were in their boat with their father

Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. At once, leaving the boat and their father, they followed him.

Follow me

What am I waiting for?

As we celebrate the Feast of St Andrew, we are challenged to look at our lives and see what prevents us from following Jesus as quickly as Andrew.

Andrew heard Jesus' call: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." He, together with his brother, responded by leaving their nets and following Jesus.

What are we waiting for?

Many times, we lead such hectic lives: meeting deadlines, rushing for Christmas shopping, completing many tasks, such that we miss the daily opportunities to hear Christ's call and respond to him immediately.

What am I waiting for? Can I respond as quickly as Andrew? When Jesus calls me to follow Him in His way of life and love, do I listen and act with generosity?

Jesus, help me not to wait for the 'right' moment to follow you because You are inviting me here and now, to follow You. May I drop all my nets of excuses, fears, laziness, etc. and follow You immediately, today.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How is Jesus inviting me to follow Him today?
- 2) What obstacles do I have that can prevent me from responding to His call?

Saturday, 1st December

Revelation 22:1-7, Luke 21:34-36

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'

Make space for God

We have everything in life that it is so easy to forget God because of all the distractions that our good and comfortable life brings to us. Money, clubs, holidays, shopping, good food, etc . can make us to be lost in the riches of this world.

As we stand at the threshold of Advent, let us listen to Jesus as He calls us, *“Watch yourselves...stay awake.”*

Watch ourselves and stay awake by not letting our hearts to be weighed down by the unnecessary anxiety and worries over things of this life.

Jesus patiently invites us again to enter into an intimate relationship with God and allow ourselves to be loved by Him. The intensity of God’s love is like a blazing fire. He is not content to have us near the fire of His love but within the very depth of it.

Even though we might forget God, the Good News is that God never forgets us. Each of us is in His mind and heart. Each of us is loved by Him. Each of us is important for Him.

Let us today spend time to simply be amazed at how much we are loved by God. May we make space for God in our mind and heart so that God can remain in us and we with Him.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I lost sight of God in the busyness and cares of life?
- 2) How can I remain in God’s loving presence today?