

Prayer for Living

~THE WORD OF GOD FOR
DAILY PRAYER



**YEAR A
A REPRINT**

Sr.Sandra Seow



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By Verbum Dei Missionaries
4 Sommerville Road, Singapore 358228
Email: verbumdeispore@yahoo.com.sg

Website: www.verbumdeisingapore.org

Sunday, 1st December, First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1–5, Romans 13:11–14, Matthew 24:37–44

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away. It will be like this when the Son of Man comes. Then of two men in the fields one is taken, one left; of two women at the millstone grinding, one is taken, one left. 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.'

The journey towards the end

Advent is a season for drawing closer to Jesus and allowing Him to lead us into a journey of joy, peace and love. As we celebrate Advent, let us not forget that Jesus is the reason for this season. The commercial world of malls and supermarkets celebrate with Santa Claus and Frosty, the Snowman. Let us not be too caught up with the external festivity that we forget the real reason for this season.

The Gospel today invites us to prepare well for Jesus' coming, especially His final coming. There are three comings of Jesus that we usually speak of. First, He came to us as a baby born in a lowly stable at Bethlehem. Second, Jesus comes to us every day, in our daily activities: whenever we become aware of His presence through prayer, by receiving the Sacraments, in our interaction with people and through nature. Finally, He will come to us again at an

hour we do not expect, i.e. at the moment of our death. We do not like to think of death and the manner in which we will leave this world, even though it is a reality which we will all face one day.

'As it was in Noah's day, so will it be when the Son of Man comes. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept all away...'

The people, during Noah's day, were doing ordinary things - eating, drinking, marrying, etc. They were so caught up in the busyness of their life that they had no time to think of the shortness of their life. Likewise, we too are so caught up with working, travelling, eating, drinking, etc. that we pay little attention in preparing spiritually for our death when we will meet Jesus face-to-face. We become complacent because we think that we have plenty of time before we leave this world.

Jesus invites us to stay awake and stand ready today by cultivating a loving relationship with God and with others. When our daily words and actions are guided by Love itself, we are preparing ourselves to face our future with peace and calmness.

Question for reflection:

1) If today is my last day, how ready am I to meet Jesus face-to-face?

Monday, 2nd December

Isaiah 4:2–6, Matthew 8:5–11

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority

myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the **feast in the kingdom of Heaven.**'

Humility, humility, humility and humility

In today's gospel, the humble faith of the Roman centurion amazed Jesus. He, who was a man of authority, was in touch with the suffering of his servant and was moved to seek help from Jesus, an itinerant preacher from Galilee. The humility of this Roman centurion is truly a model for us today.

As we enter this season of Advent, how can we learn from the Roman centurion's humility?

Humility is derived from the Latin word 'humus' or earth. Thus, the person, who is humble, has his/her feet constantly rooted on the ground and lives a life centred on God and others. In fact, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, when asked to list the four cardinal virtues, replied: "Humility, humility, humility and humility." Humility is the key to open the door to the heart of God and others. It leads us to depend on God more and stirs us to put ourselves at the service of others.

Today, let us be humble enough to go to Jesus with humility and not to live through this day by just depending on our own power and strength.

"Humility is the way through which charity passes. If there is no humility, love remains blocked, it cannot go forward." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I put into practice this virtue of humility?

Tuesday, 3rd December, St. Francis Xavier

1 Corinthians 9:16–19, 22–23, Mark 16:15–20

(Readings taken from Feast of St. Francis Xavier)

Jesus showed himself to the Eleven, and he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.' And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.

Count on me, Lord!

What do we see when we look at the crowds? Are they simply objects that prevent us from achieving greater success or accumulating more wealth? Do we look at people through the eyes of God and recognise their search for lasting joy, permanent meaning in their lives?

In today's Gospel, Jesus instructed His disciples to go out to the whole world and to proclaim the Good News of God's love. Today, He continues to call us to do the same. As Christians, we know that our source of happiness comes from God and God alone. However, there are many people who do not know of this profound reality. Jesus looks at each one of us and asks, "Can I count on you? Can

you go out of your comfort zone and bring people to experience My love?"

"The spread of the Gospel is not guaranteed either by the number of persons, or by the prestige of the institution, or by the quantity of available resources. What counts is to be permeated by the love of Christ, to let oneself be led by the Holy Spirit and to graft one's own life onto the tree of life, which is the Lord's Cross." (Pope Francis)

If our hearts are empty of Jesus and His love, we cannot go out and proclaim that love. Therefore, in order to go out and proclaim the Good News, we must first encounter Jesus as our Friend and Companion in life and experience His tenderness and love.

Question for reflection:

- 1) How can I, through my words and deeds, be a docile instrument to bring the Good News of Jesus' love to those around me?

Wednesday, 4th December, St. John Damascene

Isaiah 25:6–10, Matthew 15: 29–37

Jesus reached the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and he went up into the hills. He sat there, and large crowds came to him bringing the lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others; these they put down at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were astonished to see the dumb speaking, the cripples whole again, the lame walking and the blind with their sight, and they praised the God of Israel. But Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them off hungry, they might collapse on the way.' The disciples said to him, 'Where could we get enough bread in this deserted place to feed such a crowd?' Jesus said to them, 'How many

loaves have you?' 'Seven' they said, 'and a few small fish.' Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves and the fish, and he gave thanks and broke them and handed them to the disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected what was left of the scraps, seven baskets full.

A child-like humility

Jesus looked at the crowd of hungry people, and His heart was moved with deep compassion for them. He could have gone to another place with His disciples. However, Jesus had child-like humility and knew that He could make a difference in these people's lives.

What about us today? Can we humble ourselves to be child-like and spend time with Jesus, knowing that His presence can make a difference in our lives? Are we too busy with rushing and planning that we forget that Jesus is all that we need? Can we also see that our smiles, our listening ear, our words of encouragement are little efforts in reaching out to someone in need? Can we humble ourselves and see that our actions and words can make a difference to someone today?

"In a gentle way, you can shake the world." (Mahatma Gandhi)

Today, let us imitate Jesus' child-like humility and shake the world with our compassion and love.

Question for reflection:

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

Thursday, 5th December

Isaiah 26:1-6, Matthew 7:21,24–27

Jesus said to his disciples: 'It is not anyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. 'Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!'

Jesus, my Rock!

Jesus calls us to follow Him sincerely by living out what we believe and profess because He does not want us to be enthusiasts who simply appreciate and admire His life from afar. We are called to listen to His words and act on them. There is no shortcut to this, except through continuous daily practice. In every decision we make, let us seek to know and do His will. In every experience that we have, let us allow Him to have a say in it. The more we allow Jesus and His words to guide and lead us in every gesture and action, the more we start to build our life on Him as our rock, our firm foundation.

Today, we are called to be more Christ-centred and less self-centred. This is not easy because we tend to be preoccupied with ourselves – our personal affairs. Therefore today, we have to pause again and enter into the silence of our hearts in order to listen attentively to Jesus' gentle voice. We need to learn to make time to be still and enjoy the sacred space for us to be with Jesus. The more

we stay with Jesus, the more we let go of our need to be in control of our life.

Jesus invites us today to be Christians who are wise, not foolish. Let us start taking small steps today by making efforts to live a more Christ-centred life.

Jesus, help me to tune in to the Father's will and to seek to carry it out. Help me to be faithful to the little things in life lived with You. In this time of Advent, give me the vision and hope that these little things are the basis of a rock-solid faith that You want to construct in me.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is Jesus the Rock on which I build my life?
- 2) Today, how can I follow Jesus in a more authentic way?

Friday, 6th December, St. Nicholas

Isaiah 29:17–24, Matthew 9:27–31

As Jesus went on his way two blind men followed him shouting, 'Take pity on us, son of David.' And when Jesus reached the house the blind men came up to him and he said to them, 'Do you believe I can do this?' They said, 'Lord, we do.' Then he touched their eyes saying, 'According to your faith, let it be done to you.' And their sight returned. Then Jesus sternly warned them, 'Take care that no one learns about this.' But when they had gone away, they talked about him all over the countryside.

I cannot help but speak

Who among us can manage to keep quiet upon receiving a real piece of good news? When we pass a difficult exam that we thought

we would surely fail, or the joyful birth of a baby in our family, or when we unexpectedly get a promotion, or maybe the doctor has told us that we are totally cured of the sickness we had! Wouldn't we like to share this news with others?

In today's Gospel, two blind men received their sight. Imagine their tremendous joy and amazement at such great blessing of being able to see! Even though Jesus warned them sternly to keep quiet and not to tell anyone, these two men eagerly went out and shared with everyone what Jesus did for them.

In our personal story of faith, have we ever experienced moments when Jesus gave us vision to see the reality of life in a different and wider horizon and open our hearts to live with more hope and greater joy? When we have the faith to believe in His power of love, Jesus continues to perform miracles in and through us. Are we aware of God's actions in us and do we value them? Do we, like the two blind men, spread the wonders of God to those around us? Or do we keep quiet for fear of what others would say?

As we celebrate Advent, let us not keep quiet but be eager to share all the wonders that God has done and is continually doing in us and through us.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, who are the people whom I can share my faith with?

Saturday, 7th December, St. Ambrose

Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26, Matthew 9:35–10:1, 6–8

Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds,

he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest.' He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who was also his betrayer. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not make your way to Gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.'

Count on me to be your labourer, Lord!

What do we see when we look at the crowds? Are there obstacles preventing us from reaching our destination quickly? Do we see numerous people moving around? Or do we see people who struggle, who suffer, who seek meaning in life or a sense of direction? Jesus looks at every one with the heart of the Good Shepherd and wants us, as Christians, to do the same.

We know our origin: the love of God. We know our identity: children of God. We know our destination is God the Father. But so many people do not know that they have a loving Father who is God!

Jesus asks us to pray to the Father, not with external petitions, but to talk to Him about it: 'Father, do you have many children that do not know you? Why don't you send more workers?' The Father may

say "Can I count on you? Many people come to me to ask me for things, but very few are interested in knowing my feelings, my desires, my will, and how I feel for the people. Can you help me? Can you be a shepherd among the so many sheep who don't know me, those who need my care?"

Lord, I understand that the workers are not 'others', but me. Count on me today!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be a shepherd to those around me?

Sunday, 8th December, Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1–10, Romans 15:4–9, Matthew 3:1–12

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand'. This was the man the prophet Isaiah spoke of when he said: A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father", because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more

powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

Repent!

'Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.' In some cultures, people honour visiting kings and rulers by lining the roads and paths to the cities for them.

As we enter into the second week of Advent, we are called to prepare a way for the Lord by straightening the paths so that Jesus can enter and dwell in our life. This implies daily conversion from everything that makes our paths crooked, such as our pride, laziness, selfishness, hypocrisy, superficiality, and the list goes on. Now, is the time for us to repent!

In the Gospel passage, St John the Baptist saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, but he knew that hypocrisy still reigned in their lives. He warned them, *'But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit...'* This message is also for us today. Repentance is not a matter of just thinking about it, but true repentance implies daily action in taking efforts to focus more on the needs of others, being patient with someone, discontinuing an addiction, saying more positive words instead of hurtful ones, etc. In our small efforts to repent, we can depend on Jesus because He is the first to work hard in clearing the boulders and dead branches He sees in our life. Let us make a way for the Lord to enter and be born in our lives.

Question for reflection:

1) Is there something in my life that I am struggling with now that I would like to repent doing?

Monday, 9th December, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Genesis 3:9–15,20, Ephesians 1:3–6, Luke 1:26–38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

Let what you have said be done to me

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary who received the special and unique privilege of being born without original sin. Mary, "full of grace", was chosen and called by God to be the mother of His son. Despite her fears, Mary cooperated with God in total obedience. She said, "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me." These words expressed her total trust in God, even though she did not

fully understand what her 'Yes' to Him fully entailed. She trusted that the God who loved her would do marvellous things through her life.

What does this Feast speak to us about our lives today? Like Mary, we too are chosen and called to make our lives instruments of bringing God's life and love to the world. Despite our personal weaknesses and struggles, may we too speak the words of Mary and make them our own prayer to God, "...let what you have said be done to me." With trust, we know that we exist to live for God and to allow Him to use our lives as His instruments of love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can Mary teach me to trust God more and let Him use my life for His purpose?

Tuesday, 10th December

Isaiah 40:1–11, Matthew 18:12–14

Jesus said to his disciples: '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? In truth I tell you, 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.'

Jesus, my Shepherd

In the real world, no Shepherd would risk his ninety-nine sheep for the sake of one sheep lost in the wild. It is extremely foolish to do so. Yet, Jesus the Good Shepherd did just that because His faithful love moves Him towards those who are lost and most vulnerable. Many times, we are like that one lost sheep who wandered away from the safety of the Shepherd. Advent is a time to renew our trust

that our Good Shepherd wants to love us and pardon us. All He wants from us is to be close to Him and stay in the safety of His protection and love.

"The gate that is Jesus is never closed... it is always open and open to everyone, without distinction, without exclusions, without privileges. Jesus does not exclude anyone. Some people might feel excluded because they are sinners — but no, you are not excluded! Precisely for that reason you are preferred, because Jesus prefers the sinner, always, in order to pardon him, to love him. Jesus is waiting for you, to embrace you, to pardon you" (Pope Francis)

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is waiting to embrace us, to pardon us. We need to have greater trust that His love is greater than our weaknesses and mistakes. On the other hand, if we find ourselves happily with the other ninety-nine sheep and not bothered about the missing Shepherd or the one missing sheep, then we are also lost in our false sense of security. Maybe it is time for us to find the Shepherd! To find the Shepherd, we also need to look out for the lost sheep. When we find the lost sheep, we will find the Shepherd with it. This is because Jesus our Good Shepherd is always with the lost, the separated, the weak and the poor.

In this time of Advent, let us allow ourselves to be deeply loved. Let us, once again, find our security and our belongingness in Jesus alone.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' message to me today?

Wednesday, 11th December, St. Damasus I, Pope

Isaiah 40:25–31, Matthew 11:28–30

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

Come to me

Are we exhausted because we are facing many demands from work and family? Are we perhaps feeling tired because we are too dependent on our own strength? Do we look at our efforts as something futile?

Let's listen to Jesus' gentle voice as He invites us, *"Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest."*

Remain in these words and let them bring comfort to us.

Jesus did not promise us rest from work. He knows that we have responsibilities to fulfil and work to be done. However, Jesus tells us that He will put His yoke upon us. What does this mean? A yoke is a farming equipment that joins two animals together, so that they can distribute the workload equally and thus become more productive. A beautiful image to show us that Jesus wants to be our partner as we work and toil. We are not alone as we face the challenges of each day. As we walk by His side, we have Jesus to share the burden with us. With Him, the load is made lighter. Can we have more trust in Jesus and allow Him to be our partner?

"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress; I shall never be shaken." (Ps 62:1-2)

Today, we are called to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus and let Him give us the rest we need. With Jesus, we are never shaken!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I learn to experience the rest that Jesus desires for me?
- 2) What prevents me from sharing my burdens with Jesus?

Thursday, 12th December, Our Lady of Guadalupe

Zechariah 2:14–17 or Revelation 11:19, 12:1–6, 10, Luke 1:26–38

(Readings taken from Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe)

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

To Jesus through Mary

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe – we rejoice that God has chosen Mary as His faithful instrument to lead us to Jesus. The first missionaries who went to Mexico had a hard time spreading the Christian faith to the native Mexicans. The natives were sceptical with the religion, thus only a handful opened their hearts to welcome the Christian faith.

In 1531, Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego, a simple peasant. After miracles of roses, healing as well as the beautiful image of Mary on Juan Diego's mantle, many came to believe in Jesus.

In today's gospel, Mary said 'Yes' to God's will, and willingly surrendered herself to dance to God's tune. Till today, God has been using Mary as an instrument of faith for multitudes to believe in Jesus. We can emulate Mary and say 'Yes' to God so that people can know and love Jesus through us.

Today, let us also ask Mary to guide people who have hardened their hearts against God and the Church, so that they can come to believe once again.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Does Mary play an important role in my journey of faith?
- 2) Who are the people in my life who need me to be their instrument of faith?

Friday, 13th December, St. Lucy

Isaiah 48:17–19, Matthew 11:16–19

Jesus spoke to the crowds: ‘What description can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place: “We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn’t dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn’t be mourners”.’ For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He is possessed”. The Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners”. Yet wisdom has been proved right by her actions.’

Dancing with God

In the gospel today, Jesus compared the people around him to a group of children playing in the marketplace. They started playing wedding music, but no one danced. Another group started to wail and sing sad funeral songs, but no one cried.

What word would we use for such children who would not dance when merry music was played for them or would not cry when funeral songs were sung? The word is ‘Spoiled’.

Thus, Jesus was calling those people around him who refused to accept his message as ‘spoiled’. They were neither contented nor satisfied with whatever was given to them. John the Baptist came with his message of repentance, yet they would not repent. Jesus came with the joyful message of forgiveness, loving the outcasts in society, but they would not dance accordingly.

Today, we are also like those children playing in the marketplace. We want a God who dances to our tune, rather than us dancing to his. We put God in our own small box and expect God to act, to do and to love according to what we think, and feel is the best. Many

times, we are afraid to let God be God, and to dance with trust according to his rhythm. Like spoiled children, we insist on our own ways, our own plans, and refuse to give way to allow God to be God in our lives.

'I am the Lord your God, the one who wants to teach you for your own good and direct you in the way you should go.'

Let us take courage and dance with God today!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I trust in God and allow him to lead me in the dance of life?

Saturday, 14th December, St. John of the Cross

Sirach 48:1–4, 9–11, Matthew 17:9a;10–13

As they came down from the mountain the disciples put this question to Jesus, 'Why do the scribes say then that Elijah has to come first?' 'True;' he replied 'Elijah is to come to see that everything is once more as it should be; however, I tell you that Elijah has come already and they did not recognise him but treated him as they pleased; and the Son of Man will suffer similarly at their hands.' The disciples understood then that he had been speaking of John the Baptist.

Your ways, Lord, not mine!

The ways of God are not the ways of man. We are always seeking for fame, for titles and glory. The more qualifications and worldly possessions a person has, the more we will admire him/her. For God, however, material wealth, glory and power are not at all important. What is essential for Him is the heart of a person.

John the Baptist is the Elijah that the Jews have been waiting for. However, he did not come according to what the world expected. He was a lowly person who lived in the desert, wore camel skin and ate honey and locusts. However, the heart of John the Baptist was dedicated totally to God and he lived his life doing the will of his God.

In this time of Advent, let us not be distracted with all what the world has to offer us. Instead, let us search for the ways of God in our own lives and to see where He is leading us each day.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be less distracted with the ways of the world and truly dedicate my life to live God's ways?

Sunday, 15th December, Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10, Jas 5:7–10, Matthew 11:2–11

John in his prison had heard what Christ was doing and he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or have we got to wait for someone else?' Jesus answered, 'Go back and tell John what you hear and see; the blind see again, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to life and the Good News is proclaimed to the poor; and happy is the man who does not lose faith in me.' As the messengers were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the people about John: 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No? Then what did you go out to see? A man wearing fine clothes? Oh no, those who wear fine clothes are to be found in palaces. Then what did you go out for? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom the scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger before you; he will prepare your way before you. I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women, a greater than John the Baptist has

never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.'

Joy

It was said that the ancient Egyptians believed that after their death, they would be asked two questions. Their answers to these two questions would then determine their journey in the afterlife. The first question was, 'Did you bring joy?' The second was, 'Did you find joy?'

Today, we celebrate 'Gaudete' Sunday, i.e. the Sunday of Joy. As we draw closer to Christmas, let us ask ourselves these two questions: 'Did I bring joy?' and 'Did I find joy?'

Let us look at the life of Jesus. Did Jesus bring joy? The answer would be a definite 'Yes'. He brought joy to the people whose lives He helped to heal, transform and make new. With His outstretched arms, He always welcomed the poor and outcast and brought God's peace and joy to them. He brought joy as He preached the Good News of God as 'Abba', 'Father' whose love is faithful and unconditional.

The answer to the next question: Did Jesus find joy? Yes! A firm and clear resounding 'Yes'! Jesus found joy in bringing joy to others. He was a happy man who lived the life of love, not for admiration from others, but for life itself.

Why do we waste time searching for joy in the world outside? Go within! Search deeper! See that joy can only be found when we start opening our hearts to bringing love.

Question for reflection:

1) As I journey through these weeks of Advent, did I bring joy, and did I find joy?

Monday, 16th December

Numbers 24:2–7, 15–17, Matthew 21:23–27

Jesus had gone into the Temple and was teaching, when the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, 'What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?' 'And I' replied Jesus, 'will ask you a question, only one; if you tell me the answer to it, I will then tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism: where did it come from: heaven or man?' And they argued it out this way among themselves, 'If we say from heaven, he will retort, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?"; but if we say from man, we have the people to fear, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know.' And he retorted, 'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this.'

Courage to act in the name of Love

The chief priests and the elders of the people were upset with the actions of Jesus. They saw him healing the sick, eating with the sinners, making friends with the outcasts, etc. They shook their heads with self-righteous pride as they heard him telling the people about God who is merciful, loving and forgiving. Thus, they asked Jesus with cautious curiosity, 'What authority... and who gave you this authority?' All Jesus did and said came from the authority of Love, and this love had its source in God. He was motivated by love, and thus He was free from the opinions of the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees. He fearlessly went around loving and doing good against all odds.

In our lives, we want to love more, to forgive more, to include more, etc. We desire to spend the day doing good. Yet, sometimes we hold back because we are afraid of the opinions of others. 'What would this person think of me if I offer her peace?' 'What would my friends say when they see me trying to be nice to this person whom they hate?' and so on. All these fears make us procrastinate in doing good, and at times, we choose to do nothing at all.

'Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to say that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to the end, requires some of the same courage which a soldier needs.' (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

In this time of prayer, let us dialogue with Jesus. We can perhaps ask him the same questions that the chief priests and elders asked. We can tell him our fears about taking the step to love more. But let us listen to him as he speaks to us in our concrete situations. Let the gentle loving voice of Jesus silence all the voices of the critics. Today, Jesus calls us to partake in his authority to Love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I struggle to act in the name of Love due to the opinions of others around me?
- 2) How can I listen to the voice of Jesus and put love into action today?

Tuesday, 17th December

Genesis 49:2,8–10, Matthew 1:1–17

A genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of

Judah and his brothers, Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, Tamar being their mother, Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon was the father of Boaz, Rahab being his mother, Boaz was the father of Obed, Ruth being his mother, Obed was the father of Jesse; and Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, Joram the father of Azariah, Azariah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah; and Josiah was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers. Then the deportation to Babylon took place. After the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, Achim the father of Eliud, Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob; and Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. The sum of generations is therefore: fourteen from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian deportation; and fourteen from the Babylonian deportation to Christ.

God at work

In today's Gospel, we are told of the genealogy of Jesus. What does it mean for us today?

It is for us to realise that God guides human history. A human history which is filled with concrete people and their stories of sins and conversion, victories and failures, fears and joys. God is always present, and He makes crooked lines straight and heals broken lives.

God used each person in the genealogy of Jesus to bring about the life of Jesus. Likewise, in the midst of our own brokenness, God is at work and He shines in us and through us. As we approach Christmas, let us deepen our trust in God both in our life and in the lives of others.

"Because always, even in the darkest moments, in moments of sin, in moments of weakness, in moments of failure, I have seen Jesus, and I trusted Him... He has not left me alone." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) Do I trust that God is at work in my life and He is making crooked lines straight?

Wednesday, 18th December

Jeremiah 23:5–8, Matthew 1:18–24

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. And they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Emmanuel

'God-is-with-us'. Read this phrase. Say it aloud. Repeat it silently. Allow it to sink deeply into your heart. 'God-is-with-us', 'God-is-with-me'. Why do we celebrate Christmas? It is because we believe that the God we worship, adore, love and serve is a God who is never far from any of us. God is present. We can find Him in every success, every failure, every hurt, every grief, every anger and every joy. We can find Him in every person and in our very own lives.

"Open your eyes to the presence of Emmanuel. Wherever you are, He is present. Open the ears of your heart and listen to His gentle voice, 'I am the God of your life. I am the God of your story. I am the God who is with you here, now and forever.' Open your heart to Him. Open your life to Him. Let God be in your comings and goings, your joys and pains, your dreams and fears. "Christ is the sacrament of the invisible God – a sacrament that indicates presence. God is with us." (St. John Paul II)

Let us open our eyes of faith to see that God is not invisible or distant from any of us. Wherever we are, God is present. We can see Him, we can touch Him, we can hear Him in the Sacraments we have in the Church, in the Word of God, in our innermost conscience, in the lives of our brothers and sisters, in nature. Jesus, Emmanuel, is 'God-is-with us'.

He is present for us, but are we present for Him?

The world is now in full swing celebrating Christmas with Santa Claus, reindeers, last minute shopping. As Christians, can we prepare for Christmas differently?

Question for reflection:

1) In this time of prayer, am I fully present for God who is present for me?

Thursday, 19th December

Judges 13:2–7,24–25, Luke 1:5–25

In the days of King Herod of Judaea there lived a priest called Zechariah who belonged to the Abijah section of the priesthood, and he had a wife, Elizabeth by name, who was a descendant of Aaron. Both were worthy in the sight of God, and scrupulously observed all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless: Elizabeth was barren, and they were both getting on in years. Now it was the turn of Zechariah's section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God when it fell to him by lot, as the ritual custom was, to enter the Lord's sanctuary and burn incense there. And at the hour of incense the whole congregation was outside, praying. Then there appeared to him the angel of the Lord, standing on the right of the altar of incense. The sight disturbed Zechariah and he was overcome with fear. But the angel said to him, 'Zechariah, do not be afraid, your prayer has been

heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must name him John. He will be your joy and delight, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink no wine, no strong drink. Even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the disobedient back to the wisdom that the virtuous have, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him. Zechariah said to the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years.' The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel who stand in God's presence, and I have been sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. Listen! Since you have not believed my words, which will come true at their appointed time, you will be silenced and have no power of speech until this has happened.' Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he stayed in the sanctuary so long. When he came out

he could not speak to them, and they realised that he had received a vision in the sanctuary. But he could only make signs to them and remained dumb.

When his time of service came to an end he returned home. Sometime later his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept to herself. 'The Lord has done this for me' she said 'now that it has pleased him to take away the humiliation I suffered among men.'

Faith, not doubt

Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous people in God's sight. They were good people who loved God with their heart, mind and strength. However, Zechariah was afraid when he saw the angel in the Temple and doubted God's message. He allowed his and his wife's physical limitations to prevent him from rising to greater faith in God's promise.

Many times, we can be diligent in observing rituals and commandments, and live good Christian life. However, we struggle deep down with a lot of fears and doubts because our hearts are not open to God and His ways. We wonder, "How can I be sure of this...How can I be certain of the future...How can I have the guarantee that this is the way for me?" Why don't we turn to God in prayer and be honest with Him about our fears and doubts? He wants to bring us to deeper faith, to greater trust. He longs that we have peace within our hearts.

"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You." (Psalm 56:3)

Question for reflection:

1) Do my fears and doubts stop me from rising to greater faith in God and His Word?

Friday, 20th December

Isaiah 7:10–14, Luke 1:26–38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

When God asks...

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." Mary clearly understood what humility meant. She understood that she is only human, with her own set of limitations and weaknesses. Yet, she also understood very much that she was loved by God and she loved Him in return. This is the basis of her 'yes', for her whole life, in good times and bad. She rejoiced and trusted in His love. When God gave her the task to be the mother of His Son, her response was a heartfelt 'yes', even amidst the confusion and ambiguity of the message. Her relationship with her Creator was one built on mutual trust and love!

“There is one more truth that the Annunciation teaches us... the Almighty Father creates heaven and earth, the sun and all the stars; but when he really wants something done, he comes, the Omnipotent and Omniscient, to one of his poor, weak creatures – and he asks.”
(Universalis)

In our own lives, in our own time and situation, day by day, God comes and knocks at our heart’s door, just like he did long ago with Mary. Today, let us build our relationship with God on the basis of trust and love. Like Mary, we too can say ‘yes’ when God asks.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I strengthen my relationship with God so that I can say my ‘Yes’ to Him today?

Saturday, 21st December, St. Peter Canisius

Song of Songs 2:8–14 or Zephaniah 3:14–18, Luke 1:39–45

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.’

Share your Joy!

In today’s Gospel, we see two women filled with joy upon seeing each other! Our pragmatic minds might think: Shouldn’t they,

instead, be worried with so many uncertainties going on in their lives? Elizabeth must have been worried about her pregnancy at her old age and she must have been concerned with what the child she was carrying would grow up to be.

Mary too must have carried a lot of worries in her heart. In the eyes of the Jewish law, she could be stoned for being pregnant outside of marriage. As for her family and Joseph, she had no idea whether they would believe her words and support her through her pregnancy.

Both had no concrete guarantees and were filled with uncertainties. Yet, they trusted! Their faith led them to share their joy with each other, instead of focusing on their worries and anxieties. Many times, when we meet up with close friends or family members, we tend to share only our worries. In the process, we share our pessimism and discouraging thoughts with one another. Let us follow the example of Mary and Elizabeth who, instead of focusing on their problems, shared their joy.

"If we just worry about the big picture, we are powerless. So, my secret is to start right away doing whatever little work I can do. I try to give joy to one person in the morning and remove the suffering of one person in the afternoon. If you and your friends do not despise the small work, a million people will remove a lot of suffering."
(Sr Chan Khong, a Vietnamese Nun and Peace Activist)

We are days away from Christmas. Let us share joy instead of pain. Let us, each day, do the little deeds we can to try and bring joy to one person in the morning and remove the suffering of one person in the afternoon. By doing so, our hearts will leap with joy that no year-end bonus or party with friends could ever bring us.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, who is the 'one person' I can try to bring joy to and the 'one person' I can remove a particular suffering, from?

Sunday, 22nd December, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10–14, Romans 1:1–7, Matthew 1:18–24

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they came to live together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. And they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Courage of Love

The gospel today speaks to us about two people in love, i.e. Mary and Joseph. Yes! They are deeply and madly in love with God that their passion for Him led them to say 'Yes' to cooperate in his plan. They did not set conditions, calculate or complain. They simply loved. Their love gave them the courage to extend themselves and tread unknown paths, to walk on unfamiliar grounds. Courage is not the absence of fear. Rather, courage is choosing to act and move into the unknown despite of fear. The courage of these two people made Christmas possible.

“Do not forget that true love sets no conditions; it does not calculate or complain, but simply loves.” (St John Paul II)

As Christmas is just a few days away, let us (using the words of St John Paul II) not forget that true love sets no conditions; it does not calculate or complain, but simply loves. How is our love for God? Is our love for him true? Sometimes, we are afraid to let God tell us of his plans for us. We lack the courage of love that Mary and Joseph had. We set conditions, calculate, complain and refuse to fully let go and let God take over. With our ‘Yes’, God can use us as His instruments to make Christmas possible for many people today.

What about our love for those people closest to us? Do we truly love them? Do we set conditions, calculate or complain? We cannot truly love God if we do not have the courage to love those closest to us.

As we draw close to Christmas, let us exercise true love towards God and others. May we not be so caught up with the last-minute shopping that we forget the essential.

Question for reflection:

1) What are the concrete challenges we face in loving God and others without conditions?

Monday, 23rd December, St. John of Kanty

Malachi 3:1–4, 23–24, Luke 1:57–66

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy. Now on the eighth

day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said, 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name' and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John'. And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned, and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

Rejoice!

"They shared her joy" – Do we share the joy of others? A beautiful statement and yet it can be sometimes a difficult thing to do as we tend to compare, to envy, to compete, etc. We can only share the joy of others when we share the pain of others. This comes from a heart that truly treasures the lives of the people around them. The neighbours and relations of Elizabeth shared her joy because they too shared her pain of being barren for so many years. Now at last, they were able to celebrate with her and her family.

In our individualistic society, our hearts are so complicated that we are quite selective with rejoicing, as well as suffering with others. Look around us today, are there relatives and friends whom we have distanced ourselves from? Isn't this the right time to re-establish friendships with them and to be part of their joys and pains?

Christmas is a time to be with our friends and family and it is the season of sharing, not just gifts and vouchers, but to share our hearts with them. Are we truly generous enough?

Question for reflection:

1) How can I open my heart to share the joys and pains of others?

Tuesday, 24th December

2 Samuel 7:1–5, 8–12, 14, 16, Luke 1:67–79

John's father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel for he has visited his people, he has come to their rescue and he has raised up for us a power for salvation in the House of his servant David, even as he proclaimed, by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times, that he would save us from our enemies and from the hands of all who hate us. Thus he shows mercy to our ancestors, thus he remembers his holy covenant the oath he swore to our father Abraham that he would grant us, free from fear, to be delivered from the hands of our enemies, to serve him in holiness and virtue in his presence, all our days. And you, little child, you shall be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him. To give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins; this by the tender mercy of our God who from on high will bring the rising Sun to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

Blessing and praise

Whenever we are filled with the presence of God, we will speak out words of blessings and praise. Many times, we have the tendency to curse, to complain, to gossip and to put others down.

As we prepare ourselves to welcome Jesus, let us ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and minds with His love, His peace and His joy so that we can proclaim words of praise and blessings!

There are many people who continue to *'live in darkness and the shadow of death'* as they grapple with guilt, fears, anxieties and the stresses of life. How can we bring the Good News of Joy to them? How can we share with them the Light of Jesus so that He can shine and dispel their darkness?

Let us go out and share the Good News with those around us. Christmas is not just about giving chocolates, wallets, shirts, etc. Let us not forget the greatest gift of all! Jesus is the greatest gift that we can give to people.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I have Jesus in my heart so that I can give Him to others?

Wednesday, 25th December, The Nativity of The Lord

Isaiah 52:7–10, Hebrew 1:1–6, John 1:1–18

In the beginning was the Word: The Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself. The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the Only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

An encounter with a Person who gives a decisive orientation

God is the God of Life. Christmas is a time to celebrate this reality that God desires to participate in our daily life with his active presence and lead us towards living our true identity as His beloved sons and daughters. Reading through this passage of the Gospel of John on this Christmas day, one cannot help but feel a sense of peace and joy. Jesus, the Word, was made flesh, and He came to live among us. This gives us so much security that God, Emmanuel, will never leave us alone. Jesus, full of grace and truth, is with us in our everyday life. He comes to live among us. Fixing our eyes on Him, we learn how to live in the Truth as children of the Father. Have we encountered Jesus? Have we experienced the grace of His presence and the truth of the Word that leads us to real freedom?

'One doesn't begin to be a Christian because of an ethical decision or a great idea, but rather because of an encounter with an event, with a Person, who gives new horizons to life, and with that, a decisive orientation.' (Pope Benedict XVI)

This Christmas is a time for us to encounter Jesus, the Final Word of God. Jesus wants to give us new horizons to life and wants to direct us to a decisive orientation to live as children of the Father. Living in the world, we are often confused with the many voices that tell us that we are what we possess, we are how others regard us, etc. Therefore, we strive to work for success, productivity, seek praise from others, etc. Yet, sooner or later, we realise that material things and successes do not give us the joy and peace we are searching for. Jesus wants to re-direct our orientation again. We are children of God – this is who we are.

On this beautiful Christmas day, let us allow Jesus, the God of Life, to speak to our hearts because He wants to re-direct our lives towards what is real and essential.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I allow Jesus, the God of Life, to speak to my reality and to re-direct me to what is real and essential today?

Thursday, 26th December, St. Stephen

Acts 6:8–10, 7:54–59, Matthew 10:17–22

Jesus said to his apostles: 'Beware of men: they will hand you over to Sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the pagans. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when

the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name; but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

Fix our gaze on Jesus

*"On St Stephen's Day, we are called to fix our gaze on the Son of God."
(Pope Benedict XVI)*

In the atmosphere of joyful celebration, we celebrate the Feast of the First Martyr who imitated Jesus, even in death. This is a reminder for us that Christianity is not simply celebrating the birth of Jesus, but a call to lay down our lives for Him. It does not mean physically dying for our faith, but we can seek opportunities daily to lay down our lives by choosing to die to our self-centred pride, laziness, addictions, jealousy, and other actions that turn us away from God. We can die to ourselves for the good of those around us. Today, we can try to set aside our likes and wants in order to look at Jesus and desire to know what He wants and needs from us.

In today's gospel, Jesus warns us that when we desire to follow Him and live for Him, we will meet with oppositions from family members and friends. People might not understand certain options we take and might make use of our love and goodness. The only consolation is that Jesus is telling us, *"Do not worry... the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you, will be acting through you, will be loving with you."*

May we fix our gaze on Jesus and stand firm with Him to the end!

Question for reflection:

1) In what concrete ways can I lay my life down for Christ?

Friday, 27th December, St. John, Apostle and Evangelist

1 John 1:1–4, John 20:2–8

On the first day of the week Mary of Magdala came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.' So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw, and he believed.

John the Beloved

St John the evangelist gave His whole life to live and proclaim the Word of God. Even when he was exiled for his faith, he did not give up but continued to give his life to Jesus, His Master and Friend. What made St John so passionate about his discipleship?

In the Gospel, after hearing the news of Jesus' resurrection, John was the first to reach the tomb, even before Peter, and he believed immediately that his beloved Master has truly risen. His faith in Jesus came, not from knowledge, but from his experience of being loved deeply by Jesus Himself. No wonder John is called the Beloved disciple! The constant love of Christ urged him to share the same love with others, right to the end. When we allow ourselves to be loved by Jesus, we will spontaneously want others to know and experience the treasure we have.

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptised, whatever

their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelisation to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients.

The new evangelisation calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptised. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelisation; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.

Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans came to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (Jn 4:39). So too, St Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6–21)." (E.G. 120)

What are we waiting for? Because we have been loved, we now share the love of Christ with others. We must find ways in which we can communicate Jesus wherever we are.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I communicate Jesus to those around me today?

Saturday, 28th December, The Holy Innocents

1 John 1:5–2:2, Matthew 2:13–18

After the wise men had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.' So Joseph got up and taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet:

I called my son out of Egypt.

Herod was furious when he realised that he had been outwitted by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or under, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men. It was then that the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled:

A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loudly lamenting: it was Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were no more.

Herod, Joseph and the Wise Men

Herod still exists in today's world in the form of senseless violence, addiction, indifference, war, poverty, etc. The 'Herod' of today continues to destroy innocent lives and bring misery to many people. We too can have 'Herod' in us when we 'kill' the divine life of Christ in us by our sins as well and when we 'kill' the Christ in others, as well.

In the same way that Herod lives, 'Joseph' and the 'three wise men' continue to live on as well. When there is care, protection, sacrifices

and love, the 'Joseph' of today continues to bring God's hope into the world. When there is desire for truth and openness to be guided by love, the 'three wise men' continue to illuminate the long journey towards God. Herod killed and annihilated while Joseph looked after and protected. The three wise men encountered and believed.

Today, God invites us to choose love and life.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I diminish the 'Herod' in me?
- 2) How can I imitate Joseph and the three wise men so that I can live my life for Christ?

Sunday, 29th December, The Holy Family

Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14, Colossians 3:12–21, Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23

After the wise men had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.' So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet:

I called my son out of Egypt.

After Herod's death, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you and go back to the land of Israel, for those who wanted to kill the child are dead.' So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, went back to the land of Israel. But when he learnt that Archelaus had succeed his father Herod as ruler of Judaea he was afraid

to go there, and being warned in a dream he left for the region of Galilee. There he settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way, the words spoken through the prophets were to be fulfilled:

'He will be called a Nazarene.'

A family united in their trust in God

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family – the bond of love that surrounded and invaded Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Many times, we are so used to see paintings or statues of St Joseph doing carpentry work while Mary sitting close by with the child Jesus. Everybody looked so happy and serene.

In today's gospel, we see that it was not a 'happy- ever- after' for Joseph, Mary and Jesus. They were refugees who had to escape from Herod and later from his son, Archelaus. Joseph, Mary and Jesus experienced suffering, loneliness in a foreign land, anxiety of not knowing what would happen next, etc. Yet, they lived in deep trust in God because they knew that He would never abandon His Beloveds. Living with this deep trust in God, Mary and Joseph did not let the circumstances of their lives harden them.

What can today's gospel teach us? Like Mary and Joseph, many of us do not live in a 'happy-ever-after' world. We wake up every day to new problems, to great uncertainties of the future, to everyday demands of life. In the face of these circumstances, we can become increasingly bitter and anxious or we can let them lead us to a deeper experience of trusting in God and growing stronger in our faith. We have the choice of how we want to live.

Questions for reflection:

1) How do I live through difficult moments in life?

Monday, 30th December

1 John 2:12–17, Luke 2:36–40

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

The virtue of Patience

We are a society governed by time. At times, we display impatience and intolerance at the slightest incident in which we need to wait. Anna, our main character in today's gospel, was a person of God who knew patience. She waited patiently and looked forward with hope for God's deliverance. Her patience led her to stay where she was and listen attentively to God as He revealed Himself in each event, each person. Thus, she was able to recognise the baby Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

"A waiting person is a patient person. The word patience means the willingness to stay where we are and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself to us."
(Henri Nouwen)

We like to pray for more patience in our lives, however, we do not like to practice patience. We want quick answers to our questions. We snap at the slowness of the traffic, of a child. We rush from one place to another. Living in such a fast-paced lifestyle, we are afraid

to slow down, to stop, to wait and let God bring us to another dimension in our spiritual life. Today, let us stop, listen and look! Let us learn to recognise God in the people we encounter, the situations we live, the beautiful nature we see.

Jesus grew to maturity and he was filled with wisdom. His maturity and wisdom took time to deepen, to grow, to manifest. He was patiently living a life in Nazareth, waiting for thirty years before he began his mission of preaching, teaching and healing for just three years.

Let us open our hands today in prayer and ask God to place this gift of patience in our hands. Let us take every opportunity to practice this gift so that we can rejoice at God's presence.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I learn to exercise patience?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation for me in this time of prayer?

Tuesday, 31st December, St. Silvester I

1 John 2:18–21, John 1:1–18

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light. The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had its being through him, and

the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself. The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John appears as his witness. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me ranks before me because he existed before me'. Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received - yes, grace in return for grace, since, though the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

To receive or not to receive!

Life is full of choices. In today's Gospel, we are told that there were some people who chose to reject Jesus while others opened their hearts and received Him. To 'receive' means to welcome Jesus and allow Him to affect the way we live our life. Jesus wants to live in our life today. However, He will never force us to receive Him, but waits for us to choose to open ourselves to Him.

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Revelation 3:20)

When we open the door and let Jesus into our life, it means that we allow Him to affect our whole life: our hobbies, the way we utilise time, our usage of internet websites, our relationships with friends and family, etc.

Our Christian faith is in the Person of Jesus. It is time we all take our faith seriously and allow Him to lead us to live as Children of God.

This New Year's Eve, Jesus stands at our door. He knocks, He waits. We have a choice. If we want a purposeful life, then we need to receive Jesus and welcome Him today. He wants us to live forever in love and joy. Let us take a step to trust Him today.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Wednesday, 1st January, Mary, Mother of God

Numbers 6:22–27, Galatians 4:4–7, Luke 2:16–21

The shepherds hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say. As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told. When the eighth day came and the child was to be circumcised, they gave him the name Jesus, the name the angel had given him before his conception.

Wish versus Resolution

On this first day of the New Year, people make resolutions, but some do nothing to fulfil them. In fact, such people make wishes, not resolutions.

What is the difference between a wish and a resolution? A person who makes a wish sees and recognises a goal, for example, "I wish to be a more prayerful person this coming year." In contrast, a person who makes a resolution diligently spells out the steps that have to be taken to reach that goal. For example, he/she might say "I will set aside this TV programme at this specific time so that I can

spend quality time to pray.” Making resolutions require us to actively do it, and not simply say we’ll do it.

As we celebrate the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, let us look at her and learn from her how to be people of resolutions, and not just people making wishes. In today’s gospel, Mary *“treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.”* Mary made time to listen attentively and ponder deeply about God’s word, and thus, found her strength from within to faithfully put into action what she understood to be God’s will.

The best resolution we can make to God this New Year is to become people of prayer. Many times, when we find ourselves in a problem or crisis, we turn to God and pour our hearts out to Him in prayer. Do we listen to what He has to say to us?

May this New Year be a journey of prayer where we grow closer to God. Today, let us start by taking the step to listen more to God’s voice and to treasure His words in our hearts. In God alone, we find strength to carry out our resolutions.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is/are my resolution/s for this New Year?
- 2) How can I include God in living out what I have resolved to do?

Thursday, 2nd January, Ss. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen

1 John 2:22–28, John 1:19–28

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, ‘I am not the Christ’. ‘Well then,’ they

asked 'are you Elijah?' 'I am not' he said. 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No'. So they said to him, 'Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?' So John said, 'I am, as Isaiah prophesied: a voice that cries in the wilderness: Make a straight way for the Lord'. Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, 'Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?' John replied, 'I baptise with water; but there stands among you - unknown to you - the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap'. This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

Witness to Christ

Who are we? This is a key question which we must ask in order to be true witnesses of Jesus and to point Him to others. In today's gospel, John the Baptist was asked by the priests and Levites from Jerusalem, "Who are you?" John the Baptist knew who he was and who he was not. He was not Christ, Elijah or the Prophet. John the Baptist knew that he was a witness to Christ. He was the voice pointing others to Jesus so that they too can come to encounter Him. John the Baptist was humble and did not want to draw attention to himself. All he wanted was to be faithful to the call God has given to him.

Today, we are called to witness Christ through the simplicity of our everyday working relationships, family relationships, friendships. Perhaps we look at our lives and feel our unworthiness to be His witness. Yet, Jesus precisely calls us - weak and common as we are - to go and direct people to Him. He trusts us to be the John the Baptist of today. Do we trust Jesus by giving ourselves completely to Him?

"Give yourself fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love than in your own weakness." (St Mother Teresa)

Jesus, may I be faithful to your call for me to be your witness. I want to decrease so that you can increase in me.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I bear witness to Christ through my faith?

Friday, 3rd January, The Most Holy Name of Jesus

1 John 2:29–3:6, John 1:29–34

The next day, seeing Jesus coming towards him, John said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I spoke of when I said: A man is coming after me who ranks before me because he existed before me. I did not know him myself, and yet it was to reveal him to Israel that I came baptising with water.' John also declared, 'I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and resting on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is going to baptise with the Holy Spirit". Yes, I have seen and I am the witness that he is the Chosen One of God.'

Only Jesus can complete me

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him and he recognised that this man was the One who would come after him, the One whose sandals he was not good enough to untie. Joyously, he proclaimed, *"There is the Lamb of God..."*.

He singled Jesus to others so that they could follow Him. He continued, *"I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and resting on him."* It is interesting that St John should mention the Holy Spirit in his gospel, which was not mentioned in the other three gospels, regarding John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus' baptism. The evangelist, St John, wanted us to see the important role of the Holy Spirit in our faith journey.

When we encounter Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit that opens our hearts to recognise Jesus and prompts us to respond. He stirs our hearts and makes us acknowledge that money, wealth, pleasures, worldly powers cannot complete our lives, but only Jesus can!

Let us continue to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is the one who constantly leads us to a deeper encounter with Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us courage, strength, perseverance and joy to keep going in this mission.

Someone once said, *"I'm just a beggar telling other beggars where I found bread."*

Like John the Baptist, let us be happy beggars who point Christ to others so that others may also find Him, the Lamb of God – the One who will truly satisfy the hunger of each person.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit so that He can lead me to a constant and deeper encounter with Jesus?

Saturday, 4th January, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

1 John 3:7–10, John 1:35–42

As John stood there with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God.' Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, 'What do you want?' They answered, 'Rabbi' - which means Teacher - 'Where do you live?' 'Come and see' he replied; so they went and saw where he lived and stayed with him the rest of the day. It was about the tenth hour. One of these two who became followers of Jesus after hearing what John had said was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Early next morning, Andrew met his brother and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' - which means the Christ - and he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked hard at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas' - meaning Rock.

'What do you want?'

In the Gospel today, the two disciples heard John the Baptist saying, "*There is the Lamb of God.*". Something stirred in them and they started to follow Jesus. When Jesus saw that these two men were following him, he turned and asked them, "*What do you want?*". Today, Jesus asks us the same question, "*What do you want?*".

There are many moments in our life when we spend a lot of our energy, money and time looking for something or someone to make us happy, to make us fulfilled. We learn from the two disciples what we should desire in our life: it is not money, not power, not pleasures, not the latest gadgets, but Jesus alone.

The two disciples asked Jesus, "*Where do you live?*". This question signifies their desire to be with Jesus and to be part of His life.

We have the tendency to go to Jesus with our list of requests and problems. Can we simply desire to be with Jesus and to be part of His life? As His friends, we need to seek His presence in our ordinary life. Jesus will never turn any of us away when we go to Him with the desire to know Him more, to love Him deeper, to live each day with Him. He will never stop calling us, *"Come and see"*.

When we truly encounter Jesus, only then can we go and tell others, with joyful enthusiasm, *"We have found Jesus. We have found the Messiah. Come and see."*

Questions for reflection:

- 1) 'What do you want?'– What can I tell Jesus when he addresses this question to me?
- 2) Looking at the people in my life, with whom can I share Jesus, today?

Sunday, 5th January, The Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60:1–6, Ephesians 3:2–3, 5–6 Matthew 2:1–12

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him 'for this is what the prophet wrote: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah You are no means least among the leaders of Judah, For out of you will come a leader Who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared and sent them on to

Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said; and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod and returned to their own country by a different way.

What am I searching for?

In our journey of life, we all search for something. In one way or another, we all want to be happy. In order to achieve it, we may take different paths, thinking that they all lead us to our desired goal for happiness.

In this passage, we have two different groups of people. The first group is the men from the East who were genuine seekers and they were searching for the One who would bring them true happiness. The act of searching demands courage and trust. It demands us to start walking, without knowing the way, similar to Abraham as he journeyed, guided only by the certainty of his faith in God.

The second group is Herod and the teachers of the Law. As Jews, they knew that the Messiah was supposed to come from Bethlehem, but they were not interested in finding Him in order to worship Him. Herod was searching for more and more power. For him, worldly power would make him happy. Thus, he wanted to get rid of any obstacle that prevented him from gaining worldly power.

Question for reflection:

What about me? What kind of happiness am I searching for?

Monday, 6th January

1 John 3:22–4:6, Matthew 4:12–17, 23–25

Hearing that John had been arrested, Jesus went back to Galilee, and leaving Nazareth he went and settled in Capernaum, a lakeside town on the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali. In this way the prophecy of Isaiah was to be fulfilled: *'Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali! Way of the sea on the far side of Jordan, Galilee of the nations! The people that lived in darkness has seen a great light; on those who dwell in the land and shadow of death a light has dawned.'* From that moment Jesus began his preaching with the message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand'. He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people. His fame spread throughout Syria, and those who were suffering from diseases and painful complaints of one kind or another, the possessed, epileptics, the paralysed, were all brought to him, and he cured them. Large crowds followed him, coming from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea and Transjordan.

Go out and share your joy with all!

In today's gospel, Jesus went to Capernaum, a Gentile area where the people of the town were labelled as sinners by the Jewish authorities. He did not go to the great city of Jerusalem where many of the self-righteous Jewish leaders lived. Instead, Jesus chose to be with *"the people that lived in darkness"* and *"those who dwell in the land and shadow of death"*.

Today, let us reflect on the gospel in relation to the words of Pope Francis:

"Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should

appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytising that the Church grows, but "by attraction".

*John Paul II asked us to recognize that 'there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel' to those who are far from Christ, 'because this is the first task of the Church'. Indeed, 'today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church' and 'the missionary task must remain foremost'. What would happen if we were to take these words seriously? We would realize that missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity. Along these lines the Latin American bishops stated that we 'cannot passively and calmly wait in our church buildings'; we need to move 'from a pastoral ministry of mere conservation to a decidedly missionary pastoral ministry'. This task continues to be a source of immense joy for the Church: "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Lk 15:7)." (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 14–15)*

Question for reflection:

1) What strikes me about the mission that I, as a Christian, am called to do?

Tuesday, 7th January, St. Raymond of Penyafort

1 John 4:7–10, Mark 6:34–44

As Jesus stepped ashore, he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length. By now it was getting very late, and his disciples came up to him and said, 'This is a lonely place and it is getting very late, so send them away, and they can go to the farms

and villages round about, to buy themselves something to eat'. He replied, 'Give them something to eat yourselves'. They answered, 'Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?' How many loaves have you?' he asked, 'Go and see.' And when they had found out they said, 'Five loaves and two fish'. Then he ordered them to get all the people together in groups on the green grass, and they sat down on the ground in squares of hundreds and fifties. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing; then he broke the loaves and handed them to his disciples to distribute among the people. He also shared out the two fish among them all. They all ate as much as they wanted. They collected twelve basketfuls of scraps of bread and pieces of fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

A heart full of unfailing love and mercy

"The thought of my pain, my homelessness, is bitter poison. I think of it constantly, and my spirit is depressed. Yet hope returns when I remember this one thing: The Lord's unfailing love and mercy still continue, Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. The Lord is all I have, and so in him I put my hope." (Lamentations 3:19-24)

The heart of our God is full of unfailing love and mercy. It is through Jesus' life that we come to know the heart of God's love.

In today's gospel, Jesus' heart was full of pity when He saw the needs of the crowd, and He sat down and taught them. Later, he did not send them away to look for their own food, but He performed the miracle of the five loaves and two fish and fed them. The heart of God - the heart of the Good Shepherd is not for us to admire from a distance. Rather, we are called to actively imitate him so as to make His heart ours.

Jesus, let me imitate your heart, the heart of the Good Shepherd so that I can use my five loaves and two fish, the little and much that I have for the sake of the many who depend on me.

Wednesday, 8th January

1 John 4:11–18, Mark 6:45–52

After the five thousand had eaten and were filled, Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to Bethsaida, while he himself sent the crowd away. After saying good-bye to them he went off into the hills to pray. When evening came, the boat was far out on the lake, and he was alone on the land. He could see they were worn out with rowing, for the wind was against them; and about the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the lake. He was going to pass them by, but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they had all seen him and were terrified. But he at once spoke to them, and said, 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.' Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind dropped. They were utterly and completely dumbfounded, because they had not seen what the miracle of the loaves meant; their minds were closed.

With Jesus in my boat, I stand firm!

Is Jesus in my boat as I face the strong winds in my daily life? In today's passage, Jesus saw the worn-out faces of His disciples as they struggled against the strong winds. He came to their boat, walking on water in order to show them that He was in control of the storm. We, in our lives, struggle with many strong winds and frightening storms that come in the form of temptations, family problems, rejections, illnesses, loss of loved ones, etc. Jesus wants us to know that He is in control of the situations and longs to guide us through the concrete storms we face.

It does not mean that we will never have any difficulties and that life will be a paradise. On the contrary, with Jesus in our lives, we will still face strong winds and storms. However, Jesus' presence gives us inner peace and calm as we face the challenges of life. Our Christian faith helps us accept sadness, grief, regrets and other calamities with the hope and certainty that God is with us.

"There is only one secure foundation: a genuine, deep relationship with Jesus Christ, which will carry you through any and all turmoil. No matter what storms are raging all around, you'll stand firm if you stand on His love." (Charles Stanley)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I aware that Jesus is in my boat as I face the strong wind and concrete storm in my life?
- 2) How can I deepen my trust in Jesus so that I can stand firm?

Thursday, 9th January

1 John 4:19–5:4, Luke 4:14–22

Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in

the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'. And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.

God loves us!

"The text is being fulfilled today even as you listen." Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecy. He is the 'me' that Isaiah spoke about. At the start of His mission, He proclaimed himself as the one who has been sent to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to give the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

Word by word he echoed the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus, however, did not finish the last line that the Prophet Isaiah uttered. Jesus omitted the words, '*And the day of the vengeance of the Lord*' (Isaiah 61:1–2).

Why? This is because Jesus, the Son of God, has come to present to us the complete picture of God who is love, mercy and faithfulness. God does not take vengeance on anyone, rather, he loves all regardless of skin colour, nationality or race. Each person is a person loved by God, our Father, no matter how small or insignificant society sees him/her. This is the Good News that Jesus came to proclaim. He proclaimed the heart of God who is love.

"Faith is God's precious gift, which opens our mind to know and love him. He wants to enter into relationship with us and allow us to participate in his own life in order to make our life more meaningful, better and more beautiful. God loves us! Faith, however, needs to be accepted, it needs our personal response, the courage to entrust ourselves to God, to live his love and be grateful for his infinite mercy. It is a gift, not reserved for a few but offered with generosity. Everyone

should be able to experience the joy of being loved by God, the joy of salvation! It is a gift that one cannot keep to oneself, but it is to be shared."

(Pope Francis, World Mission Sunday Message, 2013)

Friday, 10th January

1 John 5:5–13, Luke 5:12–16

Jesus was in one of the towns when a man appeared, covered with leprosy. Seeing Jesus, he fell on his face and implored him. 'Sir,' he said, 'if you want to, you can cure me.' Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, 'Of course I want to! Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once. He ordered him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your healing as Moses prescribed it, as evidence for them'. His reputation continued to grow, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their sickness cured, but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray.

The look of love, the touch of healing

Lepers in the time of Jesus were known as the living dead who were deemed to be outcasts. They could not live with their families or stay in their villages. Many times, people regarded them with fear rather than compassion. They were thought to have such dreadful sickness as a punishment from God. Thus, they were outcasts in the eyes of people as well as God.

Today, Jesus met one of those undesirable living dead who appeared to him, covered with leprosy. The disciples and crowds following Jesus would most likely be appalled and revolted with the sight of the leper near them. We could imagine them backing far away from him, with fear of catching the dreadful disease. Jesus saw

a person in need of love, of acceptance, of being a person again. Jesus saw God in the leper. He heard God in the cry of the man, 'Sir, if you want to, you can cure me.' Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him. At once, the man was made whole again.

We are surrounded by many 'lepers' every day. There are people whom our friends, family members, colleagues, and even we consider as outcasts. They are outcasts because of their dodgy past, their quirky and irritating habits, their unacceptable personalities, etc. We choose to avoid working with them, living with them, being friends with them. If Jesus would be among us today, how would he look at our 'lepers'? He would see God in them. He would hear the cry of God in them. He would love them as persons, as children of God.

Where did Jesus get his constant strength to love the way he loved? The last sentence of today's gospel gives us the important clue. Jesus would always go off some place where he could be alone and pray. Prayer, i.e. spending time with God his Father, opened His eyes to see people as persons in need of love and opened his heart to give them back their dignity as beloveds of God the Father. As we spend time with Jesus today in prayer, let us allow him to open our eyes to see, our hearts to love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Can I think of any people whom I consider as 'lepers'? How can I allow Jesus to open my eyes to see God in them?
- 2) Jesus stretched his hand and touched the leper. How can I stretch my hand, my heart to show my acceptance, my friendship, my attempts for reconciliation with at least one 'leper' today?

Saturday, 11th January

1 John 5:14–21, John 3:22–30

Jesus went with his disciples into the Judaeen countryside and stayed with them there and baptised. At the same time John was baptising at Aenon near Salim, where there was plenty of water, and people were going there to be baptised. This was before John had been put in prison. Now some of John's disciples had opened a discussion with a Jew about purification, so they went to John and said, 'Rabbi, the man who was with you on the far side of the Jordan, the man to whom you bore witness, is baptising now; and everyone is going to him'. John replied: 'A man can lay claim only to what is given him from heaven. 'You yourselves can bear me out: I said: I myself am not the Christ; I am the one who has been sent in front of him. 'The bride is only for the bridegroom; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens, is glad when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This same joy I feel, and now it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow smaller.'

Be yourself!

Today, we see an interesting exchange between John and His disciples. The disciples clarified with John as to why Jesus was in the same area doing John's job of baptising? Perhaps they felt threatened by Jesus' popularity and started feeling the need to compare Jesus with their Master.

Competition! Isn't it something common in all of us? We compete in school, at work, with colleagues. We compare our children's successes, businesses have price wars with each other, and the list goes on. When we enter into this cycle of competitions, we will constantly feel superior or inferior because there are always some who are better than us and others who are lesser than us. Our self-esteem either goes rocket high or plummets to the ground.

John the Baptist provided a different perspective for us. He said – The bridegroom’s friend rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice. John the Baptist was confident as to who he was, and he knew the task that he had to do. Instead of seeing Jesus as a threat, he rejoiced in Jesus’ presence.

‘We will never find our vocations trying to figure out whether we are better or worse than others. We are good enough to do what we are called to do. Be yourself!’ (Henri Nouwen)

Let us learn to recognise that each of us is a unique person with our own sets of gifts as well as limitations, strengths as well as weaknesses. In prayer today, let us ask Jesus to remove any hurts, jealousy or fears that prevents us from being who we are.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more positive with myself and others today?

Sunday, 12th January, The Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 42:1–4,6–7, Acts 10: 34–38, Matthew 3:13–17

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. John tried to dissuade him. ‘It is I who need baptism from you’ he said ‘and yet you come to me!’ But Jesus replied, ‘Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands.’ At this, John gave in to him. As soon as Jesus was baptised, he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice spoke from heaven, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.’

You are a child of God

A voice spoke and Jesus listened and kept those words in his heart, *'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.'* He is the Son of God, and nothing or nobody can steal this identity from Him.

After His baptism, Jesus started His mission of proclaiming the Good News of the Father's love to all people. He went from town to town, village to village to tell people about a God who is Father and whose love is unconditional. Along the way, there were many who rejected him. There were some who admired his works and words so much that they followed Him. Yet, Jesus was not affected by the responses of the people. He remained grounded in the Father's love.

In our baptism, we have become children of God, we belong to God. This is our identity here, now and forever. Yet, we forget this fundamental truth of our life in this busy world of success, popularity and power. We are deaf to the voice of Love calling out to us, *'You are my son, my daughter, my Beloved; my favour rests on you. You are not what the world makes you. You are not what you have, you own, your achievements. You are my child. You belong to me.'*

Today, we remember that we are God's sons and daughters, and this is our security.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live with security today that I am God's beloved child?

Monday, 13th January

1 Samuel 1:1–8, Mark 1:14–20

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the

Good News.’ As he was walking along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men’. And at once they left their nets and followed him. Going on a little further, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending their nets. He called them at once and, leaving their father, Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.

Come, follow me

Simon and Andrew as well as James and John were doing what every fisherman had to do – mending the nets, casting a net in the lake, etc. Yet in their very ordinary monotonous life, Jesus came and called them, “Follow me”.

Today, as we start a new work week, we are again rushing to meet deadlines, going through our daily routine of sending children to school, dragging ourselves to work, etc. Yet, Jesus calls us, in the same way he called those fishermen centuries ago, to follow Him – to follow His values, the way He loved, the way He opted to live in the Truth, etc. Jesus is inviting us to take the step out of our ordinariness into an extraordinary life - to live His life here and now.

Jesus calls us in the ordinary moments of our life - when we are in the office, at home, in the supermarket, caught in a bad traffic congestion, etc. He calls us to follow Him by reaching out to an outcast in the office or being patient with a spouse or a child or forgiving the mistakes of someone or smiling and greeting an elderly cleaner at the office, etc. Jesus calls us because we are not meant to follow the voices of the world, which make us unforgiving, impatient, competitive, selfish, proud, self-righteous, etc.

Today, in our ordinary life, Jesus comes and calls us to live with him so that our life can be extraordinarily filled with His love, joy and peace.

Jesus, help me to listen to you as I go through my routine today. Give me an attentive ear to hear you as you call me once more to follow you.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What does the call of Jesus, 'Follow me', mean for me in my concrete life right now?
- 2) What can I learn from the disciples' response to Jesus' call?

Tuesday, 14th January

1 Samuel 1:9–20, Mark 1:21–28

Jesus and his disciples went as far as Capernaum, and as soon as the Sabbath came, he went to the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. In their synagogue just then there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit, and it shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: The Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant. 'Here is a teaching that is new' they said, 'and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him.' And his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

Walk the walk, Talk the talk

The people were amazed with Jesus because he taught them with authority. His authority came from his being coherent with what he taught and lived. Looking at the life of Jesus, he lived what he taught, he taught what he lived. There was no division between his actions and words. This was what attracted people to him. They saw that he was different from the scribes who happily put heavy burdens on their backs, but without stretching their fingers to help (Luke 11, 46). Jesus was different! They started to spread the news about this great Teacher.

How can we become like Jesus? You might be thinking, 'Me? Becoming like Jesus? Impossible!' Well, as Christians, we are not just call to admire him but to follow him and imitate him. Today, let us sincerely look at our actions and words. Are our words and actions

consistent? Sometimes, we know that we do not walk the walk, and talk the talk. Take for example, a parent tells a young child, 'Do not shout at your sister. That was rude of you!' However, the next moment, the same parent shouts angry words at the driver who cuts into the lane. We are people filled with inconsistencies!

In this time of prayer, let us open our hands and ask Jesus to fill us with his Spirit of Truth and Love, so that we may learn to be more coherent in the way we live our lives. Our children, friends, parents, siblings, etc. need to see the same authority of Jesus in us. Through our being consistent, we can then help bring people to know and love Jesus.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Are my words consistent with my actions?
- 2) How can I become more like Jesus?

Wednesday, 15th January

1 Samuel 3:1–10, 19–20, Mark 1:29–39

On leaving the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law had gone to bed with fever, and they told him about her straightaway. He went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. And the fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door, and he cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another; he also cast out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was. In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him, they said, 'Everyone is looking for you.' He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can preach there too, because that is why I came.' And he went all through Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils.

Jesus' healing love

'He went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up'- These words evoke the image of the Good Shepherd who goes out to look for the one lost sheep. When he finds it, he picks it up and carries it on his shoulder.

Yes, Jesus, the Good Shepherd is God who is tender and compassionate. He is always ready to come to us when we are burdened by 'fevers' of sinful tendencies, past mistakes, life's greatest disappointments, betrayal of good friends, etc. We, at some points of our lives, we have experienced 'fevers' that paralyze us and make us to feel that we cannot go on anymore. Jesus comes to us, takes us by the hand and helps us up. He gives us inner peace

and strength to face our realities. Experiencing ourselves loved and cared for with such tenderness by Jesus, we will find the freedom to move on again. Open our hearts and let Jesus come into our lives. Let his healing love touches every wounded and painful parts in our hearts.

Later that evening, many people brought those who were sick to him. How did Jesus feel when he saw so many people suffering, in pain? He must surely have felt overwhelmed with what he saw, heard, and touched. In our lives, we too touch many sufferings of people. In our families, neighbourhoods, offices, communities, etc, we see the brokenness of the people. Some people are chained up in their past mistakes and cannot have the strength to move one. Others are suffering from the pain of physical sicknesses. Others are weighed down by depressions. The list goes on. Sometimes, we are overwhelmed with so many problems, conflicts, pains and sufferings we see in the lives of others. We can feel a sense of hopelessness and sadness.

Jesus went to a lonely place and prayed there. This is our clue on how we can find solace and peace even in the midst of pains and sufferings. Let us spend this time in prayer. Bring to Jesus all our personal sufferings as well as those of our friends and family members. Let him be our Good Shepherd that leads us always to green pasture of new Life and new Love.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I trust in Jesus? Why?

Thursday, 16th January

1 Samuel 4:1–11, Mark 1:40–45

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: 'If you want to' he said 'you can cure me.' Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured. Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him, 'Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery.' The man went away, but then started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around would come to him.

Healing the lepers of today

Every single day, we meet lots and lots of lepers. Yes! We do! We see 'lepers' in the streets, in families, in schools, etc. There are so many people who are in need, like the leper who approached Jesus for help. These 'modern-day lepers' are crying out for love and attention. 'If you want to, you can cure me. You can give me dignity. You can give me hope. You can give me friendship. You can give me consoling words.' These are the deepest need of many people around us. They might not actually say those words, but they carry within them the desire for our compassion, time, love, understanding, etc. If we want to, we can touch their lives in the same way Jesus touched the life of the leper.

We do not have to look far and search for people who are in need. Many times, there exist lepers in our own families. *'It is easy to love the people far away. It is not always easy to love those close to us. It is easier to give a cup of rice to relieve hunger than to relieve the loneliness and pain of someone unloved in our own home. Bring love*

into your home for this is where our love for each other must start.'
(Mother Teresa)

Home- this is where we should start loving! We tend to shower gifts or to bring our family for holidays. But in the daily life, we are not bothered to give those close to us our time. There is a saying that goes like this: How do you spell love to a child? T-I-M-E. This applies not just to children, but to every single person we relate to. We show our love by spending time with those we love. We give them our attention and listen to them, without keeping track of each ticking of the clock.

Jesus was present to the leper. He gave his time to him without brushing him off with the excuse, 'No time'. He stopped when the leper came to him. He listened attentively when the leper told him his desire to be cured. At that moment, Jesus loved the person. In his love, Jesus showed compassion to him and healed him.

Today, open our ears to the cry of those around us, especially those close to us!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I bring love to the one most unloved in my family, office, community?

Friday, 17th January, St. Anthony Abbot

1 Samuel 8:4–7, 10–22a, Mark 2:1–12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum, word went round that he was back; and so many people collected that there was no room left, even in front of the door. He was preaching the word to them when some people came bringing him a paralytic carried by four men, but as the crowd made it impossible to get the man to him, they stripped the roof

over the place where Jesus was; and when they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'My child, your sins are forgiven.' Now some scribes were sitting there, and they thought to themselves, 'How can this man talk like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God?' Jesus, inwardly aware that this was what they were thinking, said to them. 'Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk?" But to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' – he said to the paralytic- 'I order you: get up, pick up your stretcher, and go off home.' And the man got up, picked up his stretcher at once and walked out in front of everyone, so that they were all astounded and praised God saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'

Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts?

'As long as we continue to live as if we are what we do, what we have, and what other people think about us, we will remain filled with judgements, opinions, evaluations and condemnations. We will remain addicted to putting people and things in their "right" place.'
(Henri Nouwen)

The scribes were addicts of putting people and things in their "right" place. They saw that Jesus was forgiving sins. Thus, their opinion was that he was in the wrong because only God could forgive sins. Who was Jesus, a mere mortal, to do the job of God? Their self-righteous pride of thinking that they knew everything led them to miss the Person of God in Jesus. They were too fixed in fixing others that they could not see beyond their judgements.

Jesus' question must have shocked them: 'Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts?' Well, this question can be something for us to ponder too. There are times when we too are filled with

judgemental thoughts when we see someone not in his/her 'right' place. We might not verbally say what we think but sometimes we start to act coldly towards the person or become condescending with him/her. Today, we can ask ourselves, 'Why?'

Another beautiful point in today's gospel is the love of the four friends for their paralytic friend. They wanted the paralytic man to meet Jesus because they had faith in Jesus. Thus, no obstacles could prevent them from bringing their sick friend to the feet of Jesus. Each of us has been, at one point of our life, like the paralytic man. We have been too weak, troubled, tired, helpless etc. Along our way, God has placed people to carry us to Jesus. Because of the faith of our family and friends, we have been touched by Jesus' love. Now, we also called to do the same to our other friends and family members who are down on their 'stretchers' without strength, enthusiasm, hope for life, for God. It is our turn to be the ones carrying them to Jesus.

Question for reflection:

- 1) Do I have the tendency to put people in their 'right' place?
- 2) Looking at my life, do I give thanks to the people who have brought me closer to Jesus?

Saturday, 18th January

1 Samuel 9:1-4, 17-19; 10:1, Mark 2:13-17

Jesus went out to the shore of the lake; and all the people came to him, and he taught them. As he was walking on he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus, sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

When Jesus was at dinner in his house, a number of tax collectors and sinners were also sitting at the table with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many of them among his followers. When the scribes of the

Pharisee party saw him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this he said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor but the sick. I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'

Broken common clay pots

Good News! Jesus does not call perfect people with perfect lives to follow him. Instead, he calls 'common clay pots' to carry the spiritual treasure of his very presence (c.f. 2 Cor. 4, 7). He calls us, broken as we are, to follow him.

In today's gospel, Jesus saw Levi, a tax collector and a public sinner, as he was sitting at the customs house. Jesus did not look at Levi as the rest of the society saw him. Instead, he saw a man who was yearning for something more in his life. Jesus knew that Levi had the potential to become a good disciple, even though the rest regarded him as an unacceptable sinner. Imagine the great joy when Levi heard the voice of Jesus telling him, 'Follow me' He was so happy that he invited all his friends for a meal to celebrate the gift of his new life.

Like Levi, Jesus calls us to follow him as a parent, as a spouse, as a child, as a retiree, as a student, etc. The thought 'I am not worthy' could flash to our mind. This is true! We are not worthy of Jesus' love and trust. However, this does not take away the fact that he calls us and keeps calling us to follow him. This does not remove the mystery of God's love who will never give up on any of us. We might never comprehend such unconditional love embracing the worst in us, and yet still patiently cries out to us, 'Follow me!'

When we have Jesus in our lives, we have the joy that nobody can take away from us. There might be 'scribes' in our lives who throw cynical and judgemental comments over our desire to follow Jesus more. If we really encounter Jesus' love, we will not take their

comments too seriously. Like Levi, he was not bothered about what the scribes said. He was too overjoyed with having Jesus as his Master, as his Lord, and he chose to focus his heart and mind on Jesus alone.

Let us listen to the voice of Jesus speaking to us personally today.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What prevents me from following Jesus today?
- 2) Do I really trust in God's love for me?

Sunday, 19th January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:1-3, John 1:29-34

Seeing Jesus coming toward him, John said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I spoke of when I said: A man is coming after me who ranks before me because he existed before me. I did not know him myself, and yet it was to reveal him to Israel that I came baptising with water.' John also declared, 'I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and resting on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is going to baptise with the Holy Spirit." Yes, I have seen and I am the witness that he is the Chosen One of God.'

We are fingers pointing out for others the way to Jesus

'Look, there is the lamb of God!' John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, as the Chosen One of God. This was his mission: A finger pointing to Jesus. His finger is always pointing, 'There is the lamb of God, follow him.' Where is our finger pointing?

Maybe we realise that many times, we tend to point our fingers at ourselves due to our egoistic pride. We point ourselves out to others because we want people to pay attention to us. We think we know what is best or that we know everything, and thus, we start to call people to follow us. Imagine a person, full of self-pride, pointing his/her finger at him/herself and saying, 'Look at me! Look at this marvel creation! Listen to me. Follow me.' Perhaps we see that we are pointing our fingers at the faults of others. We simply see the many bad and negative faults of others and we start to complain and compare. Imagine again a parent standing with his/her wagging finger at a child and saying, 'Why are you not like your elder brother/sister? Why are you like that? Why can't you be a better child?' Perhaps our fingers are pointing at the many attractions that the world offers to us. We point and we always want to get that latest computer product, that fashionable dress, that sleek car, that extra tuition class to add on to the many other classes for the children, etc. We point and we get, and we accumulate. Yet, we never seem to be satisfied.

John the Baptist pointed his finger at Jesus and told the people to follow him. Today, let us point our fingers, not to ourselves or at faults of others or worldly attractions, but at Jesus. We point Jesus so that our children, parents, siblings, nieces/nephews, friends, colleagues, etc. will start to follow the Chosen One of God.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Where is my finger pointing?
- 2) Do the people in my life encounter Jesus more because of me? Why?

Monday, 20th January, Ss. Fabian and Sebastian

1 Samuel 15:16-23, Mark 2:18-22

One day when John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, some people came and said to Jesus, 'Why is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants would never think of fasting while the bridegroom is still with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they could not think of fasting. But the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then, on that day, they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; if he does, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. And nobody puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins too. No! New wine, fresh skins!'

Jesus, the New Wine, brings Joy

Our Christian faith is a call to Joy, not to go through life with long and sombre faces! We are called to celebrate each day because Jesus, our Bridegroom, is with us!

In today's gospel, Jesus used the parable of using a new cloth to patch up an old coat which will only result in the garment suffering from a greater tear. This is because the new cloth on an old garment will start to shrink over time and it will start to pull the threads and thus making a greater hole than ever before!

He used another parable of new wine in the used wineskins. Old wineskins become brittle over time. When new wine is put into old wineskins, the wine will start to expand it which will cause it to burst!

We might not appreciate such examples of new cloth on old coat and new wine in old wineskins, because they are not in our present-

day context. However, Jesus' audience certainly understood the message behind them. The message is: Jesus is here! He brings newness to those who truly believe in Him. Newness in his teaching on love and mercy! Newness in ways to follow Him! Newness! It is not for us to think of our faith as a religion of norms and rules but as a message of love. To be a Christian, in fact, is to have the fullness of love in our hearts. When we have love of God in us, we will live our days with a sense of deep joy within. We must leave behind our old ideas of God, of the Church, of ourselves that prevent us from seeing Jesus and his unconditional love today! We must allow Jesus to make our hearts and minds new. Yes! A new heart and new mind that is big enough to contain Jesus and the Joy that following him brings!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I aware that Jesus is with me as I go through each day?
- 2) How can I live my life with more joy?

Tuesday, 21st January, St. Agnes

1 Samuel 16:1-13, Mark 2:23-28

One Sabbath day Jesus happened to be taking a walk through the cornfields, and his disciples began to pick ears of corn as they went along. And the Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are thy doing something on the Sabbath day that is forbidden?' And he replied, 'Did you never read what David did in his time of need when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the loaves of offering which only the priests are allowed to eat, and how he also gave some to the men with him?'

And he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath.'

Rest in me!

'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.' The Pharisees saw Jesus' disciples picking corn as they were walking through the cornfields on a Sabbath day. They saw the actions of the disciples as doing work and thus they confronted Jesus. They were not defending the idea of Sabbath but the man-made laws that surrounded the idea of Sabbath. Thus, Jesus reminded them the purpose of the Sabbath, i.e. the why God made the Sabbath.

The main purpose is summed up with one word: Rest. In Genesis 2,1-3, God rested on the first Sabbath after he finished his work of Creation. What kind of rest is Jesus referring to? The 'rest' does not mean idleness or not working and having fun with other activities or being inactivity/stoning away the whole day.

When God rested on the First Sabbath, it was after he created the first man and woman whom he created, out of love, in his image and likeness. He rested not by himself, but he rested by being in communion with Adam and Eve and with all his work of creation. He took pleasure to be with his Creation. He rejoiced over each work of his hands.

The Pharisees got it all wrong! They failed to understand the Sabbath because they did not understand the heart of God. What about us?

God's faithful love brought us into being. His love searches for communion with us. His love always calls out to us to 'Come! Come to me and I will give you rest from all the heavy burdens you carry in life.' (c.f. Mt 11, 28-30) *'Though our feelings come and go, God's love for us does not.'* (C.S Lewis) This love of God seeks always to be with his people, his creation.

Let us today know the Master of the Sabbath and not downsize our faith to a religion of do's and don'ts, failing instead to live in communion with this Love who will never stop loving us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the message from Jesus to me today?
- 2) Do I seek communion with God and with people? What are my personal challenges to work for communion?

Wednesday, 22nd January

1 Samuel 17:32-33, 37, 40-51, Mark 3:1-6

Jesus went into a synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand. And they were watching him to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath day, hoping for something to use against him. He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Stand up out in the middle!' Then he said to them, 'Is it against the law on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil, to save life, or to kill?' But they said nothing. Then, grieved to find them so obstinate, he looked angrily round at them, and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out and his hand was better. The Pharisee went out and at once began to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him.

To do good or not to do good

The purpose of Jesus' life was to do good. Because he knew that his purpose was to do good, he was not afraid of the opinions of the Pharisees. On the other hand, the Pharisees gathered in the synagogue to do harm because they were all ready to accuse Jesus of doing wrong. Such a great contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees.

What is the purpose of today as we go through life? What is the purpose of doing what we are doing? What is the purpose of saying the words we say? Is it to help or to harm? To save someone's life or to destroy it?

We all desire to do good. That is why we choose a certain career path, or we choose to be patient with someone, or we choose to help someone in need, etc. Yet, sometimes our desire to do good lead others to gossip, to some misunderstandings, to be harshly judged and we even sometimes lose hope along the way. We think pessimistically, 'What is the point of doing good?'

Jesus persisted in doing good even if his actions and words made the Pharisees to hate him even more. He displayed his emotions of being angry with them for their hard-heartedness. However, he felt sorry for them too because they were so stubborn and wrong. How many of us could also identify with such emotions of being angry at someone's hard-heartedness and at the same time to be sorry for that same person's stubbornness? Jesus was angry because he saw their hearts were closed to his presence, to his love. He was angry and grieved but he did not hate. We must, like Jesus, continue to love and not to allow hatred to enter into our hearts.

Like Jesus, we need to persist to choose to do good even though we sometimes just want to give up when we face challenges and even persecutions.

There is a saying that goes like this: 'Life's toughest obstacles can make us better or bitter.'

Let us choose to make it better by continuing to do good!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is doing good my purpose in life?
- 2) How can I continue to seek to do good when others do not appreciate my actions/words?

Thursday, 23rd January

1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7, Mark 3:7-12

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lakeside, and great crowds from Galilee followed him. From Judaea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, Transjordan, and the region of Tyre and Sidon, great numbers who had heard of all he was doing came to him. And he asked his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, to keep him from being crushed. For he had cured so many that all who were afflicted in any way were crowding forward to touch him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, would fall down before him and shout, 'You are the Son of God!' But he warned them strongly not to make him known.

The secret of being human

Crowds and crowds of people kept going to Jesus because people saw the great miracles he did, and so they kept coming from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Tyre and Sidon. They came and kept coming because they saw that there was something special about this man called Jesus. Thus, they pushed their way through so just to be with this man, to be touched and healed by him. They wanted to know him- Who is this man?

Today, let us ask ourselves: Do I know Jesus?

Many of us would say 'Yes!', but do we?

Many of us tend to focus on the Divinity of Jesus with great divine power. Therefore, when we encounter a problem in life, we tend to blame Jesus and ask 'Why it is that he is not helping me? If Jesus is so powerful, why then he is allowing this crisis to happen to me? Why can't he prevent this from happening?'

Jesus becomes for us a superman with superpower out to save the world. If he fails to, then our faith is shaken, and we start to doubt.

A mature faith leads us to see Jesus as fully God but also fully Man. We should not just go to him with a long list of expectations and anticipate him to perform miracles after miracles in our life. Rather, we need to see that his humanity is what gives us the answer to live our life with all its problems and challenges we face each day. In his humanity, Jesus believed in God, trusted in him and obeyed his will. In his humanity, he remained faithful and unwavering in his love for God. In the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes no. 22*, it stated so beautifully, '*He (Jesus) worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart.*'

Do we know Jesus? Do we know how he worked, thought, acted and loved? Jesus is here not to take away all the problems in the world, but he comes to our life to show us how to become fully human.

Let us be part of the people from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Tyre and Sidon as we go to Jesus in order to know him more. Let us meet Jesus again as though today is our first time. Let us approach him with eagerness, with curiosity, with no expectations. Let us recognise that his humanity is our secret to be happy. In his humanity, Jesus trusted in God and kept his faithful love for him even in the face of sufferings.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I have expectations that Jesus is here to remove all my problems and sufferings?
- 2) How can Jesus' humanity teach me to be happy, regardless of the challenges I face?

Friday, 24th January, St. Francis de Sales

1 Samuel 24: 3-21, Mark 3:13-19

Jesus went up into the hills and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to preach, with power to cast out devils. And so he appointed the Twelve: Simon to whom he gave the name Peter, James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boanerges or 'Sons of Thunder'; then Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the man who was to betray him.

The ordinariness of an Apostle

Jesus chose the twelve to be his apostles and he entrusted them with the mission to bring his teachings, his life to the world. Each person whom Jesus chose and called that day was normal, ordinary and very unexceptional people. They were not some great famous personalities in Israel, but poor and simple fishermen, tax-collector, etc. Jesus called these ordinary people with ordinary lives to change the world. In fact, they did! These people went out to the world and preached the Good News, and because of them, Christians are presently everywhere. In fact, we are Christians- Friends of Jesus, because of their witnessing, their preaching, their sacrifices, their faith.

Why do we think that Jesus only calls extraordinary individuals to change the world today? Why do we think that Jesus cannot call us- with our ordinary lives- to go, live our faith, share his teaching so as to transform the world today?

Jesus calls you, ordinary as you are, 'little' as you feel in front of the world and its overwhelming problems. However, we are not alone

in this mission. Look at the passage of today. Jesus called the Twelve to be his companions and only then he sent them out for mission.

Likewise, we cannot change the world if we do not stay with Jesus and be with him. We are first called to be his companions before we can go out and share his teaching, his life with others. What does it mean to be a companion of Jesus? It is to be a person of prayer, a person who lives his/her life with Jesus, who allows Jesus to guide his/her daily life.

Today, look carefully at the names of each of the apostles, and we can also include our names there. We continue the list of ordinary people whom Jesus has chosen and called to be his companions and his missionaries. Let us have the faith to believe this reality and give thanks to Jesus for his trust in our lives.

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I believe that Jesus is calling me, ordinary me, to be his companion and missionary? Why?

Saturday, 25th January, Conversion of St. Paul

Acts 22:3-16 or 9:1-22, Mark 16:15-18

Paul said to the people, 'I am a Jew and was born at Tarsus in Cilicia. I was brought up here in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was taught the exact observance of the Law of our ancestors. In fact, I was as full duty towards God as you are today. I even persecuted this Way to the death, and sent women as well as men to prison in chains... I was on that journey and nearly at Damascus when about midday a bright light from heaven suddenly shone round me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" I

answered: 'Who are you, Lord? And he said to me, "I am Jesus the Nazarene, and you are persecuting me." The people with me saw the light but did not hear his voice as he spoke to me. I said: What am I to do, Lord? The Lord answered, "Stand up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told what you have been appointed to do." The light had been so dazzling that I was blind and my companions had to take me by the hand, and so I came to Damascus. Someone called Ananias, a devout follower of the Law and highly thought of by all the Jews living there, came to see me; he stood beside me and said, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." Instantly, my sight came back and I was able to see him. Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Just One and hear his own voice speaking, because you are to bear witness before all mankind, testifying to what you have seen and heard. And now why delay? It is time you were baptised, and had your sins washed away while invoking his name."

My life is Christ!

Today, we celebrate the beautiful feast of the conversion of St. Paul, the Patron Saint of Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity. Therefore, we will spend time to reflect and contemplate on the first reading which tells of St. Paul's Kairos moment, his God-moment.

What kind of event was St. Paul in when he was recounting his story about his conversion? Who was his audience in this passage? Well, he was not sharing his story to his friends over a nice cup of tea. St. Paul was actually arrested in the Temple and later a mob even tried to kill him. It was in such tense situation that St. Paul was telling his conversion experience. He told the beginning of his love story with Jesus with passion, even though his audience was his enemies waiting to cause harm to him.

For St. Paul, his strong experience along the journey to Damascus was deeply engraved in his mind and heart. No external hardships or internal doubts could ever remove this experience. He anchored his whole life in his personal love story with Jesus. After his baptism, St. Paul never looked back. Jesus, the one whom he was persecuting, became his Life. In his letter to the Galatians, he wrote *'it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.'* (Galatians 2, 20) Like his master, he went around preaching all what he had seen and heard to people of all nations. Like his master, he dedicated his life to build communities united in the Word, in the Love of God. In doing so, he experienced hardships, persecutions, loneliness, anxieties for his communities, sadness, and even danger of death. Yet, he never gave up because his faith was deeply rooted in his personal encounter with Jesus.

Today, let us ask St. Paul for his same passion for Christ and to help us never to forget our Kairos moments when we encountered Jesus and experienced our lives, transformed.

Sunday, 26th January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 8:23-9:3, 1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17, Matthew 4:12-23

Hearing that John had been arrested Jesus went back to Galilee, and leaving Nazareth he went and settled in Capernaum, a lakeside town on the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali. In this way the prophecy of Isaiah was to be fulfilled:

Land of Zebulun! Land of Naphtali!

Way of the sea on the far side of Jordan,

Galilee of the nations!

The people that lived in darkness has seen a great light;

On those who dwell in the land and shadow of death

A light has dawned.

From that moment Jesus began his preaching with the message, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.' As he 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 Jesus. 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. He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people.

A change in life

Jesus came to bring change! He preached about repentance, which is to leave behind our old ways that are contradictory to the Christ, and to enter into a new life of relationship with him. Repentance leads us to grow to become more like Jesus. It, thus, involves hard work and effort on our part to change certain bad habits and addictions. This makes us to be resistant to change- and the work involved in change. We prefer sometimes to remain in our old status quo than to move into new commitments, new responsibilities, new status quo. We might be attracted to live the values of the Kingdom and take small steps to change our ways of thinking and loving. After a while, we start to give up because we think that to change is just hard work and too much effort. Therefore, we choose to cling onto our old and familiar ways and to stay in our comfort zones. By doing so, we miss living in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is not a place but a person. The Kingdom of God is Jesus. We are all called to start living in relationship of loving

union with God. This is the vertical dimension of the kingdom. There is, however, the horizontal dimension which is to live in peace with the rest of humanity as our brothers and sisters.

When Jesus called the fishermen to follow him, he was introducing them to a life in the Kingdom. They left everything. They dared to make changes in life in order to accommodate the reality of the Kingdom in their here and now. However, they did not do so with their own strength, but they fixed their eyes on Jesus and followed him.

God always seek for our growth to become mature human persons. He sees beyond what we see, and he knows the potential in us to start living the kingdom here and now.

Today, the message, 'Repent, for the kingdom is close at hand' is addressed to each of us. Let us allow Jesus to speak to us through this passage. He wants to bring new changes into our life, into the way we relate to people, into the way we look at events in our daily life.

Monday, 27th January, St. Angela Merici

2 Samuel 5:1-7, 10, Mark 3:22-30

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying, 'Beelzebul is in him' and, 'It is through the prince of devils that he casts devils out.' So, Jesus called them to him and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot last. And if a household is divided against itself, that household can never stand. Now if Satan has rebelled against himself and is divided, he cannot stand either- it is the end of him. But no one can make his way into a strong man's house and burgle his property unless he has tied up the strong man first. Only then can he

burglar his house. I tell you solemnly, all men's sins will be forgiven, and all their blasphemies; but let anyone blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and he will never have forgiveness: he is guilty of an eternal sin.' This was because they were saying, 'An unclean spirit is in him.'

Open your eyes and see God's presence

The teachers of the Law saw the good that Jesus was doing and concluded that Beelzebul (Satan) was in him. They openly discredited Jesus because they were upset over the crowds of people flocking to him. Bitterness made them to see negative out of the good that Jesus was doing.

Sometimes, it is so easy also for us to see the negative out of the good actions or the positive words of somebody because for our own internal struggle with our jealousies, anger, prejudices, etc. There is a proverb that goes: 'Fear less, hope more. Eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; Talk less, say more; Love more, and all the good things will be yours.' Perhaps this is something we can remember and try to live it out in our relationships with people around us. Perhaps it is time to get rid of all bitterness within us and start to think, speak and act positively.

Jesus defended himself by showing the illogical reasoning of the teachers of the Law. 'How can Satan drive out Satan?' Jesus is the 'strong man' who cannot be defeated because Love conquers all, even death. This is the 'strong man' in whom we are called to place our trust in!

Jesus then went on to say that the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is an unpardonable sin. Why? How come? If God is so loving and merciful, how can he not forgive?

God is alive, active, moving in the world through the Holy Spirit. When we say evil things against the Holy Spirit, we choose to close our eyes to God's presence. Like the teachers of the Law in today's gospel, they refused to see the loving presence of God in Jesus' actions and words. They chose to close their minds to God's presence in the midst of them. If we close our minds and hearts to God, how can God reach out to us? God's love is powerful, but his love also gives us the freedom to choose to go to him or to reject him. He will never force his way into our heart if we close the door to him. God is love! Yes! This is who God is! He is a God who waits patiently for us to open our hearts to Him.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' message for me today?

Tuesday, 28th January, St. Thomas Aquinas

2 Samuel 6:12b-15, 17-19, Mark 3:31-35

The mother and brothers of Jesus arrived and, standing outside, sent in a message asking for him. A crowd was sitting round him at the time the message was passed to him, 'Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.' He replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking round at those sitting in a circle about him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.'

To be a true member of Jesus' family

When we acknowledge that we are Christians, we are proclaiming to all our identity as members of the family of Christ, as His brothers and sisters. Yet, sometimes, we are only a member of Christ's family in name and nothing else. In our human relationships, to be a brother or a sister to another person represents a deep tie that is

not to be taken lightly. To acknowledge that we have family tie to a person implies mutual unconditional love and commitment between each other. Regardless of what a person might do, a family never forsake him/her.

In our belonging to Jesus' family, do we realise this implication? Towards Jesus and other brothers and sisters in Christ, do we strive to show unconditional love through our words and actions e.g. obedience to God the Father, untiring forgiveness to others? We are not just a member in this spiritual family by name, but we try each day to live in love.

Let's today take Mary as an example. She is truly a member of Jesus' family, not just by blood relation but more importantly by her actions. She stayed with Jesus uncompromisingly, through the good and bad days of His life, until His ultimate suffering on the Cross. After the death of her son, she did not abandon his disciples. She stayed with them, praying with them and for them in the upper room (Acts 2, 12-14). She was constantly loving God the Father and the people around her. Mary did not budge but stayed faithful to her spiritual family.

In our prayer, let us renew again our identity as Jesus' brothers and sisters. We ask today for the strength to be a true brother/sister to God's family in love, and not just by name.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I live as a true member of God's family?

Wednesday, 29th January

2 Samuel 7:4-17, Mark 4:1-20

Jesus began to teach by the lakeside, but such a huge crowd gathered round him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there. The people were all along the shore, at the water's edge. He taught them many things in parables, and in the course of his teaching he said to them, 'Listen! Imagine a sower going out to sow. Now it happened that, as he sowed, some of the seed fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground where it found little soil and sprang up straight away, because there was no depth of earth; and when the sun came up it was scorched and, not having any roots, it withered away. Some seed fell into thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it and it produced no crop. And some seeds fell into rich soil and, growing tall and strong, produced crop; and yielded thirty, sixty, and even a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Listen, anyone who has ears to hear!' When he was alone, the Twelve, together with the others who formed his company, asked what the parables meant. He told them, 'The secret of the kingdom of God is given to you, but to those who are outside everything comes in parables, so that they may see and see again, but not perceive; may hear and hear again, but not understand; otherwise they might be converted and be forgiven.' He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand any of the parables? What the sower is sowing is the word. Those on the edge of the path where the word is sown are people who have no sooner heard it than Satan comes and carries away the word that was sown in them. Similarly, those who receive the seed on patches of rock are people who, when first they hear the word, welcome it at once with joy. But they have no root in them, they do not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, they fall away at once. Then there are others who receive in thorns. These have heard the word, but the worries of this world, the lure of riches and all the other passions come in and choke the word, and so it produces nothing. And there are those who received the seed in rich soil: they

hear the word and accept it and yield a harvest, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.'

How can I be consistently like the good soil?

In different moments of our life, we experience being the four different types of soil. Sometimes, we are like the edge of the path. We hear the Word of God in prayer or in a homily or talk but we make no effort to allow it to influence our lives. We can identify also with the rocky soil. We listen and receive the Word with joy, but we lack perseverance to allow it to take deep roots in our hearts. We see ourselves sometimes as the thorny soil. We hear the Word, but we allow the worries and passions of this world to be stronger than what we receive from God. Yet, there are times when we are like the good soil. We hear the Word and accept it with humble hearts and allow it to guide the way we live and love. We experience, in such moments, the great joy of bearing fruit of love, peace, reconciliation, freedom, etc.

Listening to Jesus telling us this parable, we can see the deep insight of Jesus regarding the fickleness and inconsistency of human beings and yet our potential of bearing a rich harvest too. Jesus knows the inner conflicts we face in keeping the Word deep in our hearts. However, Jesus never gives up on any of us. He never stops sowing his Word of God's love in the soil of our hearts. We might see ourselves far from being the good soil at this point of our lives, but we should not be discouraged. Jesus never gives up on us!

Thursday, 30th January

2 Samuel 7:18-19, 24-29, Mark 4:21-25

Jesus said to the crowd, 'Would you bring in a lamp to put it under a tub or under the bed? Surely you will put it on the lamp-stand? For there is nothing hidden but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to this.' He also said to them, 'Take notice of what you are hearing. The amount you measure out is the amount you will be given - and more besides; for the man who has will be given more; from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away.'

Let it shine! Let it shine!

Remember the song that goes like this: 'This little light of mine. I'm going to let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine...Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.' This song should not just remain as words to sing but life to live. We are to let the light of Christ shine brightly for all to see.

Though, we have the mission to shine the light of Christ, we ourselves might still have areas of darkness that we tend to hide from others, from ourselves, from God.

Sometimes, it is tempting to remain unaware of the consequences of our bad habits and attitudes that we so carefully keep away from public eyes. For example: our proud and discriminating attitudes, our judgemental thoughts that no one knows, etc. Yet, God who is the Source of Light, sees and knows all, and he wants to bring the Light of love, forgiveness, healing and truth to all the dark areas of our lives.

God, our Lover, our Friend, wants us to live in his light of joy and freedom. In this way, when we shine, we can be genuine and authentic 'shiners' or stars lighting up the darkness of our world.

Let God love us in our brokenness today so that he can gently bring out the real us out from the many layers we hide behind. Today, God wants to be the Light that shines brightly through us to others.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I listen to the gentle voice of Love calling me out from my personal darkness to his Light of Love?
- 2) What prevents me from taking that step?

Friday, 31st January, St. John Bosco

2 Samuel 11:1-4a, 5-10a, 13-17, Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowd, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, he loses no time: he starts to reap because the harvest has come.' He also said, 'What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.' Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were alone.

Making our life a matter of love

Today's passage shows a beautiful image of what mission is all about. When we build God's kingdom of Love among us, we are like the man who scatters the seeds in his field. The seeds grow in

silence, without even the man knowing about it. Likewise, we are mere instruments in this mission of love. We do our very best to sow the seeds of God's love through our efforts to reach out to a friend in need, our encouraging words to a child, our giving of our precious time to help a neighbour, etc. We sow the seeds of love, but God is the one who makes them to take roots and grow in the hearts of people. All we need to do is to trust in God!

The man in the passage seems to do something so insignificant-scattering seeds. Perhaps, we might think that the ordinary and small actions we do every day will not help to change the world. We are wrong! Every small action of love we put in, every simple words of encouragement, every hug of reconciliation, we are playing a part in transforming the world- our world! *'We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean; I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop. I do not agree with the big way of doing things.'* (Mother Teresa)

God makes use of our seemingly small and insignificant actions and words to manifest his presence of Love. He trusts that we will help him in this mission. Let us respond today to his trust by making our life a matter of love!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus inviting me to concretely put into practice today?

Saturday, 1st February

2 Samuel 12:1-7a, 10-17, Mark 4:35-41

With the coming of evening that same day, he said to them, 'Let us cross over to the other side'. And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him.

Then it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are going down!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and all was calm again. Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?' They were filled with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.'

Jesus, A Friend, in whom I trust!

At the start of today's prayer, Jesus asks us a very personal and fundamental question: 'Who do you say I am?' (Matthew 16, 15) What will our answer be? Is Jesus a stranger to us? Is he our friend who walks with us in our daily journey? Is he our Lord and God? Is he our shelter and refuge?

Trusting in someone requires us to develop a deep and personal relationship with that person. Likewise, in having trust in Jesus, we need to have a strong relationship with him.

Jesus is the Friend we can count on all the time, in moments of joy and peace and in moments of sorrow and disappointments. In fact, he is with us right here, right now.

Friendship with Jesus is not just a matter of knowing him with our minds, but more importantly, with our hearts. We need to experience his love concretely in our lives so that Jesus becomes someone real to us.

In today's passage, the disciples took Jesus into their boat. Yet, with this knowledge in their head, they still panic when they experienced the strong gale and waves. The disciples carried Jesus in their mind but not in their hearts and spirits. In their hearts, Jesus was

'sleeping'. Their true friendship with Jesus had not been awakened, and thus, they failed to trust in him.

We need to strengthen our friendship with Jesus. It is never too late to open our hearts to him! Jesus is always ready to be awakened by us, no matter what the circumstances are. He is always with us, never apart from us.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I make an effort to strengthen my friendship with Jesus?

Sunday, 2nd February, Feast of Presentation of the Lord

Malachi 3:1-4, Hebrews 2:14-18, Luke 2:22-40

And when the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord—observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: 'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel'.

My eyes have seen!

It was a tradition that every Jewish person had to follow- the sacrifice of every first- born male. Mary and Joseph brought a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, which were sacrifices of the poor.

In the temple, they met a man named Simeon who was described as 'an upright and devout man'. This pious man was promised by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. That day, the Holy Spirit rested on him and opened his eyes to recognise Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah who would come to set Israel free.

We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and to see Jesus for who he really is. There are many people who go to church for mass, especially on Sundays. (We might be one of them too.) They listen to the Word proclaimed, the homily preached, and the Bread broken and taken. They come and go. They go through routines and failed to recognised Jesus as their personal Friend, Master, Lord and God. They forgot to enter into a relationship with him and to allow him to make a real difference in their lives.

That day in the Temple, there were many people present. How many recognised who the Baby Jesus really was? How many of them were sensitive to the promptings of God's Spirit? Were they there just to fulfil a set of obligations and duties?

This old man, Simeon and even Ana the prophetess, were people of prayer. They lived in the Spirit and allowed God to open their eyes to see His presence in the little baby. Thus, Simeon blessed God and said, '... my eyes have seen'. Simeon saw Jesus as He is. In that little baby boy, he recognised God.

Question for reflection:

1) What stop my eyes from seeing the presence of God?

Monday, 3rd February

2 Samuel 15:13-14, 30; 16:5-13, Mark 5:1-20

They reached the country of the Gerasenes on the other side of the lake, and no sooner had he left the boat than a man with an unclean spirit came out from the tombs towards him. The man lived in the tombs and no one could secure him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been secured with fetters and chains but had snapped the chains and broken the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him. All night and all day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he would howl and gash himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and fell at his feet and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? Swear by God you will not torture me!' For Jesus had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, unclean spirit'. 'What is your name?' Jesus asked. 'My name is legion,' he answered 'for there are many of us.' And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the district. Now there was there on the mountainside a great herd of pigs feeding, and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send us to the pigs, let us go into them'. So he gave them leave. With that, the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd of about two thousand pigs charged down the cliff into the lake, and there they were drowned. The swineherds ran off and told their story in the town and in the country round about; and the people came to see what had really happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his full senses - the very man who had had the legion in him before - and they were afraid. And those who had witnessed it reported what had happened to the demoniac and what had become of the pigs. Then they began to implore Jesus to leave the

neighbourhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to be allowed to stay with him. Jesus would not let him but said to him, 'Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you'. So the man went off and proceeded to spread throughout the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

Transformation

Jesus always challenges us for transformation. In today's passage, the man possessed by an unclean spirit came out from his tombs and drew near to Jesus. This man recognised that Jesus had the power to heal him. Deep within, he wanted to be healed. He wanted to live a normal life again. Yet, on the other hand, he was afraid. He was afraid to let Jesus enter his life. Thus, he shouted, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? ...' He was afraid of what Jesus would do with him. Would he lose his 'freedom' to live among the tombs? Would he lose what he was so used to after so many years?

Changes. People are afraid of changes because changes imply work. Sometimes, people rather stick to their fears, their addictions, to their old unhealthy sick selves because they are too lazy to make effort to give up their old ways, and to put effort to put on new habits, new lifestyle. Drawing close to Jesus, he always challenges us for a change, a transformation. In this process of transformation, we are never alone because he stays close to us, and tells us, 'Do not be afraid!' Jesus sees us as people living fruitful, happy and fulfilled lives, and so he will never give up on us. At the end of the passage, Jesus told the man, now healed, to go home to his people and tell them about what God, in his mercy, had done for him. With a new and transformed life comes a deeper following of Jesus as well as mission. We are called to share with others how God, in his mercy, has touched and healed our lives.

Tuesday, 4th February

2 Samuel 18:9-10, 14b, 24-25a, 30-19:3, Mark 5:21-43

When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered round him and he stayed by the lakeside. Then one of the synagogue officials came up, Jairus by name, and seeing him, fell at his feet and pleaded with him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her to make her better and save her life.' Jesus went with him and a large crowd followed him; they were pressing all round him. Now there was a woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years; after long and painful treatment under various doctors, she spent all she had without being any the better for it, in fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus, and she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his cloak. 'If I can touch even his clothes,' she had told herself 'I shall be well again.' And the source of the bleeding dried up instantly, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her complaint. Immediately aware that power had gone out from him, Jesus turned round in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' His disciples said to him, 'You see how the crowd is pressing round you and yet you say, "Who touched me?"' But he continued to look all round to see who had done it. Then the woman came forward, frightened and trembling because she knew what had happened to her, and she fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. 'My daughter,' he said 'your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free from your complaint.' While he was still speaking some people arrived from the house of the synagogue official to say, 'Your daughter is dead: why put the Master to any further trouble?' But Jesus had overheard this remark of theirs and he said to the official, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith'. And he allowed no one to go with him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. So they came to the official's house and Jesus noticed all the commotion, with people weeping and wailing unrestrainedly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and crying? The child

is not dead, but asleep.' But they laughed at him. So he turned them all out and, taking with him the child's father and mother and his own companions, he went into the place where the child lay. And taking the child by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha, kum!' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up'. The little girl got up at once and began to walk about, for she was twelve years old. At this they were overcome with astonishment, and he ordered them strictly not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

A solid faith in Jesus

Today we see two extreme cases when Jesus healed; one when He was asked openly and directly and another when approached silently but both came with solid faith and humility. We can easily relate to the two experiences; we often approach Jesus desperately in prayers only as a last resort! Many times, we try to solve our issues through our human wisdom and strength. However, not only did Jesus not chide them for coming to him only at the last minute in desperation, but he encountered them personally with healing experiences and affirmed them publicly for their solid faith! Many times, Jesus uses our faith experiences to affirm others and to encourage many more to also come to him. Jesus despite his busy schedule with the crowd pressing around him did not allow the situation to distress him. He is always ready to heal.

Wednesday, 5th February

2 Samuel 24: 2, 9-17, Mark 6:1-6

Jesus went to his hometown and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him?'

This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?'

And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, though he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Familiarity breeds contempt

'Familiarity breeds contempt': This was the experience of Jesus when he went back home to his own people. The people heard him, and they were impressed with his wisdom and the miracles he worked. Yet, they found him too familiar. They said to one another, 'This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' Because of this, they chose not to take him as a prophet. Jesus remained always in their mind as a carpenter they knew. Because of their lack of faith, Jesus could not work any miracles there.

In our spiritual life, we can be like the people in the hometown of Jesus. We can be so familiar with the matters of faith- prayer, the Word of God, the Eucharist- that nothing excites us anymore. Prayer becomes boring. Attending mass becomes an obligation to be fulfilled. Following Jesus becomes meaningless. We fail to grasp the true beauty of what our faith is all about. A living faith needs a living experience, a daily encounter with Jesus who never stops bringing us to a deeper level of relationship with him.

*"The essence of Christianity... is an ever-new encounter with... the God who speaks to us, who approaches us and who befriends us!"
(Pope Benedict XVI)*

Let us, in this time of prayer, allow Jesus to speak to us, approach us and befriend us. Let Jesus bring us to a personal encounter with

him today. With him in our lives, we will never be bored or tired because his presence brings newness of love, peace and joy to our hearts.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I been taking my relationship with Jesus for granted? How?
- 2) What is Jesus inviting me to at this point of my journey with him?

Thursday, 6th February, St. Paul Miki and Companions

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12, Mark 6:7-13

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

'Go by faith, not by sight'

Jesus continues to send us out as his Messengers of the Good News of His Love. We represent Jesus to the places, people whom he wants to go. We are his ambassadors to areas where he wants to be.

However, to be a fruitful messenger of the Good News, we need firstly to spend time with Jesus. This is because we cannot give what we do not have, and we cannot share Jesus if we ourselves have not

personally enter into an intimate friendship with him. We do not need to have a degree or an impressive memory of all the teachings of the Church. We do need, nevertheless, a living relationship with the person of Jesus.

'Know what you are talking about.' (St. John Paul II)

This knowledge is not just mere head knowledge but the knowledge of the heart. The words we speak come from our personal relationship we have with Jesus.

The 'Go' of Jesus implies that we need to hold onto Faith. A faith that believes in the power of Jesus in our lives. A faith that trusts that he is the one putting words in our mouths, love in our hearts. We go to our family and friends, but we walk by faith not by sight.

Jesus instructed his disciples to take nothing for the journey 'except a staff- no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses, etc. The key message behind his words is: 'Trust in me. Depend on me. Not on worldly securities and knowledge. Not on your human power and strength.'

Questions for reflection:

- 1) 'Know what you are talking about' ~Pope John Paul II: Do I know from my heart what I am talking about? Have I experienced the Good News of Jesus' love in my life?
- 2) What prevents me to do mission with faith in Jesus?

Friday, 7th February

Sirach 47:2-11, Mark 6:14-29

Meanwhile King Herod had heard about him, since by now his name was well-known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him'. Others said, 'He is Elijah'; others again, 'He is a prophet, like the prophets we used to have'. But when Herod heard this he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead'. Now it was this same Herod who 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.

Open our mouths to speak for Truth!

The story of John the Baptist invites us to be people who dare to tell the truth, even in the face of ridicule, rejection or even death for doing so. Many times, we prefer to keep our mouths shut and not to offend people around us so as to keep 'peace' in relationships, in the family, in the office, in the parish, etc. We yearn for safety and so we shun away from speaking the truth. John the Baptist dared to open his mouth for God. Now, it is our turn.

Too many times, truths are not being said because we tend to go with the general opinions of others. We check what people have to say about an issue and then we say our own opinions regarding it. We do not have the courage to go against the opinions of others. We do not want to be the lone voice of opposition against an injustice we see at home, in the office, in society.

Desmond Tutu, an Anglican Bishop, who is known as the South African's moral conscience, said, *'Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.'* Yes! Wherever we are, we are called to do our little bit, to speak our little bit, because it is those little bits of good, of truth put together that overwhelm the world.'

Saturday, 8th February, Ss. Jerome Emiliani and Josephine Bakhita

1 Kings 3:4-13, Mark 6:30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many could guess where; and from every town

they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

R.E.S.T

The disciples worked very hard and they went to Jesus to tell him all what they did. Jesus appreciated their hard work and their enthusiasm, and he also saw their need for rest. Therefore, he said, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while.'

REST- this four-letter word that so many people are longing for! Don't we all want to go to a lonely quiet place all by ourselves and simply rest?

We are always so busy busy busy. Many times, we rush, run, fly, hurry that we do not even know how to be quiet and still. Today, let Jesus speak these words to us, '*You must come away to some lonely place all by yourself and rest for a while.*'

The crowd of people saw Jesus and his disciples going away in a boat, and they hurried off to be with them. In the end, Jesus took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He sat down and taught them, including his tired disciples listening on. What did Jesus teach? Did Jesus tell the crowd the need to be productive and efficient? Jesus taught them about God, love, etc. But Jesus also taught the very basic need of resting... because life is more than rushing, accomplishing, pushing for time, productivity, etc.

"Solitude begins with a time and a place for God, and God alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that God is actively

present in our lives-- healing, teaching and guiding-- we need to set aside a time and space to give God our undivided attention. (Matt 6:6)" (Henri Nouwen)

Let Jesus our Shepherd lead us to green pastures where he invites us to rest and be renewed again with new strength, new hope, new peace, new love. Today is an opportunity to set aside time and space again to be with Jesus and to give him our undivided attention because he deserves it!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Where is this lonely place where I can be with Jesus in silence and solitude?
- 2) In my daily life, how can I make an effort to stop being busy and simply rest?

Sunday, 9th February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 58:7-10, 1 Corinthians 2: 1-5, Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven.'

Salt and Light

We are called to live a meaningful and purpose-driven life by being salt and light of the world. We are to bring the flavour of God's love to the lives of those around us, not pain and distress. We are meant

to bring the Light of God's presence to the darkness in the lives of many people who live without love, hope and peace. Life is short. In this one short life, we are not meant to simply confine ourselves to routines, to chasing after money, to fight for power, etc. Life is more than all these! Life is about love! Life is about making a difference in the lives of the people around us.

In order to be salt of the earth and light of the world, we need to go out of ourselves- our selfishness, indifference, pride, excuses of 'no time', etc. and start to seek what is best for others.

As someone once said, "*Love seeks to make happy rather than to be happy.*"

Look at the life of Jesus, he always seeks to make others happy. Because of his life of self-giving love, he never stopped shining God's presence!

Let us make the choice to start living life with meaning and purpose. Jesus looks at us today and tells us that it is now our turn to be the salt of the earth and Light of the world.

Question for reflection:

1) In my life right now, how can I live these words of Jesus: 'You are the salt of the earth...Light of the world.' with more awareness and conviction?

Monday, 10th February, St. Scholastica

1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13, Mark 6:53-56

Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret and tied up. No sooner had they stepped out of the boat than people recognised him and started hurrying all through the countryside and

brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, to village, or town, or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were cured.

Ruled by Compassion, not time!

Jesus is a Master, a Teacher of Life. He does not come to teach people about following laws and regulations. He comes to teach us how to become fully humans as God has created us to be- a human person with a heart of compassion. Compassion (which is to suffer together with) is what makes us to be truly humans.

In today's gospel, Jesus went from village to village, town to town; and people flocked to him. He was not ruled by time, but by compassion. He stopped. He touched. He healed. He taught. He helped. He saw the sufferings of each, and he suffered with them. Looking at the life of Jesus, this is the secret of his happiness. What about us? What is the secret of our happiness?

It is so easy to tell people who are struggling through life, '*I will pray for you.*' Praying for others is good and essential. But can we do more for someone more than praying? Can we listen? Can we comfort? Can we touch the wounds of others? Can we heal them with our words of love and encouragement?

Today, let us try our best not to be ruled by time. Let us be ruled instead by compassion. We meet so many people each day- our family members, domestic helpers, cleaners in the office, colleagues, friends, strangers, even our enemies. Is there someone in need of our compassion?

The Dalai Lama beautifully explained compassion in the following paragraph. Let us read, reflect and put it into practice today!

'Let me explain what we mean by compassion. Usually, our concept of compassion or love refers to the feeling of closeness we have with our friends and loved ones. Sometimes compassion also carries a sense of pity. This is wrong--any love or compassion which entails looking down on the other is not genuine compassion. To be genuine, compassion must be based on respect for the other, and on the realization that others have the right to be happy and overcome suffering just as much as you. On this basis, since you can see that others are suffering, you develop a genuine sense of concern for them. As for the closeness we feel toward our friends, this is usually more like attachment than compassion. Genuine compassion should be unbiased. If we only feel close to our friends, and not to our enemies, or to the countless people who are unknown to us personally and toward whom we are indifferent, then our compassion is only partial or biased. Genuine compassion is based on the recognition that others have the right to happiness just like yourself, and therefore even your enemy is a human being with the same wish for happiness as you, and the same right to happiness as you. A sense of concern developed on this basis is what we call compassion; it extends to everyone, irrespective of whether the person's attitude toward you is hostile or friendly.' (The Dalai Lama)

Tuesday, 11th February, Our Lady of Lourdes

1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30, Mark 7:1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round him, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the marketplace they never eat without first sprinkling

themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless, the doctrines they teach are only human regulations. You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.' And he said to them, 'How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition! For Moses said: Do your duty to your father and your mother, and, anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is Corban (that is, dedicated to God), then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother". In this way you make God's word null and void for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.'

The Teacher of Life calls us to follow Him

Many of us are like the Pharisees and the scribes in today's passage. We are good people who live a very conventional faith and find security in following rules and doing fixed practices without knowing the reasons behind. We miss the joy of living in relationship with Jesus.

'This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me.'

Jesus wants us to return to the root of our faith- to know Him with our hearts, to fall in love with Him and to follow Him faithfully.

Jesus is not the Teacher of the Law, but the Teacher of Life. When we know Him more, we will understand that his message is not about a terrible, vengeful God who delights in our austere practices but about discovering a loving God, who is Abba, present in the daily little events of our ordinary lives.

Let us not just strive to be good people living good lives but empty without a loving relationship with God. Rather, let us strive to be loving people who see the presence of Love, of God secretly acting at the heart of our human existence everyday so that we too can be transformed in the way we love others, the way we look at people, the way we opt to follow Jesus faithfully.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is my heart far from Jesus?
- 2) What distance me from him?

Wednesday, 12th February

1 Kings 10:1-10, Mark 7:14-23

He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to this.' When he had gone back into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Do you not understand either? Can you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot make him unclean, because it does not go into his heart but through his stomach and passes out into the sewer?' (Thus he pronounced all foods clean.) And he went on, 'It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery,

avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean.'

To possess a heart like Jesus'

Today, Jesus invites us to deal with our hearts. Why? This is because an unclean heart is the cause of many problems in our family life, in friendships, in community life. It is perhaps easier to blame the circumstances and events that keep leading us to explode, scold and be angry. We can put the blame on the externals, such as the impatience of the other, weather, the noisy children, etc. Deep within, however, we are angry people, jealous people, hurtful people. Our physical external actions are merely the products of what we have in our hearts.

'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that makes him unclean. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to this.' These words of Jesus are meant for each one of us today.

Let us go to Jesus and allow him to renew us with his love, mercy and compassion. Jesus will never reject us, but he invites us to come to him. He desires to heal us from all the anger, hurts, frustrations and fears we hold deep in our hearts. Today, Jesus wants to give us a heart of flesh, a heart of love, a heart just like his.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the state of my heart?
- 2) What prevents me from opening myself to the love of Jesus and allowing him to remove the hurts, anger, fears I have?

Thursday, 13th February

1 Kings 11: 4-13, Mark 7:24-30

He left that place and set out for the territory of Tyre. There he went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there, but he could not pass unrecognised. A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him straightaway and came and fell at his feet. Now the woman was a pagan, by birth a Syrophenician, and she begged him to cast the devil out of her daughter. And he said to her, 'The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs'. But she spoke up: 'Ah yes, sir,' she replied 'but the house-dogs under the table can eat the children's scraps'. And he said to her, 'For saying this, you may go home happy: the devil has gone out of your daughter'. So she went off to her home and found the child lying on the bed and the devil gone.

A model of faith

Do we have this kind of faith like the one of the Syrophenician woman?

The woman heard that Jesus was in town. She went straight to him and fell at his feet. She wanted Jesus to heal her daughter who was 'possessed by the devil' (in today's medical term, the daughter would be diagnosed as suffering from mental illness) Instead of comforting the woman, Jesus seemed so heartless and cruel with his answer. '...it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs.'

Jesus wanted to test the faith of the Syrophenician woman. After encountering so many Pharisees and scribes who stubbornly refused to believe in him, he wanted the disciples to see what it meant to have a great faith. He saw the heart of the woman and recognised in her a person whose love for her sick daughter led her

to have great faith in Jesus. She kept her eyes fixed on Jesus and continued to ask...ask ... ask.

This Syrophenician woman is a model of great faith for all of us today. Many times, we seem to have our eyes off Jesus and we focus on our hopeless situations and feel burdened and restless. Let us not quit because Jesus never quits on us!

*When things go wrong as they sometimes will;
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill;
When the funds are low, and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but have to sigh;
When care is pressing you down a bit-
Rest if you must, but do not quit.
Success is failure turned inside out;
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt;
And you can never tell how close you are
It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit-
It's when things go wrong that you must not quit. (Author
unknown)*

Let us learn from this Syrophenician woman who did not quit but asked and trusted.

Friday, 14th February, Ss. Cyril and Methodius

1 Kings 11: 29-32; 12:19, Mark 7:31-37

Returning from the district of Tyre, he went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private,

away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened'. And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. Their admiration was unbounded. 'He has done all things well,' they said 'he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

Only he who listens can speak

In this world, we are living in a collective monologue. We speak without listening. We listen in order to speak, to defend, to reply. Yet, listening is so essential! Dag Hammarskold (Swedish diplomat, had a posthumous Nobel Peace Prize) so rightly said, *'The more faithfully you listen to the voice within you, the better you will hear what is sounding outside. Only he who listens can speak.'*

Today, Jesus wants us to listen first to his voice within us as he tells us, 'Ephphatha, Be opened.' The more we allow Jesus to open our ears to listen to him, the more we find ourselves being loved, accepted by His love. His words of love made us to be complete, at peace with who we are, with the purpose of our life.

When we start listening to Jesus in prayer, we will learn to appreciate listening to people with their advices, words of encouragement, their cries for help, their stories of hopeless and failures. When we truly listen from within, then we can speak back to them clearly with compassion, love, patience, understanding, etc.

The deaf man, upon being healed, went out at once and started to proclaim what Jesus did for him. Nothing could stop him from speaking about Jesus because he had found the treasure and

wanted to share and keep sharing it with others. Let us be like this deaf man who dared to speak out in order to make Jesus known. In the silence of prayer, let us allow Jesus to open our ears so that we can truly listen. From truly listening, we can then speak clearly words that give others God's life, love, peace.

Am I deaf, Lord? Open my ears so that I can listen faithfully to your voice within me. When I truly listen to you, then only I can speak.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) 'Only he who listens can speak.': Do I really listen to the voice of Jesus in prayer and in my daily life? Do I really listen to those around me?
- 2) Why am I afraid to speak and make Jesus known to our children, our spouse, our relatives, in-laws, friends, siblings, nieces/nephews, colleagues?

Saturday, 15th February

1 Kings 12:26-32; 13:33-34, Mark 8:1-10

A great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat. So he called his disciples to him and said to them, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. If I send them off home hungry they will collapse on the way; some have come a great distance. His disciples replied, 'Where could anyone get bread to feed these people in a deserted place like this?' He asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' 'Seven' they said. Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them among the crowd. They had a few small fish as well, and over these he said a blessing and ordered them to be distributed also. They ate as much as they wanted, and they collected seven basketfuls of the scraps left over. Now there

had been about four thousand people. He sent them away and immediately, getting into the boat with his disciples, went to the region of Dalmanutha.

From nothingness to plenitude

From nothingness to plenitude- This is the constant movement each time we are with Jesus. In today's passage, the crowd was with Jesus for three days and they had nothing to eat. Nothing! Yet, Jesus, who was attentive to the needs of the people, knew that they needed to be fed. With the few loaves of bread and few fish, he fed the crowd. Thus, they were no longer empty but full. Only after filling them, Jesus sent them away.

When we come to Jesus in prayer, we might be aware of our emptiness within. For example, we might feel lousy with ourselves, disappointed with life, doubtful over the future. Jesus sees our hearts and recognises all the empty spaces needing love, assurance, comfort. Like the crowd, we have '*nothing to eat*'- nothing to give, nothing to cling on, nothing to look forward. Jesus, He, the God of Plenitude, wants to feed us with his love, joy, strength, hope, etc, until we are full and ready to leave prayer and enter into the world with renewed hearts. Jesus feeds us with his Word that is the source of Life and Love. He feeds us with his self-giving love in the Eucharist. He feeds us with his beauty in creation. He feeds us with love we experience from friendships.

The world will always tell us to feed our nothingness, our hunger with more excitement and pleasures, with more new high-tech products, with exotic holidays, etc. These 'fast food' will only make us hungrier, and in the long-run, destructive.

Today, Jesus, who is Love, speaks to us in the silence of our hearts, *'I am your God. I will be faithful to you even when you do not*

acknowledge my love. I am your God. I will give you what you need. I am your God. I am here.'

Jesus, you are faithful to me. You are here waiting for me to go to you for nourishment. What prevents me from doing so? Have I taken you for granted, Jesus?

Sunday, 16th February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sirach 15: 15-20, 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, Matthew 5:17-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court. You have learnt how it was said: You must not commit adultery. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Again, you have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not break your oath, but must fulfill your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you: do not swear at all. All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'

The Law of Love

'For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.'

What does Jesus mean when he said these words? The scribes and Pharisees were simply concerned with moral distinctions between right and wrong. Thus, they surrounded themselves with rules and

more rules, so much so that they missed the whole point of their religion. They missed loving God and loving others.

As Christians, we must never miss the point of our faith, which is Love. We are called to love God with all our heart, mind and strength, and to love ourselves and others. The Kingdom of God is present when we start to live the power of love in our daily life.

'Above all, do not be afraid of loving God. Do you not know that the more we love God, the happier we are? Because this is our ultimate end, the end for which we are all created. Do you not know that we are made to love God, so much so that outside of God there is nothing but emptiness?' (Gabrielle Bosis)

The friendship we have with God will lead us to spontaneously and joyfully reach out to do good to others, instead of harming or hurting them. Let us not miss the whole point of our faith.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I missed the whole point of my Christian faith?
- 2) How can I love God, others, myself more today?

Monday, 17th February

James 1:1-11, Mark 8:11-13

The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with Jesus; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to test him. And with a sigh that came straight from the heart he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign? I tell you solemnly, no sign shall be given to this generation.' And leaving them again and re-embarking he went away to the opposite shore.

Jesus, the greatest sign

The Pharisees wanted great and extraordinary signs but refused to see the many miracles he had performed. They had no faith and were wrapped in their own self-righteousness and judgements against Jesus. Due to their hardness of hearts, they failed to recognize the greatest sign of all, i.e. the person of Jesus, the Word made flesh, the incarnation of God's love.

Let us not miss the point like the Pharisees. We do not need great and extraordinary miracles and signs because Jesus is THE greatest miracle, and He is with us always. He comes to us in the Eucharist and in the Word. We have to open our eyes each day and see the presence of God around us and in us.

Can we also give our lives like Jesus to help others in need? Can we give our time, energy, creativity, a listening ear, etc so that Jesus, through us, can continue to perform miracles to touch the lives of others?

Today, let us re-embark the boat with Jesus and make our way to the opposite shore with Him. Let us not remain with the Pharisees, who no matter how many miracles they saw or how many of Jesus' teachings they heard, refused to believe in Jesus and in God because of their hardened hearts.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I perceive with eyes of faith the presence of Jesus in the events of my life, in the people around me, in the silence of my heart and in the gift of nature?

Tuesday, 18th February

James 1:12-18, Mark 8:14-21

The disciples had forgotten to take any food and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Then Jesus gave them this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod'. And they said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread'. And Jesus knew it, and he said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you not yet understand? Have you no perception? Are your minds closed? Have you eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear? Or do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' They answered, 'Twelve'. And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' And they answered, 'Seven'. Then he said to them, 'Are you still without perception?'

Are you still without perception? Do you still not understand?

The disciples had seen Jesus performing the miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and fish twice. Yet, they worried about the predicament they had gotten themselves into. They had forgotten to bring along food and had only one loaf of bread with them. They must be thinking, 'How can one loaf be enough for all of us? Will we be hungry? Where can we get more bread?'

Jesus, knowing what was troubling his disciples, warned them about the 'yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod'. What does this phrase mean? To the Jews, the process of leavening (when yeast is added to bread) was a sign of "rotting" or "corruption". Jesus was warning them not to allow the corruption of the Pharisees

and Herod, i.e., their unbelief, their power and their stubbornness to influence them.

When Jesus mentioned 'yeast', the disciples associated this with their immediate personal need of only having one loaf. They failed to understand the warning of Jesus and to see the meaning beyond his words. Despite their lack of understanding and faith, Jesus patiently told them to trust in him, reminding them to 'remember' what they witnessed and experienced with the two miracles of the multiplication of loaves and fish.

Like the disciples, we too worry about not having enough for ourselves and our loved ones. We look at our 'one loaf of bread' and we begin to worry. How blind we are! How deaf we are! Today, Jesus reminds us to trust in Him, and not be so distracted with one concern after another that we forget the small and big 'miracles' we have experienced in our lives.

"He has not made us for nought; He has brought us thus far, in order to bring us further, in order to bring us on to the end. He will never leave us or forsake us; so that we may boldly say, "The Lord is my Helper; I will have no fear in what flesh can do unto me." We "may cast all our cares upon Him who cares for us." What is it to us how our future path lies, if it be but His path? What is it to us whither it leads us, so that in the end it leads to Him? What is it to us what He puts upon us, so that He enables us to undergo it with a pure conscience, a true heart, not desiring anything of this world in comparison of Him? What is it to us what terror befalls us, if He be but a hand to protect us and strengthen us?" (John Henry Newman)

Question for reflection:

1) Looking back at my life's journey, when did I experience Jesus' personal care and protection?

Wednesday, 19th February

James 1:19-27, Mark 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man whom they begged him to touch. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Then putting spittle on his eyes and laying his hands on him, he asked, 'Can you see anything?' The man, who was beginning to see, replied, 'I can see people; they look like trees to me, but they are walking about'. Then he laid his hands on the man's eyes again and he saw clearly; he was cured, and he could see everything plainly and distinctly. And Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village'.

Open my eyes, O Lord, help me to see you!

Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. The blind man walked alongside with Jesus, trustingly. He felt Jesus' touch and heard the voice asking him, '*Can you see anything?*' The man looked and started to see but not clearly, he said, '*I can see people; they look like trees to me, but they are walking about.*' Again, he felt Jesus' hands on him. Lo and behold! He saw clearly. This is the only miracle performed by Jesus in stages. Why? How come? Did Jesus fail the first time and had to try again?

Looking at the stories before today's passage, we see Jesus dealing with the lack of faith of the Pharisees who were asking for signs and then the lack of faith of the disciples who were so concerned with their one loaf of bread and could not see the bigger picture.

This passage today shows that faith, like the sight of the blind man, comes gradually. The disciples' eyes were gradually opened to see, to understand who Jesus was for them. The more their eyes were opened, the more their passions for Jesus were ignited and they went and preached the Good News, without ceasing.

What does this say to us here and now? We, like the blind man, have been touched once, twice... but we continue somehow to not to see things, events, people, ourselves, even God clearly. Our visions are blurred by perhaps ambition, extreme worries, prejudices, greed, lust, anger, selfishness. How many of us see, but do not see? Helen Keller, a great thinker who was deaf-blind said, *'The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but no vision.'*

Jesus never gives up on us. He is always at our side, correcting our vision, helping us to see people, things, events, ourselves, God in new perspectives. We must be patient and humble to acknowledge that we see some truth, but not all the truth; we understand but perhaps do not fully understand.

Questions for reflection:

1) As I pray with the passage today, which phrase strikes me? Why?

Thursday, 20th February

James 2:1-9, Mark 8:27-33

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him. 'John the Baptist,' they said 'others Elijah; others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ'. And he gave them

strict orders not to tell anyone about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

Jesus, you are my Way, my Truth, my Life!

'Who do you say I am?' This is a question that we have to answer with our very lives, not just using mere words to formulate a perfect answer.

Peter heard the question and he answered, *'You are the Christ'* He got it right! Somehow, he understood who Jesus was. But the 'Christ', the 'Messiah' he had in his mind was not the same as the one Jesus had. Peter wanted Jesus to be a glorious, powerful Messiah. However, Jesus started to talk about suffering grievously, being rejected, about dying, about rising from death. Peter became confused. He pulled Jesus aside and started to rebuke him for saying such things.

He wanted desperately to make Jesus' vision to match with his. Peter did not want Jesus to suffer or to die. This was because, deep inside, Peter was not ready to follow this path of his Master. Thus, he wanted to remould the mind of Jesus, to correct the vision of Jesus. What did Jesus do? He rebuked Peter in front of all the rest of the disciples, 'Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

What is God's way?

God, out of love, sent Jesus to the world in order to give fullness of life. (John 3, 16; John 10, 10) Jesus lived his life doing good by loving with a very radical love, healing, preaching about God as Abba, as Love. There were people, like the Pharisees and scribes, who could not accept the teachings of Jesus. Thus, they wanted to eliminate the Messenger and his message. Jesus knew the consequences of his radical life and preaching. Yet, he was willing to walk the path of suffering, of losing himself for the sake of the Good News.

Who is Jesus for us? If we are ready to follow Jesus, we are also called to embrace sufferings and challenges for his sake and the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus wants us to correct our vision of him so that we might strive to love him, and to trust him even though we might not understand fully the path he is leading us to.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Jesus, who are you in my life?
- 2) How do I want to live this day so that my life would reflect the answer to the question, '*Who do you say I am?*'

Friday, 21st February, St. Peter Damian

James 2:14-24, 26, Mark 8:34-9:1

He called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. What gain, then, is it for a man to win the whole world and ruin his life? And indeed what can a man offer in exchange for his life? For if anyone in this adulterous and sinful generation is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' And he said to

them, 'I tell you solemnly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power'.

A life lived for others

'What gain, then is it for a man to win the whole world and ruin his life?' Let us allow these words of Jesus speak to us in this time of prayer.

When we hear the word, 'Gain', we might think of gaining in terms of accumulating, storing, owning, keeping. In this rather materialistic world, we are bombarded with messages from the media that 'more' is good. Thus, we work hard to gain a new car, get the latest toy, accumulate properties, etc. We are not truly living! We expect material things to make us happy, and this will never happen.

Life is not about success, accumulating wealth, gaining status, etc. No! When we are so busy gobbling and gobbling what the world offers that we are losing our true life. Real success in life does not mean the accumulation of wealth. True happiness does not come from having lots of money. Rather, we gain our lives when we give ourselves to others. Placing our talents, time, strengths, etc for the good of many people is what will make us gain true life.

The span of our life here on earth is short. It is up to us how we want to live it.

Today, Jesus invites us to start living by choosing to be his followers who live a life for others. This implies renouncing to our own ambitions, our desires to have more, our laziness, our impatience, etc, so that we can live a life of love like our Master.

'Somebody should tell us, right at the start of our lives, that we are dying. Then we might live life to the limit, every minute of every day.'

Do it! I say. Whatever you want to do, do it now! There are only so many tomorrows.' (Pope Paul VI)

Yes, life is short. We must grasp every chance to live life to the full, and not wait until it is too late.

Question for reflection:

1) The span of my physical life is short, how can I live it for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the gospel, and renounce to the values of this materialistic world?

Saturday, 22nd February, Chair of Peter

1 Peter 5:1-4, Matthew 16:13-19

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.'

An ordinary life

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Chair of St Peter. What is this Feast all about? This feast does not celebrate a piece of furniture, rather it celebrates the occupant. The very first occupant of the

chair, St Peter, who was chosen by Jesus to be a servant-leader of his flock.

St Peter was an ordinary man who received an extraordinary calling. He was a simple fisherman who followed Jesus for three years. An outspoken person and a leader to the rest of the disciples. However, he stumbled a bit in several occasions in his following of Jesus. Remember the incident when Jesus spoke about his coming death and resurrection, and Peter rebuked him? (Mark 8, 27-33) Remember how he denied Jesus, his Master and Friend, out of fear for his own life? (Matthew 26, 69-75) Remember also how Peter yielded again to his cowardice when he stopped eating with the Gentile converts because he was afraid to offend the Jewish Christians and he was confronted by St Paul for his actions? (Galatians 2, 11-14) With each stumble in his following of Jesus, he stood up again and again. In the end, Peter died a martyr's death on the Vatican Hill in Rome.

An ordinary person with an extraordinary calling.

Jesus calls us to follow him. Yes, ordinary us with our own moments of stumbling, as well as strengths. The world is often impressed by people with great talents, wealth, beauty, popularity, accomplishments and high levels of education. Yet, Jesus looks at the inner hearts of men and women who desire to seek him alone and to do whatever he tells them to do.

A writer once wrote: *'We have one precious life: do something extraordinary today, even if it's tiny. A pebble starts the avalanche.'* (K.A Laity)

We have this one precious life today. Jesus looks at us with great love and asks us again, 'Who do you say I am?' He wants us to enter into a personal relationship with him. From this friendship of love,

he wants to start an avalanche of wonders and miracles from our ordinary lives.

Sunday, 23rd February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18, 1 Corinthians 3:16-23, Matthew 5:38-48

'You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away. 'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Loving without limits

'Love your neighbour' is not an easy command to achieve. Today, Jesus tells us not just to love God or our neighbours, but to love our enemies. This is a powerful message that continues to be one of our greatest challenges in life.

We sometimes do have certain hatred for or dislike certain people due to different personalities, past hurts, harm done, etc. Let us examine and ask ourselves: Is there someone who I hate, just

irritates me and who I resent and feel hostility towards? Am I proud and happy with the hatred and resentment within?

Hatred/dislike leads us to resentment. Resentment is like a chain that keeps us from being free to love again, to forgive, to let go and move on. Someone once said that the effects of carrying resentments is like a person dragging a chain with a bag of horse droppings at the end. This person goes around and around wanting to throw the bag of droppings into the face of the person he resents. He carries it around and waiting for the right moment to strike. At the end, who stinks? We stink if we keep carrying the chain with bag of horse droppings!

When we resent, we are actually hurting ourselves. The person we resent most likely forgot about what happened and moved on in life. But when we keep resentments, we bury ourselves in our pain, and continue to live in the past memories. We hurt ourselves with our bitterness. When Jesus tells us to 'Love your enemies', it is for our own good, for our own peace and happiness.

'To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.' (Unknown)

Jesus, help me to love my enemies so that I can be set free from my resentments and bitterness. Help me to have peace within!

Monday, 24th February

James 3:13-18, Mark 9:14-29

When Jesus, with Peter, James and John came down from the mountain and rejoined the disciples they saw a large crowd round them and some scribes arguing with them. The moment they saw him the whole

crowd were struck with amazement and ran to greet him. 'What are you arguing about with them?' he asked. A man answered him from the crowd, 'Master, I have brought my son to you; there is a spirit of dumbness in him, and when it takes hold of him it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and goes rigid. And I asked your disciples to cast it out and they were unable to.' 'You faithless generation' he said to them in reply. 'How much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' They brought the boy to him, and as soon as the spirit saw Jesus it threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell to the ground and lay writhing there, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' 'From childhood,' he replied 'and it has often thrown him into the fire and into the water, in order to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.' 'If you can?' retorted Jesus. 'Everything is possible for anyone who has faith.' Immediately the father of the boy cried out, 'I do have faith. Help the little faith I have!' And when Jesus saw how many people were pressing round him, he rebuked the unclean spirit. 'Deaf and dumb spirit,' he said 'I command you: come out of him and never enter him again.' Then throwing the boy into violent convulsions it came out shouting, and the boy lay there so like a corpse that most of them said, 'He is dead'. But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him up, and he was able to stand. When he had gone indoors his disciples asked him privately, 'Why were we unable to cast it out?' 'This is the kind' he answered 'that can only be driven out by prayer.'

Increase my faith!

In life, we face many challenges and difficulties that we do not know how to resolve. We may have tried many ways, from asking help from others, to checking for solutions in the Internet, to perhaps

simply ignoring the issue. Nothing seems to work! We grow increasingly helpless and miserable.

The father in today's passage felt helpless and miserable after Jesus' disciples failed to help him. Jesus simply turned to the father and said, '...Bring him to me.'

How comforting it is to hear Jesus saying those words to us personally, 'Bring him to me...Bring yourself to me...Bring the family problem to me...Bring your child/spouse/ to me...'

Faith is to believe in the person of Jesus and to trust that he truly cares. Today, Jesus tells us again, 'Everything is possible for the person who has faith.'

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going, I do not see the road ahead of me, I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." (Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude.)

Tuesday, 25th February

James 4:1-10, Mark 9:30-37

After leaving that place they made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples;

he was telling them, 'The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again'. But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him. They came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' They said nothing because they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all'. He then took a little child, set him in front of them, put his arms round him, and said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me'.

Live simply

We can feel Jesus' frustration towards his disciples. He had just opened his heart to them and shared with them his anxiety as the hour of his passion approached. Yet, they were arguing about who among them was the greatest.

So many moments the Master had taught them with his own life the way of love, service, humility. When the Master needed their understanding and commitment, he found them bickering for power and greatness.

The struggle for power and greatness continues on till today. How many cases we know of families divided all because of wealth! How many friendships are broken because of the struggle for power! Jesus did not give up but started again to teach them: "*Whoever wants to be first must place himself last...*" To live the Kingdom of God implies that we do not strive for power, wealth, glory of the world, but to endeavour to live a life of simplicity and love. In the eyes of God, he has preference in his heart for those who are less

fortunate and those without voice in this world due to oppressions and injustices. Open our eyes and see that there are many of our brothers and sisters who are in need of our service. Mother Teresa once said, " Live simply so others may simply live." Jesus continues to live in the little ones, i.e. the poor, the outcasts, the sick, etc. However, we cannot see him in the little ones when we bicker about greatness, money and power.

Lord, I am sorry for the moments when my heart desires for greatness and power. You are my Master who has come to show me how to live my life simply. Help me, Jesus, to live like you today!

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus inviting me to live today?

Wednesday, 26th February, Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18, 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them; I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'

God sees and is pleased

Today, we begin the season of Lent. Lent is a journey in which we walk towards a closer union with God. It is not simply a time of doing external actions of giving alms, fasting without including God into our lives. All that we do during this time of Lent should lead us to communion with God.

That is why Jesus warns us today not to parade or to display ourselves when we fast or give alms or pray. What is our motive for doing what we do? Who are we trying to please?

Jesus invites each of us to look at our hearts and see our intention for doing, acting, fasting, giving, loving, praying. Many times, we are so concerned with people's opinions, i.e. what they think, what they say, etc. We chase after the praises and affirmations of others, and thus, we work hard to project a good, holy, pious image of ourselves to others. Let us wake up and see that people's opinions are like wind that keep constantly changing its direction. If we are trying to please people, we become slaves of their changing opinions, moods, affections, etc. Like leaves carried away by strong wind, we will be moved without direction, without strong convictions.

Lent is a time to be drawn by God's love and live each day pleasing him alone. We do what we do according to his will and this gives us pleasure within. *'You must concentrate on pleasing God alone, and if He is pleased, you must be pleased.'* (Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina)

Let us, at this start of Lent, prepare to examine our hearts, search our motives and desire that each fast from chocolates or the television, each good deed, each fervent prayer should all be done in secret.

Lord, may my life today be pleasing to you!

Question for reflection:

1) How do I want to live this Lent?

Thursday, 27th February

Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Luke 9:22-25

Jesus said to his disciples: 'The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.' Then to all he said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, that man will save it. What gain, then, is it for a man to have won the whole world and to have lost or ruined his very self?'

In way of the cross, there is Life

Suffering- the dreaded reality that we want to avoid. As we start this journey of Lent, Jesus tells us today these words, 'The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders...' In the same way, Jesus experienced suffering, we, as his followers, too must face our own sufferings.

Many times, we question, 'Why must I suffer? What did God allow this to happen to me?' It is not a question of God allowing or not allowing certain events to happen. Rather, we need to see how we respond to adversities, disappointments, failures. We can either curse God or bless God. Yet, suffering is what makes us to be human. It bends us and sometimes breaks us, but when we live in faith, we come out of it as a new person of strength and maturity.

'Jesus Christ has taken the lead on the way of the cross. He has suffered first. He does not drive us toward suffering but shares it with us, wanting us to have life and to have it in abundance.' (Pope John Paul II)

Today, Jesus whispers these words to our hearts, 'Renounce yourself, pick up your cross and follow me.' Instead of running away from our crosses, let us renounce to our fears, the need to be in control, our lack of faith, etc. Jesus has taken the lead on the way of the cross. Fixing our eyes on him, we walk with faith, not with our fears.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is my response to suffering?
- 2) How can I learn to follow Jesus in the way of the cross?

Friday, 28th February

Isaiah 58:1-9a, Matthew 9:14-15

Then John's disciples came to him and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants would never think of mourning as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

Fasting for Love

Whose disciples are we? John the Baptist? Or Jesus?

In today's gospel, John's disciples came and asked Jesus about the topic of fasting. They noticed that Jesus' disciples did not fast, but the Pharisees and they fasted. In their mind, they wondered, 'How come?'

For John's disciples and the Pharisees, fasting was a way to prepare themselves for the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. Surely, Jesus' disciples fasted according to the Jewish laws. However, it was not

their main priority as they followed Jesus, their Master, the Bridegroom.

For Jesus, fasting was not his preoccupation in his mission. Rather, it was acts of love and mercy that he did to express the face and heart of God.

Many people nowadays tend to fast for the wrong reasons. They fast because they could work on their waistlines or simply out of obligations.

At the start of this Lent, Jesus tells us that the greatest form of fasting is not from chocolates or meat but fasting from all what prevents us from loving. Look at ourselves, there might be obstacles to love more, forgive more, show more compassion. Perhaps we should fast from our tendency to anger, envy, holding resentments, etc.

Jesus is present, not absent, from us. The Bridegroom is here with us always. We are no longer waiting for the coming of the Messiah, like John's disciples and the Pharisees. Therefore, his presence in us should make a difference to the way we live this Lent. Let us be creative in the way we fast! Let Jesus be the one leading us to fast for love!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I best prepare myself to love more this Lent?

Saturday, 29th February

Isaiah 58:9b-14, Luke 5:27-32

When he went out after this, he noticed a tax collector, Levi by name, sitting by the customs house, and said to him, 'Follow me'. And leaving

everything he got up and followed him. In his honour Levi held a great reception in his house, and with them at table was a large gathering of tax collectors and others. The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples and said, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' Jesus said to them in reply, 'It is not those who are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners to repentance.'

Jesus First

In Jesus' honour, Levi held a great reception in his house. And what a party it was. Levi invited all his tax collector friends and the many unsavoury characters that were on society's blacklist and had to hang out with tax collectors like Levi. Perhaps Levi also invited the Pharisees and their scribes, who certainly knew about it and came by to see the action.

Levi was very willing and eager to hold a great party in honour of a man whom he barely knew, a man who simply invited him, with all sincerity, to '*follow me*'.

He wanted his friends to also meet this Jesus whom in a brief encounter thoroughly changed and impacted his life.

In the entire passage, we do not see Levi uttering a single word. But his actions boomed louder than any uttered sound for we saw that he (1) listened, (2) was open and accepted Jesus' invitation, (3) followed in Jesus' footsteps and (4) brought others to have a chance to know and encounter his Jesus who has changed his life forever. And perhaps, just perhaps Levi hoped that they too would experience what he had.

Levi was ready to welcome Jesus into his life. Are we ready to experience God in our daily encounters? Will we, like Levi, take the opportunity to say 'Yes' to Jesus in our every situation life throws

us? Levi held a grand reception in Jesus' honour. Are we, like Levi, ever ready to give Jesus the place of honour in our lives? Will we not give Jesus the centre stage and let Him and His ways emanate to our work, our chores, our leisure, our lifestyles? And as Levi, and as we too have, listened, accepted and followed Jesus, will we share his joy of desiring that others too should come meet and know Jesus.

Let us, this day, place Jesus first in our lives, to allow him to provide us the grace to be able to say 'Yes' to him in the good and bad situations that we find ourselves in. And in all this, let us be mindful that we are his instruments and we bear his light. Hence, let us use our lives to witness to his light and like Levi, gently make ourselves available to provide Jesus the possibility be the doctor that He is, ministering to the many who need His healing.

Sunday, 1st March, First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7, Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves'. But he replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'. The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God' he said 'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He will put you in his angels' charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone'. Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says: You must not put the Lord your God to the test'. Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these' he said, 'if you fall at my

feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone. Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him

I am a child of God

When we fall into temptation, isn't it normal to excuse ourselves with statements like these: 'I am only human and so it is normal to make mistakes.' Or 'It is ok. I will only do it once. This will be the last time'? Then the next time we fall, we make the same excuses again. Before we know it, our conscience has become numb to all our excuses and we become used to committing certain sins, doing certain actions, looking at people as objects, dividing ourselves from others, craving pleasures and power.

Jesus was tempted but He did not fall into the traps of the Tempter. Why? Jesus, though divine, had a human conscience. With His human conscience, He had to decide what was right and wrong. What was His criterion for His choices? The reason behind all His choices was God. Jesus lived His life with his Father in a close and intimate relationship. Being firmly rooted in His identity as the beloved Son of God, He desired to please His Father and loved Him above all else. The voices of temptation that lured Him towards pleasures, worldly popularity, fame, wealth and power were nothing for Him.

Today, we too are faced with many temptations that tend to lure us away from God and make us forget our real selves as children of God. As children of God, His Word of Truth and Love should be our criterion and standard to choose between right and wrong, not the world's. God invites us to root our lives in Him alone and to allow His Word to guide our path. We are beloved children of God. This is who we are! Let us strive to live in a relationship with God, our

Father, so that we can be strong in moments of temptation and choose to walk away from all that tries to lure us away from God.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I grow in my relationship with God during this Lent?

Monday, 2nd March

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18, Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me". Next, he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food; I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink; I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, naked and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so

far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me". And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the virtuous to eternal life.'

A terrible hunger for love

"You must love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18)

Lent is a time to deepen our relationship with God and the people around us. This is because our Christian faith is not about 'God and I', but rather 'God, others and I'.

Today, Jesus, our King and Master, identifies Himself with the poorest of the poor. Who are the poorest of the poor in our society today? They are the materially poor as well as the spiritually poor. We have many people who are struggling hard to make ends meet. However, we are also surrounded by many others who are comfortably well-to-do yet spiritually poor. They might have enough good food and branded clothes to last their lifetime. Yet, money, good clothes, modern gadgets, etc. cannot remove loneliness, the need for love, hunger for laughter, need for a deeper meaning in life, etc. that is in each one of us. Giving alms and donations during this time of lent is a wonderful thing to do. Yet let us go a step further and see how we can help bring love and meaning to those who are spiritually poor, especially the people close to us. Mother Theresa, in her work with the poorest of the poor, recognised another set of poor, i.e. the spiritually poor. She wrote, *'There is a terrible hunger for love. We all experience that in our lives - the pain, the loneliness. We must have the courage to recognise it. The poor you may have right in your own family. Find them. Love them.'* (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Let us ask Jesus to open our eyes and recognise the hunger for love in the people around us. Let us courageously recognise it in those close to us so that we can learn to love them

Question for reflection:

1) Today, who are the people whom I can bring love to?

Tuesday, 3rd March

Isaiah 55:10-11, Matthew 6:7-15

Jesus said to his disciples: 'In your prayers do not babble as the pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So you should pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the evil one. Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.'

Father, you know what I need!

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the very basic method of how to pray. He tells us,

'Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him.'

This is the basis of every prayer, every conversation with God. We need to recognise Him as our Father, the one who loves, takes care, protects and provides. He is our Father who knows every single need before it is articulated. Therefore, we need to hold onto this sentence, *'Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him', whenever we enter into prayer.'*

Therefore, we come before God with an uncomplicated heart that trusts Him enough to know that, in His time and in His way, He will give us what is truly best for us.

It is only with an uncomplicated and trusting heart that one can utter those words of the prayer, 'Our Father.' Jesus taught us to

address God as 'Father' and thus invites us to enter into a loving relationship with God.

It is from this dependence on God, who takes care of us, that we can face temptations with courage. It is from this intimate loving relationship with God that we can learn to love and forgive others in their failures and weaknesses. This prayer is not meant to be recited mechanically but to be lived out in our daily lives.

In this time of Lent, let us also set aside more time and space in our daily schedule for prayer. Let us enter into our inner room to spend some quiet time with God. It is not because God is a needy God who needs our prayer. No! We pray because we know prayer helps us to stay focused on what truly matters.

"Who except God can give you peace? Has the world ever been able to satisfy the heart?" (St. Gerard Majella)

Question for reflection:

1) Do I find it hard to recognise God as my Father who loves and takes care of me? Why?

Wednesday, 4th March, St. Casimir

Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11:29-32

The crowds got even bigger and Jesus addressed them, 'This is a wicked generation; it is asking for a sign. The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. On Judgement day the Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here. On Judgement day the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation

and condemn it, because when Jonah preached they repented; and there is something greater than Jonah here.

The greatest sign

In today's Gospel, Jesus knew that the crowds of people were coming to him because they wanted to see signs so that they could believe that He was the One sent by God. As for Jesus, the only sign He would show was the sign of Jonah.

The sign of Jonah refers to the Old Testament where Prophet Jonah was trapped in the whale's belly for three days. Jesus used this story to refer to His own death when He would be in the tomb for three days, but the tomb could not contain the power of God's love. Jesus would rise on the third day.

The power of Jesus' death and resurrection is the only sign that love will have the last Word, that truth will always triumph, and that life is more powerful than death.

This sign would confront the lives of those who believe in Him to give themselves to proclaim and be witnesses to it. It continues to activate in us a desire to be living witnesses to Jesus' death and resurrection through our words and deeds.

Question for reflection:

1) When people look at me, can they see Jesus' presence in me?

Thursday, 5th March

Esther 14:1,3-5, 12-14, Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one

who knocks will always have the door opened to him. Is there a man among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! 'So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets.'

Ask and you will receive

Jesus invites us today to pray with persistence and determination. He calls us to seek God always in our prayer, to never get tired of knocking on His door, to ask for what we really need and desire.

With trust, we believe that God our loving Father will answer our prayer in His time and in His way. Like Esther in the first reading, let us call on God with trusting hearts,

*"My Lord, our King, the only one,
Come to my help, for I am alone
And have no helper but you..."*

"Miracles happen. But they need prayer! A courageous prayer, that struggles for that miracle. Not like those prayers of courtesy: Ah, I will pray for you! Followed by one Our Father, a Hail Mary and then I forget. No! It takes a brave prayer like that of Abraham who was struggling with the Lord to save the city, like that of Moses who prayed, his hands held high when he grew weary... Prayer works miracles...but we must believe it. I think that we can say a beautiful prayer, not a polite prayer, but a prayer from the heart and tell him today throughout the whole day: Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief".
(Pope Francis)

Let us be assured that God, our Father, will give everything that is good. He will. He told us so. All we need is to trust and pray from the heart!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I pray to God from my heart?

Friday, 6th March

Ezekiel 18:21-28, Matthew 5:20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. 'You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; if a man calls his brother "Fool" he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and if a man calls him "Renegade" he will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. I tell you solemnly, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.

Making a choice to reconcile

Today, the message of Jesus is one that leads us to experience this very love. This message calls us to make peace with our brothers and sisters. It is a message of reconciliation.

Sadly, many of us carry with us what should have been left behind - the past. Hurt and anger that have made us bitter, defensive and miserable inside. It is time to let go and move on.

"Two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument; and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "Today my best friend slapped me in the face." They kept on walking, until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: "Today my best friend saved my life." The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "after I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?" The friend replied "when someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."
(Anonymous)

Forgiveness is the hardest thing to do, yet it is the key to have a heart full of peace and freedom.

Question for reflection:

1) At this moment in my life, who is the person that Jesus is inviting me to work with for reconciliation?

Saturday, 7th March, Ss. Perpetua and Felicity

Deuteronomy 26:16-19, Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you

will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

A clean heart to love again

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."

As children of God, we are called to do more, love more and to be more. We step out of our comfort zone and the familiar environment of family and friends and venture into the 'enemy's' zone. In this 'enemy zone', people might not be nice to us or like us for who we are. Yet, we do not answer dislike with dislike, but offer peace and friendship instead.

As children of God, we have God, our Father, with us all the time. He, who is the source of all love, gives us the courage to reach out, the perseverance to try again and the compassion to forgive.

"To be able to love one another, we must pray much, for prayer gives a clean heart and a clean heart can see God in our neighbour. If now we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten how to see God in one another." (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Today, let us allow God our loving Father to clean our hearts from all that prevents us from loving more. With a clean heart, we look at one another as our brothers and sisters, and no longer as our enemies.

Question for reflection:

1) As a child of God, how can I love with an extraordinary love?

Sunday, 8th March, Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12-1-4a, 2 Timothy 1:8b-10, Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this the disciples fell on their faces overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said 'do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead'.

Listening to Jesus as he speaks

"The Gospel of the Transfiguration of the Lord puts before our eyes the glory of Christ, which anticipates the resurrection and announces the divinization of man. The Christian community becomes aware that Jesus leads it, like the Apostles Peter, James and John "up a high mountain by themselves" [Mt 17:1], to receive once again in Christ, as sons and daughters in the Son, the gift of the Grace of God: "This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him". It is the invitation to take a distance from the noisiness of everyday life in order to immerse oneself in God's presence. He desires to hand down to us, each day, a Word that penetrates the depths of our spirit, where we discern good from evil [cf. Heb 4:12], reinforcing our will to follow the Lord." (Pope Benedict XVI)

As we enter into the second Sunday of Lent, we are invited to move away from the many noises that distract us from listening truly to Jesus, the Son of God. There are many voices that demand our attention: voices of our pride, our hurts, our restlessness and our laziness. These noisy voices deafen us to the gentle, small voice deep within that calls us, *"You are my Beloved, listen, You are my Friend, follow Me."*

In order to listen to the voice of Jesus, we need a lot of effort on our part to be still and allow ourselves to wait patiently for His Word. In silence, He speaks.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I open and eager to listen to Jesus in this time of prayer?

Monday, 9th March, St. Frances of Rome

Daniel 9:4b-10, Luke 6:36-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

The yardstick we use

We cannot judge, nor condemn and expect pardon if we do not strive to be compassionate as our Father who is compassionate. Without compassion, we cannot give love.

The secret to Jesus' compassionate heart was His openness to receive the Father's love. Today, we are also called to depend on God our Father as the source of our loving.

Therefore, we need to pray and go back to God with open hands to receive His love. He is always ready to give us what we need in order to be loving and compassionate as He is. With His love in our hearts, we can then truly give compassion to others.

"Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I treat the people around me with more compassion instead of judging or condemning them?

Tuesday, 10th March

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20, 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.'

Humility, our way of life

'Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.' (St Augustine)

One word that can sum up today's gospel is: Humility. Humility is the virtue that allows us to live in the truth of who we are for God and who He is for us. The truth of who we are is that we are all precious children of God and that each of us is loved by Him.

The virtue of humility frees us to be who we truly are, without the need to put on the masks of superiority or feel inferior. It also gives us the courage to look at ourselves as well as at each person in the light of love. When humility does not exist, we tend to be caught up in a rat race of trying to be the best, have the most, be more perfect, etc. We allow success, popularity and power to trap us into striving for greatness and self-glorification.

The Pharisees in today's gospel wanted to attract attention and take the places of honour. Instead of glorifying God, they glorified themselves. *'Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted.'*

Let us begin today by carrying humility in our hearts.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I glorify God today in all that I do and say?

Wednesday, 11th March

Jeremiah 18:18-20, Matthew 20:17-28

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

Imitating my Master

Jesus' disciples did not understand that the way of their Master was not about being powerful and admired but it is about humility, self-giving and service. They failed to realise that their Master's ambition was not to have titles or status, but to be the servant of all.

Do we understand the way of Jesus and desire to have His same ambition?

"Remember that the Christian life is one of action; not of speech and daydreams. Let there be few words and many deeds and let them be done well." (St. Vincent Pallotti)

Today, let us put into action the path of humble service and joyfully seek to be servant of all, out of love for Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I humbly serve my family and friends and not expect them to serve me instead?

Thursday, 12th March

Jeremiah 17:5-10, Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even came and licked his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 'In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his bosom. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames". "My son," Abraham replied "remember that during your life good things came your way, just as bad things came the way of Lazarus. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to stop anyone, if he wanted to, crossing from our side to yours, and to stop any crossing from your side to ours. "'The rich man replied, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too".

"They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham "let them listen to them.". "Ah no, father Abraham," said the rich man "but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead".

A heart that loves

In the first reading of today, God said, "*The heart is more devious than any other thing, perverse too: who can pierce its secrets? I, the Lord, search the heart, I probe the loins, to give each man what his conduct and actions deserve.*" (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

In the Gospel, there was a rich man, who was enslaved by his wealth and self-indulgence. He was blinded to the needs of Lazarus, a poor beggar who was sickly with sores and hungry for food. Both died.

The rich man went to the eternal fires of hell while Lazarus was carried by angels to eternal glory. The rich man, when he was still alive, had sewn his pockets tight and chose not to take notice of the needs of others. He thus stitched his fate by the choice he made while he was still alive.

Knowing that he had stitched his fate, the rich man wanted to warn his five brothers who most likely had the same lifestyle as he did. These five brothers represent anyone who live their lives by immersing themselves in wealth, pleasures and power.

Money is and should always remain as a resource that is used. It is not something to be hoarded for selfish needs. Let us open our eyes to the many Lazarus that are in need of our time, attention, kind words, smile, forgiveness so that we can live each day at peace with ourselves, others and God.

"At the end of our life, we will be judged on love" (St. John of the Cross)

Question for reflection:

1) What wealth can I share with those around me during Lent?

Friday, 13th March

Genesis 37:3-4,12-13a,17b-28a, Matthew 21:33-43,45-46

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next, he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them. "They will respect my son" he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." So, they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives'. Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see? I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' When they heard his parables, the chief priests and the scribes realised he was speaking about them, but though they would have liked to arrest him they were afraid of the crowds, who looked on him as a prophet.

If you hear God's voice today, harden not your heart

In this parable, Jesus is reading to us the history of the Old Testament where prophets were rejected because of their radical call to conversion and living the faith. History repeats itself in the life of Jesus and continues to happen today as well.

Today, God continues to send us his messengers to speak to us about God and his ways. He sometimes sends those we least expect to be his instrument to tell us His Good News. From a child to the cleaner in the office, God can use anybody to bring us words of truth and reminders of love. No person is too 'small' or 'insignificant' for God to use as his prophets of today.

In Jesus' time, the crowd considered Jesus as a prophet, a man of God. In contrast, the Pharisees and the religious leaders rejected him because his teachings and actions were too new, too people-orientated, instead of rule abiding. They saw him simply as the Nazarene, the son of a lowly carpenter, an itinerant preacher. They closed their hearts to his message, and thus, closed their hearts to God.

Today, let us open our hearts to the messengers He is sending our way. Let us embrace Jesus' call to faith and take joy in being able to respond with love.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I recognise that God can come and speak to me through people around me, even the most unexpected ones in my life?

Saturday, 14th March

Micah 7:14-15,18-20, Lk 15:1-3,11-32

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: 'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me". So, the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. 'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate. 'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the

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

God delights in showing mercy

"What God can compare with you: taking fault away, pardoning crime, not cherishing anger for ever but delighting in showing mercy?"
(Micah 7:18)

The father, in today's Gospel, showed a compassionate heart for his two sons who were both somehow far from home. The younger son took his part of the inheritance and strayed away by spending all on loose living. The elder son, though he stayed in the house, was working as a slave and not living his identity as his father's son.

When the younger son decided to return home after he had lost everything, he was greeted by his father who ran to him, embraced him with love and compassion.

When the elder son drew closer to his house, he found out that his brother was back, and his father had a party for him. He could not understand the heart of his father. In his anger, he refused to enter the house. Yet, the father did not give up on him. The father came out of the house and invited the elder son to come back home again.

Today, let us realise that God's love for us, like the love of the father in the parable, is compassionate and merciful. Let us go back to God our Father who is waiting with open arms for us. When he sees us taking the step towards him, he will run to us with love and say, *'My child, come and rest in me. All is well and all will be well.'*

Question for reflection:

- 1) Which son do I identify myself with, at this point of my Lenten journey?
- 2) How can I draw closer to God and experience Him loving me with His compassionate and merciful love again?

Sunday, 15th March, Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7, Romans 5:1-2,5-8, John 4:5-42

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' - Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied: 'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water'. 'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?' Jesus replied: 'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life'. 'Sir,' said the woman 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw

water.'... The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people. 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder if he is the Christ?' This brought people out of the town and they started walking towards him...Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said, 'He told me all I have ever done', so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world'.

"Give me a drink"

In today's Gospel, Jesus asked the Samaritan woman, "Give me a drink." This request reminds us of Jesus' cry on the cross, "I am thirsty." (John 19:28). What drink was Jesus asking the Samaritan woman at the well for? What was Jesus thirsty for? Is Jesus asking a drink from you today? Is Jesus still thirsting today?

Mother Teresa wrote the following reflection from her prayer on the words of Jesus, "I thirst":

"I thirst for you. I thirst to love and to be loved by you – that is how precious you are to me. Come to me and fill your heart and heal your wounds.

If you feel unimportant in the eyes of the world, that matters not at all. For me, there is no one any more important in the entire world than you. I thirst for you. Come to me. Thirst for me. Give me your life – and I will prove to you how important you are to my heart."

Asking the Samaritan woman for a drink, Jesus was asking her for more than just physical water to quench His thirst; He was actually offering to quench her thirst by giving a drink of life-giving water,

a drink of intimate love that only God can give. Jesus knew that the woman, who was an outcast in her community due to her lifestyle, was thirsty for love and acceptance. In their dialogue, the Samaritan woman discovered how important and precious she was in Jesus' eyes. Joyfully, she went back to her town and cried out, "Come and see...Come and see!" She left her empty water jar by the well at Jesus' feet because she now had found a new and greater purpose in her life.

Jesus wants to offer us a drink of life-giving water of God's eternal love because we are precious and important for Him. Jesus sits and waits for us by the well of prayer. He wants to converse with us and bring us to a deeper encounter with His love. He desires to fill our water jars, i.e. our empty hearts, with His love that will never go away. Will we let him?

At the same time, Jesus is also thirsty for our love. Will we offer Him our friendship, our love?

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What am I thirsting for? (Friendship? Acceptance? Forgiveness? Security?)
- 2) How is this thirst leading me to open myself more to Jesus? Am I aware that Jesus is also thirsting for more of my friendship and love?

Monday, 16th March

2 Kings 5: 1-15, Luke 4:24 -30

Jesus came to Nazara and spoke to the people in the synagogue: 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great

famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

Jesus, I welcome you!

Indeed, Jesus' personal experience at Nazareth shows clearly that a prophet is not welcomed in his own hometown. Why? Most likely the people watched him grow, they knew his parents, etc. Thus, they could not open themselves to accept His words and acknowledge Him as a prophet.

We can be like the people of Nazareth too. We can become too familiar with Jesus and His words that nothing excites us anymore.

'Today Jesus might, at first glance, appear to be boring and not so exciting, but in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and charity, all the richness of love, faith and hope.' (Pope Francis)

We allow over-familiarity to cloud our eyes to see Jesus with renewed faith and harden our hearts to be surprised by Him. Today, let us ask for more faith to welcome Jesus into our lives.

Jesus, I welcome you! Enter into my life and speak to me so that I can be enriched by you. Help me not to close myself from your presence. Give me the faith to acknowledge you now and to allow you into my life.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I take Jesus and His friendship for granted?
- 2) In this time of Lent, how can I choose to welcome Jesus more into my life?

Tuesday, 17th March, St. Patrick

Daniel 3:25, 34-43, Matthew 18:21-35

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.'

Forgive as God forgives

Forgiveness has no limits! This is Jesus' message to us today. We are called to forgive again and again even though someone wrongs us repeatedly. Why? This is because God forgives us again and again when we ourselves repeatedly go away from Him because of our pride, our choice to remain by ourselves, our lack of love, etc.

Sometimes, we need to be the one taking the initiative to apologise when we are in the wrong. This is because our top priority is always to work towards reconciliation.

"I am sorry" and "I forgive" are two very essential words in order to heal wounds in relationships. Let us have concrete people in our prayer today whom we need to humbly work for reconciliation.

"Loving and forgiving are the concrete and visible signs that the faith has transformed our hearts and allows us to express in ourselves the same life of God...Loving and forgiving as God loves and forgives...This is a program of life that cannot know interruptions or exceptions, but pushes us to always go beyond without ever tiring, with the certainty of being sustained by the paternal presence of God."
(Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be an instrument of reconciliation in my relationships with my family, friends and parish community?

Wednesday, 18th March St. Cyril of Jerusalem

Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9, Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete

them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'

The greatest commandment of love

"But take care what you do and be on your guard. Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart all the days of your life; rather, tell them to your children and to your children's children." (Deuteronomy 4:9)

Jesus has come, not to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to complete them with His Law of Love. Right before He embraced His death, Jesus gave a new commandment of loving one another as He has loved.

'And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.' (John 13:34).

We must not forget and let this Law of Love slip from our heart but remember it by putting it into practice every day.

Do we really want to follow Jesus? If our answer is a firm 'Yes', then we should be daring to imitate the way He loves - which is with a love that is patient, forgiving and self-giving.

It goes against our nature to love like Jesus. Thus, we need to ask Jesus for the courage to take up His simple appeal of the commandment of love, and to take small steps to love. Let us strive today to dedicate ourselves once more to put love into action!

Question for reflection:

1) What is stopping me from practising this law of love?

Thursday, 19th March, St. Joseph

2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16, Romans 4:13,16-18, 22, Matthew 1:16,18-21,24a

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Humility and hiddenness

"In all of this he showed himself, like his spouse Mary, an authentic heir of Abraham's faith: faith in God who guides the events of history according to his mysterious salvific plan. His greatness, like Mary's, stands out even more because his mission was carried out in the humility and hiddenness of the house of Nazareth. Moreover, God himself, in the person of his Incarnate Son, chose this way and style of life - humility and hiddenness - in his earthly existence. From the example of St Joseph, we all receive a strong invitation to carry out

with fidelity, simplicity and modesty the task that Providence has entrusted to us." (Pope Benedict XVI)

In humility and hiddenness of the house of Nazareth, Joseph lived his ordinary days with Mary and Jesus. His life was great, not because of the power and riches he had, but because his simple heart trusted God. When the angel appeared to him in a dream and asked him to take Mary home as his wife even though she was pregnant with a child, Joseph simply said 'Yes' and did what the angel told him. Even though he did not understand what was going on, he continued to trust in God.

How much can we learn from this great saint. We tend to lead our life in pursuit of riches, power and status so that we can be seen as great and important in the eyes of the world. Yet, there is a restlessness in our hearts that can never be satisfied by the achievements and praises we have.

Today, as we celebrate this feast, let us learn and follow the example of this silent saint who displayed his greatness in his humility and hiddenness.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I imitate the footsteps of St Joseph in my life?

Friday, 20th March

Hosea 14:2-10, 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

A boy saw his elder neighbour, who had just lost his wife, crying as he sat on his yard. The boy went over to the neighbour's yard and just sat there with the old man. After the boy got home, his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbour. The little boy said, "Nothing. I just cried with him." (Anonymous)

In today's Gospel, Jesus gave two commandments: Love God, Love neighbour as ourselves.

Who are our neighbours?

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)

We are invited again today to put love into action. To love is to be with a person in his/her pain and suffering. To love is to sacrifice time to simply listen to a friend. To love is to offer words of peace instead of anger. To love is to give a smile of friendship.

In this time of Lent, let us allow ourselves first to be loved by God, and then to take small steps to love our neighbours.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I struggle to put love into action? Why?

Saturday, 21st March

Hosea 6:1-6, Luke 18: 9-14

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

Stop playing the Judge!

Today, let us enter into the parable of Jesus and apply this story to our own personal life. The Pharisee was a very proud man who despised everyone else and thus he took great delight in playing the Judge. He looked at the tax collector with very negative eyes

and assumed the worst from this man. Little did he know that this despised tax collector went home right with God.

How different the world will be if we just stop making judgmental assumptions about others!

Look at the life of Jesus, our Master of Life. Did he ever make judgmental assumptions about others? Did he look down at people and despised them from his heart?

No! Jesus looked for the good in each person, no matter how society condemned him/her. He reached out to touch people with his heart of compassionate love. It takes a lot of courage to look for the good in others, rather than to jump to our spontaneous tendency to play the Judge.

Let us today dare to be the first to reach out to others with our hearts and have the courage to stop the Pharisaic voices in us that judge others. Today is a new day to dare to be different! Let us look for the good in others and respect each person's unique journey towards life and God!

Sunday, 22nd March, Forth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16:1b,6-7,10-13a, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam (a name that means 'sent'). So, the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored. His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one'. Others said, 'No, he only looks like him'. The man himself said, 'I am the man'. They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and

opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see'. Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath'. Others said, 'How could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' 'He is a prophet' replied the man. 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away. Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir,' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you'. The man said, 'Lord, I believe', and worshipped him.

Jesus, our Greatest gain

The blind man, in today's gospel, experienced the greatest miracle of his life - he regained his sight! Yet, although he regained his sight, this did not 'improve' his life. He was, in fact, left alone and cut off from his own parents who were too afraid to stand by his side and he was also driven away from the temple he loved so dearly.

Isn't this how we sometimes experience life? We get something great but the next moment, we find out that something else is being taken away. It is so easy to blame God, 'Why God? Why me?' Did the man look back and regret that moment when Jesus touched his eyes and gave him his sight? Did he wish that Jesus had never entered his life? Did he blame God?

The man neither blamed God nor regretted the miracle he experienced. In fact, the more problems he faced with the Pharisees, the more he grew in his faith. In the end, he even reprimanded the Pharisees for their unbelief. This brave man was driven out because of his growing conviction in Jesus.

Jesus did not leave him alone. He went to look for the man and brought him into a deeper faith in God. This was the greatest gain, more than the gift of his eyesight! The man saw Jesus with eyes of faith and professed with joy, *'Lord, I believe!'*

In our ups and downs in life, our gains and losses, let this man in today's gospel be our inspiration. Let us not focus on what we gain or lose here on earth, but on Jesus who comes to us and leads us always into a deeper faith in God. Jesus is the greatest treasure, our greatest gain!

'Every time there are losses there are choices to be made. You choose to live your losses as passages to anger, blame, hatred, depression and resentment, or you choose to let these losses be passages to something new, something wider, and deeper.' (Henri Nouwen)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I allow myself to be led to a deeper faith in God?

Monday, 23rd March

Isaiah 65:17-21, John 4:43-54

Jesus left Samaria for Galilee. He himself had declared that there is no respect for a prophet in his own country, but on his arrival the Galileans received him well, having seen all that he had done at Jerusalem during the festival which they too had attended. He went again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a court official there whose son was ill at Capernaum and, hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went and asked him to come and cure his son as he was at the point of death. Jesus said, 'So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!' 'Sir,' answered the official 'come down before my child dies. 'Go home,' said Jesus 'your son will live. 'The man believed what Jesus had said and started

on his way; and while he was still on the journey back his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. 'The fever left him yesterday' they said 'at the seventh hour. 'The father realised that this was exactly the time when Jesus had said, 'Your son will live'; and he and all his household believed. This was the second sign given by Jesus, on his return from Judaea to Galilee.'

'Go home, your son will live'

In today's Gospel, a court official went to Jesus and begged Him to heal his son who was lying with fever at the point of death.

Jesus seemed to dismiss the man by replying, *"So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!"* In fact, Jesus was not addressing these words to the distressed father. Jesus was talking in plural and thus He was referring to the crowd around Him who was seeking for signs and miracles.

However, the court official desperately told Jesus, "Come down before my child dies." Once again, all he heard was Jesus' words, "Go home, your son will live." Instead of going with him, Jesus sent him away with simply the words that his son would live.

The court official chose to accept Jesus' way of healing his son. He believed and went on his way even though he was most likely troubled with uncertainty.

Faith is active; it is what we actually do and not what we know and feel.

As we draw close to Jesus, let us learn to take leaps of faith and trust in Him. Jesus responds to us in ways that we might not understand but we still continue to walk on with trust.

Question for reflection:

1) In this Lenten journey, how can I choose to take the leap of faith in the concrete situations I am facing?

Tuesday, 24th March

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12, John 5:1-16

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

'Do you want to be well again?'

Jesus saw a crippled man by the pool, and he went up to him and asked, 'Do you want to be well again?' Reading this line, we might think that Jesus was asking the obvious! Who wouldn't want to be

well again? Yet this is not true. Oftentimes, when a person has been “crippled” for so long, trapped in a particular way of life that handicaps one from growing and moving forward, habit and fear prevent one from “wanting to be well again.”

Jesus asks this question because He knows the heart of each person. Perhaps the crippled man might not really want to be healed. He was crippled for 38 years and might be comfortable in his condition. He might have fears of what it meant to be well again. If he was to really get well, he would have to look for a job and sustain himself and try to fit into society once more. Life would surely become more complicated.

We are like the crippled man sometimes. Fear of what it means to be well again, what it means to be free again, what it means to follow Jesus radically, etc. keeps us from fully and completely choosing Jesus in every aspect of our lives. We are afraid of changing what we are already comfortable with.

Today, Jesus is asking us, *‘Do you want to be well again?’* This question implies choosing a different way -- new challenges, an uncertain future, letting go of living in our comfort zones, etc. Jesus wants to heal us and make us well again, whole again, free again, happy again, fruitful again. We are not meant to be crippled in our life of faith.

The words of Jesus to the crippled man are meant for us today, *‘Get up, pick up your sleeping mat and walk.’* *In this time of Lent, let us take the courage to “be well again.”*

Wednesday, 25th March, The Annunciation of the Lord

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8:10, Hebrews 10:4-10, Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

I come to obey your will, Lord

As we celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation, the 'Yes' of Mary, Jesus draws us to His Mother and calls us to contemplate and imitate her faithfulness in doing God's will.

In the Gospel passage, Mary was asked to offer her whole life to God by being the mother of His Son. Mary may not have fully understood the invitation from God when she said those words, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.' Yet, she trusted in the plan of God for her. Mary trusted because she loved God with her whole heart, mind and will.

As we approach the last week of Lent, we are also called by God to offer more than just external sacrifices of fasting. Like Mary, we are called to give to God our lives so that He can use us to bring goodness and love to the world. Even though we might not understand the ways of God, we continue to trust in Him.

"... this is what Christ said, on coming into the world: You, who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepare a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sins; then I said, just I was commanded in the scroll of the book, 'God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will.'" (Hebrews 10: 5-7)

Question for reflection:

1) In my following of Jesus now, how can I concretely say 'Yes' to him?

Thursday, 26th March

Exodus 32:7-14, John 5:31-47

Jesus said to the Jews: 'Were I to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid; but there is another witness who can speak on my behalf, and I know that his testimony is valid. You sent messengers to John, and he gave his testimony to the truth: not that I depend on human testimony; no, it is for your salvation that I speak of this. John was a lamp alight and shining and for a time you were content to enjoy the light that he gave. But my testimony is greater than John's: the works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me. Besides, the Father who sent me bears witness to me himself. You have never heard his voice, you have never seen his shape, and his word finds no home in you because you do not believe in the one he has sent. 'You study the scriptures, believing that in them you have eternal life; now these same scriptures

testify to me, and yet you refuse to come to me for life! As for human approval, this means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you. I have come in the name of my Father and you refuse to accept me; if someone else comes in his own name you will accept him. How can you believe, since you look to one another for approval and are not concerned with the approval that comes from the one God? Do not imagine that I am going to accuse you before the Father: you place your hopes on Moses, and Moses will be your accuser. If you really believed him you would believe me too, since it was I that he was writing about; but if you refuse to believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?’

People pleaser or God pleaser?

“As for human approval, this means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you.”

Jesus was addressing these words to the Jewish authorities whose hearts were so full of self-righteous pride and self-love that the Word of God could not find a home in them. Jesus saw their hearts and knew that they were insecure with God’s love because they neither knew Him nor had a personal relationship with Him. Thus, they sought the approval of human beings more than God’s.

Look at our own lives. We want affirmation and appreciation. We want others to approve the things we do and words we say. Seeking people’s approvals make us into people-pleasers and live in a state of insecurity.

We tend to forget that we are loved deeply and unconditionally by God. He freely gives us His acceptance and love. In Him, we find our desire for love and approval complete. In Him, we find our security. This Lent let us go back to God again and humbly let Him love us.

Questions for reflection:

1) Is there someone from whom I am seeking constant approval? How can I live freely to seek God's approval rather than humans'?

Friday, 27th March

Wisdom 2:1a, 12-22, John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Jesus stayed in Galilee; he could not stay in Judaea, because the Jews were out to kill him. As the Jewish feast of Tabernacles drew near. However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went up as well, but quite privately, without drawing attention to himself. Meanwhile some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Isn't this the man they want to kill? And here he is, speaking freely, and they have nothing to say to him! Can it be true the authorities have made up their minds that he is the Christ? Yet we all know where he comes from, but when the Christ appears no one will know where he comes from. Then, as Jesus taught in the Temple, he cried out: 'Yes, you know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of myself: no, there is one who sent me and I really come from him, and you do not know him, but I know him because I have come from him and it was he who sent me.' They would have arrested him then, but because his time had not yet come no one laid a hand on him.

Jesus' commitment to the mission in the face of conflict

The Jews were waiting to capture and eliminate Jesus as soon as they had the chance. Yet, the gospel tells us that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles despite the threat of death. Jesus could have stayed in Galilee and hide somewhere safe where no one could find him. Why did he put himself in danger? Why did he go to Jerusalem, the hub of all Jewish authority? This was because Jesus' only desire was to carry on his mission. He saw the

urgency of preaching and teaching the people about God, His Father.

Jesus was a person who was committed to preaching the message of God and bringing His love to the people, even in the midst of great difficulties. Nothing and nobody could remove him from living His life for God, his Father.

As Christians, we are all called to live the mission of living out Christ-like values of love, compassion, peace, unity and forgiveness. We are all invited to stand up and speak the Truth in the face of injustice. We are called to be different in the way we work, speak and live our lives.

Yet, it is so easy to run away from this mission when we are faced with disapproval or rejection from others.

As we come closer to the end of this Lenten season, let us learn to contemplate on Jesus' life and learn from Him what it means to be committed Christians who live out our Christian mission even in the face of conflicts.

Question for reflection:

1) What holds me back from truly living my mission of living the Good News of love entrusted to me by Jesus?

Saturday, 28th March

Jeremiah 11:18-20, John 7:40-53

Several people who had been listening to Jesus said, 'Surely he must be the prophet', and some said, 'He is the Christ', but others said, 'Would the Christ be from Galilee? Does not scripture say that the Christ must be descended from David and come from the town of Bethlehem?' So the people could not agree about him. Some would have liked to arrest him, but no one actually laid hands on him. The

police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought him?' The police replied, 'There has never been anybody who has spoken like him'. 'So' the Pharisees answered 'you have been led astray as well? Have any of the authorities believed in him? Any of the Pharisees? This rabble knows nothing about the Law - they are damned.' One of them, Nicodemus - the same man who had come to Jesus earlier - said to them, 'But surely the Law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?' To this they answered, 'Are you a Galilean too? Go into the matter and see for yourself: prophets do not come out of Galilee.'

Taking a stand

Jesus caused divisions among the people who had been listening to Him. Some of them had insufficient evidence about Jesus being a prophet. Some went further and claimed that He was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. This group was right in their perception, but they were not committed to take the step to follow Jesus. Another group was the chief priests and the Pharisees who were determined to condemn Jesus because they claimed that He broke the law.

The only person who truly stood up to defend Jesus was Nicodemus, the Pharisee who went to Jesus at night and entered into a dialogue with Him (John 3). Surely, Nicodemus was impressed then by Jesus and kept a deep respect for Him in secret as he feared the comments of his fellow Pharisees. At that moment, Nicodemus felt that he needed to do something to help soothe the hatred of those around him, and so he said, "But surely the Law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?" In response, they piled insults on him.

Finally, Nicodemus took a stand and associated himself with Jesus when he and Joseph of Arimathea went to request for Jesus' body and buried Him later in a tomb (John 19:38-42).

A real encounter with Jesus requires us not just to have opinions about who we think He is, but to make a decision to really take a stand and follow Him, even if we face ridicule and rejection from others. We cannot sit on the fence anymore but have to allow Jesus to influence the way we live our life each day.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I make a stand and follow Jesus faithfully?

Sunday, 29th March, Fifth Sunday of Lent

Ezekiel 37:12-14; Romans 8:8-11, John 11:1-45

The sisters sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill'. On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified'. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judaea'. On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathize with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you'. 'Your brother' said Jesus to her 'will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day'. Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she said 'I believe that

you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not prevented this man's death?' Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha said to him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: 'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.' When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, here! Come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

Do you believe?

"Seeing Martha and Mary and those who had come to console them weeping, Jesus "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled," and lastly, "wept" (John 11:33, 35). Christ's heart is divine-human: in him God and man meet perfectly, without separation and without confusion. He is the image, or rather, the incarnation of God who is love, mercy, paternal and maternal tenderness, of God who is Life. Therefore, he solemnly declared to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." And he adds, "Do you believe this?" (11:25-26). It is a question that Jesus addresses to each one of us: a question that certainly rises above us, rises above our capacity to understand, and it asks us to entrust ourselves to him as he entrusted himself to the Father. Martha's response is exemplary: "Yes,

Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (11:27). Yes, O Lord! We also believe, notwithstanding our doubts and darkness; we believe in you because you have the words of eternal life. We want to believe in you, who give us a trustworthy hope of life beyond life, of authentic and full life in your kingdom of light and peace." (Pope Benedict XVI)

At moments in our life, we can be spiritually dead in the same way that Lazarus was physically dead. Jesus wants to give us the gift of eternal life which starts the moment we choose to live in a relationship of love with God. Therefore, He comes to us and wants to break the bonds of sin that bind us tightly and make us live in the darkness of the tomb, instead of the light of God's presence.

Today, let us draw close to Jesus, the incarnation of God who is love, mercy and tenderness. He comes to us and calls us to entrust ourselves to Him. Let us tell Jesus, "Lord, I want to believe in You!"

Question for reflection:

1) Which word/phrase strikes me most as I pray with this Gospel passage? Why?

Monday, 30th March

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62, John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking

for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her'. Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? "No one, sir' she replied.' Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and don't sin anymore.'

God's forgiving love

'The Lord never tires of forgiving. We are the ones that get tired of asking for forgiveness.' (Pope Francis)

The scribes and Pharisees condemned the woman for her sin. Jesus, instead, forgave her. Jesus' love for us is so deep that He never gets tired of taking us by our hand, lifting us up and leading us on. We need to trust in His forgiving love.

In our lives, whenever someone hurts us deeply, it is so easy to condemn and pull ourselves from them. However, from our awareness of our own fragile nature and God's never-ending mercy, we will be moved to the mission of forgiveness, and not condemnation and accusation. We have the strength to utter these words, "I do not condemn you", and re-build once more the broken relationship and the broken trust.

In this time of prayer, let us be loved by God once more. His patience calls us constantly to return to Him, regardless of the type of mistakes and faults we have committed. God is always waiting. Let us never get tired of asking for His forgiveness. By being loved

by God, we are called to embrace this task of forgiving others too for their fragility. We become instruments of God's forgiving love!

Questions for reflection:

1) Looking back at my life, have I experienced God's forgiving love? How can I be merciful to others as God is merciful to me?

Tuesday, 31st March

Numbers 21:4-9, John 8:21-30

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'I am going away; you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' The Jews said to one another, 'Will he kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' Jesus went on: 'You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I have told you already: You will die in your sins. Yes, if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.' So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus answered: 'What I have told you from the outset. About you I have much to say and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is truthful, and what I have learnt from him I declare to the world. They failed to understand that he was talking to them about the Father. So Jesus said: 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of myself: what the Father has taught me is what I preach; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him'. As he was saying this, many came to believe in him.

I have come from God and am going to God

In today's Gospel, Jesus told the Pharisees that He was going away. The Pharisees, however, did not understand what He meant. In fact, Jesus was talking about His return to God His Father. He told Mary Magdala, '*I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*' (John 20:17) Jesus told the Pharisees that they could

not go to where He was going, i.e. to His Father, because they had closed their hearts to him and refused to believe in Him.

"...He who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself..."

Jesus' security was that God His Father would never leave Him to be by Himself in every moment of His life.

Our life is also a journey back to God the Father, and we are called to walk the same path that Jesus has left for us. With Jesus opening the way to the Father, we walk without tying ourselves to any obstacles of greed, worldly ambitions, accumulation of wealth, etc. As Jesus' disciples, we choose to walk through this life by carrying a baggage full of trust and faith in God alone. We journey through life with the daily desire to do what pleases God.

Like Jesus, God will never leave us alone by ourselves, but He will always stay close to us and walk with us in our journey.

As we get closer to Holy Week, let us fix our eyes on Jesus!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus telling me as I reflect on His Word today?

Wednesday, 1st April

Daniel 3:14-20,91-92,95, John 8:31-42

To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: 'If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free'. They answered, 'We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, "You will be made free"?' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now the slave's place in the house is not assured, but the son's place is assured. So if the Son makes you

free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descended from Abraham; but in spite of that you want to kill me because nothing I say has penetrated into you. What I; for my part, speak of is what I have seen with my Father; but you, you put into action the lessons learnt from your father.' They repeated, 'Our father is Abraham'. Jesus said to them: 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do as Abraham did. As it is, you want to kill me when I tell you the truth as I have learnt it from God; that is not what Abraham did. What you are doing is what your father does.' 'We were not born of prostitution,' they went on 'we have one father: God.' Jesus answered: 'If God were your father, you would love me, since I have come here from God; yes, I have come from him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent, and by him.'

Having the true freedom of Jesus

Jesus is inviting us to be truly free by following him. The world offers us the freedom to do what we like. However, this is not the freedom that Jesus is offering to us. He offers us a greater freedom, i.e. a freedom to live out our true identity as sons and daughters of God the Father.

The world presents to us many lies in order to conquer and enslave us. The world shouts out to us, 'You are what you have. You are what you achieve in life. You are what others say of you.' Is this our Truth? Thus, we enter into an endless cycle of comparing, competing, fighting with others around us so that we can be somebody loved, appreciated, valued. Instead of experiencing freedom, we find ourselves as beggars begging for people's affirmations, praise and success.

What is the Truth that Jesus gives us? This truth is the truth that we are children of God, loved by God. Living from our identity as the Beloveds of God, we do not need to become slaves to our selfishness, envy, jealousy, insecurities, etc. When we are firmly

rooted in God's love for us, we will look at others not as objects or threats, but with eyes of fraternal love.

Let Jesus' word make a home in our hearts today so that we can truly be his disciples and live in the truth which can set us free!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Today, how can I live in the truth that Jesus brings to my life?
- 2) What prevents me from living freely as a son or daughter of God?

Thursday, 2nd April

Genesis 17:3-9, John 8:51-59

Jesus said to the Jews: 'I tell you most solemnly, whoever keeps my word will never see death.' The Jews said, 'Now we know for certain that you are possessed. Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead, and yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never know the taste of death". Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? The prophets are dead too. Who are you claiming to be?' Jesus answered: 'If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all; my glory is conferred by the Father, by the one of whom you say, "He is our God" although you do not know him. But I know him, and if I were to say: I do not know him, I should be a liar, as you are liars yourselves. But I do know him, and I faithfully keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see my Day; he saw it and was glad.' The Jews then said, 'You are not fifty yet, and you have seen Abraham!' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, before Abraham ever was, I Am'. At this they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

Not taking who we are for granted

In today's passage, Jesus and the Jews got into a very heated argument which built up to his crucifixion. In today's gospel, Jesus

pointed out how the Jews were disconnected from God. They took for granted their privilege to be the chosen people of God and did not bother to live their lives as beloved children of God. The Jews were filled with rage as they listened to Jesus who became a real threat to their power and authority. However, Jesus continued to challenge them because he wanted them to show through their lives what it meant to be chosen people of God. It was not a matter of holding on to their Jewishness that made them to be real children of God.

As Christians, we too are called not to take our identity as sons and daughters of God for granted. We need to be constantly connected to God who lives, moves and acts in us and through us. We must live like one, talk like one, act like one, behave like one. We must reflect the heart of God our Father through our very lives.

"He is our God" although you do not know him. But I know him, and if I were to say: I do not know him, I should be a liar, as you are liars yourselves.'

Jesus did not take his identity as the Son of God for granted. He truly knew his Father and loved him with all his heart, mind and strength. He dedicated his life to serve God in the people he encountered in his mission.

Today, let our lives reflect who we truly are within!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I taken my identity as a child of God for granted? Have I taken my relationship with God for granted?
- 2) How can I consciously live in awareness of who I am for God today?

3) How can I help others to treasure their identity as children of God?

Friday, 3rd April

Jeremiah 20:10-13, John 10:31-42

The Jews fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them, 'I have done many good works for you to see, works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?' The Jews answered him, 'We are not stoning you for doing a good work but for blasphemy: you are only a man and you claim to be God.' Jesus answered: 'Is it not written in your Law: I said, you are gods? So the Law uses the word gods of those to whom the word of God was addressed, and scripture cannot be rejected. Yet you say to someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming", because he says, "I am the son of God". If I am not doing my Father's work, there is no need to believe me; but if I am doing it, then even if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for sure that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' They wanted to arrest him then, but he eluded them. He went back again to the far side of the Jordan to stay in the district where John had once been baptising. Many people who came to him there said, 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true'; and many of them believed in him.

I am the child of God

The Jews fetched stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy. However, Jesus fearlessly stood his ground and based his claim on his personal relationship with God the Father. He did not back down and pretended to be who he was not in order to please the threatening crowd. He continued to say with conviction, '*The Father is in me and I am in the Father.*'

What about us?

In our daily interactions with people, especially those from different religions, surely we have been asked about our faith and what we believe. Do we change topic and start speaking about the weather? Are we filled with deep conviction from within to share with others about who God is for us and who we are for him?

At the end of today's passage, Jesus managed to elude the angry crowd. He went back again to the far side of the Jordan, the place where he was baptised by John the Baptist. He went back to the place where he once heard the voice of God proclaiming his identity, 'This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased.' (Matthew 3, 17)

Do we return to the moments where we experienced God's intense love and presence so as to allow God to re-affirm us today that we are his beloved children?

As we draw closer to the end of Lent, let us ask God our Father to help us to stay convinced of our identity in the same way Jesus did. In moments of difficulties and struggles, let us never forget but always stay rooted in our Father's unconditional love.

Saturday, 4th April

Ezekiel 37:21-28, John 11:45-56

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him, but some of them went to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting. 'Here is this man working all these signs' they said 'and what action are we taking? If we let him go on in this way everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy the Holy Place and our nation.' One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, 'You don't seem

to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed'. He did not speak in his own person, it was as high priest that he made this prophecy that Jesus was to die for the nation - and not for the nation only, but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God. From that day they were determined to kill him. So Jesus no longer went about openly among the Jews, but left the district for a town called Ephraim, in the country bordering on the desert, and stayed there with his disciples. The Jewish Passover drew near, and many of the country people who had gone up to Jerusalem to purify themselves looked out for Jesus, saying to one another as they stood about in the Temple, 'What do you think? Will he come to the festival or not?' The chief priests and Pharisees had by now given their orders: anyone who knew where he was must inform them so that they could arrest him.

'What actions are we taking?'

The plot against Jesus thickens. Many of the Jews reported to the Pharisees what Jesus did to Lazarus, even though they saw the wonderful miracle and saw the joy of Mary and Martha. They went to the Pharisees because they did not believe. These people added fuel to the already burning flame of hatred the Pharisees and religious leaders had for Jesus.

What a hard-hearted people the Pharisees and the chief priests were! Their hatred for Jesus blinded them to see that their judgment against Jesus was merely subjective and biased.

Today, as we prepare ourselves to celebrate the Holy Week, let us ask ourselves:

Am I like the Jews who reported Jesus to the religious leaders even after witnessing Lazarus coming back to life?

Do I tend to judge people and condemn them out of my own subjective and bias opinions?
Am I afraid to stand up for Jesus?

The chief priests and the Pharisees asked themselves, 'What actions are we taking?' Well, let us ask ourselves the same, 'What actions are we taking?' However, the actions we want to take is to give life and love, not to destroy.

Sunday, 5th April, Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

Isaiah 50, 4-7, Philippians 2:6-11, Matthew 26:14-27:66

When they were near Jerusalem and had come in sight of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village facing you, and you will immediately find a tethered donkey and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, "The Master needs them and will send them back directly".' This took place to fulfil the prophecy: Say to the daughter of Zion: Look, your king comes to you; he is humble, he rides on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden. So the disciples went out and did as Jesus had told them. They brought the donkey and the colt, then they laid their cloaks on their backs and he sat on them. Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in his path. The crowds who went in front of him and those who followed were all shouting: 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heavens!' And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil. 'Who is this?' people asked, and the crowds answered, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee'.

An ascent towards Love

'Our procession today is meant, then, to be an image of something deeper, to reflect the fact that, together with Jesus, we are setting out on pilgrimage along the high road that leads to the living God. This is the ascent that matters. This is the journey which Jesus invites us to make. But how can we keep pace with this ascent? Isn't it beyond our ability? Certainly, it is beyond our own possibilities. From the beginning men and women have been filled - and this is as true today as ever - with a desire to "be like God", to attain the heights of God by their own powers.' (Pope Benedict XVI's Palm Sunday homily, 2011)

We are setting on a pilgrimage with Jesus as he leads us to God. Are we ready to take this journey with him as we enter into Holy Week?

In today's passage, the frantic crowds were shouting, 'Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David.' as they were caught up in the frenzy of all the excitements. However, they went home and continued as though nothing happened. They did not allow Jesus to really be the Messiah, the King of their lives. They did not set out on pilgrimage along the high road that would lead them to the living God. Instead of ascending, they descended towards falsehood and evil. They shouted, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' a few days later as they were swayed by the insinuations of their religious leaders.

Today, we are part of this procession with Jesus and his disciples as we make our ascent towards God. We are loved by God and when we say 'Yes' to his love, we are elevated upwards to true freedom, true love.

6th April, Monday of Holy Week

Isaiah 42:1-7, John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot - one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him - said, 'Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions. So Jesus said, 'Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me.' Meanwhile a large number of Jews heard that he was there and came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Then the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.

An extravagant love

Jesus knew that his end was near and so he went to the house of his closest friends- Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He wanted to spend time with each of them even when his heart was heavy with sorrow. Martha, Mary and Lazarus knew that this would be their last meal with their dearest friend. Each of them did their best to express their loving affection for Jesus. Mary was not contented with simply helping Martha to serve Jesus his meal. Instead, her love for Jesus led her to take the most precious thing she had and spent it all on Jesus. Mary's action of extravagant love caused some murmurings in the crowd. Yet, she took no notice of what others would say or think. Mary simply wanted to show Jesus her deepest love and gratitude.

Judas voiced out his disapproval as he looked on at Mary with disdain. He could not see love behind Mary's action, but only wastefulness.

How deep is our love for Jesus? We sometimes hold back in expressing our love and giving our best to Jesus because we are afraid of the opinions and comments of our family members and friends. Listen as Jesus defended Mary: 'Leave her alone...' For Jesus, he was grateful to Mary for her expression of love. Today, he is waiting for us to pour our love on him as we live this day with him, for him.

Let Mary of Bethany be an example for us of what it means to be Jesus' friend.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I express my love and gratitude to Jesus?

7th April, Tuesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 49:1-6, John 13:21-33,36-38

Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, 'I tell you most solemnly, one of you will betray me'. The disciples looked at one another, wondering which he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter signed to him and said, 'Ask who it is he means', so leaning back on Jesus' breast he said, 'Who is it, Lord?' 'It is the one' replied Jesus 'to whom I give the piece of bread that I shall dip in the dish.' He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus then said, 'What you are going to do, do quickly'. None of the others at table understood the reason he said this. Since Judas had charge of the common fund, some of them thought Jesus was telling

him, 'Buy what we need for the festival', or telling him to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. Night had fallen. When he had gone Jesus said: 'Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. 'My little children, I shall not be with you much longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come. Simon Peter said, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now; you will follow me later'. Peter said to him, 'Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' 'Lay down your life for me?' answered Jesus. 'I tell you most solemnly, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'

Jesus, a friend, who knows all about us and still loves us

'A friend is someone who knows all about you and still loves you.'
(Elbert Hubbard)

At the last moments of his life, Jesus spent time with his closest friends. He knew each one of them, their loveable and unlovable parts, yet he called them his friends. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, Peter would deny him, and the rest would run away at the sight of his downfall. He continued loving them to the very end.

'I call you friends' (John 15, 15) Jesus addresses these words to us and calls us 'Friends'. He knows our limitations and weaknesses, yet he continues to shepherd us without giving up on any of us. Like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus is always ready to forgive us whenever we choose to walk away from him.

When Peter proclaimed with zealous passion that he would lay down his life for Jesus, Jesus knew Peter well enough to know that he would not do so. Yet, his heart did not give up on Peter.

Let us spend this time of prayer with Jesus as a friend, one who knows him and loves him.

Today, open our hearts to experience what friendship with Jesus mean.

Questions for reflection:

1) Like Peter, I too can make promises to Jesus about dying to certain habits or to certain worldly values or attitudes and sometimes have experienced faltering in our promises. How can I be faithful to my promises?

2) Do I value my friendship with Jesus? In what way is Jesus my friend? Can Jesus count on me?

8th April, Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50:4-9a, Matthew 26:14-25

Then one of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you? They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray him. Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the passover?' 'Go to so-and-so in the city' he replied 'and say to him, "The Master says: My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with my disciples.'" The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover. When evening came he was at table with the twelve disciples. And while they were eating he said 'I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me' They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, 'Not I, Lord, surely?' He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me, will betray me. The Son of Man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man

by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' Judas, who was to betray him; asked in his turn, 'Not I, Rabbi, surely?' 'They are your own words' answered Jesus.

30 silver pieces for a friend

The focus of today's passage is on Judas and his act of betrayal. Why would Judas want to betray Jesus? Judas was a very ambitious man who expected Jesus to start a political career and assumed that he would be given an important position as part of Jesus' new government. But Judas realised that Jesus' kingdom was not physical or political but spiritual. He became disillusioned with Jesus and started to distant himself away from his cause to bring about the Kingdom of God. The heart of Judas was yearning for worldly wealth, power and fame. He realised that Jesus could give him none of these. Thus, he betrayed his friend and master for 30 silver pieces.

In betraying Jesus, Judas was also betraying himself. He chose to go against his core identity and mission entrusted to him by God. We might think that we would never have done what Judas did. Let us stop and reflect for a while.

Have I betrayed Jesus, perhaps not for '30 silver pieces', but for compromising the truth or for not acting in love or giving in to temptation of skipping our daily prayer? Have I betrayed myself when I fail to live out my true identity as a child of God, a disciple of Jesus, a friend whom God and others can count on?

Jesus knew what was in Judas' heart, but he continued to hope against hope that Judas would come to his senses and return back

to him. Even after Judas gave Jesus the kiss of betrayal, Jesus continued to love him and called him, 'Friend'. (Matthew 26, 50).

Let us walk with Jesus as he leads us into a firmer friendship today.

9th April, Holy Thursday

Exodus 12: 1-8, 11-14, 1 Corinthians 11: 23-26, John 13:1-15

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand'. 'Never!' said Peter 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me'. 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet,

you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'

Intimacy of Christian love

Today's passage speaks of intimacy- revealed in the setting of a meal and in the washing of the feet. Too often, people regard this word, 'intimacy' in relation with physical intimacy. Today, let us look at this word in its more profound meaning. It is about oneness and union with God, with each other, with ourselves.

At the last Supper, Jesus got up from his position as the Teacher and Master, in order to bend at his disciples' feet to wash them one by one. An intimate action of expressing his intimate communion with Judas, Peter, John, James, etc.

As Jesus approached closer to Peter, Peter could not allow his beloved Master to be at his dusty feet and to do the work of a slave. He told Jesus, 'Never! You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me.' Peter would never know how to love others with intimate love if he did not allow Jesus to love him the same way. Like Peter, we need to experience being one with Jesus before we can truly love others the way Jesus wants us to.

Jesus invites us to wash the feet of others by pouring our love, forgiveness, kindness, patience on them. At the same time, he also calls us to offer our feet humbly to another. Today, let us allow Jesus to wash our feet by experiencing ourselves loved by him. In this way, we can wash one another's feet as well as open to offer our own to others.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is Jesus telling me from today's passage about Christian love?
- 2) Jesus said, 'If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet.' Whose feet will I wash?

10th April, Good Friday

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Hebrews 4:14-16,5:7-9, John 18:1-19:42

... They then took charge of Jesus, and carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place of the skull or, as it was called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified him with two others, one on either side with Jesus in the middle. Pilate wrote out a notice and had it fixed to the cross; it ran: 'Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews'. This notice was read by many of the Jews, because the place where Jesus was crucified was not far from the city, and the writing was in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. So the Jewish chief priests said to Pilate, 'You should not write "King of the Jews", but "This man said: I am King of the Jews"'. Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written'. When the soldiers had finished crucifying Jesus they took his clothing and divided it into four shares, one for each soldier. His undergarment was seamless, woven in one piece from neck to hem; so they said to one another, 'Instead of tearing it, let's throw dice to decide who is to have it'. In this way the words of scripture were fulfilled: They shared out my clothing among them. They cast lots for my clothes. This is exactly what the soldiers did. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son. Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home. After

this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the scripture perfectly he said: 'I am thirsty'. A jar-full of vinegar stood there, so putting a sponge soaked in the vinegar on a hyssop stick they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the vinegar he said, 'It is accomplished'; and bowing his head he gave up his spirit...

Look at the cross and see love

What do you see when you see Jesus on the cross?

Suffering? Sadness? Failure? Death? Yes, these are, no doubt, present on the cross. However, with eyes of faith, we see beyond suffering, and instead, we see the love of God. Jesus embraced the cross because of love. He did not look at the cross, but he saw through it. For Jesus, he understood that humiliation and death was not the end. He knew with trust that his Father's love would be stronger than the sting of death.

Suffering, humiliations, failures and death—we tend to want to avoid these at all cost. Like Peter, his fears of suffering and death led him to deny Jesus three times, 'I do not know him. I do not know him. I do not know him.' For Peter, he could not see love behind the cross.

In our own life, we see many crosses of brokenness, grief, suffering and death. How can we follow the way Jesus embraced his cross? When we see our crosses, can we see love there as well?

We are never alone because Jesus continues to join us in our own crosses of life. More than just joining us, he carries us through our moments of sufferings and pains with tenderness and love. Today, we must choose to trust more on Jesus' love rather than the crosses we are burdened with.

'Jesus Christ has taken the lead on the way of the cross. He has suffered first. He does not drive us toward suffering but shares it with us, wanting us to have life and to have it in abundance.' (John Paul II)

11th April, Holy Saturday

Genesis 1:1-2:2 (Gen 1:1,26-31a) Genesis 22:1-18 (Gen 22:1-2,9a, 10-13, 15-18) Exodus 14:15-15:1, Isaiah 54:5-14, Isaiah 55:1-11 Baruch 3:9-15,32-4:4, Ezekiel 36:16,17a; 18-26, Romans 6:3-11, Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, and towards dawn on the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the sepulchre. And all at once there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face was like lightning, his robe white as snow. The guards were so shaken, so frightened of him, that they were like dead men. But the angel spoke; and he said to the women, 'There is no need for you to be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said he would. Come and see the place where he lay, then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has risen from the dead and now he is going before you to Galilee; it is there you will see him". Now I have told you.' Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples. And there, coming to meet them, was Jesus. 'Greetings' he said. And the women came up to him and, falling down before him, clasped his feet. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee; they will see me there'.

Returning to Galilee

'The faith of Christians is the resurrection of Christ. It is no great thing to believe that Jesus died; even the pagans believe this, everyone believes it. The truly great thing is to believe that he is risen.' (St. Augustine)

This is the reason of our joyful celebration: Jesus is alive! Let us approach Easter with a new heart. It is not a celebration of the past, but a present reality that continues to touch our lives now.

In today's gospel, we read about the narration of the empty tomb which is a powerful symbol of God's love. The empty tomb reveals to us a love that even death cannot overpower. It is a powerful symbol showing to us the reality that God is with us. Yes, Jesus is risen. He does not belong to the world of the dead, but he belongs to us today.

Mary Magdala and the other Mary was told by the angel that they had to tell Jesus' disciples to go to Galilee where they would see him. Let us contemplate on the message of the angel. For us, Jesus is also inviting us to return to Galilee which is a symbol of our Christian life lived from day to day, and it is there that we would see him. We do not need to look for him in spectacular and grand events, because he is present in our 'Galilee'. He is with us in our ordinary days as we go about our routines of waking up, going to work, rushing kids to school, cleaning the house, paying bills, going to bed, etc. He is present in every breath, every tear, every laughter, every hug, every moment of our life. Let us return to Galilee with our hearts believing that Jesus has truly risen and is with us here, now and forever.

Question for reflection:

1) What is the Good News that Jesus has for me today?

Sunday, 12th April, Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34, 37-43, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20:1-9

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the

tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.' So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Joyfully witnessing to the Risen Lord!

'Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.' A humble sentence to end the gospel for Easter Sunday. Neither John nor Peter and the other disciples could understand the truth that Jesus would rise from the dead. Even Mary Magdala, who saw the empty tomb, could only suspect that Jesus' body was being taken away (John 20, 2).

Their inability to grasp the truth of Jesus' resurrection came to an end when they encounter the risen Lord, face- to- face. The great joy of seeing their beloved Master gave them the faith and boldness to go out and preach the Good News to all the nations.

Today, we celebrate this Feast of all feasts with great joy in our hearts. Even though, we have not seen Jesus or the empty tomb as the disciples did, we continue to trust that he is truly risen. The resurrection story is not a myth or legend we celebrate. Jesus' disciples gave witness to this reality with their very own lives. They devoted themselves to Jesus and even suffered persecutions and

even martyrdom gladly for the sake of the Good News of the resurrection. If the resurrection of Jesus would just be a myth, would they really go through all the sufferings and persecutions just for a 'myth'? Each of the disciples encountered the risen Christ, and thus, they had the courage to stand for the truth. Today is our turn. Easter is not about Easter bunnies and eggs, but it is our turn to have the courage to witness for what we know is true. Being witnesses to the risen Lord starts with an intimate and profound relationship with him who is alive in our lives.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be a witness to the Good News of Christ's resurrection?

13th April, Monday within the Octave of Easter

Acts 2:14, 22-33, Matthew 28:8-15

Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples. And there, coming to meet them, was Jesus. 'Greetings' he said. And the women came up to him and, falling down before him, clasped his feet. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee; they will see me there'. While they were on their way, some of the guard went off into the city to tell the chief priests all that had happened. These held a meeting with the elders and, after some discussion, handed a considerable sum of money to the soldiers with these instructions, 'This is what you must say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep". And should the governor come to hear of this, we undertake to put things right with him ourselves and to see that you do not get into trouble.' The soldiers took the money and carried out their instructions, and to this day that is the story among the Jews.

Friends of the Risen Christ

We see contradicting responses to the empty tomb. The women, Mary Magdala and the other Mary, encountered Jesus, their beloved Master and Friend. They clasped his feet for fear of losing him again. An image of joy and tenderness of finding Jesus whom they thought they lost!

On the other hand, the chief priests heard the news of the empty tomb, but their hearts were not filled with joy. They were dismayed and started to plot a plan on how to oppose the Good News of the resurrection. They started to spread rumours that the disciples came during the night and stole his body away. This continues to happen today. There are many people who continue untiringly to live and witness to the Risen Lord. Sadly, there are many people who live their lives opposing to the experiences of the resurrection. Which side do we belong to?

Why didn't Jesus appear to the chief priests in Jerusalem so that they would not fabricate the lie? Why didn't Jesus made himself be seen by those who nailed him on the cross?

Jesus appeared to his friends instead because he knew that they needed to be renewed once more in their faith. After his death on the cross, the disciples were confused and dejected. Thus, they needed to encounter the Risen Lord and experienced his love once more in order to overcome their fears and sadness.

Today, we are the friends of the Risen Lord who tells us again, 'Do not be afraid.' because he is with us. With his presence in us, we are sent to be witnesses to those who somehow oppose to the message of Life, of the Resurrection and to share with them our joy of having Jesus in our lives.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the experience of resurrection that I have in my life?
- 2) Is there someone I know who oppose to the Good News of the resurrection? How can I share with this person the joy of having Jesus?

14th April Tuesday within the Octave of Easter

Acts 2:36-41, John 20:11-18

Meanwhile Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away' she replied 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognize him. Jesus said, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him'. Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' - which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

I have seen the Lord!

How many times we miss the presence of our friend and master, Jesus, just because we are so busy focussing on our personal grieves, ambitions and plans? How many times we centre on ourselves that we fail to look up and recognise Jesus standing in our midst?

In today's gospel, Mary Magdala was so overwhelmed by her own grief that she could not recognise Jesus the one whom she was seeking. It was only when Jesus called her by her name that she recognised him and rejoiced!

This is the message for us today! In order to find Jesus in our lives, we must stop looking at ourselves. Instead, we need to listen attentively to the voice of Jesus who constantly comes to speak to us, love us, befriend us. It is in this close friendship with him that we find our most profound joy.

After her personal encounter with Jesus, Mary Magdala was once again strengthened in her faith and knew her mission in her life. She had to go and tell the rest of the disciples and all those willing to listen to her that she had seen the Lord! This is also our mission. We have to go and tell our family members, friends and all those we meet today that we have 'seen' the Lord and that he has given us the joy that nothing and nobody can take away from us.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I 'see' Jesus today more than my self-centred desires and feelings?

15th April, Wednesday within the Octave of Easter

Acts 3:1-10, Luke 24:13-35

Two of the disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, 'What matters are you discussing as you walk

along?' They stopped short, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days'. 'What things?' he asked. 'All about Jesus of Nazareth' they answered 'who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.' Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself. When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. 'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem...

Changing disappointments to hope

When we experience disappointments in life, how do we deal with them? The two disciples in today's gospel were walking to Emmaus with their faces downcast because they were disappointed with Jesus whom they had hoped that he would be the Messiah. However, he was crucified and the rest of the disciples fled in terror.

The two disciples were feeling dispirited and tired. Yet, the risen Christ did not give up on these two lost sheep of his. He walked by their side and patiently taught them the Scriptures. At the end of the day, he sat down with them, broke the bread and handed it to them. He disappeared from their sight and their hearts recognised Jesus, risen and alive. The reality of the resurrection changed everything! Now, life was radiated with hope, instead of disappointment!

When a colleague gets the promotion we are eyeing, or when we face betrayal from a loved one, or when our expectations we have are not met, we are crestfallen. Whatever disappointments we might have, the presence of the risen Jesus changes everything. Yes, there is no denying that disappointments hurt us, but we must never forget that Jesus walks with us and brings us always to see life with the light of his resurrection that raise us up to live with hope.

'The great gift of Easter is hope- Christian hope which makes us have that confidence in God, in his ultimate triumph, and in his goodness and love, which nothing can shake.' (Basil Hume)

16th April, Thursday within the Octave of Easter

Acts 3:11-26, Luke 24:35-48

The disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread. They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them

his hands and feet. Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it, and they stood there dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes. Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms has to be fulfilled'. He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.'

Touch me and see for yourselves

'Touch me and see for yourselves.' This is the invitation from Jesus to each of us today as he draws us to spend this time with him. To touch Jesus is to experience once more God's unlimited love for us. To touch Jesus is to contemplate the heart of God himself. To touch Jesus is to have a joy so great to know that we have a God in love with us. It is by touching Jesus that we truly become Easter people!

'Do not abandon yourselves to despair. We are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song.' (Pope John Paul II)

We need to meet him daily in prayer so that we will never stop enjoying the joy of our Christian faith. It is from this deep experience of touching Jesus daily that we invite others to touch us and to take a piece of our joy, our love, our hope with them to enjoy. There are many people who live their lives without joy and hope. They search for material things, wealth, power, etc to give them the love they truly hunger for. We have a mission of leading people to 'see' Jesus and also to experience the same joy we have. Today, let us touch Jesus and find that our true joy cannot be found anywhere except in him alone. From being filled with his presence,

we can then go out and give the risen Christ to our family members, friends, colleagues, etc.

17th April, Friday with the Octave of Easter

Acts 4:1-12, John 21:1-14

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing'. They replied, 'We'll come with you'. They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night. It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Have you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No', he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something'. So they dropped the net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord'. At these words 'It is the Lord', Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on, wrapped his cloak round him and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net and the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land. As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught'. Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast'. None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

Throwing our nets on the side of God

'I am going fishing'- Even after Peter experienced the joy of the resurrected Christ, he decided to go back to fish for his daily living. When the others heard this, they too went along with him. They worked hard all night long, but they did not catch a thing. We can also perhaps identify ourselves with Peter and the disciples. Every day we go out with our boats and our nets, ready to become, a filial child at home, a patient spouse, a nice person in general. Yet, after all the efforts, we see that people do not appreciate our acts of love, our parents still do not understand us and nag at us even more, etc. We see no 'catch'!

'It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore...' Let us pause and contemplate on these words.

With Jesus, the darkness in our lives always changes to light. He appears on the shore of our daily life and calls us to us throw our nets once more to the right side i.e. to the side of God, the side of faith. He invites us to try to love once more, to be kind once more, to reach out to someone once more. When we are with Jesus, our efforts to love will bear fruits.

The important point in this passage is that the disciples listened to Jesus' voice and they obeyed it. We too need to listen to the voice of Jesus telling us everyday to throw our nets on the right side. Sometimes, we tend to listen to the voices of self-rejection that tells us that we are no good and useless, or voices of pessimism that keeps telling us to give up trying to love. This is our dark side. Jesus wants to enter more and bring light to our darkness so that we can see fruitfulness in our lives.

Jesus wants us to listen to his words that always tells us, *'Try again. Throw your net on the right side... Throw your nets again...try again because of me.'*

18th April Saturday within the Octave of Easter

Acts 4:13-21, Mark 16:9-15

Having risen in the morning on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary of Magdala from whom he had cast out seven devils. She then went to those who had been his companions, and who were mourning and in tears, and told them. But they did not believe her when they heard her say that he was alive and that she had seen him. After this, he showed himself under another form to two of them as they were on their way into the country. These went back and told the others, who did not believe them either. Lastly, he showed himself to the Eleven themselves while they were at table. He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. And he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation.'

Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News!

Upon reading the gospel of today, what remains in our mind is the disciples' lack of faith. After hearing the testimonies of so many people that they had seen Jesus alive and even after they had seen him with their own eyes, the eleven still did not believe.

Yet, Jesus still entrusted to these eleven the mission of going out to the whole world and proclaiming the Good News to all peoples.

Today, Jesus continues to trust us with the very same mission of sharing the Good News of God's love even in our doubts and limitations. He trusts us because he loves us.

With our little faith, he sends us to share the Good News to others around, and not to keep it for ourselves.

'[Evangelisation] is not something optional, but the very vocation of the People of God, a duty that corresponds to it by the command of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.' (Pope Benedict XVI)

Let us go to our family, to our friends, our colleagues, etc and tell them the reason of our hope (1 Peter 3, 15). We cannot wait till our faith is strong in order to share with others. Our little faith is not an excuse for us to be laid back in mission. The more we go and share, the more we find ourselves growing in our own conviction of Jesus. Our faith grows when we communicate what we have seen and experienced in our lives. This is something we must never forget!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I make Jesus' mission to be an essential part of my daily life?
- 2) Who can I share the Good News to today? How can I share my faith with him/her?

19th April, Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday

Acts 2:42-47, 1 Peter 1:3-9, John 20:19-31

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.' Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made

in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe'. Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.' There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

Doubt no longer but believe!

Jesus appeared to his disciples as they huddled behind closed doors due to their fear of the Jews. However, Thomas was not present then. When the rest of the disciples told him what they saw, Thomas doubted and placed a set of conditions for believing, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his hands, I refuse to believe.'

What lesson can we learn from Thomas?

Doubting Thomas continues to speak to the doubters in us who have seen hopes and dreams being destroyed; who have experienced the bitterness of being disillusioned and disappointed. He himself understood all the doubts we face sometimes in life, but he would tell us to 'Look at Jesus!'

For St. Thomas, a burning passion of faith comes from the furnace of doubts when we allow the Risen Jesus to speak to us, to love us, to strengthen us.

'Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.' (Paul Tillich)

Let us spend this time of prayer with Jesus and let his presence of Love speak to the many doubting voices in us- about life, about God, about the Church, about love. Let us also use the words of Thomas after he saw Jesus with his own eyes, 'My Lord and My God'. Today, may we repeat Thomas' words and allow them to be our own profession of our unconditional faith in Jesus.

Monday, 20th April

Acts 4:23-31, John 3:1-8

There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leading Jew, who came to Jesus by night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who comes from God; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him'. Jesus answered: 'I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Nicodemus said, 'How can a grown man be born? Can he go back into his mother's womb and be born again?' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: what is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit.'

A spiritual rebirth

Nicodemus seek an audience with Jesus at night because he was probably afraid to be seen by the other Pharisees. Nicodemus saw

Jesus as a man of God. He wanted to know the answer to an important question, *'How can one enter God's kingdom?'*

Jesus told him, *'unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'* What did Jesus mean by this answer?

Jesus is not talking about physical birth but spiritual birth. This spiritual birth is something new and radical. It is also something from above, i.e. from God himself. Thus, in order to enter into the kingdom of God and see God, Jesus is inviting us to change.

Is it possible to be born again? Is it possible to change? to change our self-centredness, our tendency to play the judge, our bad temper? There is a saying that goes like this, 'A leopard can never change its spots.' Well, how then can we work for change in ourselves?

On our own efforts, we cannot change ourselves. Rather, real internal change of our hearts can only come through the work and action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, God-at-work, constantly moulds and transforms us to live as children of God.

As we continue to celebrate Easter, let us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to a spiritual rebirth so as to enjoy the new life of everlasting love, joy and peace.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there any resistance in me to change? Why?
- 2) In my life right now, how can I be born from above?

Tuesday, 21st April, St. Anselm

Acts 4:32-37, John 3:7b-15

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit.' 'How can that be possible?' asked Nicodemus. 'You, a teacher in Israel, and you do not know these things!' replied Jesus. 'I tell you most solemnly, we speak only about what we know and witness only to what we have seen and yet you people reject our evidence. If you do not believe me when I speak about things in this world, how are you going to believe me when I speak to you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven; and the Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'

Moved by the power within

In Greek, the word '*pneuma*' means spirit and also wind. We cannot hold the wind in our hands; nor can we stop it from moving. The wind shows itself in its power. We can think of a tornado which we can experience its power even though we cannot see it. The person, who lives according to the Spirit, is like a powerful wind. He/ She lives with intense vitality and joy.

What about us? Are we moved by the Spirit within us or by our own desires and ambitions?

Today, Jesus invites us to believe in him who is the real Master of Life. He is the one who comes down from heaven to us in order to show how to live a life of the Spirit. We are not meant to live this life just by dragging our feet and trying our best to survive the rat-

race. There is more to life than just accumulating wealth and power. Look at Jesus and see how he lived his life totally dedicated to touch the lives of the people with God's love and mercy. We must also do the same.

The Holy Spirit within us empowers us to live this one life we have for Jesus by becoming living witnesses of God's love. Filled with his power, we move and touch the lives of those along our paths.

Let us allow the power of the Holy Spirit to lead us to make a difference today!

Wednesday, 22nd April

Acts 5:17-26, John 3:16-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus: ' God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son. On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.'

Choose Life by choosing to love

The gospel of John likes to confront us between two contrasting realities: Life and death, light and darkness, truth and lies. Each day,

the choice between these two realities is in our hands. We have to be the ones to decide which reality we want to live- light or darkness, truth or lies, life or death. We need to decide by starting to make choices in our daily lives, which will determine our way towards Light or darkness, life or death.

God, in the Old Testament invites us to choose Life: "*Choose Life! So that you and your children may live...*" (Dt 30, 19)

He will never force us, but He tries to convince us and gives us all possible means for us to live fullness of life. The greatest gift he gives us is Jesus. He becomes our way, so that we will not say 'I don't know how to live.' He is the path for us to follow and the companion who walks with us. He never fails to give us strength for the journey and encourages us to walk on. Jesus gives us light through his Word; as he did to the disciples of Emmaus.

He also invites us to choose life, to choose to live fully by believing in him, accepting him as the companion of our journey.

Do we prefer darkness or light? Death or life? God will not condemn our choice. We are the ones who will decide if we want real Joy, now and forever or to create our own temporary happiness in worldly successes and pleasures that will not last.

'*God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...*' Let us listen to the declaration of God's love for us behind these words. God loves us and wants us to live our life to the fullest. Let us choose life today by choosing to follow Jesus' way!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...' What do I understand from these words?
- 2) How can I choose life today?

Thursday, 23rd April

Acts 5:27-33, John 3:31-36

John the Baptist said to his disciples: 'He who comes from above is above all others; he who is born of the earth is earthly himself and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen and heard, even if his testimony is not accepted; though all who do accept his testimony are attesting the truthfulness of God, since he whom God has sent speaks God's own words: God gives him the Spirit without reserve. The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to him. Anyone who believes in the Son has eternal life, but anyone who refuses to believe in the Son will never see life: the anger of God stays on him.'

Words, words, words

Words have power. They have the power to hurt, to criticise, to compare and compete. However, words also have power to carry love. The choice is ours to make each day.

There is a story about a lady who loved to gossip and talked badly about others. She loved also to put her family members down by saying harsh words to them. She kept going to the priest for confession about this bad habit of hers. One day, the priest saw the need to help her to change, told her to take a bag of goose feathers and to meet him in the church. The lady did as she was told. The priest led her to the highest point of the church. He then told her to take the bag of goose feathers and fling them out from the window. She did as the priest told her and the wind caught the feathers and twirled them out into the air. The priest turned to the lady and said, 'That is the way your words go out to people. Now, go and pick up all the feathers.' The lady looked at the priest with incredulity, 'But, Father, that's impossible!' The priest said, 'So it is impossible to take back the words you have spoken.'

In today's gospel, John the Baptist recognised that Jesus was sent by God who had given him 'the Spirit without reserve' in order to 'speak God's words'. While on earth, Jesus' words carry the Father's love. All who heard him speak and accepted his words experienced comfort and healing.

Today, Jesus invites us to let our words carry his love to others. At the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, God gives to us the Spirit without reserve. With the Spirit in us, we are sent to speak God's words that bring healing, peace, comfort, encouragement to our family members, friends, subordinates and all we meet each day.

'Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bomb.' (Unknown)

Words do have power. Thus, let the words we use heal and improve the lives of others. Let our words build relationships that reflect God's love in our lives. Let our words carry love instead of fear, anger and hatred.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I realise the power of my words?
- 2) How can I speak God's words today?

Friday, 24th April

Acts 5:34-42, John 6:1-15

Jesus went off to the other side of the Sea of Galilee - or of Tiberias - and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he gave by curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside, and sat down there with his

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

Take my five loaves and two fishes!

Today, Jesus looks up and sees many people in need of God's love. He whispers to us the same question as he did to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat...Where can we get love to nourish each person you encounter today?'

'The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty -- it is not only a poverty of loneliness but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God.' (Mother Teresa)

In front of such great task, we feel inadequate to help Jesus feed the hunger for love, for God. Like Philip, we too will respond, 'We have no more than 5 loaves and 2 fish. What is that to feed so many? Impossible.'

Yet, Jesus continues to open his hands and asks for our 5 loaves and 2 fish. This is because when we start giving the little that we have with trust, we will discover that Jesus will work miracles with the little we give. He needs us to be the ones feeding the crowds of today who hunger for love, for God. We face these crowds every day- in the streets, in the workplace/school, and even in our homes.

'Take my five loaves and two fishes, Do with it as you will. I surrender. Take my fears, my inhibitions. All my burdens, my ambitions. You can use it all to feed them all' These are the lyrics of a song '5 loaves and 2 fish' by Corrinne May. May these words be our prayer to Jesus today!

Saturday, 25th April, St. Mark the Evangelist

1 Peter 5:5b-14, Mark 16: 15-20

Jesus said to the Eleven, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.' And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the

Lord working with them and confirming the world by the signs that accompanied it.

Go!

"The Church continues to preach this to everyone, all over the world. But she does not go forth alone: she goes forth with Jesus." (Pope Francis)

Jesus continues to call us to go and share the Good News with people around us. We cannot keep the gift of God's love that we have received. Rather, we need to listen and respond with generosity as He tells us, "Go!"

"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours." (St. Teresa of Avila)

We are Jesus' hands, His feet, His eyes, His body. Through us, He loves the people. Through us, He ministers to the sick, the poor, the hungry and those in need. Through us, He leads people to experience God's unfailing love.

Look around us and see that there are so many people who need us to be Good News! Let us go forth then with Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from responding to Jesus as He tells me, 'Go!'?

Sunday, 26th April, Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14, 22-33, 1 Peter 1:17-21, Luke 24:13-35

Two of the disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, 'What matters are you discussing as you walk along?' They stopped short, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days'. 'What things?' he asked. 'All about Jesus of Nazareth' they answered 'who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.' Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself. When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. 'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were

opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

A service to God's joy!

'It is really so: the purpose of our lives is to reveal God to men. And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd, the task of the fisher of men, can often seem wearisome. But it is beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world.' (Pope Benedict XVI)

Today, let us reflect on the journey of these two disciples of Emmaus. They were walking back to Emmaus from Jerusalem with sadness and hopelessness in their hearts. Yet, everything changed when they encountered Jesus on the road and at the breaking of the bread. These two disciples went back to Jerusalem to speak to the other disciples of their renewed friendship with Jesus, their Master. They had seen the Lord, and so they revealed to others what they had seen!

The purpose of our lives is to reveal God to all those we meet each day, like the two disciples of Emmaus. Truly, there is nothing more beautiful than to know Jesus and to speak to others about our friendship with our Master and Friend, our Lord and God.

Monday, 27th April

Acts 6:8-15, John 6:22-29

After Jesus had fed the five thousand, his disciples saw him walking on the water. Next day, the crowd that had stayed on the other side saw that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that the disciples had set off by themselves. Other boats, however, had put in from Tiberias, near the place where the bread had been eaten. 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'.

God alone suffices

If someone would come up to you and ask you this question: Which is more important for you, love or money? What would your answer be?

For the people in today's gospel, their answer to the question would surely be, Money, or material things. These people went

looking for Jesus because they were hungry for food, for material things which they wanted to get from Jesus. After witnessing the feeding of the five thousand, the crowd was excited to have Jesus to somehow give them endless free food that would satisfy their physical hunger.

Jesus comes, not just to fill empty stomachs, but empty hearts. God alone can satisfy the hunger for love, acceptance, peace, joy we have within.

'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...'

Jesus addresses these words to each of us today. Let us take time to ponder, savour and enjoy his words to us. Jesus wants to give us his faithfulness and love, and this is the 'food' that will truly make us complete.

"Let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; All things pass: God never changes. Patience achieves all it strives for. Whoever has God lacks nothing, God alone suffices." (St Theresa of Avila)

Tuesday, 28th April, Ss. Peter Chanel and Louis Mary de Montfort

Acts 7:51-8:1a, John 6:30-35

The people said to Jesus, '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.'

Jesus, our source of nourishment

'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst.' Let these words of Jesus sink into our heart. Do we take these words at face value and remain unmoved? Can we hear Jesus lovingly calling out to us and offering us himself as our nourishment?

Jesus is the Bread of Life. When Jesus used these words, he meant them literally, not simply as a symbol or a mere figure of speech. In the Eucharist, Jesus becomes the Bread that comes to us and nourishes us with his life-giving love.

Pause for a moment and just simply be amazed! Jesus loves us so much that he willingly becomes food so that he can feed us with strength and courage to face life. He becomes bread so that he can become part of us and live life with us.

There is a saying that goes like this: *'We become what we eat.'* In partaking the Bread of Life, we become what we eat. We become bread for those around us too, and thus, we are moved to feed a child, a spouse, a friend, a parent, a stranger with Jesus' Eucharistic love.

Jesus is present and alive in the Eucharist. He is there waiting for us.

"Our lives must be woven around the Eucharist...fix your eyes on Him Who is the light; bring your hearts close to His Divine Heart;

ask Him to grant you the grace of knowing Him, the love of loving Him, the courage to serve Him. Seek Him fervently." (Mother Teresa)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I take Jesus in the Eucharist for granted? In what way?
- 2) How can I share Jesus' Eucharistic love to those around me today?

Wednesday, 29th April, St. Catherine of Siena

Acts 8:1b-8, John 6:35-40

Jesus said to the crowd: 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst. But, as I have told you, you can see me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day. Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.'

I am here, O Lord, not to do my will, but yours!

Many of us face with questions that we find it almost impossible to know the right answer to. For example, should I take this job, or is there something else better? Who should I marry? Which school should I send my child to? What am I going to do with my life?

To add to the complications, we often wonder, 'What is God's will for me? How can I discover his will for my life?'

Rather than as a program or plan, let us see the will of God as a process. Viewing it as a program, we might be stuck in seeking to follow some technique. However, when we see the will of God as a process, the emphasis is on the need to develop an intimate relationship with God.

In today's gospel, Jesus said, 'I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me.'

As Christians, we are here, not to do our own will, but to do the will of God who has sent us. Is God someone far and distant from our lives? How well do we know the God of Jesus Christ?

God is not someone who will never overpower us in order for us to obey him. God, who loves us, speaks to us in a subtle and quiet voice. He speaks through a feeling of dissatisfaction or through giving ideas into our minds or through time of prayer, etc. We need to listen attentively to what God wants to share with us and how he wants to guide us each day.

When we consciously recognise his presence and depend on him, then we will make choices that will help us to do his will, not ours. Doing God's will is a means, not an end, of knowing God better and making him as our intimate companion in our lives.

Today, let us live the words of Jesus and make it a reality in our lives! We are here, O Lord, not to do our own will, but yours!

Thursday, 30th April

Acts 8:26-40, John 6:44-51

'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 forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

What I have, I give to you

"I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly"
(John 10:10).

Jesus comes to us and always ready to give us Life- fullness of abundant Life. Are we ready to receive it today?

In today's passage, the people hearing that Jesus called himself 'Bread of Life', immediately thought of their Beloved Moses who, with God's help, gave their ancestors manna to eat during their time in the desert.

Jesus was not speaking to them about temporal bread that simply satisfied the physical hunger. Therefore, he said, *'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.'*

Jesus is this Bread that comes down from heaven and gives us his eternal life, which is God's very own life. We have this gift of God's eternal life in us each day. We have it right here, right now.

Possessing this gift of eternal life, we cannot keep it just for ourselves. The life we receive in the Eucharist leads us to bring others to enjoy God's life too. The Eucharist always pushes us out to others and share the God's life and love with them.

'Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can only belong to him with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians.' (Pope Benedict XVI)

Question for reflection:

- 1) What prevents me from receiving and giving this fullness of Life that Jesus has come to give me?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation for me today?

Friday, 1st May, St. Joseph the Worker

Acts 9: 1-20, Matthew 13:54-58

Jesus came to his hometown and 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.

The dignity of work

"In the Gospel of St. Matthew, in one of the moments when Jesus returns to his town, to Nazareth, and speaks in the synagogue, the

amazement of his fellow townspeople at his wisdom is emphasized, and... they ask: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (13:55). Jesus comes into our history among us, born of Mary by the power of God, but with the presence of St. Joseph, the legal father who cares for him and also teaches him his work. Jesus is born and lives in a family, in the Holy Family, learning the craft of carpenter from St. Joseph in his workshop in Nazareth, sharing with him the commitment, effort, satisfaction, and also the difficulties of every day. This reminds us of the dignity and importance of work. The book of Genesis tells us that God created man and woman entrusting them with the task of filling the earth and subduing it, which does not mean exploiting it, but nurturing and protecting it, caring for it through their work (cf. Gen 1:28; 2 15). Work is part of God's loving plan, we are called to cultivate and care for all the goods of creation and in this way participate in the work of creation! Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use an image, "anoints" us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts (cf. Jn 5:17); it gives you the ability to maintain ourselves, our family, to contribute to the growth of our nation. And here I think of the difficulties which, in various countries, today afflict the world of work and business; I think of how many, and not just young people, are unemployed, many times due to a purely economic conception of society, which seeks selfish profit, beyond the parameters of social justice.... And then I would like to speak especially to you young people: be committed to your daily duties, your study, your work, to relationships of friendship, to helping towards others; your future also depends on how you live these precious years of your life. Do not be afraid of commitment, of

sacrifice, and do not look with fear towards the future; keep your hope alive: there is always a light on the horizon” (Pope Francis)

As we celebrate the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, let us be committed to take our work - the easy tasks as well as the tough responsibilities - with the determination to do them all well because they are part of God’s loving plan for us. Many times, we simply look at our work as means to get more money, praises and success. Our work is not just for seeking profits and satisfying our ambitions, but can be our way of glorifying God. How? When we strive to become people of integrity and try to love those whom God has placed along our way each day, we are bringing glory to Him. When we allow God to use our talents to make a difference to our world, we are bringing glory to Him.

Despite the challenges of work, let us also find its joys so that we can, like St. Joseph, work for God and bring glory to Him alone. Let us find dignity in the work that we do!

Question for reflection:

1) In all that I do, how can I bring glory to God?

Saturday, 2nd May, St. Athanasius

Acts 9:31-42, John 6:60-69

After hearing it, many of the followers of Jesus 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 also want to leave?

"After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him."

The people who could not accept Jesus' teaching and chose to walk away were not simply casual listeners, but disciples who had followed Him closely. Yet, they took the decision to break away from Jesus. They walked away because their hearts were hardened, hence they were unable to listen to Jesus' teaching. Yet, Jesus did not lighten His message or change His tone in order to please His disciples and make them stay. Next, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked them, *"What about you, do you want to go away too?"* Peter replied on behalf of the rest of the Twelve, *"Lord, to 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."*

Peter and the Twelve did not fully understand Jesus and His teaching. They, however, trusted in Jesus and put their faith in Him because they recognised that He was speaking from God.

What about us? What will our response be if we find Jesus' teachings and ways too hard for us to handle? Would we choose to walk away or stay?

Today's gospel passage shows us the capacity of our human heart. We have the capacity to reject Jesus despite experiencing His call to follow Him, like many of His followers who chose to walk away.

We are also capable of taking steps to trust Jesus even when we do not fully understand His ways like Peter and the rest of the Twelve.

In this time of prayer, let us ask Jesus to give us the gift of a docile heart that listens to His Word and trusts in His love.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my inner disposition towards Jesus and His teachings?

3rd May, Fourth Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday

Acts 2:14a, 36-41, 1 Peter 2, 20-25, John 10:1-10

Jesus said, 'I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheep fold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers.' Jesus told them this parable, but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them. So Jesus spoke to them again: 'I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.'

Bringing Jesus to people and people to Jesus

'What will you do with your life? What are your plans? Have you ever thought of committing your existence totally to Christ? Do you think

that there can be anything greater than to bring Jesus to people and people to Jesus?’ (Pope John Paul II)

In this fourth Sunday of Easter, we also celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. On this day, it is a good opportunity to dialogue with the Shepherd about what we want to do with our life. Our life here on earth has a purpose - it is not to make lots of money or to have a successful career - but it is to ‘bring Jesus to people and people to Jesus.’

‘And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. There too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd.’ (John 10, 16)

Our Good Shepherd’s desire is that everyone hears his voice and follows Him. Today, Jesus wants us, as parent, child, sibling, friend, employer, employee, citizen, etc. to be shepherds to those around us. We are here to ‘bring Jesus to people and people to Jesus’.

We cannot be shepherds if we ourselves are not familiar with the voice of our Good Shepherd and do not faithfully follow his footsteps each day.

The message of Jesus for us today is: *‘Open your heart to my Love.’*

In our communities, parishes, families, we need also to create the right environment that will help young people say ‘yes’ to God’s call. Let us also show our appreciation to all those who have already given their ‘Yes’ to following Jesus as religious and priests. Let us pray for their faithfulness and fruitfulness.

As Christians, we are all called to be Shepherds who will lead our family members, friends, community members, etc., to Jesus! There

is nothing that is greater than to bring Jesus to people and people to Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I 'bring Jesus to people and people to Jesus'?

Monday, 4th May

Acts 11:1-18, John 10:11-18

Jesus said: 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd. The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my Father.'

Knowing and loving the Shepherd

"Two men were called on, in a large classroom, to recite Psalm 23. One was a published orator trained in speech technique and drama. He repeated the psalm in a powerful way. When he finished, the audience cheered and even asked for an encore that they might hear his wonderful voice again. "Then the other man, who was much older, repeated the same words --'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...' But when he finished, no sound came from the large class. Instead, people sat in a deep mood of devotion and prayer. Then the first man, the orator, stood to his feet. 'I have a confession to make,' he said. 'The difference between what you have just heard from my old friend, and what you heard from me is this: I know the Psalm, my friend knows the Shepherd.'"

Do I know the Shepherd? Have I encountered the Shepherd's love?

Today, Jesus our Good Shepherd gently calls us by our name and is always leading us towards fullness of life. Yet, we are constantly bombarded by so many 'thieves' in our life that seduce or threaten us in this journey of our faith. Jesus, however, never abandons us, no matter how far we wander from Him. He asks us, *'Do you know and love me? Are you ready to trust me to lead you?'*

The Shepherd's love waits for our response, never forcing or invading our life. Let us, in this day, learn to know the Shepherd and follow His voice of Love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What makes me deaf to the Shepherd's voice?
- 2) How can I know and love Jesus my Good Shepherd more profoundly?

Tuesday, 5th May

Acts 11:19-26, John 10:22-30

It was the time when the feast of Dedication was being celebrated in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the Temple walking up and down in the Portico of Solomon. The Jews gathered round him and said, 'How much longer are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus replied: 'I have told you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name are my witness; but you do not believe, because you are no sheep of mine. The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me. The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone, and no one can steal from the Father. The Father and I are one.'

Belongingness

"The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me."

Each of us belongs to Jesus. He, our Good Shepherd, always loves us. However, we tend to forget that we belong to Jesus and go around preoccupied with letting the world define who we are. We go around looking for people to affirm us. We yearn for success to raise us. We want to be good-looking, rich, intelligent and popular.

Today, Jesus reminds us again that He is our Good Shepherd and we are His sheep, His friends, His disciples, His beloveds. We are loved by Jesus, unconditionally and faithfully. We are cared by Jesus, despite our imperfections and failures.

Thus, neither criticism nor praise, neither failure nor success, neither difficulty nor comfort can make us lose the sense of security of belonging to the Shepherd.

Today, we are called to listen attentively once again to the voice of Jesus as He tells us, *"You belong to me. Listen to my voice and allow me to guide you. I know you through and through. Do not be afraid."*

Question for reflection:

1) Whom do I belong to: The World or to Jesus?

Wednesday, 6th May

Acts 12:24-13:5a, John 12:44-50

Jesus declared publicly: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me. I, the light, have come into the world, so that whoever believes in

me need not stay in the dark any more. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them faithfully, it is not I who shall condemn him, since I have come not to condemn the world, but to save the world: he who rejects me and refuses my words has his judge already: the word itself that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For what I have spoken does not come from myself; no, what I was to say, what I had to speak, was commanded by the Father who sent me, and I know that his commands mean eternal life. And therefore what the Father has told me is what I speak.'

I am the light

'I, the light, have come into the world, so that whoever believes in me need not stay in the dark anymore.'

Darkness brings to mind fears of the unknown. However, when we enter into light, we are awakened to optimism, confidence and hope.

Today, Jesus tells us that He is the Light that has come into our world. We who believe in Him are not called to huddle in the darkness of our fears, but to bask in His Light that brings strength to us to carry on, that gives us a sense of direction, that leads us to take steps with more security. Our fears and doubts are replaced by the Light of our faith.

When we live in the Light of faith, we become more aware that our deepest identity is Children of God who is Light, who is Life. We are not sons or daughters of darkness. We must never be afraid or ashamed of this genuine identity that God gives us each day.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You

are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." (Marianne Williamson)

We are meant to shine as children of God. We are born to manifest the greatness that God is in us. Let us shine and allow others also to shine and live as children of God.

Thursday, 7th May

Acts 13:13-25, John 13:16-20

After He had washed the feet of his disciples, Jesus said to them: 'I tell you most solemnly no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the man who sent him. Now that you know this, happiness will be yours if you behave accordingly. I am not speaking about all of you: I know the ones I have chosen; but what scripture says must be fulfilled: Someone who shares my table rebels against me. I tell you this now, before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe that I am He. I tell you most solemnly, whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.'

Happiness is yours

Today's gospel is taken right after Jesus had washed His disciples' feet. In the context of the washing of the feet, Jesus told His disciples, "I tell you most solemnly no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the man who sent him. Now

that you know this, happiness will be yours if you behave accordingly.”

Jesus was telling His disciples to go and do the same - to serve one another in the same way He did. This is because to serve is to put love into action.

The world understands love as an intense romantic feeling towards someone. It is often mistaken for dependency, possessiveness as well as looking at the other to meet one’s needs.

For Jesus, love is about placing oneself at the service of the other, and to desire for the good of the other. Love is not self-centred or self-seeking. Rather, it is to be other-centred.

Jesus promises us happiness when we put love into action. As His disciples, we are called to joyfully fix our eyes on Jesus and walk His same path of love and service.

“Remember that the Christian life is one of action; not of speech and daydreams. Let there be few words and many deeds, and let them be done well.” (St. Vincent Pallotti)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I put love into action today?

Friday, 8th May

Acts 13:26-33, John 14:1-6

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You

know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.'

Jesus cares!

Do we tend to allow suffering and problems in life to take away God's peace?

In this time of prayer, take comfort in Jesus' words to us, '*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me.*'

Allow His words to embrace us and bring us to experience real peace from within. Jesus will not take away our problems and the pains we face in life, but He promises us today that we have a place in God's house where we can always find refuge, peace and joy. In our Father's house, i.e. in His heart, is where we can find renewed strength to carry on as we come face-to-face with life's problems.

Jesus reminds us too that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus, our Friend, does not simply give us advice or direction on how to go to God, the Father. He becomes our way for us to go. He becomes our Truth that leads us to live securely as God's beloved children. He becomes our life where we can find true meaning for our own lives, even meaning in our suffering.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1Peter 5, 7)
Today, Jesus calls us to share all our worries and anxieties with Him and trust that He truly cares. Let us not let the troubles and difficulties we face each day block our hearts from trusting Him and staying close to Him.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from fully placing my trust in Jesus?

Saturday, 9th May

Acts 13:44-52, John 14:7-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.' Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied'. 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me? 'To have seen me is to have seen the, Father, so how can you say, "Let us see the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason. I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask for in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask for anything in my name, I will do it."

To be a reflection of God's love

Jesus is the perfect reflection of God, the Father, and thus, to see Jesus is to see the face of God.

Jesus lived His whole life loving with deep compassion and mercy, even towards those who opposed him vigorously. Today, Jesus calls all of us, who are His disciples, to follow Him in the same way. This is because we too are meant to reveal the face of God the Father through the way we love.

We might look at all our limitations and think, 'Me? Reveal the face of God? Impossible!' Yes! It is indeed impossible to live a life of love by our own efforts. Therefore, Jesus shares with us His secret:

"I am in the Father and the Father is in me"

Being in union with God, we can reveal His presence of love to others. For this, we need to be constantly aware of His presence and live with Him each moment of today. With God in us, we are moved to love with His heart of compassion.

How happy we are if people look at our life and recognise God's presence in us!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be aware of God's presence, not just in this time of prayer, but also during moments of this day?

Sunday, 10th May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-7, 1 Peter 2:4-9, John 14:1-12

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.', 'If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.' Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied'. 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me? 'To have seen me is to have seen the Father, so how can you say, "Let

us see the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason. I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father.

I too am going back to the Father

"I am going to the Father..."

Jesus knew that His time would soon come to leave the world. He was prepared to return to God His Father. Like Jesus, we too are on this journey of going back to the Father. However, many of us are fearful to face the mortality of our human life. Yet, we need to pause and reflect on how we are making full use of the time that we have here on this earth.

"It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death's final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it... Life is long if you know how to use it." (Seneca)

As we make our way back to our Father, let us live each day with the desire to do what Jesus desires for us, i.e. to reflect, through our own words and actions, the face of God. Let us learn to truly live so that we can learn how to truly die.

'We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to LOVE... and then we turn home.' (An aboriginal saying)

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation for me in this time of prayer?

Monday, 11th May

Acts 14:5-18, John 14:21-26

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him.' Judas - this was not Judas Iscariot - said to him, 'Lord, what is all this about? Do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus replied: 'If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him. Those who do not love me do not keep my words. And my word is not my own: it is the word of the one who sent me. I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.'

The Holy Spirit, always and forever, in my life

The Holy Spirit is our Advocate, our Helper who always leads us to follow Jesus closely. We need the Holy Spirit in a very special way in these times of consumerism and intense pursuit of worldly pleasures. We have no more room to listen to God's voice and our conscience becomes blunt and dull. We tend to live our Christian faith without enthusiasm and joy.

Today, Jesus reminds us that He gives us His Holy Spirit to be our Advocate who will teach and remind us of all what is essential for

us to become authentic Christians living our faith in the midst of our society. He always pushes us to give ourselves to live a life of love.

"To put it simply: The Holy Spirit bothers us. Because he moves us, he makes us walk, he pushes the Church to go forward. And we are like Peter at the Transfiguration: 'Ah, how wonderful it is to be here like this, all together!' ... But don't bother us. We want the Holy Spirit to doze off... we want to domesticate the Holy Spirit. And that's no good. because he is God, he is that wind which comes and goes and you don't know where. He is the power of God, he is the one who gives us consolation and strength to move forward. But: to move forward! And this bothers us. It's so much nicer to be comfortable." (Pope Francis)

Are we open enough to allow the Holy Spirit to bother us and make us move forward?

"I wish not merely to be called Christian, but also to be Christian." (St. Ignatius of Antioch)

As we start this new week, let us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to a deeper understanding of what it means to be Christians living in the midst of this world.

Question for reflection:

1) Is the Holy Spirit involved in my daily life?

Tuesday, 12th May, Ss. Nereus and Achilleus

Acts 14:19-28, John 14:27-31

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me say: I am going away, and shall return. If you loved me you would have been glad to

know that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe. I shall not talk with you any longer, because the prince of this world is on his way. He has no power over me, but the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me. Come now, let us go.'

I give you peace

Peace is neither the absence of trouble nor the avoidance of confrontation. It neither depends on external events nor on feeling good. Rather, peace is the inner calmness we possess even in the midst of life's challenges. Only Jesus can give us this inner peace that we yearn for.

In this time of prayer, listen attentively to the loving words of Jesus to our hearts, *"Peace I bequeath you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."*

Let these words of Jesus guide us as we live through this day.

"Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4: 6-7)

Stay close to Jesus because He, and only He, can give us real peace.

"Who except God can give you peace? Has the world ever been able to satisfy the heart?" (St. Gerard Majella)

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?

Wednesday, 13th May, Our Lady of Fatima

Acts 15:1-6, John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away - he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.'

Being fruitful, not successful

The world speaks to us about being successful. Jesus, however, invites us to be fruitful. What does Jesus mean when He tells us that we should bear much fruit? How can we bear much fruit?

The world adores successful people who have money, power and status. We want to be successful too so that we can be admired and praised by people. We work hard in order to get to the top of the social ladder. We also push others to do the same by expecting them to perform and achieve. Yet, we eventually discover that success does not give us the peace and joy we yearn for.

This is because we have not been created to become successful people according to the standards of this world, but fruitful according to God. Today, Jesus invites us to remain in Him so that we will strive to be fruitful.

Jesus lived his whole life loving, serving and doing good deeds. He was a simple itinerant preacher without any stable income or comfortable life. In His mission, He sometimes experienced acceptance from people but He had many who opposed Him. In the end, Jesus died a humiliating death.

Is Jesus successful in the eyes of the world?

"We belong to a generation that wants to see the results of our work. We want to be productive and see with our own eyes what we have made. But that is not the way of God's Kingdom. Often our witness for God does not lead to tangible results. Jesus himself died as a failure on a cross. There was no success there to be proud of. Still, the fruitfulness of Jesus' life is beyond any human measure. As faithful witnesses of Jesus we have to trust that our lives too will be fruitful, even though we cannot see their fruit. The fruit of our lives may be visible only to those who live after us. What is important is how well we love. God will make our love fruitful, whether we see that fruitfulness or not." (Henri Nouwen)

Questions for reflection:

1) What am I working for in my life: success or fruitfulness? What prevents me from striving to be fruitful?

Thursday, 14th May, St Matthias

Acts 1:15-17, 20-26, John 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love, If you keep my commandments you will remain

in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete. This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants anymore, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another.'

Friends of Jesus

Listen carefully to Jesus' words to each of us today: '*I call you friends*'

As Christians, we are called to follow Jesus, not as servants, but friends. To be a friend is to share a personal and intimate relationship as well as to share in the joys and sorrows of the other. This is the kind of relationship that Jesus seek from those who follow him.

Many of us live our faith as servants who simply fulfill our religious duties. We serve Jesus without a personal friendship with him. Jesus does not want us to be hardworking servants, but faithful friends whom he can share his heart and mind with. He does not need from us great deeds accomplished but he appreciates our love for him.

Are we Jesus' friends who share our lives with him, and he with us? Or are we simply servants following Jesus out of obligation?

'You did not choose me, no, I chose you...'

Jesus is the one who chooses us to be his friends, not because of our talents and successes, but because he loves us. This is his choice and his call for us today and everyday of our lives.

Friday, 15th May, St. Isidore

Acts 15:22-31, John 15:12-17

Jesus said to his disciples, "This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants anymore, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another."

Love one another

Jesus calls us to love one another as He loves us. This is not an option or something that we do when we feel like it. Rather, it is a commandment, an imperative that demands us to make the choice to love another person. It implies that we deliberately choose to love, regardless of our feelings towards that person.

This might sound challenging for us. We might wonder, "How can I possibly love someone whom I do not like? How can I be good to someone when I cannot get along with that person?"

The good news for us is that Jesus will never make us do something that is impossible for us to do. When we remain in Jesus, love flows from us. Because He is love and we cannot help but have the abundance of His love in us.

"A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends."

To lay down our life for others means more than just literally dying for them. Christian love is when we choose to forget ourselves and go towards others in order to serve, help, guide and promote them. Even if we are not attracted to certain people, we still choose to lay down our life for them.

"The person who does not decide to love forever will find it very difficult to really love for even one day." (St. Pope John Paul II)

Today, let us make the decision to love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I love those whom I do not like?

Saturday, 16th May

Acts 16:1-10, John 15:18-21

Jesus said to his disciples: "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice withdrew you from the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours as well. But it will be on my account that they will do all this, because they do not know the one who sent me."

I belong not to the world, but to Jesus

The true mark of a disciple is love. The world will hate us if we take our following of Jesus seriously. This is because we will refuse to

identify ourselves with the values and concerns of the secular world. Instead, we will reject competitiveness, self-absorption, anger, revenge, and desire for status and power which are ingrained in the lives of so many people.

"My choice withdrew you from the world..."

Jesus chose us to live and love differently from the world's ways. Perhaps, the most horrifying thing that can ever happen to us, as Christians, is that we are loved and honoured by this world. This means that we have failed to witness God's love to the people around us. This means that we have chosen to live a self-centred life.

"There is one and only one possible road to joy: selfless love." (Peter Kreeft)

It is a challenge to walk this one possible road to joy. Yet, as people who are loved and chosen by Jesus, we are invited to choose His life of love.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from loving selflessly like Jesus'?

Sunday, 17th May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17, 1 Peter 3:15-18, John 14:15-21

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come back to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you

will understand that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you. Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him.'

The Holy Spirit living in us

Jesus is no longer visibly present among us, but His Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Truth, is with us and in us. He is the love of God that is poured out into our hearts. He is Love - living, moving and existing in us.

Do we know the Holy Spirit who is living with us and in us? Do we relate with Him? Or is he a stranger?

The Holy Spirit is always actively leading us to live a life of truth, not lies; a life of love, not hatred; a life of freedom, not enslavement. Opportunities come our way each day where we can practice putting our love into action. The Holy Spirit opens our hearts to recognise those precious opportunities as well as gives us the strength to choose to love.

This calls for us to listen attentively and recognise the voice of the Holy Spirit, in such moments, and let Him lead us.

From here, we grow, mature and are transformed more and more into becoming like Jesus. Even if we fail to choose the way of love because of a rash moment where we give into our anger or pride, we know that we can turn to the Holy Spirit within us and trust that we can count on Him to pick us up and walk the path of love again.

'Don't get upset with your imperfections. It's a great mistake because it leads nowhere

- to get angry because you are angry, upset at being upset, depressed at being depressed, disappointed because you are disappointed. So don't fool yourself. Simply surrender to the Power of God's Love, which is always greater than our weakness.' (St. Francis De Sales)

Today, the Holy Spirit is calling out to us because He is the Love of God in us who is always greater than our limitations. Let us stay close to the Holy Spirit!

Question for reflection:

1) Am I led by the Holy Spirit or by my own pride, laziness, self-interest and other negative attitude or distractions?

Monday, 18th May, St. Pope John I

Acts 16:11-15, John 15:26-16:4a

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When the Advocate comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness. And you too will be witnesses, because you have been with me from the outset I have told you all this that your faith may not be shaken. They will expel you from the synagogues, and indeed the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God. They will do these things because they have never known either the Father or myself. But I have told you all this, so that when the time for it comes you may remember that I told you.'

Reflect the Son!

'You too will be witnesses'

What does Jesus mean by this statement?

As Christians, 'witnessing' is part of our very being. In fact, we are 'walking advertisements' where we make the invisible God visible. Isn't it beautiful if people can remember us for our passionate faith?

We must never forget that our faith is not about legalistically following rules and regulations, but rather, our faith is about friendship with Jesus. This is what we, as witnesses, are called to show the world by our words and actions.

“Bring the excitement of Jesus’ friendship to the world, wherever you find yourselves: at work, at school, on WhatsApp, Facebook or Twitter. When you go out dancing, or for a drink, when you meet in the town square or play a little match on the neighbourhood field. That is where Jesus’ friends can be found. Not by conning others, but by standing beside them and being patient with them. With the patience which comes from knowing that we are happy, because we have a Father who is in heaven.” (Pope Francis)

There are many people who live their lives not knowing and experiencing this Friend whom we have come to know and love. Today, we can give witness to them that He is worthy of our love and life.

“The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot.” (St. Augustine) Let us be joyful as we bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I give witness to Jesus’ presence today?

Tuesday, 19th May

Acts16:22-34, John 16:5-11

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Now I am going to the one who sent me. Not one of you has asked, “Where are you going?” Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this. Still, I must tell you the truth: it is for

your own good that I am going because unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I do go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will show the world how wrong it was, about sin, and about who was in the right, and about judgement: about sin: proved by their refusal to believe in me; about who was in the right: proved by my going to the Father and your seeing me no more; about judgement: proved by the prince of this world being already condemned.'

The gift of the Holy Spirit

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples were sad because they heard that their Master would be leaving them soon. In addition to their sadness, they were distressed because they were not certain about what was to come.

"... you are sad at heart because I have told you this."

What about us? Each one of us has experienced sadness and grief. What is the sadness that you carry in your heart?

Jesus knew the hearts of His disciples and so He promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to be with them in their journey of life. He would be there to turn their gaze to Jesus in moments when they would face challenges and hardship.

Today, Jesus knows that we sometimes carry sadness in our hearts when people reject us for what we believe in, or when we keep falling into the same temptations, or when we face crisis at home or work. He wants us to know that we are not alone. He sends us His same Spirit who is our Advocate, our Counsellor, to speak to us through the Word of God, through the Sacraments, through our conscience. He will turn our gaze back to Jesus and find peace in Him once again.

We are never alone. This is our comforting security. The Holy Spirit is with us and in us, now and forever.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit in me today?

Wednesday, 20th May, St. Bernardine of Siena

Acts 17:15, 22-18:1, John 16:12-15

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself but will say only what he has learnt; and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he tells you will be taken from what is mine. Everything the Father has is mine; that is why I said: All he tells you will be taken from what is mine.'

Giving time and space

In today's Gospel, Jesus had many things to tell His disciples but He knew that it was not the right time and space because of their sadness, fear and confusion. Jesus simply let go and trusted that the time would one day come when they would be ready to listen, to understand and to live out what He had to say. This is because the Holy Spirit would be with them and guide them to walk in the path of truth.

Jesus was right! Filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, His disciples began to understand the message of Jesus' life. With passion and determination, they went out and continued His mission, even to the point of giving up their lives for Him.

This is a good lesson that we can learn from Jesus. Sometimes, we face a situation where we want to tell and advice people for their own good. Many times, we struggle with our impatience because we want to see results and improvements in the way these people live their life, their situations, their etc.

Our impatience might lead us to want to lash out at the person to start taking certain action. We might wish to start giving people solutions on how to deal with their problems. Perhaps, it is good to understand that people need time and space for change too.

We are called not to give up on them but to continue to put our hope in them, to pray for them and never cease to love them in the same way Jesus did with his disciples.

We have the Spirit of Truth within us. We can count on Him to lead others to live in the light of truth and love. However, let us remember that love is neither pushy nor self-righteous. Rather, in order to help others, we need to humbly listen to the Holy Spirit and discern how best to love.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from trusting and hoping in others and their process of growth?

Thursday, 21st May, Ascension of the Lord

Acts 1:1-11, Ephesians 1:17-23, Matthew 28:16-20

Jesus showed himself to the Eleven, and said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and be unharmed should they

drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.' And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven: there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it.

Living the joyful reality of the Ascension

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord. What does this feast mean for us?

Jesus' ascension tells us that we now have the duty to continue the mission of Jesus by sharing the Good News of the Gospel with everyone we meet. What is the core of the Good News that we are called to proclaim?

"Humanity is loved by God! This very simple yet profound proclamation is owed to humanity by the Church. Each Christian's words and life must make this proclamation resound: God loves you, Christ came for you, Christ is for you "the Way, the Truth and the Life!" (Pope Francis)

We cannot give what we do not have. Thus, we never get tired of encountering God and experiencing Him loving us first. When we ourselves are opened to what God does for us and how much He truly loves us, we will joyfully proclaim this Good News of His love to others.

The moment we stop growing in our relationship with God, we will choose the easy way of not giving, not sharing, not caring but remain in our comfort zone instead.

As we celebrate this beautiful feast of Jesus, let us have the desire to encounter Jesus again in our prayer and life today. With Jesus, we go out to joyfully proclaim, through our words and deeds, that God is love!

Question for reflection:

1) How does the Ascension of Jesus affect how I live my life today?

Friday, 22nd May, St. Rita of Cascia

Acts 18:9-18, John 16:20-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I tell you most solemnly, you will be weeping and wailing while the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers, because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a man has been born into the world. So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you. When that day comes, you will not ask me any questions. I tell you most solemnly, anything you ask for from the Father he will grant in my name.'

Sorrow and joy

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the self same well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight. Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater." But I say unto you, they are inseparable. Together they come, and when one sits, alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy. Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced. When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall. (Kahlil Gibran)

As we journey through life, we start to discover that joy and sorrow are inseparable. We face the grief of saying goodbye to a loved one as we part ways. At the same time, we also hold onto the joy of being loved by that person and the friendship we have. We face the sadness of facing a failure but we also have the joy of witnessing the encouragement and support given by friends and family. We face the joy of celebrating a keystone moment yet we may sense the gripping sadness of missing people who are no longer around to rejoice with us.

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples grieved as they listened to Him speaking about His leaving. In order to comfort His disciples, Jesus used an example of childbirth. At the moment of giving birth, the mother suffers because of the pain and distress. However, her heart is filled with joy when the baby is placed in her embrace. The baby is the cause of the mother's pain as well as joy. Likewise, Jesus would be the cause of His disciples' sorrow as well as joy as they

journeyed with Him to the path of the cross and resurrection. The disciples needed to continue to keep trusting in Jesus.

In our own life, let us, together with Jesus, learn to welcome the pain of sadness as well as the consolation of joy. Both sadness and joy lead us to grow as mature people of faith. We are never alone in our moments of desolation as well as in our moments of joyfulness. In Jesus, we have our Companion and Friend.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I choose to welcome joy as well as sadness?

Saturday, 23rd May

Acts 18:23-28, John 16:23-28

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I tell you most solemnly, anything you ask for from the Father he will grant in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete. I have been telling you all this in metaphors, the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in metaphors; but tell you about the Father in plain words. When that day comes you will ask in my name; and I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you, because the Father himself loves you for loving me and believing that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I leave the world to go to the Father.'

Ask and you will receive

"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." This does not mean that we can make any request that comes into our head and expect all our prayers to be answered. When we ask for what we genuinely need and not just for what we want, then our prayers will be answered and our joy will be complete. What do we genuinely need?

What we need most of all is to grow closer in union with God and to desire what He desires. The will of God is always for us to live a life of love and build His Kingdom of justice and peace in the midst of where we are. Let us desire for more of God in our lives. In Him, we live lovingly. In Him, we find our peace.

"...and I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you..."

Why did Jesus say that He would not be praying for His disciples, for us?

Jesus wanted His disciples to put their trust in God the Father. God loved each of them despite their limitations. God cared for them and knew what they truly needed.

"...the Father himself loves you for loving me and believing that I came from God."

Today, let us find our delight in Jesus' words. God the Father loves us for loving Jesus and believing that He came from God. God is love. This is who He is. He loves each one of us with tenderness and faithfulness. He will never let us down but will give us what we really need to do - His will and live our life with true joy that the world with all its riches and pleasures can never give us.

Question for reflection:

1) What do I genuinely need in order to desire what God desires today?

Sunday, 24th May, Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:12-14; 1 Peter 4:13-16 John 17:1-11

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: 'Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you; and, through the

power over all mankind that you have given him, let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him. And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have glorified you on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do. Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world was. I have made your name known to the men you took from the world to give me. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now at last they know that all you have given me comes indeed from you; for I have given them the teaching you gave to me, and they have truly accepted this, that I came from you, and have believed that it was you who sent me. I pray for them; I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, because they belong to you: all I have is yours and all you have is mine, and in them I am glorified. I am not in the world any longer, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.'

Eternal life is to know the one true God

We have been created by God to be in a relationship of love with Him.

"The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No 27)

Jesus speaks of eternal life as knowing God. This knowledge of God does not mean to know something about God but to know God personally by entering into a daily relationship with Him. God never ceases to draw us to Himself. He calls each of us to be in communion with Him.

When we respond to His love and enter into a relationship with our eternal God, we live eternal life here and now. Jesus comes and reveals to us the heart of God who loves us passionately, to the point of the Cross. Today, let us once more fix our eyes on Jesus because to see Him is to see God.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more aware of God's presence in my life so that I can start living eternal life today?

Monday, 25th May, St. Gregory VII

Acts 19:1-8, John 16:29-33

His disciples said to Jesus, 'Now you are speaking plainly and not using metaphors! Now we see that you know everything, and do not have to wait for questions to be put into words; because of this we believe that you came from God.' Jesus answered them: 'Do you believe at last? Listen; the time will come - in fact it has come already - when you will be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world.'

Be brave!

"When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."
(Corrie Ten Boom)

There are many people around us who feel scared and hopeless because of the many burdens they carry in life. Sometimes, we too carry the heaviness of desolation due to a family crisis, a personal problem or a difficulty at work.

"I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me."

Today, let us stop and allow these words to fill our hearts with peace. Jesus reminds us that we, like Him, are also never alone because God the Father is with us. This reality is the source of our peace.

"I plead with you--never, ever give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Be not afraid." (St. Pope John Paul II)

Today, let us never ever let fear cripple us to stop hoping, and stop walking on. We walk through this journey of life with Jesus who is always close to us. He is our Peace. He is our Courage. He is our Love.

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus inviting me to live through moments when I sense myself walking through the dark tunnel of fear and uncertainty?

Tuesday, 26th May

Acts 20:17-27, John 17:1-11a

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: 'Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you; and, through the power over all mankind that you have given him, let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him. And eternal life is this: to

know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have glorified you on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do. Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world was. I have made your name known to the men you took from the world to give me. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now at last they know that all you have given me comes indeed from you; for I have given them the teaching you gave to me, and they have truly accepted this, that I came from you, and have believed that it was you who sent me. I pray for them; I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, because they belong to you: all I have is yours and all you have is mine, and in them I am glorified. I am not in the world any longer, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us.'

Glory to the Father...

"...so that your Son may glorify you."

This was Jesus' constant desire. He wanted to glorify God His Father by His words and acts of love. He went around bringing healing to people. He ate with sinners and welcomed outcasts. He spoke and taught about love, forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion.

What does Jesus' words and actions speak to us about God? As Christians, our words and actions must glorify God. Instead, many times, we seem to forget this and tend to seek glory for ourselves. We yearn for praises and affirmations from others. We want people to recognise us for the good works we do. We get upset when we are not shown appreciation.

"Whoever wants to boast must boast of what the Lord has done." (1 Corinthians 13:1)

Today, can we examine our habits, our words, our options in life, our thoughts, our conduct towards others, etc., are we glorifying God?

In this time of prayer, let us ask the Holy Spirit to remind us throughout this day that we are here to bring honour and praise to God. Through our words and actions, people can recognise God and give glory to Him.

Question for reflection:

1) What do my words and actions tell others about God?

Wednesday, 27th May, St. Augustine of Canterbury

Acts 20:28-38, John 17:11b-19

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said, 'I am not in the world any longer, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us. While I was with them, I kept those you had given me true to your name. I have watched over them and not one is lost except the one who chose to be lost, and this was to fulfil the scriptures. But now I am coming to you and while still in the world I say these things to share my joy with them to the full. I passed your word on to them, and the world hated them, because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world. I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.'

Consecrated in truth

It is rather daunting task to carry, to be sent to the world as Jesus had done many years ago and as we are tasked to do now. This is

because it is very easy to get lost in the world, consciously and subconsciously. The world presents and distracts us with many noises and colours, with many views and questions. That is why Jesus prayed for us to the Father so that we be consecrated in the truth, in his word. To be sent to the world, we need to be rooted deep in God's word, truth and especially in his love. If we are not rooted and grounded firmly, it is easy to be swayed and blown away by what the world perceives as the truth.

In our prayer today, let us be silent for a moment and stand with Jesus as he prayed his prayer for us. Let us be still and enjoy being with Him, savouring his words and basking in his gentle love for us. Let us realize once again that Jesus is our truth and we belong to him. Our identity, first and foremost, are Beloved children of God and this is where we are rooted. Let us allow the Spirit to fill our hearts with love so that we are ready once again to go out and love the world, following our Master's footsteps.

Thursday, 28th May

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11, John 17:20-26

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: 'I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Father, Righteous One, the world has not known you, but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me. I have made

your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.'

Love leads to unity

"We are made for loving. If we don't love, we will be like plants without water." (Desmond Tutu)

Jesus' desire is that we may all be one. Without love, unity is impossible. What kind of love builds unity?

Active, self-giving love is what builds unity. Such love is not a sentiment or a thought but it involves the will. It implies that we need to choose to do the right action, the good action, the loving action.

We love for the good of the other. We give ourselves for the growth of the other.

In this time of prayer, let us reflect on our relationships with our family members, colleagues, friends, fellow parishioners and ask ourselves: Does my love build unity? When I speak, do I sow the seeds of love? When I carry out a task, do I seek to do so with the desire to express my love to others?

"In a Christian community division is one of the most serious sins, because it does not allow God to act...What God wants is that we be welcoming, that we forgive and love each other so as to become more and more like Him, who is communion and love." (Pope Francis)

May we put effort in building oneness with others. Our oneness with others will only come when we are one with God. It is He who opens our hearts to desire for love and communion.

Today, let us take steps to work for oneness!

Questions for reflection:

1) Is there someone whom I am divided from? How can I work for unity?

Friday, 29th May

Acts 25:13b-21, John 21:15-19

Jesus showed himself to his disciples, and after they had eaten he said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes Lord, you know I love you'. Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs'. A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He replied, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you'. Jesus said to him, 'Look after my sheep'. Then he said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was upset that he asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you'. Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. 'I tell you most solemnly, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go.' In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me'.

Do you love me? Feed my sheep!

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus approached Simon Peter and asked him, "*Do you love me?*" three times. This reminds us of Peter's denial of Jesus when he said, "I do not know him". Out of fear, Peter turned his back on His Friend and Master.

By asking Peter the question thrice, Jesus was forgiving Peter for his moment of weakness. Moreover, Jesus continued to entrust the

mission of being a Shepherd to His flock to Peter. He did not stop trusting Peter despite all that had happened.

Today, Jesus knows that our human frailties are obstacles to truly love Him and give ourselves to Him. He never tires of asking us daily, "Do you love me?" It is not that Jesus has His suspicions about our love for Him. Rather, He wants us to express our love, no longer by mere words or empty promises, but by allowing ourselves, again and again, to be used for His grand mission. Jesus calls us to enter into a more mature love, a deeper following.

"Feed my lambs... Look after my sheep....Feed my sheep."

There are many people who are like sheep without a Shepherd. Thus, we have the responsibility to bring people to Him so that they too can experience the gift of His love.

In this time of prayer, let us listen to Jesus as He asks once more, "Do you love me?" What will your response be?

Question for reflection:

1) If I love Jesus deeply, what am I doing for Him?

Saturday, 30th May

Acts 28:16-20. 30-31, John 21:20-25

Peter turned and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them - the one who had leaned on his breast at the supper and had said to him, 'Lord, who is it that will betray you?' Seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, 'What about him, Lord?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come, what does it matter to you? You are to follow me. 'The rumour then went out among the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus had not said to Peter, 'He will not die', but, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come'. This disciple is the one who vouches for these things

and has written them down, and we know that his testimony is true. There were many other things that Jesus did; if all were written down, the world itself, I suppose, would not hold all the books that would have to be written.

You are to follow me!

Peter had a long way to go in his journey of following Jesus. Even after Peter was given the responsibility to be the Shepherd of His flock, he was still the same old impulsive Peter. He was distracted as his thoughts wandered to the Beloved disciple. If Peter had received the mandate to feed Jesus' sheep, he was curious to know about the path of the Beloved disciple.

"What about him, Lord?"

Why was Peter curious about the Beloved disciple? Was he comparing himself to this disciple who had leaned closely to Jesus at the last Supper? Was Peter feeling jealous?

We will never know the reason why Peter asked Jesus that question.

However, we do know that we ourselves have asked the same question that Peter asked. We ask because we tend to compare ourselves with others.

"Follow me"

The answer of Jesus to Peter shows His patient love that never stops to call him back to what is essential. Likewise, Jesus patiently calls us, *"Follow me"*

When we follow Him, He will lead us to live a purposeful life of love. Then, we will realise that we have our own missions as well as to recognise that each brother and sister has also been called to follow Jesus, and He is the One who will lead them to do the specific mission that they have been entrusted with.

Today, let us fix our eyes on Jesus and follow Him wherever He goes.

Question for reflection:

How can I follow Jesus with greater faithfulness today?

Sunday, 31st May, Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13 John 20:19-23

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'

Spirit of Love, come!

"Receive the Holy Spirit." As we celebrate the great feast of Pentecost Sunday, we rejoice with the gift of the Holy Spirit given by Jesus to us.

Jesus gives us His same Spirit in order that we might live a life of love. Love is shown concretely when we start to forgive others. It is from forgiving that we find our hearts to be at peace. *"Forgive others, not because they deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace."* (Jonathan Lockwood Huie)

We have the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. We can count on Him to give us the desire for true peace and the inner strength to show

forgiveness. There may be certain people whom we need to forgive such as: our parents for not loving us enough; our husband/wife for not being faithful or not loving us as we want to be loved; our siblings for bullying us or competing with us; our children for hurting us with words; our friends for turning their backs when we need them most; our priests, religious, church leaders for not caring for our needs, etc.

We might also be the cause of another feeling wounded and hurt because of our angry words, choices in life, insensitivity, etc. Many times, pride makes us stumble to say those three words: 'I am sorry.'..." to our parents for taking them for granted; to our children for putting them down out of our own frustrations; to our husband, wife for not listening to them with love; to a friend for not being there for her/ him, etc. Once again, we can humbly ask the Holy Spirit in us to teach us how to open ourselves to receive forgiveness.

The Spirit always reaches to love, never to divide. Open our hearts today to receive this Spirit of love so that we can truly possess the peace that the world can never give.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' invitation to me on this Feast of Pentecost?

Monday, 1st June, Mary, Mother of the Church

2 Peter 1:2-7, Mark 12:1-12

Jesus began to speak to the chief priests, the scribes and the elders in parables, 'A man planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug out a trough for the winepress and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce from the vineyard. But they seized the man, thrashed him and sent him away empty-handed.

Next he sent another servant to them; him they beat about the head and treated shamefully. And he sent another and him they killed; then a number of others, and they thrashed some and killed the rest. He had still someone left: his beloved son. He sent him to them last of all. "They will respect my son" he said. But those tenants said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they seized him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. Now what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and make an end of the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this text of scripture: It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see? And they would have liked to arrest him, because they realised that the parable was aimed at them, but they were afraid of the crowds. So they left him alone and went away.

Take, Lord, all that I have and all that I am!

In today's Gospel, the owner of the vineyard entrusted the land to the tenants in order for them to cultivate the land. When the time came for them to return to the owner what was rightfully due to him, the tenants thrashed one servant, shamed another and killed the others. Finally, they even killed the owner's beloved son. These tenants, out of pride, wanted to become owners of the vineyard.

Like the owner of the vineyard, God gives us vineyards of our life to cultivate and bear rich fruit. We are simply stewards of our vineyards, not the owners.

Each of us has been created with unique abilities and talents, including our life experiences, skills, personalities, etc. With all that we are and have, we are called to work in our vineyards in order to bear fruit of eternal love.

The time will come when each of us has to give a reckoning of the fruitfulness of our vineyard.

Are we ready for that day?

Question for reflection:

1) How can I strive to be fruitful today?

Tuesday, 2nd June, Ss. Marcellinus and Peter2 Peter 3: 12-15, 17-18, Mark 12:13-17

The chief priests and the scribes and the elders sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians to catch him out in what he said. These came and said to him, 'Master, we know you are an honest man, that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man's rank means nothing to you, and that you teach the way of God in all honesty. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay, yes or no?' Seeing through their hypocrisy he said to them, 'Why do you set this trap for me? Hand me a denarius and let me see it.' They handed him one and he said, 'Whose head is this? Whose name?' 'Caesar's' they told him. Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God'. This reply took them completely by surprise.

Belonging to God

The Jewish leaders wanted to set a trap to test Jesus. They wanted to discredit Him in front of the crowd who respected Him as a prophet and teacher. In relation to the issue of paying taxes to Caesar, if Jesus had answered that it was lawful to do so, He would lose the crowd's respect. If He had said that it was unlawful, then the religious authorities would have all the reasons to hand Jesus over to the Romans as a potential threat to Caesar. Jesus, with wisdom in His heart, knew what to say to them. He took a coin bearing the image of Caesar, and asked, "Whose head is this? Whose name?" They answered, "Cesar's" Thus, Jesus answered their question by saying, "Give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar." Going deeper, Jesus added, "- and to God what belongs to God."

In the same way the coin belonged to Caesar because it bore the image of the ruler on it, we too have been imprinted with God's

image since we have been created in His own likeness. We belong to God! And so, we give to God what rightfully belongs to Him.

In this time of prayer, let us recognise once more that we belong, not to this world or to ourselves, but to God. Belonging to God, we are loved unconditionally by Him. Let this reality sink into our hearts and not just stay as intellectual knowledge in our heart. Choose to believe it and experience His love throughout this day.

When we face failures and difficulties along the way, let us return again and again to this security that we belong to God, and allow Him to bring us to greater joy, greater hope and greater peace. Living rooted in this sense of belonging to God, we can then joyfully give to Him what belongs to Him i.e. our very life.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to give to God what truly belongs to Him?

Wednesday, 3rd June, St. Charles Lwanga and Companions

2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12, Mark 12:18-27

Some Sadducees - who deny that there is a resurrection - came to Jesus and they put this question to him, 'Master, we have it from Moses in writing, if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no child, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first married a wife and then died leaving no children. The second married the widow, and he too died leaving no children; with the third it was the same, and none of the seven left any children. Last of all the woman herself died. Now at the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be, since she had been married to all seven?' Jesus said to them, 'Is not the reason why you go wrong, that you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry;

no, they are like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising again, have you never read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the Bush, how God spoke to him and said: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is God, not of the dead, but of the living. You are very much mistaken.'

I am the Living God

The Sadducees, unlike the Pharisees, did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They approached Jesus with a question and hoped that they could discredit Him.

From the way the Sadducees phrased their question, they assumed that resurrected life would be like the present reality. The woman, in their example, got married to all seven brothers, and so they asked, "Now at the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be?"

The Sadducees put God in a box and limited Him based on their own understanding. We can also be like the Sadducees in putting God in a box. We limit God based on what we understand or do not understand, on our beliefs and ideas. We forget that God is bigger, much bigger than our ideas, logic, feelings, circumstances and plans.

In today's Gospel, Jesus was so patient with the Sadducees. He tried to open their heart to the power of God. Jesus pointed out that God is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Looking at these three Patriarchs, we are reminded of their wives: Sarah, Abraham's wife, was barren; Rebekah, Isaac's wife, had trouble conceiving; Rachel, Jacob's wife, was barren too. Yet, God opened their wombs and brought life to their barrenness. Thus, God is a God of life, not death.

Today, let us never lose sight of the greatness of our God. Let us release Him from our box so that He can truly be the God of our life.

Question for reflection:

1) "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob"
– Of what relevance is this statement to me?

Thursday, 4th June

2 Timothy 2: 8-15, 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.

Christian love

In today's Gospel, a scribe asked Jesus for the greatest commandment. Why then did Jesus give two commandments? Why didn't Jesus simply answer that loving God is the greatest commandment? If we were to ask Jesus the same question as the scribe, He would still give us two commandments instead of one. Why?

Jesus knows our hearts. He knows that we tend to equate loving God with piety. We go for mass, join church activities, serve in the parish, etc. This is how we fulfil the commandment of 'loving' God. Once we finish doing something for God, we go back to our self-centred lives, and love those around us poorly. We separate loving God from loving others.

"Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him." (1 John 2:9-11)

The love for God and love for our brothers and sisters is inseparable.

As Christians, this is our greatest commandment - Love God, Love neighbours. When we love the people around us - our spouse, children, friends, neighbours, etc., we love God. When we love those people who hurt us or those whom we dislike, we love God.

In this time of prayer, let us be drawn close to God and let us be loved by Him. God accepts each of us for who we are. From this experience of being loved by God, we must go out and love the people He places in our way today.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I put into practice loving God and loving others?

Friday, 5th June, St. Boniface

2 Timothy 3:10-17, Mark 12:35-37

At that time while teaching in the Temple, Jesus said, 'How can the scribes maintain that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, moved by the Holy Spirit, said: The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand and I will put your enemies under your feet. David himself calls him Lord, in what way then can he be his son?' And the great majority of the people heard this with delight.

Jesus, the Messiah and Lord

Jesus had been asked and challenged by various individuals and groups. In today's Gospel, He took the initiative to ask a question which no scribe, Pharisee or Sadducees dared to answer. Those religious leaders remained silent while the people heard Jesus with delight. They were delighted because Jesus spoke with authority (Matthew 7:29), unlike their religious leaders.

What about us? Do we take delight in listening to Jesus? Do we allow Jesus' words to go straight to our hearts?

"... in what way then can he be his son?"

Jesus was basically asking His listeners, "Whose son is Christ?" According to the Old Testament prophecy, the Messiah would come from the lineage of King David. Thus, Christ is rightly to be referred to as the son of David in virtue of His incarnation.

However, Christ is also King David's Lord in virtue of Him being the Son of God. Thus, King David addressed Christ as 'Lord'.

Jesus, our Messiah, is the Lord to whom we give our life. As Christians, do we really give ourselves to Him, with trust and love?

We sometimes choose to give our lives to chasing wealth, ambitious pride, love of power, etc. Today, Jesus invites us to be

moved by the Holy Spirit and recognise that He is our Lord, our Master, the Christ who desires to be the only one ruling our days and nights, our passions and interests, our work and play. To have Jesus as our Lord and Messiah also implies that we follow Him in the path of passion, death and resurrection and are also ready to be sent to bring God's presence to the places where we are. Are we ready to follow Jesus, the Son of David, along the path He leads us through? Are we happy to give to Jesus, our Lord, a free reign in every aspect of our life?

Question for reflection:

1) How can Jesus be the only Master and Lord of my life?

Saturday, 6th June, St. Norbert

2 Timothy 4:1-8, 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'.

Blessed is she who trusts

In today's Gospel, there are no amazing miracles of healing, no great teachings on the Mount. There is just a poor widow who is one of the least in the eyes of the Jewish society. There are also two small coins. The woman and her two coins caught the attention, as well as the admiration of Jesus.

Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw many people giving a lot of money in order to look good in front of others. This poor widow entered the temple, went to the treasury and quietly put in her two small coins. Her giving reflected the interior state of her heart. She gave all that she had because she trusted in God's faithfulness to her and that He would not abandon her. Her story continues to inspire us to live with the same radical trust in God.

Can we tell God, "Lord, I give you my thoughts, will, feelings... I hold nothing back."?

In this time of prayer, let us ask humbly for the grace of trust so that we too can give everything we possess to God.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I follow the example of the poor widow?

Sunday, 7th June, Holy Trinity Sunday

Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, John 3:16-18

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses

to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son.'

I love the Trinity

Today, we are invited to contemplate on the heart of God whose deepest reality is the profound communion of life and love. The Trinitarian God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit- is love that is merciful, gracious, faithfulness and steadfast love.

'God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son...' Let us pause and contemplate the great love he places in our hands every day. We have the freedom to reject this immense gift of love when we choose to focus our energies and resources on pursuing what the world offers. What are the priorities of our day to day lives?

God the Father loves us and gives us his Son, Jesus. God the Father and Jesus the Son love us so much that they pour out their love in the form of the Holy Spirit into our hearts to be in us always and forever.

We are the objects of the love of our Trinitarian God. Is the Trinity the object of our love and faithfulness? Can we say, 'I love the Trinity'?

We cannot love what we do not know. Thus, let us spend this day contemplating on the Trinity and allow ourselves to be drawn by Love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is the Trinity an abstract theory or a real presence of God in my life?
- 2) How can I increase my love for the Trinity?

Monday, 8th June

1 Kings 17: 1-6, Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, he 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.'

How happy are the poor in spirit

Jesus wants friends, not fans! To be Jesus' friend is to step into his vision and to understand what it really means to be truly happy.

Many people associate happiness with having abundant wealth or managing to avoid sufferings or possessing the power to call the shots, etc. For Jesus, the reality is the opposite! He is inviting us, his friends, to step into his vision and start living the real happiness today.

Let us slowly read and reflect on Jesus' words today: 'How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Happy the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage...'

This first beatitude is the key to open the door to the rest. What does it mean to be 'poor in spirit'? To be spiritual poor is like a child

who is in need of his/her parents for guidance, nourishment, strength, etc. Look at Jesus, who is truly the poor in spirit, lived his life depending on God his Father. He spent long hours in the evening to pray because he was constantly in need of his Father and desired to be guided by him alone.

Likewise, we who are Jesus' friends, are called to live this first beatitude of depending on God totally. Of course, we need to use our capacities, talents, abilities, etc. in our work, studies, relationships with others. However, we must never forget to include God in all areas of our lives. We need to trust in him that he knows what is good for us and our loved ones so as to give him room to guide and direct us.

When we are spiritually poor in this sense, we will experience true happiness within. From here, the rest of the Beatitudes flow.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) As Jesus' friend, what does it mean to be truly happy?
- 2) How can I strive to be 'poor in spirit' today?

Tuesday, 9th June, St. Ephraem

1 Kings 17: 7-16, Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven.'

Make a difference!

Salt is one of the most important ingredients we use in cooking a meal. Without salt, our food will be bland and unappetizing. Today, Jesus likens our following as being salt for the whole human race! Yes, just like salt bringing out the best flavours in the food, our lives can also make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Light is meant to illuminate the darkness so that people can see and know where they are going. We are lights of the world because we bring Jesus who is the true Light to brighten the darkness around us.

Jesus' message today is that each of us can make a difference in our families, offices, schools, society at large. We must seize the day and make the most of every opportunity we have! Perhaps, we cannot do many things to help multitudes of people but we can do something for a few people, or even one person. Yes, even for one person, we are called to make a difference and let our light shine!

There is a story that can help us in this time of prayer:

'While walking along a beach, an elderly gentleman saw someone in the distance leaning down, picking something up and throwing it into the ocean. As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a young man, picking up starfish one by one and tossing each one gently back into the water. He came closer still and called out, "Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?" The young man paused, looked up, and replied "Throwing starfish into the ocean." The old man smiled, and said, "I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?" To this, the young man replied, "The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll die." Upon hearing this, the elderly observer commented, "But, young man, do you not realise that there are miles and miles of beach

and there are starfish all along every mile? You can't possibly make a difference!" The young man listened politely. Then he bent down, picked up another starfish, threw it into the back into the ocean past the breaking waves and said, "It made a difference for that one."

Wednesday, 10th June

1 Kings 18:20-39, Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Not to abolish but to complete

Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the teachings of the Prophet but to complete them. The Old Testament, which represented by the Law and the Prophets, points to Jesus. By his life, teachings, his death and resurrection, Jesus brings the incomplete masterpiece that started in the Old Testament to reality, to completion.

In Jesus, we see that love is the greatest fulfilment of the law. Jesus is the personification of what it means to love! He is the fullest expression of God's love for us as well as the fullest expression of the human response to that love.

Today, we are invited once again to enter into a personal intimate relationship with Jesus, the One who has brought the Law into fulfilment. In this friendship with Jesus, we learn from Jesus our Master how to love God and the people in our lives. Like Jesus, we should strive to show the perfect practice of love.

In our silent prayer time with Jesus, let us allow him to speak to us and show us the way in which we, in our own words and actions, can make love a reality today!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live this day striving to show the perfect practice of love?

Thursday, 11th June, St. Barnabas the Apostle

Acts 11:21-26, 13:1-3, Matthew 5:20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: If your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; if a man calls his brother "Fool" he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and if a man calls him "Renegade" he will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. I tell you solemnly, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.'

Anger does not pay

In today's gospel, Jesus continues to teach us about His commandment to love. Often, one of the common violations to the commandment of love is being angry. Anger is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control leading to violence, verbal abuse, as well as unseen wounds that damage the hearts of others.

Here is a short story about a boy who was always losing his temper. His father gave him a bag full of nails and said to him, 'My son, I want you to hammer a nail in our garden fence every time you need to direct your anger against something and you lose your temper.' So the son started to follow his father's advice. On the first day, he hammered in 37 nails, but getting the nails into the fence was not easy, so he started to control himself when he got angry. As the days went by, he was hammering in less nails, and within weeks he was able to control himself and was able to refrain from getting angry and from hammering the nails. He came to his father and told him what he had achieved. His father was happy with his efforts and said to him, 'But now, my son, you have to take out a nail every day that you do not get angry.' The son started to take out the nails for each day that he did not get angry, until there were no nails left in the fence. He came to his father and told him what he had achieved. His father took him to the fence and said, 'My son, you have done well, but look at these holes in the fence. This fence will never be the same again.' Then he added, 'When you say things in a state of anger, they leave marks like these holes on the hearts of others. You can stab a person and withdraw the knife but it doesn't matter how many times you say "I'm sorry", because the wound will remain.'

Anger keeps us from sustaining a loving and pleasing relationship with God. How can we claim to love God and yet harbour anger towards others?

Our attitudes towards others reflect our relationship with God. Today's gospel offers an invitation to us to be reconciled with 'our enemies' and to offer to God a peaceful and reconciled heart.

Friday, 12th June

1 Kings 19:9, 11-16, Matthew 5:27-32

'You have learnt how it was said: You must not commit adultery. But I say this to you: if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of you than to have your whole body go to hell. It has also been said: Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a writ of dismissal. But I say this to you: everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of fornication, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.'

A healthy heart, a happy life

'Happy are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' (Matthew 5, 8). Today, Jesus is inviting us to develop clean and healthy friendships with those around us because he is concerned with our heart.

The heart is what we are. It is where we keep the secrecy of our thought and feeling, which nobody knows if we choose not to reveal them. However, Jesus looks at our hearts and know all the longings, cravings and desires we have within. He comes to us because he knows that we have hearts that need to be purified. Jesus wants us to have a pure heart that is committed to live a life loving God and pleasing him alone.

'Purity of heart is to will one thing' (Soren Kierkegaard)

Regardless of our age or status in life, all of us are called to strive for purity of heart that follow Jesus faithfully with single-mindedness. When our hearts are pure, we will also look at our friends, colleagues, family members with eyes of selfless love that seek the best for them.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I have a pure heart that is fully devoted to love and please God alone?
- 2) In an amoral society that practices infidelity, how can I share this message of possessing a pure heart to those around me?

Saturday, 13th June, St. Anthony of Padua

1 Kings 19: 19-21, Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you: do not swear at all, either by heaven, since that is God's throne; or by the earth, since that is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great king. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'

Honesty

Remember the story of the boy who cried 'Wolf'? Remember the moral of that story?

Today, Jesus teaches us the same important lesson of honesty. What is honesty?

'We all need to know what it means to be honest. Honesty is more than not lying. It is truth telling, truth speaking, truth living and truth loving.' (James E. Faust)

Honesty is not an easy value to live out especially in grey areas, in the little things that we think cannot hurt anyone. Do we choose to tell white lies to save a friendship or do we choose to tell the truth, even if the truth hurts?

Jesus tells us, 'All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no.' But how?

Look at our hearts and see the intentions we have in telling the truth. When we speak and act for the right reasons, there is no need to do so out of fear that we will cause hurts or harms. Thus, we need to be honest to ourselves before we can truly be honest to others. This is because honesty can also be used as a weapon to hurt and humiliate others. Brutal honesty is not the honesty that Jesus wants for us, his disciples. We can always learn from him how to be honest in love. As long as we have the sincere desire to love and help others, we should have no fear to practice honesty in our relationships.

When we are not truthful, we move away from God. Thus, let us be God-centred people so that we can live as he wants us to.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What prevents me from being truthful in my dealings with others?
- 2) How does God want me to live my life?

Sunday, 14th June, Corpus Christi Sunday

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the Jews: '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.'

Get closer to the Eucharist

'If I can give you any advice, I beg you to get closer to the Eucharist and to Jesus... We must pray to Jesus to give us that tenderness of the Eucharist.' (Mother Teresa)

Jesus is present in the Eucharist. Thus, to eat the Bread is to enter into communion with the person of Jesus. It is an intimate act of love with Jesus where we encounter him and allow our lives to be deeply touched by him. Truly, it is the closest we will get to heaven on this earth. Do we understand what we receive each time we go for Holy Communion? Do we experience the deep love Jesus has for us in the Eucharist? Do we love Jesus in the Eucharist?

Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist implies that our lives are transformed into he who is the source of love. *'The Eucharist brings*

about a fundamental transformation. God no longer simply stands out before us as totally other. He enters into us and then seeks to spread outward to others until he fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world.' (Pope Benedict XVI)

We bring Christ out into the world, our homes, our workplaces, our schools, our neighbourhoods, our parishes, so that our lives and the lives of those around us will be penetrated by his Eucharistic love.

Today, let us pray to Jesus to give us that tenderness of the Eucharist. Let us always be open to his presence and follow him faithfully.

Question for reflection:

1) What is the significance of celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi?

Monday, 15th June

1 Kings 21:1-16, Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if a man takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away.'

But I say to you...

The law of the Old Testament is to treat others as they treat you: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth". Nevertheless, Jesus

goes beyond justice and he teaches us what love is from the heart of his Father. God is love and he does not retaliate and his children cannot do otherwise.

Being sons and daughters of our Father, we need to conquer evil with love; to go beyond our instincts and feelings and treat others as God treats us. Jesus commandment is to love as he has loved us. Does our love for those around us reach that point? We may find difficult to forgive when someone hurts us or to be generous when we are not appreciated. Yet, how many times Jesus gives himself to us and we do not even realize? How many times are we forgiven again and again by Jesus or given much more than what we need by him? To answer with love when somebody hurts us is a sign of maturity in love, a sign that we are following the Master.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I go beyond the limits that I place on how much love I give to others?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation for me today?

Tuesday, 16th June

1 Kings 21:17-29, Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

By our love, they will know we are Jesus' disciples

The sign that we are followers of Jesus is not that we know by heart the Creed and the dogmas of the Church, but that we have love for one another. It is by the quality of our love we show that we are Christians, disciples of Christ.

It is in our human nature to love one's own family and friends. However, it takes a different kind of love to show care, concern, to extend our help, give our time and even ourselves to those we do not like or are against us or even hurt us in a way or another. We may think that this is not human, but actually this kind of love, Christian love, makes us more human. It develops our capacities and makes us grow in a mature love; not simply the love of feelings or blood but the Christian love that makes us to resemble our Father God.

Hatred is the worst disease, a kind of illness that produces death, death of the spirit and of the heart.

Hating people is like burning down your own house to get rid of a rat" (H. Emerson)

Jesus invites us to grow in our maturity of love by opening our heart to those we encounter along our way, the ones we like and the ones we do not like. Then, people will recognize us as his disciples.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) When people look at my life, can they see me as Jesus' disciple?
- 2) How can I concretely love the ones I like and the ones I do not like today?

Wednesday, 17th June

2 Kings 2:1, 6-14, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them; I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. 'When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'

Pleasing people or God?

In today's gospel, Jesus is asking us about our motivations. What is the motivation we have when we help someone, give alms or attend religious activities? Are we concerned with the opinions of others or even with our own self-image, thinking that we are better than others? Or do we act from our heart, as an expression of our love for God and people?

Surely all of us have the experience of trying to please people and ending up frustrated because many times the outcome is the opposite. Rather, if we try to act out of love, sometimes the receivers may not appreciate our good deeds but God who sees our heart will give us his gift of peace and inner joy. Human reward does not last; people may applaud us for a while and criticize us later. One day we can be very good and the next day we are terribly bad according to someone's opinion. We human beings have a very fickle mind and are difficult to please. But our behaviour does not have to be conditioned to the likes or dislikes of those around us. Rather we need to have solid values that make us act out of our Christian convictions; then we will be *"like the tree that grow beside a stream and bear fruit at the right time, whose leaves do not dry up"* (Ps 1:3)

Let Jesus be our reason and motivation in all our actions!

Thursday, 18th June

Sirach 48: 1-14, Matthew 6:7-15

Jesus said to his disciples, 'In your prayers do not babble as the pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So you should pray like this: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the evil one. Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.'

Our Father in heaven

Today Jesus teaches us how to pray, following his own prayer. He is a person of prayer who has a personal relationship with God his

Father. This is what he wants us to become too, people of prayer who relate with God our Father.

Our Father knows what is in our heart; why then, should we express to him our feelings, our needs? This is because when we tell our needs to God, we ourselves become aware of them and we open our heart to his presence of peace and love... No, there is no need for many words, because words are poor expressions of the activity of our heart, and he knows what is going on. We just need to open ourselves to his presence and trust that He will give us what He knows will be truly good for us.

The Our Father is the universal prayer that summarizes our relationship with the one who has created us out of love and from whom we depend totally. Today, Jesus invites us to live this prayer concretely in our everyday life.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is prayer a top priority in my daily life?
- 2) How can I live out the Lord's Prayer today?

Friday, 19th June, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Deuteronomy 7:6-11, 1 John 4:7-16, Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Learn from the heart of Jesus

Today, Jesus is calling each of us who labour and seek rest to 'come' to him. He draws us close to his heart in order to enlarge our hearts, bend all what is rigid in us so as to empower us with his love. Jesus invites us to 'come' in order that we might go and love others with his same love.

Our Christian faith is about love. It is not easy for us to love with Jesus' love. That is why Jesus himself says, 'Learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart.' He, our Master and Teacher, will patiently show us how to love and serve. We might not be bright pupils in this aspect or even play truants, but he will never give up on us. He loves us and wants our hearts to be as big as his.

'You have to learn from the Heart of Jesus. That is why Jesus said: 'Learn of me'- not from books. The heart of Jesus is an open heart. Spend your time there... It is not an ordinary school or a boarding school or a school of examination, but it is a school of Jesus where you come to learn and to know the heart of Jesus- where the teachers are his Mother and he. What have we to learn? To be meek and humble; if we are meek and humble, we will learn to pray. If we learn to pray, we will belong to Jesus. If we belong to Jesus we will learn to believe and if we believe we will learn to love, and if we love we will learn to serve.' (Mother Teresa)

Let us contemplate on Jesus' heart, the heart that loves each one of us with a personal and faithful love. Let us enter into his heart and listen to his voice calling us, 'Come and learn from me.'

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation for me today?

Saturday, 20th June, Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary

2 Chronicles 24:17-25, Luke 2:41-51

Every year Jesus' parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When they were on their way home after the feast, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was with the caravan, and it was only after a day's journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. Three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, 'My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.' 'Why were you looking for me?' he replied 'Did you not know that I must be busy with my Father's affairs?' But they did not understand what he meant. He then went down with them and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart.

Imitating the heart of Mary

Have we ever wonder about the heart Mary? Is it a treasure box with many memories and experiences? Is it a heart full of trust and love for God? How can our hearts imitate Mary's heart?

The heart is where we process everything we live. Mary processed everything she lived that she did not understand. She did not complain or lose faith; instead she meditated and asked God for light and pondered on it. This was because she knew that God knew better and that, one day, she would see clearly the meaning of her life.

Sometimes we process things in our mind and we try to use reason alone. We think. We reason. When we do not understand or we do not like what we see, it produces in us disbelief or frustration. To ponder in our heart, like Mary, is not simply to use feelings, but to involve our love: our love for God and people. Love that produces trust. Love that knows there are many things beyond our understanding but still chooses to embrace unwavering hope.

Mary, our mother, teaches us how to bring to our heart every experience we live in order to ponder it with the trust and love of God, so that it becomes part of our life and it helps us to integrate everything we live in our lives

Sunday, 21st June, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary time

Jeremiah 20:10-13, Romans 5:12-15, Matthew 10:26-33

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not be afraid of them therefore. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows. So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

Fear not

'Do not be afraid ...There is no need to be afraid'

Why did Jesus keep telling His disciples not to be afraid?

This was because Jesus knew that His disciples would face persecution that would shake them. They would even face death for their faith. Thus, Jesus wanted to tell them that they should never let fear stop them from proclaiming and shouting the Good News from the housetops, even in the face of danger.

Today, many continue to be persecuted simply because they are Christians. Let us pray for those persecuted for their faith that God may give them the courage of fidelity.

For us, who are not facing any persecution for our faith, we are also invited to hold onto the words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid..." as we face our own challenges and struggles. We do not need to be afraid because God is with us and His unfailing love will sustain us through and through.

"We face so many challenges in life: poverty, distress, humiliation, the struggle for justice, persecutions, the difficulty of daily conversion, the effort to remain faithful to our call to holiness, and many others. But if we open the door to Jesus and allow him to be part of our lives, if we share our joys and sorrows with him, then we will experience the peace and joy that only God, who is infinite love, can give." (Pope Francis)

May we never let any hardship of life, and even conflicts and persecutions, to make us falter in our following of Jesus. Let Jesus be part of our lives so that we can walk on this journey of life without fear.

Questions for reflection:

1) What is my greatest fear? What is Jesus' invitation to me as I listen to His Word?

Monday, 22nd June, Ss. John Fisher and Thomas More

2 Kings 17:5-8, 13-15, 18, Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; because the judgements you give are the judgements you will get, and the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own? How dare you say to your brother, "Let me take the splinter out of your eye", when all the time there is a plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.'

Free ourselves from judging

This is a very common experience which we all have, we are brought up with the societal norm to critically assess someone and be assessed in return. In school, we are assessed academically and for our conduct. At work, we are appraised by our managers and our customers give us service satisfaction grades. Needless to say, we are also being critically assessed by our loved ones, knowingly or unknowingly. And when we are unable to meet the other person's expectations, one can imagine the consequences.

Jesus knows our humanity, our tendencies to judge each other critically and our pride. Jesus understands how we react to our unspoken expectations on each other and how we can hurt each other in the process. Despite of this, Jesus continues to love us for who we are, with these weaknesses. He invites us to be charitable to ourselves and to each other, by first reflecting if we could meet these unspoken expectations, before applying them on another person.

In understanding and accepting who we really are in humility, we will also be able to let go of these expectations that bind ourselves and others down, that do not free each other to be authentically who we are.

With a grateful heart who has received God's unconditional love, let us pray to Jesus to teach us how to love each other with the same quality of love which we have experienced from Him.

'How would your life be different if...You stopped making negative judgmental assumptions about people you encounter? Let today be the day...You look for the good in everyone you meet and respect their journey.' (Steve Maraboli)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I look at others with love, not judgement?

Tuesday, 23rd June

2 Kings 19:9-11, 14-21, 31-35, 36, Matthew 7:6,12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces. So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets. Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.'

Rule of thumb

There was once a Chinese girl named Li-li who got married and lived with her mother-in-law. Since the mother-in-law was obnoxious, Li-li decided to kill her. Li-li went to her doctor to get slow-acting poison.

The doctor said, "Just so that people don't suspect you, treat your mother-in-law very nice, as you'd like to be treated." So Li-li was nice to her mother-in-law as she slipped a little poison into her food each day. Now a funny thing happened: the two started getting along much better and became best friends. So Li-li went back to the doctor and said, "I now love my mother-in-law and don't want to kill her; please give me something to counteract the poison." The doctor replied, "I gave you ordinary vitamins; the only poison was in your attitude." (Anonymous)

Jesus gives us the golden rule: "So always treat others as you would like them to treat you."

Jesus invites us to actively do for others what we would want others to do for us. If we want to be loved, we must first give love to others. If we want to be treated with respect, we must treat others with greater respect. If we want to be understood, we must first try to open ourselves to understand others' mindset and viewpoint. Let this rule be the basis for all our actions today!

Question for reflection:

1) "So always treat others as you would like them to treat you." How can I apply this concretely to my life today?

Wednesday, 24th June, Nativity of St. John the Baptist

Isaiah 49:1-6, Acts 13:22-26, Luke 1:57-66, 80

Meanwhile the time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy. Now on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family

has that name', and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John'. And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him.

Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit matured. And he lived out in the wilderness until the day he appeared openly to Israel.

His name is John

Today, we celebrate the solemnity of the birthday of St John the Baptist. St John the Baptist is indeed a miracle child, for Zechariah and Elizabeth gave birth to him at a very old age. So you can imagine the huge amount of joy and love, with which the whole extended family and the neighbours, received St John on the day of his birth and later watched him grow into a matured man from his childhood.

Everyone who saw the miracle, experienced God's works in the various events of St John the Baptist's birth and childhood, were filled with awe. They treasured these experiences in their heart and often pondered over them, wondering what significance do they hold? It was a sign of God's presence in St John the Baptist and God has a plan for this child. Though everyone do not yet know or understand God's future for St John the Baptist, they were very much in anticipation for something good.

Doesn't this sound familiar? We have also experienced God's wonders and mysteries in our own lives as our lives unfold from the unknown in each moment. Though we do not know where God is leading us or how He will unfold our lives in the next

moment, we can be sure God is very present in us as He was present in St John the Baptist. And to see and understand by faith where God is bringing us in the next steps of our lives, we need to treasure and ponder over these experiences in our hearts.

Let us pray to be able to perceive more and more how God is working in our lives and to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's movements, so that we can continue to walk in faith with joy and peace.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) When did I experience God's wonders and mysteries in my life?
- 2) How can I perceive God's presence today?

Thursday, 25th June

2 Kings 24:8-17, Matthew 7:21-29

Jesus said to his disciples: 'It is not those who say to me, "Lord, Lord", who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. When the day comes many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?" Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me, you evil men!' 'Therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and hurled themselves against that house, and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had!' Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and his teaching made a deep impression on the people because he taught them with authority, and not like their own scribes.'

A house on rock

What distracts us and leads us away from God? We yearn to live a close relationship with God, but often we find ourselves being lured away by the many attractions around us, by the pleasures which the world offers us, and then we turn away from listening to God and to being faithful to live out His will for us. Why do we falter easily? For some of us, perhaps we are not putting aside enough time to pray, to listen to the Word of God. For some of us who listened to God's words and received lights for a conversion, perhaps we find it difficult to surrender to God's will, to be faithful to live out what we have heard. For some of us who tried to do God's will on our own strength, perhaps we are struggling, losing steam and perseverance in continuing to follow God in this demanding discipleship.

No matter which stage we are in, Jesus is clear that if we are to be his disciples, then we need to listen and act on his words, his teachings. We are to build our house, our life, on the rock, and this rock is Jesus. Jesus is, in fact, asking us to allow him to build and mould our lives in him as the master builder, the architect. Imagine God designing and building our life into a magnificent structure, with the many possibilities and potential.

It gives us a great sense of stability to see Jesus wanting to be the rock where our life is founded on. On him, we can draw inspiration and strength on a daily basis to be faithful to God's call.

Let us pray today for the humility to surrender to Jesus as the master builder of our lives and allow him to be our rock, our foundation.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which one do I identify myself with: the sensible person who built his house on rock or the stupid person who built his house on sand?
- 2) What is Jesus' message to me today?

Friday, 26th June

2 Kings 25: 1-12, Matthew 8:1-4

After Jesus had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. A leper now came up and bowed low in front of him. 'Sir,' he said 'if you want to, you can cure me.' Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, 'Of course I want to! Be cured!' And his leprosy was cured at once. Then Jesus said to him, 'Mind you do not tell anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering prescribed by Moses, as evidence for them'.

I want to! Be cured!

Leprosy, in the time of Jesus, was a slow and painful killer. Lepers not only suffered from physical pain, but also from the emotional scars of being rejected by their families, friends and society. Moreover, the people generally believed that lepers were cursed by God because of their sins.

A leper came up and bowed low in front of Jesus. "Sir, if you want to, you can cure me" Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, 'Of course I want to! Be cured!'

The leper took the risk to draw close to Jesus. He somehow trusted that Jesus would not reject him but would help him. In fact, Jesus did the unthinkable thing. He stretched out His hands and touched the leper. He was not afraid because His heart was filled with love for this suffering man and wanted the best for him.

We do not have leprosy today. However, we do suffer from the spiritual leprosy of anger, lusts, greed, jealousy, pride and envy that disfigure us and separate us from God and others.

Do we dare to go close to Jesus and humbly ask Him to heal us? Jesus desires nothing more than our trust in Him. He tells us today, "I want to heal you. I want to love you. Are you willing?"

Today, let us be loved by Jesus. When we allow Jesus to touch our misery, we can then have the courage to go out and touch others in their miseries.

"Sometimes we are tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length. Yet Jesus wants us to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others. He hopes that we will stop looking for those personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune and instead enter into the reality of other people's lives and know the power of tenderness. Whenever we do so, our lives become wonderfully complicated and we experience intensely what it is to be a people, to be part of a people." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) Have I experienced the power of God's tenderness in my life?

Saturday, 27th June, St. Cyril of Alexandria

Lamentations 2:2, 10-14, 18-19, Matthew 8:5-17

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said 'my servant is lying at home paralysed, and in great pain.' 'I will come myself and cure him' said Jesus. The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself,

and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man: Go, and he goes; to another: Come here, and he comes; to my servant: Do this, and he does it. 'When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you solemnly, nowhere in Israel have I found faith like this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west to take their places with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven; but the subjects of the kingdom will be turned out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.' And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go back, then; you have believed, so let this be done for you'. And the servant was cured at that moment. And going into Peter's house Jesus found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. That evening they brought him many who were possessed by devils. He cast out the spirits with a word and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: He took our sicknesses away and carried our diseases for us.

A heart of faith

Jesus was amazed at the extraordinary faith of this Roman centurion. He, a non- Jew, asked Jesus for help to heal his servant. He trusted that Jesus would not fail him. His faith in Jesus was so strong that he believed that just one word from Jesus would be enough to heal his servant.

What is faith?

"Faith is believing in this love of God that is never lacking in the face of human wickedness, in the face of evil and death, but is capable of transforming every kind of slavery, giving us the possibility of salvation. Having faith, then, is meeting this "You", God, who supports me and grants me the promise of an indestructible love that not only aspires to eternity but gives it; it means entrusting myself to God with the attitude of a child, who knows well that all his difficulties,

all his problems are understood in the “you” of his mother. And this possibility of salvation through faith is a gift that God offers all men and women. I think we should meditate more often — in our daily life, marked by problems and at times by dramatic situations — on the fact that believing in a Christian manner means my trusting abandonment to the profound meaning that sustains me and the world, that meaning that we are unable to give to each other but can only receive as a gift, and that is the foundation on which we can live without fear. And we must be able to proclaim this liberating and reassuring certainty of faith with words and show it by living our life as Christians” (Pope Benedict XVI)

Faith is a gift from God that requires us to respond to Him. God will never impose Himself on us. He allows us to say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to His gift of faith. When we say ‘Yes’ to Him and entrust ourselves to God, we live life with a certain hope, a quiet joy because we know that God will never abandon us.

Let us never lose our faith in God but keep trusting in Him who loves us the most.

“God didn’t promise days without pain, laughter without sorrow, or sun without rain, but He did promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears, and light for the way. If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it.” (Anonymous)

Question for reflection:

1) How can my faith in God mark the way I live the ups and downs of my life?

Sunday, 28th June, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16, Romans 6:3-4, 8-11, Matthew 10:37-42

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a holy man will have a holy man's reward. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.'

Are we ready to embrace the cost of discipleship?

To be Jesus' disciple means more than just going to Church on Sundays and attending mass or serving in parish groups. Discipleship entails total commitment and love to Jesus. In fact, Jesus demands that our love for Him surpasses that of our love for family and friends. There are moments when our family members and friends become obstacles to living out our commitment to Jesus. In such moments, we are reminded to choose Jesus first rather than compromise our faith in Him in order to please the people around us.

As Jesus' disciples, we are called to live our life following His footsteps of love. Often we think that we are required to do big, heroic and extraordinary feats. However, Jesus invites us to look at discipleship as loving in the small ordinary moments of each day. To be a disciple starts when we open our heart to give 'a cup of cold water' to the little one. When we give a listening ear to a friend

in need, or spend quality time with a loved one, or visit an elderly relative, etc., we are following Jesus in His footsteps.

Self-giving love is made up of small gestures of kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, generosity and attentiveness.

We might not be able to change the whole world and solve the crisis of humanity. However, we can give a cup of cold water in some places and make a difference to someone.

Today, let us listen to Jesus as He calls us again, "Come, follow Me."

Question for reflection:

1) How can I follow Jesus in His footsteps?

Monday, 29th June, Ss. Peter and Paul

Acts 12:1-11, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18, Matthew 16:13-19

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.'

A response from the Heart

There is a story that goes like this: A lover pressed his suit unsuccessfully for many months, suffering the atrocious pains of

rejection. Finally his sweet-heart yielded. "Come to such and such a place, at such and such an hour," she said.

So the lover finally found himself seated beside his beloved. He pulled out a sheaf of love letters that he had written to her over the months. They were passionate expressions of pain and burning desire. He began to read them aloud. The minutes passed and he read on and on. Finally the woman burst out, "What kind of a blockhead are you? Those letters fell of your longing. Well, here I am with you at last, and you are lost in your ludicrous letters."

In prayer, we can be like the talkative lover who keeps talking and talking without any awareness of who we have with us. Today, Jesus asks us a very personal question that needs our personal response: 'Who do you say I am?'

Jesus wants our answer to come from a living encounter with Him today, not from books we read or our own logics we have in our heads. We need to stay in silence and experience his love so that we can truly give our answer of who he is for us at this point of our faith life.

Question for reflection:

1) 'Who do you say I am?': What is my answer to Jesus' question?

Tuesday, 30th June, First Martyrs of the Church of Rome

Amos 3:1-8, 4:11-12, Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus got into the boat followed by his disciples. Without warning a storm broke over the lake, so violent that the waves were breaking right over the boat. But he was asleep. So they went to him and woke

him saying, 'Save us, Lord, we are going down!' And he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened, you men of little faith?' And with that he stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and all was calm again. The men were astounded and said, 'Whatever kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him.'

Perfect trust

In today's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples got into a boat and went on a journey on the lake. Along the way, they encountered a fierce storm. The disciples were terrified to the point that they thought that their boat would capsize.

Reflecting on this passage brings consolation to us. This is because we realize that it does not mean that when Jesus is in our boat, in our life, we will never experience storms of difficulties. It does not mean that our life would be free from all pains, brokenness and disappointments. Jesus was in the boat with His disciples but they still had to face the storm.

Storms will come along our way as we journey through life. Yet, our greatest comfort is that Jesus is in our boat, in our life. He is with us no matter how great the storm is.

Sometimes, we might not sense His presence and think that He is 'asleep' and does not bother or care. Jesus knows. He calls us to trust in Him. Jesus slept on despite the storm because He had deep trust in God His Father. His trust was so great that He was able to find rest in His Father's love. In the same way that Jesus remained sleeping in the midst of the fierce storm, we are also called to rest in His presence when we find ourselves faced with broken relationships, crisis at work, family problems, health issues, etc. We can trust that Jesus will never let us down. He will give us His peace and give us the strength to carry on.

“O Christ Jesus, when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness, give us the sense of Your presence, Your love and Your strength. Help us to have perfect trust in Your protecting love and strengthening power, so that nothing may frighten or worry us, for, living close to You, we shall see Your hand, Your purpose, Your will through all things.” (Prayer for Trust in Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I have a tendency to allow my personal storms in life to overwhelm me that I become fearful? What prevents me from trusting more in Jesus?

Wednesday, 1st July, St. Athanasius

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

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

Pigs and Demons

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

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

What about us?

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

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

Question for reflection:

1) How can I learn to see the events in my life today through eyes of faith?

Thursday, 2nd July

Amos 7:10-17, Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his own town. Then some people appeared, bringing him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Courage, my child, your sins are forgiven'. And at this some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming'. Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, 'Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' - he said to the paralytic - 'get up, and pick up your bed and go off home'. And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for giving such power to men.

Your sins are forgiven

A paralytic man was brought to Jesus for healing. Jesus, looking at the faith of the friends, told the paralytic, "Courage, my child, your sins are forgiven." The paralytic man expected healing instead Jesus forgave his sins. Why did Jesus forgive the sins of this man and not just heal him from his physical infirmity?

Jesus saw the heart of this man. He knew that the man needed to be forgiven for his sins that prevented him from living life with deep peace and true freedom. Jesus' love reached out to the paralytic man and He did the most unthinkable thing by healing him spiritually. The Pharisees, however, accused Jesus of blaspheming. For them, only God could rightfully forgive sins. Jesus, by forgiving sins, had taken the place of God. In order to show that Jesus had authority to forgive sins, He healed the man from his physical infirmity. Interestingly, Jesus knew the wicked thoughts in the Pharisees' hearts but continued to hope that they, after witnessing

the many miracles and listening to His teaching, would be open to receive Him. However, their hearts were hardened and they could not praise God for what they saw. The people, with their simple faith, saw the miracle and praised God. Today, let us, like the paralytic man's friends, bring our family and friends to Jesus so that His healing love can touch them and make them live their lives fully.

Let us also never get tired of going to Jesus and knowing that He has the power to heal us from everything that makes us suffer from paralysis within us. We need to trust that His love desires the best for us. Lastly, may our hearts hold thoughts of goodness and love that make us rejoice at the actions of God in our life and the life of others.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' message to me in this time of prayer?

Friday, 3rd July, St. Thomas, Apostle

Ephesians 2:19-22, John 20:24-29

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe'. Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

Doubt no longer!

"Dearly beloved, what do you see in these events? Do you really believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not by chance but in God's providence. In a marvellous way God's mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his master's body, should heal our wounds of disbelief. The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened. So the disciple who doubted, then felt Christ's wounds, becomes a witness to the reality of the resurrection." (St. Gregory the Great)

Today, we can identify ourselves with Thomas. Though it is the greatest challenge to live by faith, it is also the very foundation of our Christian life.

Thomas insisted on touching the wounds of Jesus in order to believe. When the Risen Jesus gave him the opportunity to personally encounter Him and touch His wounds, Thomas cried out those beautiful words, "My Lord and My God".

His encounter with His Master and Friend led him to become a living witness of his faith. Thomas became a true missionary who brought faith outside of the Roman Empire, going as far as India. He continued to touch the wounds of Jesus present in the people whom he met in his mission and gave them the healing love of Jesus.

Today, let us encounter Jesus and allow Him to heal the wounds of all our doubts so that we can be led into a deeper faith. Like St. Thomas, we cannot hold back the treasure of our faith but be

impelled to touch the wounds of disbelief and doubts in our brothers and sisters and be living witnesses of our Lord and God.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' personal invitation to me in this time of prayerful silence?

Saturday, 4th July

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

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

New Wine, New Wineskin

The disciples of John the Baptist were upset that Jesus' disciples did not fast as they did. For Jesus, His presence brought joy to the lives of His disciples in the same way the presence of the bridegroom would cause people to celebrate. There would come a time when Jesus would be taken away from them to face the sufferings of the cross, and then His disciples would grieve. However, for now, His disciples had no need to fast.

Jesus' way of doing things was different from the old norms and traditions. He wanted those who follow Him to accept openness to learn and accept new things. He did not want His disciples to have

a closed mind that holds them back from seeing the goodness of God.

Jesus used a familiar image of wineskins in order to emphasize His point. When new wine is poured into old wineskins, the inflexibility of the skins could not withstand the pressure from the gases released from the wine. Thus, the brittle skins would easily burst.

Jesus invited His listeners to be like new wineskins that are elastic and flexible. In this way, they would open themselves to learn, grow and become true people of God.

Today, Jesus is our Bridegroom whose presence brings joy to our life. He desires that we open ourselves to Him and to be surprised by the newness that He brings to our life.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I open to the actions of God in my life? What resistance do I have in being open to God?

Sunday, 5th July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Zechariah 9:9-10, Romans 8:9, 11-13, Matthew 11:25-30

At that time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

A God who comes

“Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion! Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem! See now, your king comes to you; he is victorious, he is triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will banish chariots from Ephraim and horses from Jerusalem; the bow of war will be banished. He will proclaim peace for the nations. His empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.” (Zechariah 9:9-10)

In the first reading of today, we hear the call to rejoice and shout with gladness because God makes His way to us. He is a God who yearns always to be close to us. His presence brings peace to our tired and restless hearts.

Christianity is about having a daily and intimate relationship with God. This is the point of our faith that we must never miss.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus extends the same call to us, “Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.”

The rest that Jesus gives refreshes our whole being. Thus, each time when we feel the weight of extreme anxiety as well as the pressure of work and responsibilities, we turn to Jesus and find our rest that gives inner peace.

“Our hearts were made for you God. And they shall never find rest until they find their rest in you.” (St. Augustine)

Jesus’ presence of love never burdens us but gives us the rest that we truly seek for.

Question for reflection:

1) What is the rest that I desire?

Monday, 6th July, St. Maria Goretti

Hosea 2:16:17c-18, 21-22, Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus was speaking to them, up came one of the officials, who bowed low in front of him and said, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved'. Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him. Then from behind him came a woman, who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years, and she touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, 'If I can only touch his cloak I shall be well again'. Jesus turned round and saw her; and he said to her, 'Courage, my daughter, your faith has restored you to health'. And from that moment the woman was well again. When Jesus reached the official's house and saw the flute-players, with the crowd making a commotion he said, 'Get out of here; the little girl is not dead, she is asleep'. And they laughed at him. But when the people had been turned out he went inside and took the little girl by the hand; and she stood up. And the news spread all round the countryside.

Unshakeable Faith!

Both stories, though different, have similarities too. Firstly, the two characters who were suffering are females. One of them was just twelve years old, and the other one was an older woman but she had been suffering from her illness for twelve years. Both were seriously sick. Both stories ended happily because of deep faith. The strong faith of the father as well as the woman opened the way for healing to take place.

The father pleaded with Jesus to come to his house and lay His hand on his dying daughter. He was an official from the synagogue, and thus, a very respectable Jew. Most likely, he heard the wonderful things Jesus had done, and knew that this great Prophet could work miracles for his daughter. "*Come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved!*" - such a strong statement of faith!

The woman who suffered for twelve long years from haemorrhage also heard about Jesus. She believed that Jesus could help her in the way that no other physicians could. She did not dare to approach Jesus publicly, and so, she resorted to touch His garment. She said to herself, *"If I can only touch his cloak I shall be well again"*.

Today, let us look at these two beautiful stories woven into one and learn from it a great lesson on faith. We must always look to Jesus in good times as well as bad times. We go through life with an unshakeable faith in Jesus and know that He will never abandon us.

Question for reflection:

1) How strong is my faith in Jesus?

Tuesday, 7th July

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

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

Sheep without a Shepherd

Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages. He taught, healed and stayed with the people who were most in need. Jesus

went on untiringly to be at the service of others. This was because His heart was moved when he saw that the people were harassed and dejected.

What about us? Do we place others' needs before our own?

Many times, we are self-absorbed that we fail to see the needs of others. Jesus calls us to follow His footsteps to love and serve. To love like Jesus does not depend on our moods or schedules. Whenever there is someone in need, God is there calling you to be with that person to love and serve. *"The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest."*

Today, we are the labourers sent by God to our friends, family members, colleagues, parishioners, community members, etc. We are also labourers to the strangers we meet as well as to the people we do not like. We are labourers to work for God and to bring His presence of love to all through our words and actions.

Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders for His good works. They claimed that the power of the prince of devils was working through Jesus. Likewise, when we dedicate our life to love and serve, we will surely face rejections from people who feel threatened by our goodness. We must never be afraid but continue following Jesus.

Today, we are God's labourers, ready to partner with Him in this mission of love and service. We go on from person to person, untiringly, in order to give God's love to each one.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I struggle to place the needs of others before my own?

Wednesday, 8th July

Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12, Matthew 10:1-7

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

When God calls...

"Jesus summoned his twelve disciples... These are the names of the twelve apostles"

What is a disciple? What is an apostle?

A disciple is a follower who learns from His Master. An apostle is someone who is sent on a mission in order to pass on what he/she has learnt from the Master.

Which one are we called to be - a disciple or an apostle? We cannot be apostles if we are not disciples first. Often, we regard ourselves as 'disciples' who are called to learn Jesus' teachings and ways. We forget that our discipleship must lead us to be apostles, as people actively involved in the mission of sharing the Good News.

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith,

are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples"." (Pope Francis)

In today's Gospel, Jesus called His twelve disciples to follow Him and learn from Him. At the same time, they were also called to be His apostles to spread the Good News of God's love everywhere they went. Today, it is our time to be Jesus' disciples and apostles. What are we waiting for?

Question for reflection:

1) What is my greatest challenge to live as Jesus' disciple-apostle?

Thursday, 9th July, St. Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions

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

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with a few coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the workman deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you go into, ask for someone trustworthy and

stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, let your peace descend upon it; if it does not, let your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. I tell you solemnly, on the day of Judgement it will not go as hard with the land of Sodom and Gomorrah as with that town.'

Travelling light

In today's Gospel, as Jesus sent His disciples on mission, He told them to travel light and make the spreading of God's Kingdom as their only ambition and motivation. He told them to take no gold or silver, no haversack, no spare tunic or footwear or staff. He did not want His disciples to be distracted by any worldly possessions but to live simply and to trust God to supply their needs.

What about us? Can we travel through life with no gold or silver or haversack, spare tunic, footwear or staff?

Jesus invites us to live simply and not to allow our possessions to become our greatest treasure. Many times, we tend to attach ourselves to our 'gold', 'silver' and all the other material things we have that we go through life carrying heavy burdens. When things we have or long for, have great importance and value for us, we allow them to be our Masters and depend on them for our happiness.

Jesus today invites us to travel light. Material possessions, from our money to cars to food to electronic gadgets, etc., are good as long as we use them wisely and well. Our main focus in life is to serve God, not things. We serve God by announcing that the Kingdom is close at hand. Whenever we put love into practice, the Kingdom of God is present. The Kingdom of God is made present through

concrete acts, gestures and words of love which are performed without expecting any rewards or appreciation. We reached out to the weak, the sick, the vulnerable, the needy, etc.

When we play our part in this grand mission, we receive true happiness and contentment more than our material possessions can give to us.

Today, let us ask for the grace to trust God more so that we can travel light and make the mission of God the focus of our life.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I play my part in proclaiming that God's Kingdom is close at hand?

Friday, 10th July

Hosea 14:2-10, Matthew 10:16-23

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

Sheep among wolves

"Faith is God's precious gift, which opens our mind to know and love him. He wants to enter into relationship with us and allow us to participate in his own life in order to make our life more meaningful, better and more beautiful. God loves us! Faith, however, needs to be accepted, it needs our personal response, the courage to entrust ourselves to God, to live his love and be grateful for his infinite mercy. It is a gift, not reserved for a few but offered with generosity. Everyone should be able to experience the joy of being loved by God, the joy of salvation! It is a gift that one cannot keep to oneself, but it is to be shared. If we want to keep it only to ourselves, we will become isolated, sterile and sick Christians. The proclamation of the Gospel is part of being disciples of Christ and it is a constant commitment that animates the whole life of the Church." (Pope Francis, World Mission Sunday 2013)

We are God's missionaries because we have been entrusted with the gift of sharing the joy of our faith. We need to be courageous and go out of our comfort zones to offer the gift of faith freely. Though the mission is not easy, we must never give up! Instead, we need to count more on Jesus, less on our own strengths and capabilities.

There are 'wolves' out there that will retaliate when we speak to them about Jesus. There will be people, even family members, who might not understand or welcome our faith. Yet, Jesus continues to send us out like sheep among wolves. Like the sheep, we are constantly being guided and loved by the Good Shepherd. Like the

serpent, we need to be shrewder in discerning well how to deal with people and situations. Like the dove, we too must learn to be peaceful at all times as we go about our work as God's missionaries.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from sharing this beautiful gift of faith with others?

Saturday, 11th July, St. Benedict

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

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

Do not be afraid!

"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they not say of his household?"

Jesus warns us that if we truly want to spread and live the Good News, we must expect rejection and persecutions too. Jesus Himself was called 'Beelzebul' and rejected for His teachings and way of life. In the face of suffering for the Gospel's sake, we must imitate Jesus who did not exchange insults for insults or return violence for violence. Even when we try to do good to others, but in return, get hostility and unfriendliness, we must still not stop or give up. Rather, we must always go on and face the consequences that come with living His mission of love.

We have the courage to freely talk about Jesus with others, as others talk freely about their favourite food or their pets. We must have no fear to do acts of love especially to those who are most in need of our help.

'Do not be afraid...'

This is Jesus' message to each of us today. We must not be afraid because God is the one taking care of us. He will never fail us because He is our Father.

Question for reflection:

1) Have I experienced being misunderstood or rejected for my Christian faith and my values?

Sunday, 12th July, Fifteen Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 55:10-11, Romans 8:18-23, Matthew 13:1-23

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables. He said, 'Imagine a sower going out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up straight away, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Listen, anyone who has ears!'

The extravagant sower

Jesus, in today's Gospel, told a parable regarding a sower who went out and sowed seeds by scattering them anywhere and everywhere. The seeds fell on the edge of the path, on patches of rocks, on thorns as well as on rich soil. Those seeds on the path ended up being eaten by birds. The ones that fell on the rocks sprouted but later withered. The seeds that were on thorny ground grew but were choked by weeds. The ones that fell on rich soil produced rich and fruitful crop.

As we reflect on this passage, let us first ask ourselves: Which type of seed are we? How open are we to welcome the seed of God's Word?

We are called to have good soil in our life so that we can welcome the seed and allow God's Word to bear fruit in our life. As Christians,

we must not remain fruitless at the end of our life. We are here to be fruitful in our Christian living by rooting ourselves in the Word of God and allowing God to influence the way we live and love. We are Christians with good soil ever ready to listen and root ourselves in God as the foundation of our life.

In this passage, we are not simply called to identify ourselves with the different grounds. We are constantly invited by Jesus to be the farmer who goes out repeatedly to sow God's Word to those around us. We must never get tired of sowing undeterred by birds, weeds and sun.

Let us not settle for anything less but strive always to be good soil and at the same time sowers of God's Word.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I strive to be good soil that listens to God's Word and puts it into practice? For whom can I sow God's Word today?

Monday, 13th July

Isaiah 1:10-17, Matthew 10:34-11:1

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household. Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds

his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a holy man will have a holy man's reward. 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.' When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

Loving Jesus above all

Jesus is the Prince of Peace who comes to bring divisions among people. Why?

When we strive to love Jesus above all by living His values and ways, it is possible that our family members and friends might not understand or even support us. What are we going to do then? Will we forsake Jesus and please our family members by doing what they want us to do?

"For a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies are the members of his own household." (Micah 7:6)

The love for Jesus leads us to choose Him to be the first in our lives. This does not mean that we hate our family members and friends when they oppose our way of life. Jesus does not teach us to hate, but to love. In fact, when we love Jesus above all, we will love our family members and friends with a mature and pure love that is free from expectations and fears.

Do we allow Jesus to disturb our life?

We can no longer sit on the fence anymore. Rather, we need to choose to follow Jesus radically or to remain in our comfort zones. When we choose Jesus as our number 1, we are called to have His same goal, which is to love by being kind and generous to the needs of those who are most in need.

Today, let us love Jesus with our whole heart, mind and strength.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I love Jesus enough to take on the consequences of following Him closely?

Tuesday, 14th July

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

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

Repent!

The people in the towns saw, experienced and witnessed the many miracles that Jesus performed. Yet, they did not turn away from their sins. Why? They were indifferent to what they had witnessed.

Tyre, Sidon and Sodom were cities from the Old Testament whose people were wicked and immoral. On the other hand, the peoples

of the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida were not wicked to the extent of those from Tyre, Sidon and Sodom but they were indifferent to Jesus' teachings and the miracles He performed. These people, even after hearing and seeing Jesus, continued living their lives as before.

What about us? Are we the Chorazin and Bethsaida of today? Are we the Tyre, Sidon and Sodom of today? Do we pray daily with the Scriptures, do spiritual readings, etc. but continue to be indifferent and are not bothered to change our bad habits and ways of life that prevent us from really following Christ? Do we have ears to listen?

A Japanese proverb states, *'The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists.'*

Let us be like the bamboo plant that is flexible and bends in accordance to all that Jesus speaks to us in our life each day. Jesus is with us today! Let His presence make a difference in our life!

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from changing and living a life according to the ways of Jesus?

Wednesday, 15th July, St. Bonaventure

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

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

Walking in the Light of Humility

Jesus is not against those who are intellectually learned and clever. Rather, He is referring to those who are full of pride because of their intelligence.

In today's Gospel, Jesus was referring to the Pharisees and religious leaders who rejected Him because of their pride. They regarded Jesus as a lowly carpenter from Nazareth as well as a wandering preacher, and thus they hardened themselves against Him. They, on the other hand, held themselves at high esteem and thought that they were experts with regard to God and religion.

Jesus praised those who humbled themselves to follow Him. They were without pretence and trusted in Jesus and His message. Jesus rejoiced over these simple- hearted people.

Today, Jesus calls us to have child-like simplicity and humility to allow Him to lead us into a deeper intimate relationship with God.

It is through Jesus that we can come to know God as our loving Father. In Jesus, we see the heart of God who is deeply and completely in love with each one of us. Let us never get tired of drawing close to Jesus and allowing Him to speak to us constantly revealing to us about God and bringing us into a personal relationship with Him.

"There is no room for God in him who is full of himself." (Martin Buber)

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from having Humility as my friend and companion this day?

Thursday, 16th July, Our Lady of Mount Carmel

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

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

Find rest in Me

Are you stressed with the busyness of life?

We are always busy with many things every day. We tend to have this urgency to go, go, go and seem to have more things added to our plates. Along the way, we sense a yearning in us to connect again, to find deeper meaning again.

Today, let us listen to the gentle voice of Jesus to each one of us, "Come to me... I will give you rest."

Listening to these words, we find in Jesus the source of our real rest and peace.

"May there be peace within

May we trust God that we are exactly where we are meant to be.

May we not forget the infinite possibilities born of faith.

May we use the gifts we have received to share God's love with others.

May we be confident knowing we are children of God

Let this presence settle in our bones,

and allow our soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen." (St. Therese of Child Jesus)

Let this prayer of St. Therese be ours today as we find time to pause and to be with Jesus in prayer.

Jesus, our Friend and Companion, desires to carry our heavy burdens of life with us. We need to trust that we are never alone as we walk through each happy and sad moment of life.

Let us enter into a quiet time of prayer and allow Jesus' words to comfort us and give us the inner rest and peace we truly need.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my response to Jesus' gentle invitation?

Friday, 17th July

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

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

Mercy, not sacrifice

In today's Gospel, the Pharisees saw that Jesus' disciples were picking ears of corn and eating them. Immediately, they turned to Jesus and blamed Him for not stopping His disciples from working on a Sabbath.

Jesus was not affected by their criticism. Instead, He reminded them that King David and his followers ate the loaves meant only for priests because they were hungry. For Jesus, true obedience of the Law should be motivated by the spirit of mercy, not simply following Sabbath regulations.

"And if you had understood the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless"

Today, Jesus invites us to truly know what God wants from us. He wants us to show mercy to others in their needs.

"Mercy is the heart of God. It must also be the heart of the members of the one great family of his children: a heart which beats all the more strongly wherever human dignity – as a reflection of the face of God in his creatures – is in play. Jesus tells us that love for others – foreigners, the sick, prisoners, the homeless, even our enemies – is the yardstick by which God will judge our actions. Our eternal destiny depends on this. It is not surprising that the Apostle Paul tells the Christians of Rome to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (cf. Rom 12:15), or that he encourages the Corinthians to take up collections as a sign of solidarity with the suffering members of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 16:2-3). And Saint John writes: "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother or sister in need yet refuses help, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 Jn 3:17; cf. Jas 2:15-16)." (Pope Francis)

Let us be aware that we need to exercise mercy towards our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. This is how we will please God today!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Saturday, 18th July

Micah 2:1-5, Matthew 12:14-21

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

Living from the inside

The Pharisees gathered like vultures to bid their time and wait for the right opportunity to strike. They did not want simply to oppose Jesus, but they longed to get rid of him totally. What did Jesus do? He went away from the place and he continued loving, healing, giving hope and showing mercy to all. He faced this crisis in his life, not by running away, but with boldness and determination.

Matthew quoted the passage of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 42: 1-4, in order to show that Jesus is truly the Chosen One, the Son of God.

Jesus came not to seek glory or human praises, but to do the will of God his Father. In face of sufferings and rejections, he would not run away but faced each crisis with courage, trust and peace. Jesus' boldness and determination to do good came from his inner life of prayer.

We are children of God, like Jesus. We are called to live each moment of our life, the good and the bad, with God our Father from within. Many times, we have many negativisms and tend to look at situations, people and even ourselves with guilt, anger, regrets, etc. When we do so, it is then so easy to crumble when crisis comes our way. Let us face life with all its joys and pains with God from within, and continue to be courageous and determined to go out and do good.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How do I face the challenges in my life?
- 2) How is Jesus inviting me to live today?

Sunday, 19th July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 12:13,16-19, Romans 8, 26-27, Matthew 13:24-30 (shorter version)

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

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

Weeds among wheat

The key words in today’s parable are ‘darnel’ and ‘weeds’. Jesus knew that his listeners, who were mostly people from the agricultural world, would listen and understand the subtle danger of weeds. There are certain weeds that look like wheat when it is growing. These weeds would tangle themselves with the wheat and slowly destroy the plant.

What does this parable mean to me?

Many times, we look at a group of people in church or in a parish group or in our own community and we try to ‘help’ God to identify the weeds that He might have missed out.

Let us admit it - we love to judge and point our finger at anyone who does not measure up to our standards. We want to keep our family, our community, workplace and social group ‘weed-free’. We think that we know who the weeds and wheat are. Looking at ourselves, we have no problem in recognising the weeds of anger, lust, laziness, pride, jealousy, etc. within us. We are eager to get rid of the weeds and we want ourselves to be ‘weed-free’ so that we can be flawless and perfect.

Today, Jesus invites us to be patient and open ourselves to allow God to prune away any obstacles/weeds that can prevent the good seeds of His Word to grow in our lives. However, we need to let God work in His own time and in His own way! Who knows that the ‘weeds’ we see around us and in us might be in our life for the purpose of leading us to deeper growth, deeper trust and deeper experience of God’s merciful love!

Question for reflection:

1) What strikes me in this time of prayer?

Monday, 20th July, St. Apollinaris

Micah 6:1-4, 6-8, Matthew 12:38-42

Some of the scribes and Pharisees spoke up. 'Master,' they said 'we should like to see a sign from you.' Jesus replied, 'It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. On Judgement day the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation and condemn it, because when Jonah preached they repented; and there is something greater than Jonah here. On Judgement day the Queen of the South will rise up with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here.'

Open my eyes to see you, Jesus!

In today's Gospel, some scribes and Pharisees approached Jesus and asked for a sign. They wanted Jesus to prove if He was truly from God even though they had seen Him performing miracle after miracle. Their hardened hearts could not accept Jesus. Their stubborn pride blinded them to recognise God's presence in Jesus.

Jesus knew that no matter how many impressive miracles or wonderful teachings He gave, these people would be skeptical.

What about us? Are we looking for signs or fixing our eyes on Jesus?

Once again, we need to ask for simplicity to see and recognise Jesus in the situations we are in, in the silent time of prayer, in the people we meet each day. May we be humbler to know that there is indeed something greater than Solomon, greater than ourselves, present here. Jesus is here. Let us approach Him with open and humble hearts today!

"That we need only to recognize God intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done." (Brother Lawrence)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more open to see and recognise Jesus?

Tuesday, 21st July

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

Jesus was still speaking to the crowds when his mother and his brothers appeared; they were standing outside and were anxious to have a word with him. But to the man who told him this Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.'

Here are my mother and my brothers

Family- is where we get support and love. It is a blessing to have people whom we can love and be loved.

Yet, Jesus today reminds us that as Christians, we do not only have the privilege of having a physical family but also a spiritual family. Jesus, in the passage, did not disown his mother and brothers publicly. Rather, he was using this opportunity to teach a lesson to his listeners. He wanted them (and us) to understand that those who listen to the Word of God and do the will of God are his mothers, brothers, sisters.

We do not only have our own physical families where we can find love and support. We also have a bigger family- our spiritual family with whom we can enjoy countless brothers and sisters who are all trying to live each day doing God's will. We are united in God's household when we live each day searching and doing his will.

What is God's will? God's will is to love Him with all our hearts, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves. When we love, we enter into the household of God.

Today, let us open our heart and see that there are so many people who need our friendship, forgiveness, encouragement, etc. This is the will of God that we can love him in others, even those whom we cannot get along with.

Jesus, you are my Brother and you have shown me how to do the will of God with the way you lived your life. Open my ears to hear you! Open my heart to love you, and others!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there anyone whom I find it hard to love? Who is this?
- 2) As part of God's household, how can I open my heart to love and accept this person?

Wednesday, 22nd July, St. Mary Magdalene

Song of Songs 3:1-4b , John 20:1-2, 11-18

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.' Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away' she replied 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him'. Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' - which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene, the Apostle of the Apostles

Mary Magdalene, as St. Thomas Aquinas so lovingly called her the "Apostle of the Apostles", was the faithful disciple of Jesus who followed Him even to the cross. On that Easter morning, she encountered her Risen Lord and was the first to announce the joyful message of Easter to the rest of the disciples.

"It is the Lord who gives us the grace, to all, to be able to say with our lives, 'I have seen the Lord,' not because he has appeared, but because 'I have seen him in my heart.' And this should be the testimony of our lives: 'I live this way because I have seen the Lord.'" (Pope Francis)

As we celebrate the Feast of Mary Magdalene, the 'Apostle of the Apostles', let her joy of announcing the Good News be an example for us to go out and say, "I have seen the Lord in my heart, and so I say this, I do this. I have experienced His presence in my life, and so I live this way, I love this way."

Through our words and actions, we can bring the Good News of God's love to each person we meet each day. May we never think that mission is not for us!

"All of us are invited to "go out" as missionary disciples, each generously offering their talents, creativity, wisdom and experience in order to bring the message of God's tenderness and compassion to the entire human family. By virtue of the missionary mandate, the Church cares for those who do not know the Gospel, because she wants everyone to be saved and to experience the Lord's love. She "is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel" (Misericordiae Vultus, 12) and to proclaim mercy in every corner of the world, reaching every person, young or old." (Pope Francis)

Let St. Magdalene inspire us to imitate her joy of proclaiming Christ to all!

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I proclaim the Good News to every person, young and old?

Thursday, 23rd July

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

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

The Power of Parables

Jesus used parables to talk about God and His Kingdom of love and mercy. Each parable is an urgent invitation from Jesus to His disciples and listeners to choose to leave their conventional life behind and enter into a new and different way of living God's presence. Jesus' parables touched the hearts of people and challenged them to open up to God.

"You will listen and listen again, but not understand, see and see again, but not perceive."

Jesus knew that there were people who heard His parables about God and His Kingdom, but they were not able to understand and perceive. This was because they lacked faith to move from simply

being spectators to believers. Such people could listen and listen again, see and see again, but their hearts resisted the Good News.

There were others, on the other hand, who listened with ears of faith and allowed the power of Jesus' words to transform them.

Today, Jesus continues to speak to anyone who is open and willing to listen to Him. We have the choice to allow His words to challenge us and let ourselves be transformed; or to resist and be contented with merely being spectators of the Good News. Let us ask Jesus to open our hearts to listen and understand how loving our God is, to see and perceive how He works silently in the daily events of our life. Let us approach Jesus with hearts full of faith!

Question for reflection:

1) What makes my ear to be dull of hearing Jesus and my eyes to be shut from seeing Him?

Friday, 24th July

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

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

understands it; he is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

Rich soil, rich harvest

Today, let us focus on the 4 soils presented by Jesus in today's parable.

Path: A path is hardened ground where no seed can sink below in order to take roots. That is why the seeds that fall on the path became easy food for the birds.

Rocky ground: The rocks prevent any seed from taking root. Whatever little soil there is in the rock can help the seed to grow. However, the lack of deep roots causes the plants to wither under the hot sun.

Thorny ground: The thorns do not help the seed to grow. Rather, thorns take over the growing plants by taking in their nutrients until there is nothing left for the plants.

Rich soil: This is the best soil where the seeds can take root and grow into fruit-bearing plants.

These soils - the path, the rocky ground, the thorny soil and the rich soil - are the conditions of our hearts as we listen to the Word of God. We are called to allow the seed of God's Word to fall on rich soil.

We must also remember that our responsibility is not to make the seeds sprout and grow into fruit-bearing plants. God is the one who will make the seed grow and bear fruit. We, however, are responsible for maintaining our soil in good condition.

"I am the Vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can't do anything without Me." (John 15:5)

Today, let us remain in Jesus our Vine. He will free our soil from being hardened as well as from being rocky and thorny. Without Him, we cannot do anything!

Question for reflection:

1) Which soil do I identify myself with? What is Jesus' message to me in this time of prayer?

Saturday, 25th July, St. James

2 Corinthians 4:7-15, Matthew 20:20-28

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

St. James, the Apostle

"We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7)

In the first reading, St. Paul reminds all of us that we are earthenware jars - simple and ordinary. What makes our life extraordinary is the treasure that we contain.

As we celebrate the feast of St. James, we also rejoice at him who allowed himself to be this earthenware jar for Christ. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, James served the early church with passion and dedication. In the end, he was the first among the apostles to suffer martyrdom (Acts 12:1-2).

It is a consolation for us to see that James was so ordinary in the sense that he was like any one of us. He desired to be great and powerful. Yet, he was humbled to allow Jesus His Master to correct him and teach him through life's experiences what true greatness meant.

Today, the world continues to consider people to be great and mighty because of their success, fame and wealth. Yet, Jesus does not consider these as things to be considered for greatness. What counts for greatness is when we love others by placing ourselves to be at their service.

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

Questions for reflection:

1) How can I serve God and others with more love and humility today? What strikes me in this time of prayer?

Sunday, 26th July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12, Romans 8:28-30, Matthew 13:44-52

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. Again, 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'

Jesus, our priceless treasure

What is our greatest treasure in life?

In today's Gospel, we read about a man who stumbled across a treasure hidden in a field. The field did not belong to him and so he sold everything he had in order to own the field as well as the treasure in it. This man's joy was immeasurable. In the next story, we see a merchant looking hard for fine pearls and he sold everything he owned when he found one just to possess it.

What do these parables mean to us?

When we find Jesus and recognise Him as our greatest treasure, we too will experience a deep joy that nothing and nobody can take away from us. We too will see everything else as secondary, and strive to gain more of Christ.

Having Jesus as our greatest treasure, we must never regard ourselves as superior and exclude others from coming to know and encounter Him.

"...the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds."

The Church is made of saints and sinners, and no one should be excluded but all must be welcomed. We, as part of the people of God, must go out to welcome those who are most in need of God's love and mercy. Because we have Jesus as our greatest treasure, we will help and guide them to joyfully have Him also as their treasure and their fine pearl.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is Jesus my greatest treasure?
- 2) How can I help others to search for Jesus and make Him become their greatest treasure?

Monday, 27th July

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

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

Smallest of all seeds

Jesus has a way of communicating to his followers, through the use of parables like a master storyteller. Jesus conveys his message about the Kingdom of God through the parable of the mustard seed and we need to discover his hidden meaning for ourselves.

The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds yet when sown in the field can become the largest of all plants – it is a wonderful story of something so small but left to nature and God’s devices, it grows to a large plant which provides much shade and shelter for the birds.

We wonder how the mustard seed grows. We wonder what else like the mustard seed can grow in our lives – our faith, our love.

Do we allow God to nurture our faith? Just like growth is a process, our faith journey is also a growth process. Are we patient enough to let it grow and let God work in our lives?

Tuesday, 28th July

Jeremiah 14:17-22, Matthew 13:36-43

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

All about mustard seed and yeast

In today's Gospel, Jesus used the mustard seed as His teaching point. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, but this does not mean it is powerless. Within the seed itself, there is the capacity to grow into a huge tree. The growth takes time and requires a lot of waiting. When it does grow, it becomes a big sheltering tree for birds to take refuge in it.

Next, Jesus spoke about the leaven or yeast which is minute in size. Only a little is needed for the dough to rise. The flour mixture would remain just as it is if there was no leaven added to it. However, the leaven caused the dough to rise from within.

We, like the small mustard seed, have the inner capacity for growth and usefulness. However, our growth might be slow and insignificant. However, we must always be open to allow Jesus to work steadily in us. We are called to simply trust as He commits Himself to us for our own good.

We, like the flour mixture, need the yeast of Christ to influence us from within and lead us to radically transform our life to be like Him.

Each of us has the inner potential to grow and live our life fully for God. The inner changes in our life might not come overnight and so we must be patient with ourselves and trust that God never stops working for our good.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Question for reflection:

- 1) What is God's message to me in this time of prayer?

Wednesday, 29th July, St. Martha

Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21, John 11:19-27

Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you'. 'Your brother' said Jesus to her 'will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day'. Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.'

Lord, I believe!

The gospel of today speaks to us about Martha's faith. This passage is her confession of faith to Jesus, similar to that of Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16: *'Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God'.*

Martha's well-nourished and convinced faith could only be because of her strong friendship with Jesus.

Martha, Mary and Lazarus were Jesus' friends from Bethany, whom he used to visit and spend time in conversation with them. Martha's faith in Jesus came from spending quality time with him.

A sound faith that touches and shapes our lives comes only from a time spent in relationship with the Master, listening to him and assimilating his teachings. Only then, our faith, based on friendship with God, will affect our lives and be a living faith that sustains us during moments of difficulties, hardships, doubts, sufferings or during the monotonous routine of life.

A faith, based only on head knowledge, cannot sustain our life. We need a deeper relationship with the Lord in order to go through the tough moments of life.

Jesus asks us: 'Do you believe this? Do you believe in me?'

Let us strengthen our friendship with our Master, so that our faith may grow more and more. Lord, I know you are here and you will guide me throughout every situation I live, no matter how hard it may seem.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is my personal confession of faith?
- 2) How can I strengthen my relationship with Jesus during this day?

Thursday, 30th July, St. Peter Chrysologus

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'

Catching fish

When a net is cast into the sea, it catches every fish of all kinds. The kingdom of God is like a net cast into the sea of humanity. God

welcomes everyone: the good as well as the bad, the sinner as well as the saints. Everyone is welcomed to experience God and His love. No one is excluded by God. No one is condemned by God. This is because His desire is that all may have life in all its fullness.

"What is the foundation of our faith? An act of mercy whereby Jesus bound us to himself. And the Christian life is the response to this love; it is like the story of two lovers. God and man meet, they seek one another, they find one another, they celebrate one another, and they love one another: just like the lover and beloved in the Song of Songs. Everything else comes as a result of this relationship. The Church is the family of Jesus in which he pours out his love. It is this love which the Church guards and wants to give to everyone." (Pope Francis)

It is up to us if we want to respond to God's love or to walk away from Him. There will be people who do not want to know anything about Him or those who separate themselves from God. These exclude themselves from enjoying the kingdom of God.

This Gospel passage challenges us, who desire to follow Jesus, to become fishers of people. Through our words and actions, we can share with others the Good News of God's love.

Today, let us spend this time of prayer to enjoy our love story with God. In this time and space, God and we meet. We seek each other, we find one another, we celebrate one another, we love one another. Let us be instruments of His love to all whom we will encounter today.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I welcome everyone to experience God's love, without discrimination?

Friday, 31st July, St. Ignatius of Loyola

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

Coming to his hometown, 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

In today's Gospel, Jesus went to His hometown, no longer just as a carpenter's son, but as a reputable rabbi with crowds following Him. Jesus went, as usual, to the synagogue and He started to teach. The people from his hometown heard Him and they were surprised at His wisdom as well as the miracles they heard that He did in other towns. 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.

What about us? Are we critical towards family members and friends when they try to share the Good News with us? Have we experienced being rejected by our family and friends when we try to speak to them about God and His Good News?

God continues to use ordinary people, like us, to be His prophets, His messengers of His Good News. We might not feel equipped to be part of His mission. We see our flaws and imperfections. Let us

never forget that Jesus does not call the equipped, but He equips those whom He has chosen and called.

Today, let us allow Jesus to use our life as His instrument. Even when we face rejection and ridicule from others, we continue on because we know that Jesus is our strength.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I struggle to share my faith with those closest to me?

Saturday, 1st August, St. Alphonsus Liguori

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.

A voice shouting in the desert

John the Baptist saw himself as the '*voice of someone shouting in the desert*' (John 1:23). His voice shouted with passion the

message of repentance because he wanted the people of Israel to be converted and go back to God. His prophetic powerful preaching led him to his martyrdom.

Like John the Baptist, there are many people, from the past to the present, who have sacrificed their lives because they have chosen to rock the boats of many. They shout in the desert of our society and move the conscience of many. In their fight for justice and truth, a majority of these people end up, silenced, like St. John the Baptist. One such person is Archbishop Oscar Romero. He was the voice that spoke up courageously for the rights of the poor and the oppressed in El Salvador. On 24th March 1980, Romero was shot while celebrating Mass in a small chapel near his cathedral.

As Christians, we must continue the mission of St. John the Baptist and of many others who were the voices that shouted for truth and justice. Let us never compromise our Catholic faith by opting to take the conventional ways in order to blend with those who advocate for lies, injustice and hatred.

"We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work"
(Blessed Oscar Romero)

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from standing up for what I truly believe in?

Sunday, 2nd August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**Isaiah 55:1–3; Romans 8:35, 37–39, Matthew 14:13–21**

When Jesus received this news, he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So, as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick. When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food'. Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves'. But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish'. 'Bring them here to me' he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining; twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

Bring them to Me

Jesus saw a large crowd and saw their needs. Thus, He spent time to be with the people – healing their sickness, listening to their problems, touching their loneliness, giving hope to their distress. Jesus was never indifferent to anyone who went to Him. He was never too busy to give Himself to the people.

What about us? We tend to rush around and have no time to simply be present to those who need us. Let us stay with Jesus and learn from Him how to give ourselves to others without allowing time to be an obstacle to loving.

The disciples realised that the people would need to leave soon because it was getting dark and there was no food. Jesus, however, said to His disciples, *"Give them something to eat yourselves."* Jesus' disciples must have been shocked at His proposal. They looked at the little that they had and must have felt hopeless. Isn't this situation familiar to us? We look at the little that we have and conclude with frustration and discouragement that we do not have enough, we are not worthy to try, we cannot attempt to do so, etc. Can our five loaves and two fish do any good?

Listen to Jesus – *"Bring them here to me."* The disciples brought their five loaves and two fish, and Jesus fed the huge crowd. Let us trust that Jesus can and will work miracles through the little that we give to Him.

Question for reflection:

- 1) Do I trust that Jesus can use my life with all that I am and use me to feed the crowd of today? Am I willing to let Him use me as His instrument?
- 2) How can I be more generous with my time?

Monday, 3rd August
Jeremiah 28:1–17, Matthew 14:22–36

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.

With Jesus, I am not afraid!

"This Gospel event is full of profound meaning. It concerns the most important problem of human life, faith in Jesus Christ. Peter certainly had faith, as he later magnificently showed in the region near Caesarea Philippi, but at that moment his faith was not yet solid. When the wind began to blow more strongly Peter began to sink, because he had doubted. It was not the wind that made Peter sink into the lake but the insufficiency of his faith. Peter's faith had lacked one essential element—complete abandonment to Christ, total trust in him at the moment of great trial; he lacked unreserved hope in him. Faith and hope, together with love, constitute the foundation of the Christian life, the cornerstone of which is Jesus Christ." (St. Pope John Paul II)

In the Gospel passage, Peter fixed His eyes on Jesus and trusted totally in Jesus. Because of His trust, Peter did the impossible feat of walking on water. However, when Peter took his eyes away from Jesus and focused on the wind, he became frightened and started to sink. Jesus reached out and held him up.

This encounter of Peter walking on water teaches us the need to have a personal and close relationship with Jesus. He has to be our Friend and Companion in life on whom we depend for our daily strength and courage, especially when we face the storms that paralyze us. We need to trust in Jesus more than all the voices of our fears and insecurities.

Today, Jesus invites us again to fix our eyes on Him, and to listen to His voice that speaks words of love, affirmation, peace and courage. In this journey of life, Jesus will never let us remain fallen. He will always be there to pick us up and help us to walk on again.

Question for reflection:

1) What holds me back from trusting in Jesus completely?

Tuesday, 4th August, St. John Vianney

Jeremiah 30:1–2,12–15,18–22, Matthew 15:1–2,10–14

Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem then came to Jesus and said, 'Why do your disciples break away from the tradition of the elders? They do not wash their hands when they eat food.' He called the people to him and said, 'Listen, and understand. What goes into the mouth does not make a man unclean; it is what comes out of the mouth that makes him unclean.' Then the disciples came to him and said, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were shocked when they heard what you said?' He replied, 'Any plant my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them alone. They are blind men leading blind men; and if one blind man leads another, both will fall into a pit.'

A pure love for God and neighbour

The Pharisees and the scribes came from Jerusalem just so that they could observe and judge Jesus' actions and teachings. Seeing Jesus' disciples eating without their hands washed, they criticised Him for

allowing them to go against the norms concerning purification. The Pharisees and the scribes dedicated their lives to study the Law of God and taught the people to follow strictly all the norms and laws but they neglect the essential: God Himself.

Jesus told them, *'Listen, and understand'*. He wants us to listen and understand too. Our lives are meant to be dedicated to serve and love God alone. We should be concerned with what goes into our heart that can pollute our love for God. For Jesus, it is not about the purity of the food or drink. Rather, he places purity and impurity on a higher level, on the level of the purity of our love – for God and for others. How sincere are we in our relationship with God? How honest are we in our dealings with others? How patient are we with people who are difficult to deal with? Do we befriend others for selfish reasons?

'He alone loves the Creator perfectly who manifests a pure love for his neighbour.' (Venerable Bede)

Today, let us have ears to listen and understand that we are called to live for a higher level of purity, a pure love – for God and for others.

**Wednesday, 5th August,
The Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major
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.

Great is your Faith!

The Canaanite woman went to Jesus and started shouting at the top of her voice. She was not afraid to shout out despite belonging to a race that was regarded as hopeless by the Jews. A mother's love made her hold nothing back but to keep on pleading with Jesus to help her daughter. She trusted that Jesus could heal her daughter and make her well again.

Finally, when Jesus did say something to her, and it turned out to be not what she expected, she continued to look at Him with hope and trust. Jesus, seeing her unwavering faith, praised her and answered her request.

Let us be inspired to do the same! Let us have the unwavering faith that we have a great God in our life and we can turn to Him always with trust that He will never let us down. Jesus will never turn His back on true faith. Therefore, we call to Him with a believing heart.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I identify myself with this Canaanite woman's faith in Jesus?

Thursday, 6th August, Transfiguration of the Lord Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14, 2 Peter 1:16–19, Matthew 17:1–9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said 'do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead'.

Going up the mountain

Jesus led His disciples, Peter, James and John, to Mount Tabor. There, on that mountain, each of them had a strong and deep experience of God's presence. In the Bible, the mountain is a regular place of prayer where one encounters God deeply.

"The Gospel of the Transfiguration of the Lord puts before our eyes the glory of Christ, which anticipates the resurrection and announces the divinization of man. The Christian community becomes aware that Jesus leads it, like the Apostles Peter, James and John "up a high mountain by themselves" [Mt 17:1], to receive once again in Christ, as sons and daughters in the Son, the gift of the Grace of God: "This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him". It is the invitation to take a distance from the noisiness of everyday life in

order to immerse oneself in God's presence. He desires to hand down to us, each day, a Word that penetrates the depths of our spirit, where we discern good from evil [cf. Heb 4:12], reinforcing our will to follow the Lord." (Pope Benedict XVI)

Today, Jesus leads us up the mountain to stay and deepen our relationship with Him. The normal reaction in many of us is we feel the need to 'do' something during prayer time. Strangely, we say that we want to immerse ourselves in God's presence and grow in our intimacy with Him. Yet, we allow ourselves to be distracted by being busy and doing things rather than to be still and listen attentively to Jesus.

In today's Gospel, Peter's first reaction to the powerful vision was to do something. Instead of staying, keeping still and enjoying the deep experience of Jesus, Moses and Elijah conversing, he needed to go somewhere and do something. He understood that he simply needed to stop and listen when the voice from the clouds said, *"This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him."*

There is a time to work. There is a time to pray. There is a time to do. There is a time to be still.

Today, Jesus wants to bring us up the mountain in order to keep a distance from the busyness and nosiness of life. He leads us gently to immerse ourselves in God's presence. It is time to simply be still and listen to Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?

**Friday, 7th August, Ss. Sixtus II and Companions, St. Cajetan
Nahum 2:1, 3, 3:1–3, 6–7, Matthew 16:24-28**

Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour. I tell you solemnly, there are some of these standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom.

Yes to a Life of Love

It is the human tendency to look through life with the lens of 'I, me, mine.' We tend to think that the whole world revolves around us. Jesus, in today's Gospel, shatters all our self-centred ways and calls us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. This is a call to set aside our lens of 'I, me, mine' and to enter into the dynamism of forgetting ourselves and looking at the needs of others instead. This is the paradox of discipleship. If we want to gain, we must learn to lose.

What prevents me from giving myself more? Am I afraid to lose my comforts? Am I afraid of other people's opinions of me, my popularity? Do I struggle with the need to be right all the time?

Today, let us open ourselves to deny our self-centred pride and selfish desires in order to unselfconsciously love and care for those around us, especially those in need.

"We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of God's compassionate love for others." (St. Clare of Assisi)

Today, Jesus invites us to join Him in this path of love. Are we willing to follow Him?

Questions for reflection:

1) Is it difficult for me to renounce myself, take up my cross and follow Jesus? Why?

Saturday, 8th August, St. Dominic
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.'

A little faith

A father went to Jesus and begged Him to heal his son who was most likely suffering from epilepsy. He went to the disciples first,

but they failed to heal his son. After Jesus healed the sick child, the disciples were puzzled at the reason why they were unable to heal the boy. His reply to the disciples was clear, *"Because you have little faith..."*

The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. They accompanied Him and helped Him in His mission. They heard all His teachings and saw the miracles He did. However, this did not mean that they had mature faith. They did have faith but as Jesus pointed out, they had 'little faith' that still struggled with doubts and mistrust.

'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.'

Jesus used the image of the mustard seed, a very small seed. Yet, when it grows, it becomes a big mustard tree. For Jesus, what mattered was the quality of their faith, not the quantity. This quality of faith depended on how deeply connected they were to God as well as how much they profoundly believed in Him and in His unfailing love. The disciples were, thus, challenged to grow their little faith from a shallow level to a deeper one.

We need to constantly grow in our faith, in our relationship with God by having a daily personal encounter with God. From our relationship with Him, everything else flows. What seems impossible then becomes possible.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I grow in my relationship with God?

Sunday, 9th August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
1 Kings 19:9a,11–13a, Romans 9:1–5, Matthew 14:22–33

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 headwind. 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'.

Through the eyes of faith

"Take courage, it is I."

Pause for a moment. Allow these words of Jesus to speak to our hearts at this very moment in prayer. Allow these words to give us peace in our hearts.

When we, like the disciples in today's Gospel, see troubles coming our way, our hearts get overwhelmed with fear and worry. We want to escape and run. We do not want to face them head on.

Yet, the fact is that life is full of troubles and storms. We cannot run away from problems, no matter how hard we try. When we see our

life and its problems through the eyes of faith, we begin to realise that Jesus is waiting for us in the midst of our storms. We are never alone. We need to fix our eyes on Him, and trust that Jesus is with us. With Jesus, our Prince of Peace, we will find peace in the midst of our storms.

'It is always in the midst, in the epicentre, of your troubles that you find serenity.' (Antoine de Saint- Exupery)

Let Jesus be our serenity in the midst of the storms we face.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?

Monday, 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

perfect 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 great, not because of his achievements, but because he lived and died for Christ. He placed Jesus first above everything else. Thus, this humble saint became a grain of wheat who died in order to yield a rich harvest. His only desire was to follow Jesus faithfully to the end, and to be with Him where He was.

This is what it means for us to be Christians who desire to follow Jesus authentically. We need to make a vital decision to die to our old selves and embrace our new life with Christ. The path of the grain of wheat is the daily way we must walk. It is not easy because we do not spontaneously die to ourselves, to carry our cross and follow Jesus. Yet, let us never forget that this way is glorious because we will bear fruit that will last forever. We will be with Jesus where He is. We will be honoured by God the Father.

"I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Question for reflection:

1) What is in me that must die?

Tuesday, 11th August, St. Clare of Assisi
Ezekiel 2:8–3:4, Matthew 18:1–5, 10, 12–14

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, 12th August
Ezekiel 9:1–7, 10:18–22, Matthew 18:15–20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, is between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven. I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.'

Reconciliation

A story goes like this: 'The rabbi asked his students: "How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?" One of the rabbi's students suggested: "When from a distance you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep?" "No." was the answer of the rabbi. "Is it when one can distinguish between a fig tree and a grapevine?" "No," the rabbi said. "Please tell us the answer then," said the students. "It is, then," said the wise teacher, "when you can look into the face of another human being and you have enough light in you to recognise your brother or your sister. Until then it is night, and darkness is still with us." (Henri Nouwen)

God gives us the gift of community – our family, our community of faith, of parish groups – so that we can build relationships based on mutual love. However, there are times when someone in the community does us wrong. What should we do? Can we have the light in us to recognise that person as our brother/sister?

Today, Jesus invites us to work always for reconciliation. This is because He has given us love as the absolute imperative that governs our relationships with our brothers and sisters. However, to love does not mean that we turn a blind eye to the wrongdoing of the other. Out of love, we should approach the person and enter into a dialogue of understanding and forgiveness. If he/she resists our initiative of peace, then we should bring another person or two with us. Whatever we do, we must always approach the person in the spirit of reconciliation.

May we have enough light in us to recognise every person as our brother and sister, even those who have done us wrong. May we have enough love to work for reconciliation.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I work for reconciliation so that there is unity in my relationships with others?

**Thursday, 13th August, Ss. Pontian and Hippolytus
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 and freedom

Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch Christian saviour of the Nazi's Concentration Camp during World War II, said, *'Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free, and to realise the prisoner was you.* When we really forgive from the heart, we ourselves experience freedom within.

Corrie Ten Boom witnessed the death of her beloved sister and many other women as they were locked up in the notorious concentration camp in Germany for 4 years. She was later released due to a clerical error. Even though she suffered and lost so much, she was not bitter or filled with resentment. She chose to forgive and allow God to set her heart free.

Forgiving someone is not easy or natural for us. However, we are called to forgive from faith, even when it goes against our feelings. God will set our hearts free from all anger and bitterness we carry within our hearts when we choose to forgive. To forgive is a journey. It is not a one-time choice. Rather, it is a daily decision.

Jesus, it is so natural for me to fill my heart with anger when someone wronged me or hurt me badly. Yet, this anger is what keeps me in prison and prevents me from living my life with joy, peace and love. Give me the strength so that I can choose to forgive and to allow you to bring your peace to my heart. Jesus, I need you because I cannot do this by myself!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there someone whom I have to forgive?
- 2) What prevents me from forgiving like Jesus?

Friday, 14th August, St. Maximilian Kolbe
Ezekiel 16:1–15, 60, 63 or Ezekiel 16:59–63, Matthew 19:3–12

Some Pharisees approached him, 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.'

Commitment is the key

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' Here, in four words, is a spiritual and pastoral program of life. The love of Christ, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, enables us to live like this, to be like this: as persons always ready to forgive: always ready to trust, because we are full of faith in God; always ready to inspire hope, because we ourselves are full of hope in God; persons ready to bear patiently every situation and each of our brothers and sisters, in union with Christ, who bore with love the burden of our sins." (Pope Francis)

The message for us in today's Gospel is: Commitment.

Let us go beyond commitment in marriages to reflect on the different commitments that we have in our life.

In marriage, two people make a lifelong commitment of faithful love. It is not just in marriage, but also in family life, parents commit themselves to accept and care for their children in order that they are free to be who they are meant to be. Children also commit themselves to love and respect their parents, and not to despise them in their old age. Good friends commit to be there for each other in the ups and downs of life.

In Jesus' life, He is the first who makes the lifelong commitment to each of us. His love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. This love has been poured into our hearts and capacitates us to love each other in the same way. Thus, with His love in us, we become people ready to forgive and trust. Authentic commitment requires us to have true love that stays with a friend, a spouse, a child, a parent during their 'good times' and especially in their 'bad times'.

"Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?"

According to Jesus, Moses allowed divorce because of the people's hardness of hearts. However, it was not the original plan of God. He always desires for unity – unity in marriage as well as unity in family life and friendships.

The passage though speaks specifically about marriage but let us open our eyes of faith to see commitments at every level of our

relationships. May we work hard to bring forgiveness and trust in every relationship that God has gifted us with.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my greatest challenge to commit myself to love with God's love in my marriage, family life, and friendship?

**Saturday, 15th August, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Revelations 11:19, 12:1–6, 10, 1 Corinthians 15:20–27, 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.

Rushing to do God's stuff

"Luke's Gospel which we have just heard (cf. Lk 1:39-56) shows us this living Ark — which is Mary — on the move: after leaving her home in Nazareth, Mary set out for the hill country, making haste to reach a city of Judah and go to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. It seems to me important to emphasize the expression "with haste": God's things deserve haste, indeed, the only things in the world that deserve haste are precisely those of God, which are truly urgent for our life." (Pope Benedict XVI)

When Mary heard the good news about her cousin, Elizabeth, she did not wait or procrastinate. She took action by leaving the comfort of her home in order to travel a great distance to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. The action of Mary shows that she placed Elizabeth's needs above her own. Mary did not focus on herself and her problems. Instead, she wanted to be with her cousin - to rejoice with her as well as to help her in her pregnancy.

"Love seeks one thing only: the good of the one loved. It leaves all the other secondary effects to take care of themselves. Love, therefore, is its own reward." (Thomas Merton)

We are called to imitate such love that selflessly cares for others. Such love conquers pride and does not indulge in jealousy or unkindness. Such love gives oneself without seeking for rewards or praises.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, let us ask for her help to guide our feet to always hasten to reach out to others, our heart to selflessly care for others, our mind to think for the good of others, our hands to carry the wounds of others.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I hurry to do God's things?

Sunday, 16th August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time **Isaiah 56:1, 6–7; Romans 11:13–15, 29–32, Matthew 15:21–28**

Jesus left Gennesaret 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.

Include, not exclude

"Foreigners who have attached themselves to Yahweh to serve him and to love his name and be his servants - all who observe the sabbath, not profaning it, and cling to my covenant - these I will bring to my holy mountain. I will make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their holocausts and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." (Isaiah 56:6-7)

In the first reading of today, we rejoice with the reality that God is a God who will never exclude anyone from His love. He does not drive anyone away by saying, "No, this person is out because he is like that..." or "This person is not worthy and so she is not in." He

wants to make everyone joyful in His house of prayer - in His presence of love.

We do not have the right to judge and exclude others. As Christians, we must always open ourselves to welcome others with open hearts.

In today's gospel, a Canaanite woman came to Jesus because she was desperate for help. Her daughter was sick and she, though a Gentile (outside of the Jewish religion), knew sincerely from her heart that Jesus was a man of God, and so she called out to him, *'Son of David, have mercy on me!'* Her cries, however, were met with silence from Jesus.

Jesus kept silent because He saw and knew the trusting heart of this Canaanite woman. He wanted her to be an example for his disciples who kept struggling with their faith and could not understand His ways.

In order to test her, Jesus said, *'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel'. The woman was not deterred from Jesus' strong words, but simply cried out, 'Lord, help me!'*

Once again, Jesus answered her with seemingly harsh words: *'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs'*. In Greek, there are two meanings for 'dogs.' One is used by the Jews as a derogatory term for the Gentiles. Another one referred to 'doggies', to pet dogs which are loved and looked after by their owners. Jesus was using the second meaning of "dogs". The woman understood and went along with His line of argument. Despite being a non-Jew, her great faith never gave up but she placed all her hope in Jesus.

Today, the story of the Canaanite woman challenges us not to judge people just because they are different from us. We must open the doors of our hearts to them and never exclude anyone.

Let us also learn from this foreigner, this Canaanite woman teaches us what it truly means to possess a trusting heart, a great faith!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I include, not exclude, others into my life?

Monday, 17th August

Ezekiel 24:15–23, 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 joy beyond measure

This story of the rich young man often distresses us because it is too radical and extreme. We identify ourselves with this young rich man who walked away sad from Jesus because of his great wealth.

This rich young man had kept all the commandments. Yet, he desired for something more in his life. He knew that Jesus, the Master, would enlighten and show him the right way.

“Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me”

Jesus invited this young man and us to let go of all obstacles that prevent us from opening ourselves to truly follow Him. This rich young man was so possessive of his treasure that he could not let go and have God as his true possession and greatest treasure.

What is our treasure? Does our work prevent us from spending quality time with Jesus in prayer? Does our self-love stop us from opening ourselves to the call of Jesus? Does our laziness and love for comfort make us shut ourselves from Him?

It is not a pain but a joy to have Jesus as our priceless treasure. In order to gain Jesus, we need to have the courage to sell all the obstacles. We need to never forget that only Jesus alone can fulfil our heart's deepest desires.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to let go of the obstacle I have that might be holding me back from finding true joy with Jesus?

Tuesday, 18th 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.'

Detach in order to attach

In this gospel passage, Jesus told His disciples that it would be very hard for a rich person to enter God's kingdom. What is the message for us today? Is Jesus condemning those who are materially rich?

No, Jesus is not condemning those with wealth. There is nothing wrong in having money and things. Jesus' point is about having God, not money or things, to be the one ruling our lives. Money is to serve us, not rule us. Material possessions are to be used, not to be in control of us.

Who are we following today, Jesus or money/material possessions? Today, let us develop a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus. When Jesus becomes our intimate friend and the companion of our lives, we will fully trust and follow His voice of love. Detachment from our material wealth and securities is only possible when we know the greater attachment we are invited to have.

"We must have a real living determination to reach holiness. I will be a saint means I will despoil myself of all that is not God; I will strip my heart of all created things; I will live in poverty and detachment;

I will renounce my will, my inclinations, my whims and fancies, and make myself a willing slave to the will of God.” (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Peter and so many people throughout centuries till today have left everything to follow Jesus. They detached themselves from everything because they attached themselves to have Jesus the Lord who would not fail them.

Step by step, let us start to follow Jesus and trust that He will give us all that we need.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus inviting me to do in this time of prayer?

Wednesday, 19th August, St. John Eudes
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.'

The Generous Landowner

The landowner, in today's Gospel passage, paid one denarius to each of the workers regardless of whether he was working at the start or the end of the day. When the ones working for a long time saw that they had the same amount, they started to grumble because they had worked more hours under the hot sun and were toiling relentlessly in the vineyard.

We might also think that the landowner was unfair to the workers. Those who work more must be paid more. The ones who work less must be paid lesser. This is the law of justice of the world.

Jesus tells us this parable to show us that God has a different logic from the world.

God is like this landowner whose generosity extends to every person. He gives one denarius of His love and mercy to those who are worthy as well as to those who are not. Sometimes, we wonder how possible it is for God to love this person who is so undeserving or for God to bless this person and not us. His generosity extends to everybody.

The one denarius – the daily wage of His mercy is for those who are worthy as well as for those who are unworthy, for those who are good as well as those who are not.

"Why be envious because I am generous?"

Today, we are called to rejoice and give thanks to God for His love that is so generous and rich in mercy.

God does not prefer the hardworking Catholics who faithfully work hard in the parish to those Sunday Catholics. He does not give His love more to those who go for mass every day and lesser to those who go to mass only once a year.

God pursues all – the saints and the sinners among us – in order to bring each of us always to a deeper encounter from the stage where we are. We can grumble and say that it is not fair but let us remember that God's ways are not ours and His thoughts are not ours.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I ever experienced God's generous love in my life?
- 2) How can I be generous to others in the same way God is to me?

Thursday, 20th August, St. Bernard of Clairvaux
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 grandest 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. 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, 21st August, St. Pius X
Ezekiel 37:1–14, Matthew 22:34–40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, ‘Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?’ Jesus said, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets also.’

Love is the greatest commandment

If today is your last day, what would you do?

Many of us will most likely not be bothered about counting our coin collection or watching our television dramas or washing our precious cars if today were to be our final day on this earth. Instead, we would be spending time with the people we love to express our gratitude to them as well as to make peace with them.

Well, we do not need to wait for today to be our last day in order to express our love for those around us. Today, Jesus calls us to start living a life of loving God and loving others.

Love is the heart of our Christian faith. Our love for God can never be separated from our love for our brothers and sisters. This is because we cannot love God without the desire to love Him who also dwells in our brothers and sisters. Thus, it is in our simple self-giving acts of love for others that we show the depth of our love for God.

“What is the law of the People of God? It is the law of love, love for God and love for neighbour according to the new commandment that the Lord left to us (cf. Jn 13:34). It is a love, however, that is not sterile sentimentality or something vague, but the acknowledgment of God as the one Lord of life and, at the same time, the acceptance of the other as my true brother, overcoming division, rivalry, misunderstanding, selfishness; these two things go together. Oh how much more of the journey do we have to make in order to actually live the new law — the law of the Holy Spirit who acts in us, the law of charity, of love! Looking in newspapers or on television we see so many wars between Christians: how does this happen? Within the People of God, there are so many wars! How many wars of envy, of

jealousy, are waged in neighbourhoods, in the workplace! Even within the family itself, there are so many internal wars! We must ask the Lord to make us correctly understand this law of love. How beautiful it is to love one another as true brothers and sisters. How beautiful! Let's do something today." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live the law of love today?

Saturday, 22nd August, The Queenship of Blessed Virgin Mary 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 exalted.'

Humble yourself and follow Jesus

We live in a society that measures our worth by degrees of success, efficiency, status and power. It is so common to be asked by others,

“What is your title? How much do you earn? What qualifications do you have? What do your children do for a living?”

In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus chided the scribes and Pharisees for their desire to exalt themselves because of their excessive pride. Thus, He spoke about the need to be humble to His disciples by telling them, *“The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

As Christians, we are called to follow the same path that Jesus has taken, which is one of humility. Humility is a virtue. It does not mean that we must look down on ourselves and not think much at all about ourselves. Instead, people who are humble are free from the desire to exalt themselves because they feel secure about who they are. Their security comes from their identity of being God’s beloved children. Nobody and nothing can take away this dignity from them. Thus, they seek to serve others in order to bring them to experience God’s love. They find joy in loving others for their own good.

Today, let us ask for the grace to be humble so that we can truly be fully human.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who are the people in my life who are genuinely humble?
- 2) How can I exercise this virtue of humility in my life?

Sunday, 23rd August, Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 22:19–23, Romans 11:33–36, Matthew 16:13–20

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.

Jesus, You are!

Jesus asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They had no problem in repeating what they heard from others, '*Some say John the Baptist... Elijah...Jeremiah...*' Jesus then moved to a more personal level. He asked them, '*What about you? Who do you say I am?*'

The first question of Jesus was easy to answer because the disciples needed only to recap what they heard from peoples' opinions. The second question, on the other hand, required them to answer from their own personal love story with Jesus.

Simon Peter, from his experiences with Jesus, professed an act of faith, '*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*'

Today, Jesus is not interested in what people think about Him but wants to know who He is for us. We need to re-read our love story with Jesus in order to give Him an answer that comes from our heart.

Can we like Simon Peter, profess who Jesus truly is for us?

Jesus changed the name of Peter, from Simon, son of John to Cephas or Rock. The changing of names in biblical tradition symbolises the giving of a mission to the person. Peter's profession of who Jesus was for him served as a reaffirmation that his faith was to be as solid as a rock for others to build theirs on.

We are the rocks of today and so our faith in Jesus has to be solid, strong and unshakable, even in the midst of the storms in life. Our faith in Jesus can help many others to come to know Him and love Him.

Question for reflection:

1) "Who do you say I am?" What will my answer be?

**Monday, 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'.

Come and see

It is traditionally understood that St. Bartholomew refers to the Nathanael in today's Gospel passage. What message does this feast of St. Bartholomew have for us today?

Nathanael encountered Jesus through a mediator, Philip. Philip had a deep life-transforming encounter with Jesus that he wanted to share the Good News with his friend. He went searching for Nathanael and told him, "*Come and see.*"

Philip did not stay for long but disappeared after his friend had his own personal encounter with Christ. He was simply an instrument to bring his friend to Jesus and Jesus to his friend. Because of Philip's "*Come and see*", Nathanael became Jesus' apostle. Not only that, it was believed that Nathanael went to India and Armenia where he was persecuted for his faith and died as a martyr. From that one encounter with Christ, Nathanael's whole life direction changed and lived totally with Jesus and for Jesus.

Looking at our life, our personal following of Jesus started because of the faith of our parents, friends, relatives, mentors. Through a friend's testimony or a parent's good example, we start to be drawn closer to Jesus and start our own journey with Him.

In the same way that we have 'Philips' who inspire us towards Jesus, we too are called to be mediators to tell people, "*Come and see. Come and experience. Come and know.*"

We will never know how our words and deeds can influence others to greater faith and love for Jesus.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who are the people in my life who have brought me closer to Jesus?
- 2) How can I help others to draw closer to Jesus?

Tuesday, 25th August, St. Louis, St. Joseph Calasanz
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 cummin 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 live for external appearances and forget the weightier matters of what faith in Jesus is all about?
- 2) What is my resolution at the end of today's prayer?

Wednesday, 26th August

2 Thessalonians 3:6–10, 16–18, Matthew 23:27–32

Jesus said, ‘Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and every kind of corruption. In the same way you appear to people from the outside like good honest men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. ‘Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of holy men, saying, “We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our fathers’ day”. So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the sons of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your fathers began.’

Giving glory to God

"In the same way you appear to people from the outside like good honest men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

The scribes and the Pharisees put so much emphasis on external show and appearances that their hearts and minds were full of self-love and contempt for the people around them. They looked for human glory instead of seeking for God's glory.

If we are serious in following Jesus, we need to walk His path which is not one of possessing human glory and success, but which leads to seeking God's glory and desiring to please Him alone. God's glory is what gives us lasting joy and peace.

When we live a life of love and our lives are in harmony with our words and actions, then we truly give glory to God.

"One cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one's life. Those who listen to us and observe us must be able to see in our actions what they hear from our lips, and so give glory to God!" (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) Whose glory do I seek – my glory or God's glory?

Thursday, 27th August, St. Monica
1 Corinthians 1:1–9, Matthew 24:42–51

Jesus said to his disciples: '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.'

When Jesus comes...

"Live today as there is no tomorrow because one day you will be right."
(Anonymous)

Often we are so busy with life that we do not pause and see that our life is short. We do not know the day and hour when our Master will come. Are we ready to meet Him?

In this Gospel passage, Jesus tells of two parables but with readiness as the theme flowing from them. Readiness is shown by how unfailing and faithful we are in carrying out our responsibilities. As Christians, the only responsibility we have is to fulfil the duty of love.

This duty of love speaks of love with its enduring peace, its pain from dying to self, its moments of joy and hope, its struggles and familiar routines. Thus, a Christian life is a story of love because God is love and has created us for love.

One day, Jesus will call us to Him. How happy we are when we are ready to meet Him face to face because we have readied ourselves by putting the duty of love as our top priority.

Question for reflection:

1) If today were to be my last day, am I ready to meet Jesus face-to-face?

Friday, 28th August, St. Augustine
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.'

A Faith that is Alive!

What is the message for us today as we reflect on the parable of the ten bridesmaids?

Faith either grows or dies. We need to take care of our faith in Jesus and not take for granted that our faith will always be strong and constant. How can we allow our faith to grow and keep growing?

Prayer is the first essential oil that fuels the fire of our faith to keep it glowing. Do we set time and space daily to be with God? Do we allow His Word to be the lamp that lights our path?

The next essential oil is action. Prayer must lead us to the action of living a life of love and service. Do we make time to reach out to others in need? Do we use our talents and resources to help our brothers and sisters?

Let us not be lazy Christians as personified by the five foolish bridesmaids. We cannot afford to slacken in our faith. Every day is a new day for renewing our relationship with Jesus, our Bridegroom.

Today, we have the option to stay prepared and feed our faith with prayer and action, or we can put our faith aside and let our faith fall into a deep sleep.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I taken my faith for granted and been complacent in my relationship with Jesus?
- 2) How can I feed my faith more today?

**Saturday, 29th August, The Passion of St. John the Baptist
1 Corinthians 1:26–31, 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.

Prophets of today

It does seem strange for us to celebrate the feast of someone who was beheaded. Yet, we celebrate today with great joy the ultimate act of witnessing to Christ that John the Baptist did. John the Baptist died because he did not waver to condemn Herod and his adulterous union with Herodias. He spoke the truth and was not afraid of facing the consequences of his actions because he trusted that God would never leave him alone.

The passion of John the Baptist is the story of every Christian. At our baptism, we received the call to be prophets. As prophets, we

are called to give courageous witness to the people around us. Are we ready to face the cost of being prophets of today?

For Christians dealing with business deals, it might mean rejecting a dishonest deal and so losing money in the process. For parents, to be prophets mean to be ready to protect and nurture the faith of the children against worldly values. For friends, it means helping each other to grow towards Christ, and even have the courage to speak the truth out of love for the other. For spouses, it means to be faithful to their marriage vows and stand firm together to love each other to the very end.

The passion of John the Baptist challenges us to live for Christ. When we do, we know that God will be with us and there is nothing to fear.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I bear witness to Christ in my family, friendships, workplace and society at large?

**Sunday, 30th August, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary time
Jeremiah 20:7–9, Romans 12:1–2, Matthew 16:21–27**

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.' Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the

whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour.

Jesus is our only model

'It is impossible for me to understand how anyone can love Jesus, and not desire to pattern their whole life on His.' (Charles de Foucauld)

Do we love Jesus so intensely that we desire only to pattern our life on His?

Patterning our life on Jesus' will never give us worldly success, comforts, wealth, fame and power. Instead, Jesus points us to the path of the cross, the path of self-giving, rejection and suffering. Yet, following Jesus down this path will lead us to receive the greatest peace, contentment and joy that the world and all its glory can ever give to us.

In today's Gospel, Peter did not like what Jesus said. Thus, he started to remonstrate with Him. This was because Peter was fearful of walking the path of suffering and wanted to stop Jesus from doing so. He wanted glory without the cross.

Jesus did not tone down the message just to please Peter. He continued to present the hard truth.

"If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Today, Jesus invites us to follow Him authentically and fearlessly. Let us take Jesus as our model and pattern our whole life on His,

even to the point of picking up our cross courageously and following him wherever He leads us.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I pattern my whole life on Jesus, my Master and Friend?

Monday, 31st August

1 Corinthians 2:1–5, Luke 4:16–30

Jesus came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'. And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself" and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside"'. And he went on, 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of

the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

Sent to do God's Mission

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, began His ministry with these words from Prophet Isaiah: *"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me... He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour."*

This was Jesus' mission, from the start to the end, to promote God's reign as a project of justice and compassion for the outcast and rejected ones in society. The Good News of God's love is for all people.

Today, we too have the same mission to share the Good News with everyone, especially with the poor and outcasts in our society: The elderly struggling to make ends meet, those struggling with depression, the young children with poor grades become outcast, the poor crying to be heard, etc. They more than anyone else need to hear the Good News that God loves them, and He watches over them.

"We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace." (Pope Francis)

Today, Jesus calls us to bring the Good News to the poor, lonely, depressed, sick and hungry. Let us, through our loving words and actions, bring God's love to them!

Questions for reflection:

1) Whom am I called to welcome into my life?

2) What might I need to change in my heart before I can respond to the call to bring the Good News to those who are most in need of God?

Tuesday, 1st September

1 Corinthians 2:10–16, Luke 4:31–37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because he spoke with authority. In the synagogue there was a man who was possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil, and it shouted at the top of its voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the devil, throwing the man down in front of everyone, went out of him without hurting him at all. Astonishment seized them and they were all saying to one another, 'What teaching! He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out.' And reports of him went all through the surrounding countryside.

With renewed freshness

Jesus' teaching made a deep impression on those who listened to Him. What about us, today? Does Jesus and His Word leave a deep impression on us? Do we, over time, take Him for granted?

Today, may we be shaken out of our boredom and dullness so that we can listen to Jesus with eagerness and excitement. Even if we are burdened with problems, we must never lose that joy of being drawn and attracted to Jesus because His words are eternal life and love.

The man who was possessed recognised who Jesus was. He shouted out aloud, *"I know who you are: The Holy One of God."* This

man was afraid of what Jesus, the Holy One of God, might do to him and so he wanted to be left alone.

Like the man in today's Gospel, we too have our own demons that we struggle with every day. These demons of pride, jealousy, anger, lust, laziness as well as our deep wounds from past incidents are alive and actively influencing us in the way we live and love. Do we resist Jesus' help in our struggle with our demons?

Today, let us draw close to Jesus and accept joyfully His authority as He leads us to live life with true freedom. May we stay with Jesus today!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me as I listen attentively to His Word today?

Wednesday, 2nd September
1 Corinthians 3:1–9, Luke 4:38–44

Leaving the synagogue Jesus went to Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever and they asked him to do something for her. Leaning over her he rebuked the fever and it left her. And she immediately got up and began to wait on them. At sunset all those who had friends suffering from diseases of one kind or another brought them to him, and laying his hands on each he cured them. Devils too came out of many people, howling, 'You are the Son of God'. But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him leaving them, but he answered, 'I must proclaim the Good News of the

kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do'. And he continued his preaching in the synagogues of Judaea.

Time to pray

Do not look forward in fear to the changes in life; rather, look to them with full hope that as they arise, God, whose very own you are, will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will carry you in His arms. Do not fear what may happen tomorrow; the same understanding Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day. He will either shield you from suffering or will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.

(St. Francis de Sales)

"When daylight came, he left the house and made his way to a lonely place."

Even though Jesus was constantly with the people and busied Himself with helping each person that came His way, He made time for prayer because He needed to be alone with God. In prayer, Jesus was with God, His Father where He encountered Himself to be deeply loved and truly guided by God. Submerged in His Father's love, Jesus was at peace.

No matter how busy or tired we are, we need to make time and space to be with God. In moments when we feel like we do not want to pray, then all the more we should pray. In prayer, we let ourselves be loved. In prayer, we allow God to guide us in the decisions we need to make. In prayer, we receive strength to move on. Let us be faithful to the time and space we set for daily prayer.

"Everyone of us needs half an hour of prayer every day, except when we are busy – then we need an hour." (St. Francis de Sales)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more faithful in prayer?

Thursday, 3rd September, St. Gregory the Great 1 Corinthians 3:18–23, Luke 5:1–11

Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats close to the bank. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.- He got into one of the boats-it was Simon's-and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch'. 'Master,' Simon replied 'we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signaled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled the two boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man'. For he and all his companions were completely overcome by the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is men you will catch'. Then, bringing their boats back to land, they left everything and followed him.

The deeper water

'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch'

Jesus asked Peter to put out into deep water and to drop his nets for a catch. Peter, an experienced fisherman, had worked hard all night but caught nothing. Yet, something about Jesus made him

comply despite his own tiredness and hesitation. Following Jesus into deeper waters, Peter experienced a miracle beyond his imagination.

Today, Jesus invites us to leave the safety of our shore and enter into deeper waters with Him. This is not easy for many of us because we cherish safety and security. We would rather be in the safety of the shore where we can be in control of our life than out in deep waters. Yet, it is precisely by being in deep water that we experience Jesus as He truly is. There, we learn to trust Him. There, we learn to walk by faith, not by sight.

Let us choose deep waters today.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from leaving the safety of my shore and entering into deep waters with Jesus?

Friday, 4th September
1 Corinthians 4:1–5, Luke 5:33–39

The Pharisees and scribes said to Jesus, 'John's disciples are always fasting and saying prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees too, but yours go on eating and drinking'. Jesus replied, 'Surely you cannot make the bridegroom's attendants fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come, the time for the bridegroom to be taken away from them; that will be the time when they will fast.' He also told them this parable, 'No one tears a piece from a new cloak to put it on an old cloak; if he does, not only will he have torn the new one, but the piece taken from the new will not match the old. 'And nobody puts new wine into old skins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and then run out, and the skins will be lost. No; new wine must be put into fresh

skins. And nobody who has been drinking old wine wants new. "The old is good" he says.'

Opening to the old and new

A well-loved musical, 'Fiddler on the roof', is about Tevye, a simple and poor dairyman, who struggled to maintain tradition in times of change and turbulence in his small village of Anatevka. Tevye, in the opening number states, *"Without tradition, our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof."*

In today's gospel passage, the Pharisees and scribes went to Jesus and asked him, *"Why do you do things in a different way? Why are you going against the status quo? Why don't you and your disciples fast like John's disciples and our disciples?"* They were holding onto the changelessness of their tradition as their top priority, as their highest value. They were afraid of the new ways of Jesus and how He seemed to be shaking their comfort zones.

Jesus then used the symbol of a wedding feast to answer their question regarding fasting. He likened Himself to the bridegroom. As long as He the bridegroom was present, the wedding feast carried on, and the guests, i.e. His disciples were meant to celebrate.

He then used two parables to further clarify His point. It would be senseless to tear from a piece of brand new cloak and put it onto an old torn cloak. Likewise, it would be meaningless to put new wine into old skins. Due to the fermentation process, the new wine would produce gas that would only cause the old wine skins to stretch to bursting point. Jesus' point to the Pharisees and scribes is that they had to open themselves to the newness that He was bringing to their lives. In order to do so, they could not hold onto their desire for changelessness. By doing so, they would experience the true joy of their faith.

What message does today's gospel passage have for us?

In our own faith journey, there is always place for the old and the new, for fasting and feasting. We must not be rigidly holding onto the changelessness of tradition, and close ourselves to the newness that Jesus wants to bring to our lives. Rather, Jesus invites us always to be adaptable. Thus, let us learn from the old and also welcome the new. Let us be ready to fast and also be eager to feast. Let us not miss the joy of our faith! Jesus is here. As our Bridegroom, He desires to bring new joy and love into our hearts each day.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Does my faith in Jesus bring joy and love to my life?
- 2) How can I be more flexible to the new things that Jesus is offering me?

**Saturday, 5th September, St. Teresa of Calcutta
1 Corinthians 4:6–15, Luke 6:1–5**

One Sabbath Jesus happened to be taking a walk through the cornfields, and his disciples were picking ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands and eating them. Some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath day?' Jesus answered them, 'So you have not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry how he went into the house of God, took the loaves of offering and ate them and gave them to his followers, loaves which only the priests are allowed to eat?' And he said to them, 'The Son of Man is master of the Sabbath'.

Friend of life

The Jews considered the Sabbath as a day of 'rest' in imitation of God, who had rested after six days of creating the world (Exodus

20:8–11) In fact, the term 'Sabbath' is derived from the Hebrew word, 'Sabbath' which means to stop and rest. God set the Sabbath for the people to rest and enjoy the freedom to love and to do good deeds.

Jesus wanted to restore the real meaning of the Sabbath. The Pharisees had ingrained a list of rigorous laws to celebrate the perfect observation of Sabbath day. In meticulously following the Sabbath law, the people missed the point of what the Sabbath really meant. Jesus, on the other hand, was never scrupulous in following the Sabbath law. He even cured the sick on the Sabbath day which aroused anger among the Pharisees.

Jesus, the master of the Sabbath, knew that the Sabbath was not meant to be a heavy burden to be laid on the people, but to bring goodness and rest to their lives. This is because God is the God of Life who always places the needs of the people first.

In today's passage, Jesus and His disciples were walking through a cornfield, and they were hungry. Upon seeing the ripe grain, the disciples plucked the grain, removed the husks and ate it. The Pharisees were indignant that Jesus' disciples were breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus reminded them of King David and his followers, who due to hunger, did not hesitate to eat the bread that was meant only for the priests. For Jesus, the people and their needs must come first: the hungry must be fed, the sick must be cured, the lonely must be heard, the poor must be helped.

The master of the Sabbath is a friend of life. We who follow Him must also be a friend of life. We are called, not just to be self-absorbed in our own routines and practices, but to remember to put the needs of others before ours. Today, let the God of life speak to us in this time of prayer.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I grow more in my freedom to love?

Sunday, 6th September, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ezekiel 33:7–9, Romans 13:8–10, Matthew 18:15–20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, is between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector. 'I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven. 'I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.'

Peace be with you

"For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them."

When we gather in Jesus' name, He is present with us and in us. The presence of Jesus brings peace, not war; unity, not division.

We know from our years of life experiences that there are broken relationships to be mended and hurt to be healed. Jesus invites us today to believe and work always for reconciliation.

"Reconciliation is much more than a one-time event by which a conflict is resolved and peace established. A ministry of reconciliation goes far beyond problem solving, mediation, and peace agreements. There is not a moment in our lives without the need for reconciliation."

When we dare to look at the myriad hostile feelings and thoughts in our hearts and minds, we will immediately recognize the many little and big wars in which we take part. Our enemy can be a parent, a child, a "friendly" neighbour, people with different lifestyles, people who do not think as we think, speak as we speak, or act as we act. They all can become "them." Right there is where reconciliation is needed. Reconciliation touches the most hidden parts of our souls. God gave reconciliation to us as a ministry that never ends" (Henri Nouwen)

We have the duty of love to regard each person as our brother and sister, and to embrace the responsibility to love each other, correct each other and lead each other towards God.

Today, Jesus calls us to remain in His love so that we can be aware that we are here to work for reconciliation.

Question to reflect:

1) What stops me from working for reconciliation with others?

Monday, 7th September
1 Corinthians 5:1–8, Luke 6:6–11

Now on another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and began to teach, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see if he would cure a man on the Sabbath, hoping to find something to use against him. But he knew their thoughts; and he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Stand up! Come out into the middle.' And he came out and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, 'I put it to you: is it against the law on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to destroy it?' Then he looked round at them all and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand'. He did

so, and his hand was better. But they were furious, and began to discuss the best way of dealing with Jesus.

Dare to Do the Right Thing

Jesus never takes a break from either loving or doing good deeds simply because it was the Sabbath, the day of rest. Instead, He saw a man with his right hand withered and immediately healed him. He knew that the religious leaders were closely watching what He would do. He also knew that they would condemn Him for His action. However, Jesus chose to put the man in need as His top priority.

Jesus never stops loving and doing good deeds. We must pattern the way we love after Him and give love without procrastination or fear of others' criticism. At times, our doing good actions can lead us to face misunderstandings and persecutions. We, however, must persevere, with Jesus as our strength and motivation.

"It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result." (Mahatma Gandhi)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I commit myself to love more and never stop doing good deeds?

**Tuesday, 8th September, The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Micah 5:1–4 or Romans 8:28–30, Matthew 1:1–16, 18–23**

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'.

An Instrument in God's Hands

"But you, (Bethlehem) Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born for me the one who is to rule over Israel; his origin goes back to the distant past, to the days of old. Yahweh is therefore going to abandon them till the time when she who is to give birth gives birth. Then the remnant of his brothers will come back to the sons of Israel. He will stand and feed his flock with the power of Yahweh, with the majesty of the name of his God. They will live secure, for from then on he will extend his power to the ends of the land. He himself will be peace." (Micah 5:1-4)

In today's first reading from the Prophet Micah, we find comfort that God Himself will be our peace. God, our Peace, chooses the least, the lowly, the humble in order to reveal His greatness.

In today's feast of the Nativity of Mary, we celebrate with joy that God chose her simple life to be His extraordinary instrument in the plan of salvation. Mary though an insignificant and lowly person in the eyes of the world, was regarded as great and important for God.

God has special tenderness and love for those who are considered the least and simple in the eyes of the world. Today, God invites us to make ourselves little and simple and not to complicate ourselves by becoming proud and great. Through our littleness, He reveals His loving presence of peace.

As we celebrate the gift of Mary's life, let us ask our Mother to help us to be like her so that we too can be God's instruments to bring His peace to the people we meet today.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I de-complicate myself so that God can work great things in me and through me?

Wednesday, 9th September, St. Peter Claver
1 Corinthians 7:25–31, Luke 6:20–26

Fixing his eyes on his disciples Jesus said: 'How happy are you who are poor: yours is the kingdom of God. Happy you who are hungry now: you shall be satisfied. Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh. Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets. 'But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep. Alas

for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.’

A Life with God’s Joy

Jesus offers us the Beatitudes as our way of life that brings us to possess fullness of joy that the world can never give us.

Every day, hundreds of people around us move in all directions, rushing to reach some unknown goal. Many people are so busy pursuing power, pleasures, productivity and fame. Many people have this constant fear of not making it in life. So self-absorbed they are with their personal concerns that they remain oblivious to the suffering and needs of so many people who are in need.

Let us today be still and quiet. Let Jesus speak to us about what it means to *live a life with God’s joy*.

“How happy you who are poor.... How happy you who are hungry now... How happy you who weep now... Happy are you when people hate you... ”

Jesus’ way to happiness is for us to choose to live a life of simplicity, a life hungering for justice, a life weeping in solidarity with those who are suffering. To live the Beatitudes implies that we first have to die to our desire for worldly riches, fame, popularity and power. We follow Jesus who lived His life among the marginalized, and who did not desire to use His power and influence to seek His own glory, but to relieve the suffering of those in need. Jesus chose to live for God and for others.

Money, power and success do not make us happy. We need to let Jesus show us another path to happiness that the world can never give us.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to walk the path of the Beatitudes?

Thursday, 10th September

1 Corinthians 8:1–7, 11–13, Luke 6:27–38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'But I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To the man who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek too; to the man who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from the man who robs you. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. Instead, love your enemies and do good, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

Agape love

We are called to love others around us, even the unlovable ones, in the same way we ourselves have experienced God loving us – i.e. with unconditional and compassionate love.

Is this teaching too unrealistic in the world where we live?

Jesus started this rather difficult words with '*I say this to you who are listening...*' Are we listening to him? Or do we find ourselves listening to our reactive feelings and thoughts? Perhaps, we should listen to Jesus with an open heart and mind and allow his message to penetrate into our lives so that we can grasp the beauty of his words.

Jesus is calling us to love. We sometimes limit this word 'love' to feelings. However, the 'love' that Jesus speaks about has nothing to do with feelings but has everything to do with exercising our will in choosing to love, even to our enemies.

Agape is the love that Jesus is calling every Christian to have. It is a love that goes beyond love for our friends and family members. It is, in fact, a love that calls us to love without seeking anything in return, without any expectations.

This is the love that God our Father has for each of us. He loves us unconditionally, always ready to forgive and reaches us out with compassionate mercy. He continues to love and love, even though we might take him for granted or ignore him. The heart of God never ceases to wait for us to respond to him.

Who is our perfect model for us to follow?

Jesus tells us to look at God. God is our model. The standard of God is not impossible to reach because our hearts have been created to love like him.

'God doesn't require us to succeed, He only requires that you try.' (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Jesus calls us to give this Agape love a try so that we can truly be the reflection of God in the world today!

Friday, 11th September

1 Corinthians 9:16–19, 22–27, Luke 6:39–42

Jesus told a parable to them, 'Can one blind man guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out the splinter that is in your eye", when you cannot see the plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter that is in your brother's eye.'

The splinter and plank

"Before you judge my life, my past or my character... walk in my shoes, walk the path I have travelled, live my sorrow, my doubts, my fear, my pain and laughter. Remember, everyone has a story. When you live my life, then you can judge me." (Unknown)

In today's gospel passage, Jesus invites us to go out and encounter others, without judging them but by accepting them as our brothers and sisters. We cannot see what goes on inside each person. We do not know all the facts of each person's story. Therefore, let us stop focusing on the sins of others because this does not make us saints.

Instead, let us grow in love. Jesus calls us to stay close to Him and experience ourselves being deeply loved despite our own brokenness, scars and weaknesses. He is merciful to us even though

we struggle with our imperfections. He knows every plank and splinter of sin we have within us which we perhaps might not even recognise in ourselves.

Jesus, with His tender love, desires to remove them so that we can relate freely with others without judging them.

"If you judge people, you have no time to love them." (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

In this time of prayer, let us go close to Jesus and open our hearts to His love. We pray that we may always give praise than to criticise, to build than to destroy, to love than to condemn.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I tend to judge and see others at their worst?
- 2) How can I grow in love?

Saturday, 12th September, The Most Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary

1 Corinthians 10:14–22, Luke 6:43–49

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. For every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gather grapes from brambles. A good man draws what is good from the store of goodness in his heart; a bad man draws what is bad from the store of badness. For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart. 'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord" and not do what I say? 'Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and acts on them-I will show you what he is like. He is like the man who when he built his house dug, and dug deep, and laid the foundations on rock; when the river was in flood it bore down on that house but could not shake it, it was so well

built. But the one who listens and does nothing is like the man who built his house on soil, with no foundations: as soon as the river bore down on it, it collapsed; and what a ruin that house became!

Anchor in Jesus

"For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart."

Some of us tend to be quiet and reserved while others are more open and outgoing by nature. Sooner or later, we are able to know what is within a person by the words he/she says. This is because the mouth will reveal what is in the heart.

What fills our hearts?

Today, Jesus invites us to fill our hearts with His love. He does not want us to use our mouths to say empty meaningless words that we do not mean. He does not want us to use words and religious jargon when our hearts are far from Him and our lifestyle does not pattern after His. Jesus wants us to listen and put His words into practice so that He can be our Rock, our firm Foundation. When we listen and put His words into practice, we will become good trees bearing good fruits.

Let us anchor our life in Him and we will never fall despite the many storms that come by. We stand strong and draw from within us endless goodness, love, courage and joy.

Today, it is never too late to root our life in Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) How firmly rooted am I in Jesus?

Sunday, 13th September, Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sirach 27:30–28:7, Romans 14:7–9, Matthew 18:21–35

Peter went up to him 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.'

The struggle to forgive

"...unless you each forgive your brother from your heart."

As Christians, forgiveness is our way of life, our way of loving. This is because Jesus Himself embraces forgiveness as His way of life. We must follow Jesus to walk down this way as well.

Is it possible to forgive the person who has hurt us? Is it possible to forgive a parent who has been abusive? Is it possible to forgive a friend who has betrayed us? How can we forgive and forget?

In life, we have in one way or another experienced broken promises, betrayals, being abused, etc. In principle, we agree that forgiveness is an important concept. However, in reality when we need to forgive someone, it is another matter.

In today's parable, the master forgave the humongous debt of the servant. The servant, however, could not forgive the debt of another servant but had him unmercifully thrown into jail.

This is how we are. God forgives us again and again. We find it hard to forgive others again and again. Yet, forgiveness is what will free us from living in the darkness of the anger, sadness and resentment to the light of new life. It heals us from within when we choose to let go of the past in order to live fully in the present moment. It takes time and effort to put into practice. It is about choosing to forgive despite the struggles within.

Forgiveness is not easy but it begins by looking at God and experiencing ourselves being loved unconditionally and forgiven unflinchingly by Him. With a grateful heart, we choose to forgive others with the forgiveness we have first received from God. In the process of forgiving, we find true peace in our hearts.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there someone in my life whom I need to forgive?
- 2) How can I take the step towards forgiving?

Monday, 14th September, The Exaltation of the Holy Cross **Numbers 21:4–9, Philippians 2:6–11, John 3:13–17**

Jesus said to Nicodemus: ‘No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven; and the Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.’

The Cross of Jesus

“When we walk without the cross, when we build without the cross and when we proclaim Christ without the cross, we are not disciples of the Lord. We are worldly. We may be bishops, priests, cardinals, popes, all of this, but we are not disciples of the Lord.” (Pope Francis)

We are disciples of Jesus who walk with the cross, who build with the cross and who proclaim Jesus with the cross. For us, Jesus on the cross expresses the faithful love that made even the suffering worth it. For us, Jesus on the cross reminds us that He gave His life so that we might live life to the full.

No one can be drawn to the cross without leaving something of herself or himself there. Thus, each one of us is challenged to follow Jesus as He leads us to the path of the cross where we have to also die to our pride, self-sufficiency, arrogance, prejudices, indifferences, etc. It is in dying that we give God’s life to others.

Let us contemplate on the cross and allow ourselves to be loved by Jesus. Even if we harden our hearts towards Him, Jesus does not stop loving us. His love is our hope, our joy.

Question for reflection:

1) What does the cross mean for me?

Tuesday, 15th September, Our Lady of Sorrows

1 Corinthians 12:12–14, 27–31, John 19:25–27 or Luke 2:33–35

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son.' Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home.

Standing by the Cross

At the foot of Jesus' cross, Mary stood with steadfast love and trust. She held onto her trust in God as she watched the tragedy of love unfolding on the cross. She knew with certain hope that death would not have the last word, but life and love.

Mary, the Mother of Sorrows, continues to stand firmly by our sides as we face our own personal crosses. She stays close to us and lends us her strength and trust in God. As our Mother, she encourages us to carry on and not give up because God's faithful love will overcome all suffering, sickness and even death. Mary gently leads us to trust more in God whose love will never fail us.

In this journey of life, let us count on the help of our Mother. She is here with us to guide us to walk the path of the cross with unwavering trust and hope in God.

"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all- how will he not also, along with him, graciously

give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither the height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8: 31–39)

Question for reflection:

1) In our spiritual life, who is Mother Mary for us?

**Wednesday, 16th September, Ss. Cornelius and Cyprian
1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13, Luke 7:31–35**

Jesus said to the people, ‘What description, then, can I find for the men of this generation? What are they like? They are like children shouting to one another while they sit in the marketplace: “We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn’t dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn’t cry”. ‘For John the Baptist comes, not eating bread, not drinking wine, and you say, “He is possessed”. The Son of Man comes, eating and drinking, and you say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners”. Yet Wisdom has been proved right by all her children.’

Belonging to Wisdom

John the Baptist, living an austere life in the desert, was seen by the people as ‘possessed’. Jesus, on the other hand, came eating and drinking, and was labelled ‘glutton, drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’

For those who refused to accept the message of the Good News, nothing and nobody could move their hearts to believe and rejoice.

They looked at Jesus and John the Baptist with contempt and disapproval.

"Yet, Wisdom has been proved right by all her children."

What does Jesus mean by this statement? Who are Wisdom's children? The children of Wisdom are not the intellectuals who pride themselves of knowing everything. Instead those whose hearts are filled with simplicity and humility belong to Wisdom. This is because Wisdom herself is humble and simple and looks constantly towards God for His light of Truth and Love.

"There is no room for God in him who is full of himself" (Martin Buber)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be a child of Wisdom today?

Thursday, 17th September, St. Robert Bellarmine 1 Corinthians 15:1–11, Luke 7:36–50

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal. When he arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at table, a woman came in, who had a bad name in the town. She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is that is touching him and what a bad name she has'. Then Jesus took him up and said, 'Simon, I have something to say to you'. 'Speak, Master' was the reply. 'There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he pardoned them

both. Which of them will love him more?' 'The one who was pardoned more, I suppose' answered Simon. Jesus said, 'You are right'. Then he turned to the woman. 'Simon,' he said 'you see this woman? I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she has been covering my feet with kisses ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love. It is the man who is forgiven little who shows little love.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven'. Those who were with him at table began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man, that he even forgives sins?' But he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'.

Seeking for mercy

When the woman entered the house where Jesus was, she was immediately seen as one with a bad reputation in town. She was seen as a sinner, an outcast, and thus she was despised by the self-righteous people in that house.

How do we look at others: when we look at our friends, family members and fellow parishioners? How do people view us? When Jesus looks at us, how does He see us?

Simon the Pharisee looked and condemned, not just the woman but Jesus as well. For him, if Jesus was truly a prophet, he would have stopped the sinful woman from touching him. Simon played the judge and could neither see love in the woman's action nor compassion in Jesus' acceptance of her.

The woman had courage to do what only love could do. She took a jar of ointment and wept at Jesus' feet. She then wiped the tears

away with her hair. This woman was oblivious to all the whisperings and finger-pointing happening around her. She only wanted to love the One who had shown her love and mercy.

Jesus knew what Simon the Pharisee and even the rest of the onlookers were thinking about. He then told a parable to teach them an important lesson – i.e. real love comes from a heart that is forgiven.

Today, Jesus invites us to acknowledge our need for God’s merciful love and to experience ourselves being forgiven, again and again. It is when our hearts are touched by God’s love that we have time to love others, and not judge them.

“God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy.” (Pope Francis)

Let us be drawn by the power of mercy!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I find myself judging others often? Do I acknowledge my need for God and His mercy?
- 2) What is Jesus’ message for me as to how to live my life today?

Friday, 18th September

1 Corinthians 15:12–20, Luke 8:1–3

Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God. With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources.

Following Jesus to the end

“Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God.”

Jesus was constantly on the move. His passion to bring the Good News to people led Him to tirelessly move from one place to another.

As Christians, we are challenged to be actively on the move in order to proclaim the Good News of God’s love to those around us. Through our words and actions, we can share with them the gift of God’s love. Thus, we need to be permeated by the faithful love of God and let ourselves be led by Him.

In today’s Gospel, St. Luke introduced us to Jesus’ travelling companions. They were not just made up of men but also women. These women were brave to leave the comforts of their home in order to follow Jesus on the road. This was because women did not have the rights and freedom that men had in Jesus’ time. Yet, Jesus showed no loathing or unfairness towards women. He accepted and respected them for their rights and duty to proclaim the Good News.

St. Mary MacKillop, the first and only Australian saint, was canonised on 17th October 2010. She showed great love for Christ and courage to follow Him faithfully to the end. Throughout her life, she suffered greatly because she encountered opposition from several sectors outside and even within the Church. Indeed, she bravely faced the false accusations and belittling of her work. She continued to serve the poor and needy with determination.

“Whatever troubles may be before you, accept them bravely, remembering Whom you are trying to follow. Do not be afraid. Love

one another, bear with one another, and let charity guide you all your life. God will reward you as only He can.” (St. Mary MacKillop)

Throughout centuries, there have been so many great Christian women who have shown faithfulness in following Jesus on the road. Let us today renew our commitment to follow Jesus with greater determination!

Question for reflection:

1) In what way can I model my following after these women who followed Jesus so faithfully to the end?

Saturday, 19th September, St. Januarius
1 Corinthians 15:35–37, 42–49, Luke 8:4–15

With a large crowd gathering and people from every town finding their way to him, he used this parable: ‘A sower went out to sow his seed. As he sowed, some fell on the edge of the path and was trampled on; and the birds of the air ate it up. Some seed fell on rock, and when it came up it withered away, having no moisture. Some seed fell amongst thorns and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell into rich soil and grew and produced its crop a hundredfold.’ Saying this he cried, ‘Listen, anyone who has ears to hear!’ His disciples asked him what this parable might mean, and he said, The mysteries of the kingdom of God are revealed to you; for the rest there are only parables, so that they may see but not perceive, listen but not understand ‘This, then, is what the parable means: the seed is the word of God. Those on the edge of the path are people who have heard it, and then the devil comes and carries away the word from their hearts in case they should believe and be saved. Those on the rock are people who, when they first hear it, welcome the word with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of trial they give up. As for the part that fell into thorns, this is people who have heard, but as they

go on their way they are choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of life and do not reach maturity. As for the part in the rich soil, this is people with a noble and generous heart who have heard the word and take it to themselves and yield a harvest through their perseverance.'

What kind of soil am I?

In today's Gospel, Jesus saw the large crowd gathering around Him. He started to tell this parable in order to invite His listeners to become committed disciples and not simply as 'fans' with superficial enthusiasm. Looking at the many people around Him, Jesus desired for committed people whose hearts were moved to listen and put His Word into practice.

Today, Jesus calls us to be His committed disciples with hearts willing and receptive to Him. It is a challenge to really question ourselves honestly, *"What kind of soil am I? What kind of disciple/friend am I to Jesus?"*

We might identify ourselves as the hardened path, the rocky soil, the thorny soil or the good soil. The Good News is that Jesus never gives up on any of us, even if we are cynical, superficial or distracted. He comes and keeps sowing His seed of the Word. He will wait for us to respond to His love. Even if we are good soil that bears good fruit, Jesus will continue to sow the seed of His Word so that we will, again fall in love with Him and persevere with joy in our following. Jesus always invites us to a deeper and more mature following.

What matters is that we do not give up but continue to allow Jesus to work in the soil of our hearts.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which soil do I tend to be most of the time?
- 2) What is Jesus inviting me to do in this time of prayer?

Sunday, 20th September, Twenty- Fifth Sunday in Ordinary

Time

Isaiah 55:6–9, Philippians 1:20–24, 27, Matthew 20:1–16

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: 'Now 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.

His love overflows

In the Kingdom of God, there is a place for everyone. Jesus comes to bring the Good News of God's compassionate love to all.

Everyone is invited to believe and experience His rich love. In God's vineyard, no one will be excluded.

One common complaint between siblings is the 'unfairness' of their parents. One would normally accuse parents of favouring or paying more attention to another. This reminds us of another parable of Jesus that tells us of a prodigal son's elder brother who refused to enter into the celebration (Luke 15:11–33). This elder son complained to his elderly father, *'Listen! For all these years, I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command.'* This elder brother could not understand his father's illogical way of loving his two sons. In the same way the workers who started working first could not understand the landowner's illogical way of paying them.

Jesus wants to show us that God gives His unconditional love to us just like the father in the parable of Luke 15 and the landowner in today's parable. He fills the cup of someone to the brim, even the cup of someone we deem to be unworthy. Instead of looking at the cups of others to see who has more or less than us, all we need to do is to look at our own cup and rejoice to know that it is overflowing with God's love.

What is important is that we respond to God's gentle invitation to enter into His vineyard every day, i.e. to enter into a daily relationship with Him. This is because we are not meant to live through our one short life by simply wasting our time at the marketplace. God calls and we respond.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I rejoice and be filled with gratitude for God's love in my life?

Monday, 21st September, St. Matthew **Ephesians 4:1–7, 11–13, Matthew 9:9–13**

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

Crumpled, dirtied and chosen

As we celebrate the feast of St. Matthew, we can see it so well that our God is a God of mercy. It was Jesus' gaze of mercy that moved Matthew to leave everything, get up and follow Him. That moment of encounter with Jesus changed Matthew from being a tax collector to an apostle; from being a sinner to a saint.

"A well-known speaker started off his conference by holding up a \$50 note. Looking at his listeners, he asked, "Who would like this \$50?" Majority of the people raised their hands. He said, "I am going to give this \$50 to one of you but first, let me do this." He started to crumple the note and asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. "Well, what happens if I do this?" The speaker went on to throw the note on the ground and grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked the now crumpled and dirty note up. "Now, who still wants it?" My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. The \$50 note remains \$50. It does not decrease in value despite being crumpled and dirty. Many times, we are dropped, crumpled and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances

that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what happens, we will never lose our value in God's eyes. To Him, whether we are dirty or clean, crumpled or creased, we are priceless to Him" (Unknown)

Today, let us allow ourselves to be loved by Him. No matter how 'crumbled or dirty' we are, we must never forget Jesus' profound mercy. When we truly experience ourselves being loved and forgiven by Jesus, we can also break down the walls of prejudices and judgements that make us exclude others.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is it a challenge for me to relate to others with mercy and not by being judgemental?
- 2) What do I understand from Jesus in prayer that I want to put His Word into practice?

Tuesday, 22nd September **Proverbs 21:1–6, 10–13, Luke 8:19–21**

The mother and brothers of Jesus came looking for him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd. He was told, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you' But he said in answer, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice'.

Belonging to God's Family

In today's Gospel, Jesus seemed to be impolite to Mary, His mother and His brothers (in Jewish tradition, cousins and close relatives were often referred to as brothers). We need to understand the message behind the words of Jesus so as to be enriched with this beautiful passage.

Jesus was a loving son to Mary, His mother. He would never have the heart to insult or hurt the woman who loved Him so much. Rather, He wanted the crowd around Him to grasp the new reality of what it meant to be in the new family of God. In God's family, they were united as one, not by blood ties, but by their desire to do God's will. God would be their loving Father and they would be brothers and sisters to each other. No one was better than the other. No one would be honoured more than the other. As children of God, they would do the Father's will of loving and serving all without discrimination or segregation.

We too have a place in God's family. As brothers and sisters to Jesus, our top priority is to seek and do God's will. His will is for us to live a life of love and humble service. Today, we are His children, and this is the source of our contentment and peace.

"It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world." (St. Aloysius Gonzaga)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I not take for granted being part of God's family?

Wednesday, 23rd September, St. Pius of Pietrelcina
Proverbs 30:5–9, Luke 9:1–6

Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, 'Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money; and let none of you take a spare tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there; and when you leave, let it be from there. As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as a sign to them.' So they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the Good News and healing everywhere.

Take Nothing... Trust

Jesus' whole life exuded His trust and surrender to God His Father. Everything He did was done out of genuine trust in God. In today's gospel, Jesus set the Twelve together and sent them out to preach about the Kingdom of God. Interestingly, He did not instruct them on what they should take with them in this mission, but He told them what not to take.

"Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money, and let none of you take a spare tunic."

A staff was usually carried by travellers to defend themselves against thieves and wild animals. They were to carry no haversack which was used as begging for alms and provisions. No spare tunic to protect them from the cold if they had to sleep outdoors. No bread or money as additional security. Jesus sent His disciples without anything, except their complete trust in God.

Today, Jesus sends us on a mission too. We are sent by Jesus to bring God's love, peace and joy to those who come our way. We go with a heart full of trust in God that He will provide us with the strength, the joy and enough enthusiasm for the mission.

"God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us." (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* No. 12)

God is living at our side every day to love us. Today, we trust in God and go out with joy to help Him share the Good News of His love with people in our lives.

Question for reflection:

1) What is holding me back from living the joy of mission?

Thursday, 24th September
Ecclesiastes 1:2–11, Luke 9:7–9

Herod the tetrarch had heard about all that was going on; and he was puzzled, because some people were saying that John had risen from the dead, others that Elijah had reappeared, still others that one of the ancient prophets had come back to life. But Herod said, 'John? I beheaded him. So who is this I hear such reports about?' And he was anxious to see Him.

Who are you?

"Who is this I hear such reports about?"

Herod's question continues to be the most significant question ever asked by humankind. Though he had asked the right question, he did not search in the right direction for the answer. Rather, he recalled the evil deed that he had committed against John the Baptist; he was afraid that John had come back to life. This made him fearful. His conscience was pricked and so he was anxious to see this Jesus. He was not interested in knowing Jesus personally but was just eager to satisfy his curiosity and ease his conscience.

Today, let us ask Jesus, *"Who are you?"*

With eyes of faith, we gaze at Jesus with love and allow Him to reveal to us who He truly is. With ears of faith, we hear Jesus' voice as He calls us by our names and we trustingly follow Him. With hearts of faith, we yearn to die to our self-centred pride in order to enter into a lasting relationship with Him and be united with the One we love.

"Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope

which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness."

(Pope Francis)

Herod asked the right question but he was not brave to encounter Christ. Let us today encounter Jesus and follow Him to a deeper experiential knowledge of His faithful love.

Question for reflection:

1) Who is Jesus for me at this point of my life?

Friday, 25th September

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11, Luke 9:18–22

One day when Jesus was praying alone in the presence of his disciples he put this question to them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?' And they answered, 'John the Baptist; others Elijah; and others say one of the ancient prophets come back to life'. 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' It was Peter who spoke up. 'The Christ of God' he said. But he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone anything about this. 'The Son of Man' he said 'is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.'

A question and an answer

"Who do you say I am?" This is a question that Jesus asked His disciples, and one which every disciple of every age needs to face.

Today, Jesus wants us to respond to this same question, *"Who do you say I am?"* He does not want a theoretical or intellectual answer

but one that comes from our own personal experiences of Him in our lives. Peter saw Jesus healing, forgiving, teaching, loving and he sensed that Jesus was more than just a prophet. Thus, he proclaimed, *"The Christ of God"*. He might not fully understand the meaning behind his words. For Peter and the rest of the disciples, to be the Christ or the Messiah meant victory, glory and honour. However, God's ways and thoughts are different from ours. Jesus immediately went on to explain that the Messiah had to suffer grievously, would be rejected and put to death before His victory. The path of the cross is the path that Jesus took, and one which we too have to take if we want to follow Him closely.

Jesus does not want His disciples to simply answer the question, *"Who do you say I am?"* with words, but to follow Him daily to walk the path of the cross – path of self-giving love.

Today, Jesus is here with us and asks us the only question that truly matters: *"Who do you say I am?"*

Questions for reflection:

- 1) *"Who do you say I am?"* – How can I reply, not just from what I have heard and know about Jesus, but from how I have truly experienced Him in my life of faith?
- 2) What is the cross that I have to take up today?

**Saturday, 26th September, Ss. Cosmas and Damian
Ecclesiastes 11:9–12:8, Luke 9:43–45**

At a time when everyone was full of admiration for all he did, Jesus said to his disciples, 'For your part, you must have these words constantly in your mind: The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the power of men'. But they did not understand him when he said this; it was

hidden from them so that they should not see the meaning of it, and they were afraid to ask him about what he had just said.

Set Your Heart on God

Jesus was at the high point of His life. He was greatly admired by huge crowds of people, and was successful in all that He did. Yet, He was not moved by external praises and accomplishments. Jesus knew the hearts of the people. The same people, who marvelled at what He did, would be the same ones handing Him over to death.

'The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the power of men'.

As for Jesus, He continued to set His heart solely on God, His Father. His life was in the hands of God, and not in the hands of men.

We love to be praised and admired by people. We love to be the winner and achieve great results for all we do. In our glorious moments, we tend to forget God and set our hearts on the world. However, when we are criticized, ridiculed and considered useless by others, we fall into the trap of self-rejection and self-depreciation.

The great challenge for us is to fully set our hearts on God. God loves us unconditionally and stays close to us in our lives. We do not need to work hard to prove that we are worthy of His love and care. God's love for us goes beyond our achievements or failures. We are loved, no matter how the world sees and values us.

"You must have these words constantly in your mind..."

In each time of prayer, when we truly listen to Jesus, He speaks to us about God's love and about our value in His eyes. Let us listen carefully to the voice of Love so that we can live each moment of

success and failure, of joy and sorrow by setting our hearts on God alone.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I measure my worth by the success and achievements I have?
- 2) How can I set my heart more on God and less on myself?

Sunday, 27th September, Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary

Time

Ezekiel 18:25–28, Philippians 2:1–11, Matthew 21:28–32

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, ‘What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, “My boy, you go and work in the vineyard today”. He answered, “I will not go”, but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, “Certainly, sir”, but did not go. Which of the two did the father’s will?’ ‘The first’ they said. Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you solemnly, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, a pattern of true righteousness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him.’

Yes, I will go

In today’s Gospel, Jesus told a rather straight-forward parable about two sons who were asked by their father to work in the vineyard. The first son refused but later relented and went to work. The second son said, ‘Yes’ but he did not go. Jesus ended by asking His listeners a question, *“Which of the two did the father’s will?”*

Today, this question is for us to answer too. By answering to Jesus’ question, *“Which of the two did the father’s will?”* we are in fact challenged by Him to reflect on our own lives before we reply.

The elder son was the one who did the father's will even though he refused at the beginning. Somehow, his heart repented, and he felt sorry for refusing his father's request. Quietly, he simply went ahead to work in the father's vineyard. The younger son had the intention and promised his father but did not carry out what he said. We are challenged to look at our lives. What about us? Do our actions speak louder than our words?

It is not a matter of us having good intentions or making promises but then we do not put it into action. Through this parable, Jesus is telling us that God does not want us to express verbally our love and good intentions to follow His ways but lack the determination to put their words and desires into actions. We might be active in parish work and go for mass daily, but we miss the point if our hearts are far from God. Rather, God wants us, out of love, to listen and put His Word into action.

"The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills it; and thirdly to do it because it is his will." (St. Elizabeth Ann Seton)

Questions for reflection:

1) Which son do I identify myself with? Why?

Monday, 28th September, St. Wenceslaus, Ss. Lawrence Ruiz and Companions **Job 1:6–22, Luke 9:46–50**

An argument started between them about which of them was the greatest. Jesus knew what thoughts were going through their minds, and he took a little child and set him by his side and then said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and

anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For the least among you all, that is the one who is great.’ John spoke up. ‘Master,’ he said ‘we saw a man casting out devils in your so name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘You must not stop him: anyone who is not against you is for you’.

The power of simplicity

Immediately after Jesus spoke to His disciples regarding His coming passion and death on the cross, they started to argue among themselves which one of them was the greatest. They were wondering who would be in charge when Jesus was no longer with them. Each of them desired to be the leader over the others. They were full of their own worldly ambitions and desire for power.

Jesus read their hearts and knew all that took place among His disciples. Jesus took a little child and said, *“Anyone who welcomed this little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For the least among you all, that is the one who is great.”*

Who is the greatest for Jesus? Not Peter, not John, not James, not Judas, not Simon, not Jude...none of his disciples who desired for power. Instead, a simple and powerless child represents what greatness means.

For all who desire to follow Jesus closely, the key to greatness is to be simple and humble as a little child. Unfortunately, there are many people who undervalue the power of simplicity. Yet, this is the path we need to take when we truly desire to follow Jesus.

“Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.” (St. Augustine)

In the next incident in today's gospel passage, John and James showed that they could not truly grasp Jesus' message of simplicity and humility. The two brothers saw an outsider casting out devils in Jesus' name, and they felt threatened. They felt that only they, as true disciples of Jesus, had the power to do such a thing. Jesus came and said, *"You must not stop him."* This was because Jesus knew that God could use simple hearts to do great deeds.

"Provided that God be glorified, we must not care by whom." (St. Francis de Sales)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I follow Jesus more closely today?

Tuesday, 29th September, The Holy Archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14 or Revelations 12:7–12, John 1:47–51

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'.

God Who Reveals Himself

Jesus knows each of us through and through. He knows every movement of our heart, each thought that crosses our mind and the innermost desires within. The experience of being deeply known personally through and through is a reality that each of us

has to realise. Jesus desires to be intimate with us to such a degree that He seeks to reveal Himself completely to us.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus saw Nathanael as a man searching for something more in his life. Nathanael was a good Jew who followed the Law of the Torah and knew the Scripture by heart. Yet, he was searching for more of God.

Jesus promised him that he would see 'greater things.' The 'greater things' that Nathanael would experience was to have a personal relationship with God.

God wants to have a personal relationship of love with us. Jesus used the image of Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28: 12-17 to show us that God's desire is to enter into a mutual sharing of life and love with His people. The angels descending represent God descending into our hearts in order to reveal Himself to us. The angels ascending to heaven represent our response to Him as we too open and share our life and love with Him.

At times, we fail to listen to God's invitation to enter into a relationship with Him. We tend to allow the distractions and busyness of life to deafen us to His voice. Today, let us listen attentively to God so that we can come to know the 'greater things' that He has in store for us.

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:15)

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from listening attentively and encountering God today?

Wednesday, 30th September, St. Jerome
Job 9:1–12, 14–16 Luke 9:57–62

As Jesus and his disciples travelled along they met a man on the road who said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go'. Jesus answered, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'. Another to whom he said, 'Follow me', replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first'. But he answered, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God'. Another said, 'I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home'. Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God'.

The cost of being Jesus' disciple

In today's Gospel, Jesus' main message to those who want to follow Him is that we would have to be willing to pay the price of our discipleship.

The first man came to Jesus and told Him, *"I will follow you wherever you go."* Jesus told him, *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nest, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

If we want to follow Jesus wherever He goes, this is the path on which we have to follow Him. Jesus had no home as He travelled from one town to another. He was constantly on this journey of bringing the Good News of God's love to each person He met. There was nothing to distract Him from this mission. Can we follow Him by having nothing to distract us but to be determined to give ourselves to be His instruments?

The second man went up and wanted to follow Jesus, but he wanted to bury his father first. *"To bury my father"* is a saying in the

time of Jesus which means that the man wants to be with his father as long as he lives. Thus, this man had the good intention of following Jesus but not now. Once more, Jesus seemed harsh but His point behind the words to the man was that he could not use excuses anymore. If he did not follow Jesus then, he would never follow Him at all.

The message for us is that we cannot choose the right and convenient time and day for us to follow Jesus and do His will. Today is the moment. We cannot procrastinate or make excuses just to delay living as His committed disciples today.

The third man wanted to say good-bye to his family members before following Jesus. Jesus knew that this man's heart was not ready to leave home. Going home, he would most likely be convinced to stay on. Like us, we too want to follow Jesus, but we have the tendency to go back to our old ways, to our comfortable environments, to our comfort zones where we are tempted to stay on just a bit longer and linger. Thus, Jesus calls us not to keep looking back but to fix our eyes on Him and walk on in this journey of discipleship.

Jesus wants us to make Him our top priority. He calls us to follow Him without distraction, without procrastination and without looking back.

The call to follow Jesus is one that is for all Christians, not only for selected people. Today, let us renew our commitment to follow Jesus and to follow Him with single-mindedness and determination.

"Jesus is the only significance. Beside Jesus nothing has any significance. He alone matters." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to pay the cost of my discipleship?

Thursday, 1st October, St. Therese of Lisieux **Job 19:21–27, Luke 10:1–12**

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him, in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself was to visit. He said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest. Start off now, but remember, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road. Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the labourer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you". But whenever you enter a town and they do not make you welcome, go out into its streets and say, "We wipe off the very dust of your town that clings to our feet, and leave it with you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God is very near." I tell you, on that day it will not go as hard with Sodom as with that town.'

Go and proclaim

'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.'

We are the labourers that Jesus is sending out. We tend to associate these words of Jesus as a vocation slogan to call young people to join priesthood and religious life. Jesus calls each and every one of us to be part of this mission. Jesus never excludes anyone from His

mission, and so we must not exclude ourselves too. Whether we are young or elderly, studying or working, etc., we are sent to be labourers to God's harvest.

In this mission of being God's labourers, we must be ready to be like lambs among wolves. We will encounter rejection, ridicules and even persecutions. But as lambs, we must never forget that we are safe in our Shepherd's arms. He is always with us and will renew our strength with His love.

The message of the Good News that we are called to proclaim, through our words and actions, is, "The Kingdom of God is very near to you. God is here. God is near." We are called to be messengers bringing hope and peace to the hearts of the people.

The mission is urgent. There is no time to delay or wait but there is only the need to go out and proclaim.

Question for reflection:

1) How committed am I to allow Jesus to use my life as His instrument for the mission?

Friday, 2nd October, The Guardian Angels
Job 38:1, 12–21, 40:3–5, Matthew 18:1–5, 10

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.'

To be like a little child

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples wanted to know who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was. Their question reflected what they had in their hearts. Each one of them wanted to be the greatest, to be somebody. However, Jesus' way of life involved them being little, not great; promoting others, not self; loving others gratuitously, not for selfish benefits.

In order to answer the question of His disciples, Jesus called a little child and set the child in front of them. He then told His disciples that unless they changed to be like little children, they would never enter the kingdom of heaven. He wanted His disciples to grasp His meaning of greatness. To be great does not begin with competing but converting their hearts to become child-like and humble.

"...unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Today, we are also invited to change and become like little children. This means that we are called to strive to be child-like, teachable, humble, simple, and open to learn and live. It is a challenge for many of us because we tend to want to compare and compete with others around us. We tend to want to outdo, outrun, outpace and outsmart others. Like the disciples, we want people to regard us as somebody and give us the respect we deserve.

Let us enter into this daily conversion of being child-like so that humility and love can be a permanent part of who we are. We thus strive to make ourselves a gift for others so that we can love them for their own good.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I learn to be child-like today?

Saturday, 3rd October

Job 42:1–3, 5–6, 12–17, Luke 10:17–24

The seventy-two came back rejoicing. 'Lord,' they said 'even the devils submit to us when we use your name.' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Yes, I have given you power to tread underfoot serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven.' It was then that, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, he said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Then turning to his disciples he spoke to them in private, 'Happy the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it'.

With joy in the heart

The disciples came back with great joy after their mission experience. Jesus rejoiced with them but warned them not to forget their true source of joy. Their joy must not be based on their success and accomplishments. Instead, their true joy had to come from the reality that their names were written in heaven.

Likewise, we live in joy, not because of all the great things we have achieved or the many things we possess, but because of God's

faithful love. Even when we face problems in our life, we know that we always belong to God. Thus, we have the hope to carry on.

“A Christian is a man or a woman of joy: a man and a woman with joy in their heart. There is no Christian without joy! You may be told that there are many such Christians but they are not Christians! They say they are, but they are not! They are missing something. The Christian identity card is joy, the Gospel’s joy, the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of that hope that Jesus is waiting for us, the joy that - even with the crosses and sufferings we bear in this life – is expressed in another way, which is peace in the certainty that Jesus accompanies us, is with us... The Christian grows in joy through trusting in God. God always remembers his covenant... the Christian knows that God remembers him, that God loves him, that God accompanies him, that God is waiting for him. And this is joy.” (Pope Francis)

Jesus invites us to be simple and humble. This is because the ones who are simple and humble seek only one thing, i.e. God Himself. They do not allow pride to harden their hearts. Therefore, let us ask for the grace today to be simple and humble Christians who have God, who have joy!

Questions for reflection:

1) Is my Christian identity card joy? Why?

Sunday, 4th October, Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 5:1–7, Philippians 4:6–9, Matthew 21:33–43

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, ‘Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a

vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. "They will respect my son" he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives'. Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see? I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.'

The story of the vineyard

The owner of the vineyard, in today's Gospel passage, was a person of patience. He sent one of his servants to collect his produce but the tenants mistreated and killed them. Yet, the landowner continued to be patient with the ungrateful and wicked tenants. He sent another batch of servants to them. They did the same to the landowner's servants. Finally, He decided to send his son because he thought that they would treat him better than his servants. Instead, they seized the son and killed him too.

The Jewish leaders who heard this parable knew that Jesus was referring to them and their predecessors who had ignored the messengers which God had sent to them.

Today, Jesus invites us not just to focus on the Jewish authorities and their lack of goodness in them. Rather, we need to look at God and at His love that is so patient and merciful. Just like the landowner who never gave up on the tenants, God continues to show us His love and mercy despite our moments of flaws and unfaithfulness. His endless love is not hindered by our limitations. Experiencing God's love, we are called to work for His Kingdom with joy and perseverance.

Question for reflection:

1) How do I respond to God's gift of love and mercy that He offers me each day?

Monday, 5th October
Galatians 1:6–12, Luke 10:25–37

There was a lawyer who, to disconcert Jesus, stood up and said to him, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What do you read there?' He replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself'. 'You have answered right,' said Jesus 'do this and life is yours.' But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of brigands; they took all he had, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan traveller who came upon him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him on to his own mount, carried him to the inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and

handed them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said "and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have." Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the brigands` hands?' 'The one who took pity on him' he replied. Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself'.

Go and do the same yourself

Christian love is not just a concept or an idea that we think about. It is not even a feeling or sentiment that we have in our hearts. Christian love involves thinking, feeling and putting it into action.

"What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like." (St. Augustine)

In today's Gospel, Jesus told a parable where a priest and a Levite saw the wounded man but walked on. This was because they did not regard the man as their neighbour but a stranger. Both failed to put love into practice even though they knew the concept of love. A Samaritan, the despised enemy of the Jews, saw the same person on the road. His heart was moved by compassion. He drew near the wounded man and took responsibility of him. This Samaritan man is a model for what it means to love.

Jesus reminds us never to be so busy with work, deadlines and even with parish ministries that we forget to look at others as our neighbours and love them with compassion and mercy.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more sensitive to the needs of others today?

Tuesday, 6th October, St. Bruno
Galatians 1:13–24, Luke 10:38–42

Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha who was distracted with all the serving said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered: 'Martha, Martha,' he said 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her.'

Christian life is listening and doing

Martha welcomed Jesus and His disciples to her home. She promptly busied herself with serving the guests. Mary, however, chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listened attentively to His teaching.

"Martha who was distracted with all the serving..."

Martha's distraction led her to be pulled in different directions. She was pulled in the direction of complaints, anger, resentment, becoming judgemental and anxious. She was so distracted that she forgot to serve graciously and joyfully. She was so scattered that she was prevented from being fully present with Jesus. Instead, Martha got angry with her sister and even accused Jesus of not caring. Thus, her distractions divided her from Mary as well as from Jesus.

Jesus did not chide Martha for her good work in serving. Rather, He reminded Martha that her distraction had led her to miss out on the 'only one' thing that was needed. Mary had chosen that 'only one' thing and that was to sit at His feet and pay attention to Him.

It was from listening to His words that Martha would find peace in her service.

Many of us would find ourselves drawn to Martha rather than Mary. We too, tend to be busy with serving the needs of our family, friends and even God that we become so distracted with the many activities. Thus, we have little time to be with Jesus and listen attentively to Him. Instead of finding peace in Jesus, we become worried and anxious. Lacking peace within us, serving becomes a heavy burden rather than a joy.

Today, let us listen to Jesus first so that we can be nourished by His word of love. From there, we can truly serve with joy and peace in our hearts.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from sitting at the feet of Jesus and finding rest in Him again?

**Wednesday, 7th October, Our Lady of the Rosary
Galatians 2:1–2, 7–14, Luke 11:1–4**

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples'. He said to them, 'Say this when you pray: "Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test."' "

God, our all-loving Father

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples must have been impressed by the way He was praying which was different from the rest of the Jewish

religious leaders. He was neither blabbing out words nor simply praying out of routine. Most likely, they saw Jesus praying to God the Father as though He was speaking with someone He truly loved. There was something special in the way Jesus prayed that one of them asked Him, *"Lord, teach us to pray..."*

Jesus invited His disciples as well as each one of us today to enter into a deeper relationship with God who is our Father. God is not someone distant from our lives whom we cannot relate with. God is not indifferent and uncaring. God is our Father.

"The Our Father begins with a great consolation: we are allowed to say "Father". This one word contains the whole history of redemption. We are allowed to say "Father" because the Son was our brother and has revealed the Father to us; because, thanks to what Christ has done, we have become once more the children of God. The problem for very many people today is that their experience of fatherhood is in many cases either completely absent or obscured by inadequate examples of fatherhood. We must therefore allow Jesus to teach us what father really means. For Jesus, father is the source of all good, the measure of perfection of all people. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" The love that the father has for us and endures to the end. Christ fulfilled that love on the Cross by praying for his enemies. We call God "Father" because he is the source of all love, and in the Lord's Prayer Jesus invites us to become children of this all-loving Father." (Pope Benedict XVI)

Today, as His children, let us relate with God our all-loving Father. We trust Him and know that we belong to Him and that God will give us all that is good and life-giving.

Question for reflection:

1) Looking back at my journey of faith, what are my experiences of trust and love that I have with God my Father?

Thursday, 8th October

Galatians 3:1–5, Luke 11:5–13

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, “My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him”; and the man answers from inside the house, “Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it you”. I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it him for friendship’s sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants. ‘So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

How much more...

In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus continued to tell His disciples that God whom they were to call Father is the one they can trust. He told a parable of a persistent friend whose friend unexpectedly arrived at his house. He ran out of bread so he asked another friend for some. The friend answered from within, *“Do not bother me...”*

We might look at this parable and pity that poor man who was woken up just because his friend needed three loaves of bread. However, in Jesus' culture, it is expected for someone to give whatever the friend is asking regardless of the time.

The man who refused to open his door to help his friend in need would somehow respond positively due to the persistent knocking and asking of the other. How much more would God give us of what we need to live life with His love and peace!

Likewise, if a father, with his human limitations, would give to his child what is good, how much more of the gift of His Holy Spirit would God give to those who ask Him. Many times, we pray by asking Jesus for material needs and wants. However, we must not forget that the true prayer of a child of God is a daily asking with open hands for what he/she really needs, i.e. the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Today, let us be aware that we are God's beloved sons and daughters as we enter once more into a relationship of love and trust with Him.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I place my trust in God the Father each day?

Friday, 9th October, Ss. Denis and his Companions, St. John Leonardi
Galatians 3:7–14, Luke 11:15–26

When Jesus had cast out a devil, some of the people said, 'It is through Beelzebul, the prince of devils, that he casts out devils'. Others asked him, as a test, for a sign from heaven; but, knowing what they were

thinking, he said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin, and a household divided against itself collapses. So too with Satan: if he is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? - Since you assert that it is through Beelzebul that I cast out devils. Now if it is through Beelzebul that I cast out devils, through whom do your own experts cast them out? Let them be your judges then. But if it is through the finger of God that I cast out devils, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you. So long as a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than he is attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares out his spoil. He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man it wanders through waterless country looking for a place to rest, and not finding one it says, "I will go back to the home I came from". But on arrival, finding it swept and tidied, it then goes off and brings seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and set up house there, so that the man ends up by being worse than he was before.'

He who is with me...

There were people who attributed Beelzebul, the prince of devils, to Jesus and His works. Instead of rejoicing at the many good works that He did to help those in need, these people slandered Jesus. Yet, there were many other people who were able to recognise God working through Jesus.

Jesus' presence provoked a response from the people around Him. People either were attracted to Him or repelled from Him.

"He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters."

Today, there can be no impartiality when we come before Jesus. We have to make our choice. We can be with Him or against Him; to gather with Him or scatter. When we make our choice to be with Jesus, He pushes us always towards our brothers and sisters, and to be with them too. With Jesus, we look at others through His eyes of compassionate love. With Jesus, we can rejoice at the goodness of others and not judge them with our own criteria. With Jesus, we gather people together and not divide.

Let us make the choice to live with Jesus today.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I stand with Jesus today?

Saturday, 10th October Francis Borgia Galatians 3:22–29, Luke 11:27–28

As Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said, 'Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!' But he replied, 'Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it!'

Listening and keeping the Word

A woman, upon hearing the wise words Jesus had spoken, blessed His mother who had given him life and nurtured him. "*Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!*" she exclaimed. Jesus, however, followed up on her words and brought out the importance of listening to the word of God and obeying it. This, for Jesus, is real happiness.

Prayer is an intimate moment when we listen attentively to Jesus through the word of God and allow His love to be revealed to us personally. It is important to realize that prayer is not something we do for God, but it is what God is doing in us. He is the one leading

and directing our time of prayer. Prayer does not stop with listening, but the real 'work' of prayer is in keeping the word of God throughout the day and allowing God to influence our words and deeds. Real happiness comes when we hear and obey the voice of Love.

Without prayer, we become deaf to the voice of God and become confused with many other anxious and distracting noises that pull us away from living life fully. Let us be disciplined in keeping our time of prayer and not evade setting time and space for God.

Let us look at Mother Mary whose real happiness did not come from the pride of having a capable child-like Jesus. Rather, her happiness came from listening and doing what she understood from God. Nothing and nobody could take away her joy in God. We are called too to live this real happiness that Jesus offers to us today. Let us choose to be happy today!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I accept Jesus' invitation to listen to God's word and obey it – and to find true happiness?

**Sunday, 11th October, Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 25:6–10, Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20, Matthew 22:1–14**

Jesus began to speak to them in parables once again, '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.'

Come to the feast

In today's parable, there was a king who wanted to celebrate a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to remind those who had been invited but they were too busy and would not come. The king then invited those at the crossroads in the town and invited them to be at the wedding feast. These people gladly went to the feast.

Today, God, like the king in the parable, invites each of us to His relationship feast where we will be nourished and filled with His faithful love. It is up to us to respond to His invitation. We can say 'No' and give excuses as to why we are not able to be with Him. We can say 'Yes' and enjoy being in this feast of love.

Although the king invited the good and the bad at the crossroads, the guests had the responsibility to dress in their wedding garments as a sign of respect to him and the occasion. However, there was a man who did not bother to put on the wedding garment. Most probably, he was there for nothing else except for good fun and good food.

We need to listen to the message behind this parable. God's love opens the door of His feast to all to come. However, we need to be responsible to put on our wedding garment which represents living a totally new life of love. It is not just a matter of giving our initial 'Yes' to God, but we need to die to our pride, selfishness, laziness, etc., and to be accountable in the way we conduct, behave, speak and act. Our whole life needs to show others that we are living in this Feast of love with God.

"So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to – the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, and you must put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy." (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Question for reflection:

1) What is my response to the King's invitation to the wedding feast?

Monday, 12th October

Galatians 4:22–24, 26–27, 31–5:1, Luke 11:29–32

The crowds got even bigger and Jesus addressed them, 'This is a wicked generation; it is asking for a sign. The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. On Judgement day the Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here. On Judgement day the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation

and condemn it, because when Jonah preached they repented; and there is something greater than Jonah here.”

There is someone greater...

“To you all then, who are God’s beloved in Rome, called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.”
(Romans 1:7)

These are St. Paul’s words from today’s first reading which we are invited to reflect upon in our own lives. We too are God’s beloved in the places where we are. We too are called to be saints and live our lives with Christ and for Christ.

“Me, saint? Impossible!” we might conclude as we look at our long list of flaws and imperfections.

The call to sainthood excludes no one. The saints whom we admire and love were not super humans during their lifetime. They were ordinary people who despite their weaknesses recognised God’s presence in their lives. They were friends of God and brought His love to those around them. Therefore, we are called to open our eyes of faith and see God’s presence in us and around us. Our hearts are content to have Him as the source of our love and peace.

In today’s Gospel, the crowds were surrounding Jesus but many who were present were not His friends. Jesus knew that there were some people who were looking for an outstanding and incredible sign such that there would be no question that it was God working in and through Jesus. Despite all the many miracles that Jesus had already performed, they could not believe. Their hearts were hardened and so they could not recognise God’s presence in Jesus.

Today, let us believe that there is something greater than Jonah. There is someone greater than our fear, flaw, anxiety, etc. Jesus is here with us. This is our security, our guarantee. With Jesus, we walk on towards the call to being saints, to being friends of God.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What struck me in this time of prayer?
- 2) How can I live my life in the light of faith today?

Tuesday, 13th October

Galatians 5:1–6, Luke 11:37–41

Jesus had just finished speaking when a Pharisee invited him to dine at his house. He went in and sat down at the table. The Pharisee saw this and was surprised that he had not first washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, 'Oh, you Pharisees! You clean the outside of cup and plate, while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness. Fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside too? Instead, give alms from what you have and then indeed everything will be clean for you.'

From a heart that gives

A Pharisee invited Jesus to have a meal at his house but was astonished when Jesus did not wash his hands. His reaction to Jesus not washing his hands was not due to hygienic purposes but to ritual washing. This ritual washing was part of the Law but it was imposed by the Pharisees. Thus, this Pharisee was shocked that Jesus did not do this external rite.

Jesus knew what the man was thinking and so He used a graphic image to make His point to him. The Pharisees were so concerned with making sure that the outside of the cup and plate were clean

but they forgot to look at their hearts which were full of extortion and wickedness. Thus, they missed the point of their faith in God.

What about us? Have we too missed the whole point of our faith in God?

Today, let us be more concerned with what we have in our hearts than simply going through external rituals and routines. Jesus calls us to 'give alms' from what we have, i.e. to give ourselves to those in need. Giving of ourselves to others brings us to mature in our love. We are here to give of ourselves to each other.

"If nature has made you a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart. And though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that."
(Frances Hodgson Burnett)

Jesus' heart was always full of love, patience, mercy and kindness, even though His hands were empty of material wealth and possessions. From His heart, He gave love. Though He kept giving and giving, His heart was never empty but always full of the Father's love.

Likewise, when we give love from our heart, we will never be empty within us. Instead, the more we give, the more we will receive. This is because God renews and replenishes us with His love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I practice giving love to those around me today?

Wednesday, 14th October, St. Callixtus I
Galatians 5:18–25, Luke 11:42–46

The Lord said to the Pharisees: 'Alas for you Pharisees! You who pay your tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and overlook

justice and the love of God! These you should have practised, without leaving the others undone. Alas for you Pharisees who like taking the seats of honour in the synagogues and being greeted obsequiously in the market squares! Alas for you, because you are like the unmarked tombs that men walk on without knowing it! A lawyer then spoke up. 'Master,' he said 'when you speak like this you insult us too.' 'Alas for you lawyers also,' he replied 'because you load on men burdens that are unendurable, burdens that you yourselves do not move a finger to lift.'

Pharisaism: It is still alive!

Jesus' words were strong and harsh as He spoke to the Pharisees and all those around Him. This was because Jesus, out of love, challenged them to look at their hearts and start living a true faith based on justice for their fellow brothers and sisters as well as love for God.

The Pharisees knew intellectually the fundamental concepts of their faith, i.e. to love God and their neighbours. However, these remained simply as ideas and not a reality in their lives. Instead, they spent much of their time and energy in scrupulous attention to minute matters of the external laws. They were full of pride and disdain for others and put needless burdens on the people.

Jesus' strong words to the Pharisees and the religious leaders of His time were to drive home the point: love God, love neighbour. Today, let us honestly look at our hearts again. Perhaps Jesus' words still carry certain truth for us. We might be more anxious in keeping to some rules and regulations in the Church than to guide people to encounter Jesus. We speak of love, forgiveness and mercy to others but we do not practice what we say.

With all honesty, let us take a look at our hearts again.

God is love. His love makes us always to be free to live and love. His love corrects us as well as affirms us. His love embraces and never puts burdens of guilt on us. Let us return to experience deeply God's love so that we will not forget the things that really matter in our Christian faith.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Can I identify with Jesus' message?
- 2) How can I love God and my neighbours more today?

Thursday, 15th October, St. Teresa of Ávila
Ephesians 1:1–10, Luke 11:47–54

Jesus said, 'Alas for you who build the tombs of the prophets, the men your ancestors killed! In this way you both witness what your ancestors did and approve it; they did the killing, you do the building. And that is why the Wisdom of God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will slaughter and persecute, so that this generation will have to answer for every prophet's blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was murdered between the altar and the sanctuary". Yes, I tell you, this generation will have to answer for it all. Alas for you lawyers who have taken away the key of knowledge! You have not gone in yourselves, and have prevented others going in who wanted to.' When he left the house, the scribes and the Pharisees began a furious attack on him and tried to force answers from him on innumerable questions, setting traps to catch him out in something he might say.

Stop closing doors!

In today's Gospel, Jesus accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy. They built monuments to honour the prophets whom their ancestors killed. The huge and great monuments that they built were external manifestations which meant nothing to them. This was because

their hearts were still stubborn and they refused to change and live according to what the prophets preached. He also told the scribes once more about closing the doors of heaven to people because of their way of thinking and acting.

Jesus calls each one of us to return to God's love and return to the simplicity of our Christian faith. He wants us to be authentic Christians whose lives truly attract others to God.

When Jesus left the house, the Pharisees and scribes started to attack Him. This should be a reminder for us that when we start living our faith authentically, we must be ready to face oppositions and rejections from those who do not understand the ways of God. Like Jesus, we too must never give up but persevere to keep on living our faith with joyful enthusiasm.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my greatest challenge to live in such a way that my life attracts others to Christ?

**Friday, 16th October, St. Hedwig, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque
Ephesians 1:11–14, Luke 12:1–7**

Meanwhile the people had gathered in their thousands so that they were treading on one another. And Jesus began to speak, first of all to his disciples. 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees—that is, their hypocrisy. Everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. For this reason, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed on the housetops. To you my friends I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear:

fear him who, after he has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God's sight. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. There is no need to be afraid: you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.'

Hypocrisy and pride

"We are all sinners. But may the Lord not let us be hypocrites. Hypocrites don't know the meaning of forgiveness, joy and the love of God." (Pope Francis)

Today, Jesus warns us about the "yeast of the Pharisees". What is it? The yeast of the Pharisees refers to the attitude of pride and hypocrisy. The Pharisees spent their energy to present a greater external appearance in order to be superior to the rest. They were puffed up with self-righteous pride that they judged others harshly when they failed to live to their standards.

We are all sinners as Pope Francis said. Yes, we are sinners but we know and trust in God's merciful love. We must, however, ask God to give us His grace never to become hypocrites and live our lives pretending to be who we are not.

"Everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear."

When we draw closer to God, His love uncovers all pretence and lies within us. This is because He wants us to be like Jesus His Son and live our life truthfully.

True faith is based not on fear and hypocrisy, but on love and trust in a caring and merciful God.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I afraid of allowing God to shine His light in all the dark areas of my life?

Saturday, 17th October, St. Ignatius of Antioch **Ephesians 1:15–23, Luke 12:8–12**

Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of men, the Son of Man will declare himself for him in the presence of God's angels. But the man who disowns me in the presence of men will be disowned in the presence of God's angels. Everyone who says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you must say."

Open to the Spirit of love

'He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.'

Why did Jesus say this? Why is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit not to be forgiven?

Forgiveness comes only when a person is humble enough to turn away from his/her sins and walk towards the merciful gaze of God. If anyone, who is full of pride, refuses to acknowledge his/her sins, then forgiveness is impossible. Such a person, on his/her own accord, will close him/herself from God's love and there will be a moment when he/she simply cannot recognise God, and sees evil as good and good as evil.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, comes again and again to offer us forgiveness and new life. However, when we reject the Holy Spirit and His gifts, we are telling God that we do not need His

forgiveness because we do not trust Him or have already given up on Him or we do not believe that He can still love us.

God, who is the God of mercy and love, will never give up on any of us. He runs to us like the father in the prodigal son. He searches for us like the shepherd who lost his sheep. He rejoices over the return of one sinner. This God calls us to be humble and to acknowledge our limitations and weaknesses. Let us get rid of our pride - the pride that pulls us away from experiencing the forgiving love of God.

It is only through experiencing being forgiven by God, can we then truly go out and share the Good News of His love openly and courageously with all.

Question for reflection:

1) How I can humble myself and experience the forgiving love of God?

**Sunday, 18th October, Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
(Mission Sunday)**

Isaiah 45:1, 4–6, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, Matthew 22:15–21

Then the Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap Jesus in what he said. And they sent their disciples to him, together with the Herodians, to say, 'Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in an honest way, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man's rank means nothing to you. Tell us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?' But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, 'You hypocrites! Why do you set this trap for me? Let me see the money you pay the tax with.' They handed him a denarius, and he said, 'Whose head is this? Whose name?' 'Caesar's' they replied. He then said to them, 'Very well, give

back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God’.

Belong to God

Once again, Jesus was being put to the test by the Pharisees who first flattered Him before asking Him the trick question, *“Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”*

If Jesus answered ‘Yes’, the Jewish crowds would regard him with distrust as a supporter of Caesar. If He answered ‘No’, the Pharisees would take His word and report Him to the Roman authorities as a troublemaker. Jesus cleverly avoided being trapped by asking them for the coin used to pay the tax. Pointing on the coin, Jesus asked, *“Whose head is it? Whose name?”* They answered, *“Caesar.”* Then, Jesus concluded, *“Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”*

The coin bore the image of a human king. Jesus’ answer challenged His listeners to look at their own lives and see whose image they bore.

How does this Gospel passage impact us today? We too need to reflect and look at our lives as to which image we bear. In the beginning of creation, we were told that God made man and woman in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Thus, we belong, not to ourselves, but to God. Yes, we need to pay taxes and fulfil our responsibilities as citizens of a country. However, we must never forget that we bear the image of God and it is to Him that we must give our life and all that we are.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I aware that I belong to God and not to myself?
- 2) Do I give to God what rightfully belongs to Him?

Monday, 19th October,

Ss. Isaac Jogues and John de Brébeuf, and their Companions,

St. Paul of the Cross

Ephesians 2:1–10, Luke 12:13–21

A man in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance'. 'My friend,' he replied-'who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?' Then he said to them, 'Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for a man's life is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs'. Then he told them a parable: 'There was once a rich man who, having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, "What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them, and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time". But God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" So it is when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God.'

Givers, not hoarders

A man from the crowd told Jesus to settle a family dispute over inheritance. However, Jesus was not interested in discussing such an issue but He used this situation as a teaching opportunity to the crowd about the danger of wealth.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man who instead of being grateful to God for his good fortune and sharing with those who may not be as privileged as he was, he spent his time and energy planning on building bigger barns to store his excess crops. He thought that

he could then enjoy life because of the plentiful good things that he had accumulated.

What about us? What is the message that we can learn from this parable?

Jesus calls us to strive to be rich in the eyes of God and not the world's. The world's mentality is to hoard and amass riches for ourselves. To follow Jesus' way demands that we generously share all that we have with those in need. We are not meant to be hoarders but givers.

"If nature has made you for a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart; and though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that--warm things, kind things, sweet things – help and comfort and laughter – and sometimes gay, kind laughter is the best help of all."
(Frances Hodgson Burnett)

Let us start today by giving with open hearts!

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from giving of myself to others?

Tuesday, 20th October, St. Paul of the Cross

Ephesians 2:12-22, Luke 12:35-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'See that you are dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be like men waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. Happy those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. I tell you solemnly, he will put on an apron, sit them down at table and

wait on them. It may be in the second watch he comes, or in the third, but happy those servants if he finds them ready.'

Faithfulness matters

Jesus' parable today speaks to us about faithfulness: The servants who faithfully do their duty, day in and day out, regardless of the circumstances. These faithful servants would be greatly rewarded by their Master for their diligence by seating them in the place of honour and waiting personally on them.

Faithfulness is the basis of any meaningful and lasting relationship. In our relationship with God, God commits Himself to be faithful to us here, now and forever. His unbreakable love for us is not deterred by the poverty of our response. God is not limited by our limitations in His commitment to each of us.

Faithfulness in our modern society is a virtue that is not much appreciated. Many people are willing to give up on their commitments and on relationships when things get tough and difficult. They prefer to pursue their own interests than to persevere diligently in making things work well.

Today, Jesus calls us to be faithful by putting love into action. Every time we show love to someone, every time we make use of our talents to help others, every time we care for the needy, we are being faithful to God. Many Christians know what to do, but very few Christians actually put this into action, and start living love. Let us open our hands and humbly ask for the grace to be faithful to God.

Question for reflection:

1) Have I ever thanked God for His faithfulness to me? How can I be faithful to God today?

Wednesday, 21st October

Ephesians 3:2-12, Luke 12:39-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what hour the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.' Peter said, 'Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?' The Lord replied, 'What sort of steward, then, is faithful and wise enough for the master to place him over his household to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Happy that servant if his master's arrival finds him at this employment. I tell you truly, he will place him over everything he owns. But as for the servant who says to himself, "My master is taking his time coming", and sets about beating the menservants and the maids, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, 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 unfaithful. The servant who knows what his master wants, but has not even started to carry out those wishes, will receive very many strokes of the lash. The one who did not know, but deserves to be beaten for what he has done, will receive fewer strokes. When a man has had a great deal given him, a great deal will be demanded of him; when a man has had a great deal given him on trust, even more will be expected of him.'

Responsible stewards who give and give...

"Givers can be divided into three types: the flint, the sponge and the honeycomb. Some givers are like a piece of flint – to get anything out of it you must hammer it, and even then you only get chips and sparks. Other are like a sponge – to get anything out of a sponge you must squeeze it and squeeze it hard, because the more you squeeze a sponge, the more you get. But others are like a honeycomb – which

just overflows with its own sweetness. That is how God gives to us, and it is how we should give in turn.” (Anonymous)

God has called us to be stewards responsible for looking after His household, His people. Who are these people? They are our children, spouse, parents, friends, strangers we meet each day, etc. As responsible stewards, we are called to give of ourselves in order to be at the service of others. We give our time, our talents, our strength, our creativity, our faith, etc. in order that they might grow and be strong in their faith in God. In fact, our faithfulness to God is seen from how much we put ourselves at the loving service of others.

Let us not be like the unfaithful steward who did what he pleased by wasting his time focusing on himself and his needs. Today, we strive to be good stewards on whom God has put His trust.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live my life so that I can be a true steward to God?

Thursday, 22nd October, St. John Paul II

Ephesians 3:14-21, Luke 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over! 'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

Living for God

Jesus' love purifies and cleanses all the impure thoughts, the hateful judgements, the hidden intentions behind our actions, etc. The choices we make each day lead us to live our lives for God or against God. We judge ourselves by our own choices and actions. God is Love and His Love is covered with mercy, not chastisement.

Each day, we are here on this earth to make God our choice. We are here to make good choices that will lead us to love God above all else. Sometimes, in the process of living our life for God alone, our family members and friends might not understand the reasons for the choices we make. They might disapprove or criticise the things we do. The choices we make to live for God might even cause divisions in our relationships with others. Yet, we are called to stand firm in living God's values and ways, regardless of the oppositions we face from others.

True love for God does not come from lip-service, but from making right decisions to put God above all else, and to live our lives for Him alone. When our hearts are at peace, we will bring His true peace to those around us.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I stand firm for what I believe, even if those around me have different opinions and views?

Friday, 23rd October, St. John of Capistrano

Ephesians 4:1-6, Luke 12:54-59

Jesus said again to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it will be hot, and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it

you do not know how to interpret these times? Why not judge for yourselves what is right? For example: when you go to court with your opponent, try to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the bailiff and the bailiff have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny'

Change my heart, Lord!

In the Gospel passage today, Jesus was frustrated with the people who claimed that they could read and understand the signs of nature. Yet, these people were so blinded by the greatest sign taking place before them! Jesus opened the eyes of the blind to see, made the dumb speak, the lame to walk and even the dead to rise from the dead. He taught with authority that amazed His listeners. He calmed the storms and fed the crowd from the five loaves and two fish. Despite all that He did and said, they did not seem to recognise the presence of God working in and through Jesus.

Jesus then challenged the crowd to urgently judge for themselves what was right in the sight of God and to be open to allow Him to change their hardened hearts into believing hearts.

Today, what would Jesus say about us? Do we recognize Him amidst the circumstances we live? Do we see the presence of Jesus in the words of a friend, in the needs of those around us, in the inner thirst we have for quiet time of prayer? Do we open ourselves to Him and welcome Him in the people we meet, events we live, challenges we encounter?

Each of us stands before God who sees and knows our hearts inside-out. His light of loving mercy reveals all that is in our hearts and His forgiving love frees us from the bondage of sins that

prevent us from seeing Him, believing Him and loving Him. Today, let us ready ourselves to allow God to gently change our hearts.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I use my eyes of faith to see and rejoice in God's presence in my life today?

Saturday, 24th October, St. Anthony Mary Claret

Ephesians 4:7-16, Luke 13:1-9

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.' He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."

Bearers of good fruit

Apparently, the people were all excited with the news that some unfortunate Galileans were brutally murdered by Pilate. What was Jesus' reaction? He simply said, '*Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.*' He reminded them also of another sensationalise

news of another eighteen who died when the tower fell. Again, Jesus repeated, *'Unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'*

Jesus knew that the people around were holding onto their Jewish idea that these people died such unfortunate deaths because of their sins. He wanted to remind them not to play the judge, instead, they had to use each opportunity they had to look at their own lives and repent from all what prevent them from living fully each day.

These two incidents of the Galileans and those eighteen who died reminded us of so many similar incidents of accidents, plane crash, floods, etc that we have heard and read in the news.

Human lives are so fragile! With each moment of living, we must not waste time anymore! We are alive in order to live life fully here and now! We are here- in our family, workplace, society, parish, community, to bear good fruits. Thus, we need to repent and to change all what do not help us to live a life bearing good fruits of God's life and love.

Jesus is always very patient with us. He is our gardener who takes care of us and nurtures us with His Life through the Word and the Eucharist so that we will be nourished and start living our life according to the ways of love.

Jesus, give me humility to recognise my unloving ways today and teach me how I can change in order to live my life the way you want me to!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?
- 2) How can I live this life bearing good fruit?

Sunday, 25th October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 22:20-26, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also.'

The commandment to love

In today's Gospel passage, a Pharisee asked Jesus, "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?" He asked Jesus not because he did not know the answer to the question but simply to test Jesus' knowledge. In fact, the Pharisees took pride in their thorough knowledge of the law and all the strict formal procedures.

Jesus' answer to the Pharisee was: "Love God, love your neighbour".

Our Christian life is a call to live these two inseparable commandments in our daily life. We cannot claim that we love God if we do not love our neighbours. Thus, this is our greatest challenge: To love the person whom God has placed in our lives, whether we like or do not like him/her.

The world defines love as a sentiment, a feeling. It is usually associated with romance and warm feelings. The love that Jesus speaks about is not dealing with sentiment or feeling but commitment. As Christians, we need to love God and others with an unwavering commitment. We are committed to God even when we do not understand His ways and do not sense His presence in our life. We also commit ourselves to our loved ones even when we

struggle, when affection and warm feeling are gone or when faced with misunderstandings in relationships. We commit ourselves to our elderly parents, spouse, children and friends in good and bad times. We even commit to will ourselves to love and pray for our enemies.

Our love for God is inseparable from our love for one another. Today, let us grasp truly the meaning of the commandment of love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I love God, love others more in my life?

Monday, 26th October

Ephesians 4:32-5:8, Luke 13:10-17

One Sabbath day Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit that left her enfeebled; she was bent double and quite unable to stand upright. When Jesus saw her he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are rid of your infirmity' and he laid his hands on her. And at once she straightened up, and she glorified God. But the synagogue official was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, and he addressed the people present. There are six days' he said 'when work is to be done. Come and be healed on one of those days and not on the Sabbath.' But the Lord answered him. 'Hypocrites!' he said 'Is there one of you who does not untie his ox or his donkey from the manger on the Sabbath and take it out for watering? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has held bound these eighteen years - was it not right to untie her bonds on the Sabbath day?' When he said this, all his adversaries were covered with confusion, and all the people were overjoyed at all the wonders he worked.

Don't procrastinate to love

Have you ever wondered why Jesus offered healing to the woman when she did not even seek His help? This woman, who was bent double and unable to stand upright, was simply present at the synagogue. Yet, Jesus reached out to her and healed her. His decision landed Him in trouble with the authorities. For Jesus, all the troubles were worthwhile because He knew that He had saved the woman from her misery. Jesus saw her as a person with dignity as a child of God. Moved by compassion, Jesus did not wait or procrastinate, but He acted immediately.

Love and compassion must always lead us to action, and not just remain as feelings of pity or being sentimental. There are many people around us who are 'bent double' because of the many burdens they carry. Can we do something to help them? Even if we cannot help all, we can perhaps just reach out and do good to one person each day. Let us not procrastinate to love but open our hearts to recognise that each person is a child of God who needs our words of affirmation, our listening ear, our smiles and our helping hand.

"Stay where you are. Find your own Calcutta. Find the sick, the suffering, and the lonely right where you are - in your own homes and in your own families, in your workplaces and in your schools. You can find Calcutta all over the world, if you have eyes to see. Everywhere, wherever you go, you find people who are unwanted, unloved, uncared for, just rejected by society - completely forgotten, completely left alone." (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Question for reflection:

1) Who is that one person who needs my love, attention, care and time the most today?

Tuesday, 27th October

Ephesians 5:21-33, Luke 13:18-21

Jesus said, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden: it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air sheltered in its branches. Another thing he said, 'What shall I compare the kingdom of God with? It is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

Mission to expand

As we take this passage of the mustard seed and yeast, let us wonder and be curious. Let us not be content simply to remain in this beautiful passage at the superficial level but go deeper and be open to allow Him to gently lead us to grasp the deeper meaning for our own lives.

In the Gospel passage today, we see a man throwing a small mustard seed into his garden. It grew and became a tree. We then read about a woman who took the yeast, mixed it with flour and expanded it in the process of baking bread. Jesus explained that the dynamics of the Kingdom of God is like the small mustard seed growing and the simple yeast expanding.

What do these two parables tell us?

God uses, not big and grand, but small and ordinary things to spread His Kingdom of love. Today, God wants to use our ordinary and simple lives for the good of His Kingdom. He sends us to our workplace, schools, relationships, family life to be His instruments. Our presence in society, family, parish should influence and provoke in others a change of lifestyle, habits, outlook on life, etc. Our Christian values of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, faithfulness

should disturb, challenge and provoke questions for people who are surrounded by materialistic and hedonistic values.

"Lay people are a kind of nuclear energy in the Church on a spiritual level. A layperson caught up with the gospel and living next to other people can "contaminate" two others, and these two, four others, etc. Since lay Christians number not only tens of thousands like the clergy but hundreds of millions, they can truly play a decisive role in spreading the beneficial light of the gospel in the world." (Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa)

Question for reflection:

1) Do I recognise that I am God's mustard seed, His yeast that He has placed to make a difference in the places where I am?

Wednesday, 28th October, Ss. Simon and Jude

Ephesians 2:19-22, Luke 6:12-16

Jesus went out into the hills to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

Ordinary people, extraordinary mission

Jesus chose twelve ordinary people with their own strengths and limitations to be His apostles. Looking at the list of the apostles, none of them would be qualified as great or important in the eyes of the world. They were, in fact, very ordinary men but sent on an extraordinary mission by Jesus. Because they trusted in Jesus, they followed Him.

This is wonderful news for us! Jesus calls each one of us, imperfect as we are, to be His friends. We, like the apostles, have the choice to be generous in our response to Jesus. We can give excuses such as, *"I have no time. I am not qualified. I am too old. I am too young"* or we can be bold and pray with open hands, *"Take me, Lord, and use me for your glory"*

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Simon and St. Jude. After Pentecost, St. Simon went to Egypt while St. Jude went to Mesopotamia where they proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. Later, they both went to Persia to continue their mission. Unfortunately, they were martyred. What made these two men give their lives for Jesus to the point of death? St. Simon and St. Jude were able to lay their lives for Jesus because He was somebody important for them.

We are also called to be with Jesus and to go forth to share the Good News that God is love, He cares and He is here. We might face oppositions along the way but we must never give up doing good acts. Instead, we must continue to give ourselves to allow Him to use our ordinary lives for His extraordinary mission.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I open to collaborate with God in the mission to share His love with those around me? What prevents me from responding generously to God's call?

Thursday, 29th October

Ephesians 6:10-20, Luke 13:31-35

Just at this time some Pharisees came up. 'Go away' they said. 'Leave this place, because Herod means to kill you.' He replied, 'You may go

and give that fox this message: Learn that today and tomorrow I cast out devils and on the third day attain my end. But for today and tomorrow and the next day I must go on, since it would not be right for a prophet to die outside Jerusalem. 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! So be it! Your house will be left to you. Yes, I promise you, you shall not see me till the time comes when you say: Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!'

Entering into the arms of love

Why did Jesus use the image of the hen in today's gospel?

The hen is known for her selfless devotion to her little chicks, who are weaker and more vulnerable than she is. Though the hen has no sharp teeth or long claws to fight off the sly foxes away from her precious brood, she fends off the enemies with her bravery and dedication. She never runs away from her fears but extends her wings over her chicks and willingly lets herself to be eaten by the foxes in the hope that her young might be spared.

Jesus used the image of a hen in order to show the love he had for Jerusalem, and that he continues to have for each of us.

In today's gospel, Jesus knew the danger he was getting himself in. Some Pharisees told him to go away and leave the place because Herod was looking for an opportunity to kill him. Yet, Jesus did not do so because he was totally committed to what he had to do. He would not let Herod the fox to distract him from loving his brood to the end.

Today, Jesus comes to love us and gathers us in his arms of love. We might feel lost and without direction at this point of our life, but Jesus' love encompasses us totally and gives us hope and peace

again. We might feel that we are doing well in life and that we do not need Jesus' love, but he continues to call out to us so that we might enter again into those arms of love. He loves us and wants to protect us from the 'foxes' that want to lead us away from God's presence.

Question for reflection:

Jesus loves us so much. Do we love him back the same?

Friday, 30th October

Philippians 1:1-11, Luke 14:1-6

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. There in front of him was a man with dropsy, and Jesus addressed the lawyers and Pharisees. 'Is it against the law' he asked 'to cure a man on the Sabbath, or not?' But they remained silent, so he took the man and cured him and sent him away. Then he said to them, 'Which of you here, if his son falls into a well, or his ox, will not pull him out on a Sabbath day without hesitation?' And to this they could find no answer.

Love and live fully

All Jesus wanted was to make life less difficult for those around Him. Thus, when Jesus saw the man with dropsy, He spontaneously healed him even though He knew that the Pharisees were watching Him closely.

For Jesus, love for others took precedence over others' opinion of Him.

What about us? Are we at times more concerned of others' opinions of us than the good that we can do?

At the end of our life, we will be asked, "Did you love much?", and not "Did you receive much praises and compliments?" We are here on this earth to love by bringing peace, compassion, understanding, patience and courage to those around us, especially the outcasts among us. May we choose to love more each day.

"Many of us have at some time dreamt of owning one of those magic purses that would never be empty. No matter how much money we would draw from it, it would remain full! As it turns out, we already have such a contraption in us and this one's worth a lot more than a trillion enchanted wallets. Our heart can love 24 hours a day without ever running empty. As a matter of fact, the more love we pass to others, the more love we'll have!" (Anonymous)

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?

Saturday, 31st October

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 will 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." Then, everyone with you at the table will

see you honoured. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up.

Humble yourself and follow me!

On one Sabbath day, Jesus went for a meal at a Pharisee's house. Upon observing how the guests chose the places of honour, he told a parable with the purpose of rebuking the pride of these dinner guests.

"For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up."

Looking at our lives, we do have the tendency to desire respect and honour from others. No one wants to be the last. Yet, Jesus invites us to embrace the path of humility.

This word, 'humility', has been greatly misunderstood by many. We usually associate humility with having low self-esteem, being submissive and feeling inferior to others. True humility is to know ourselves as we are, without pretending to be who we are not. There is no need for putting up with appearances or wanting to be regarded as important by others.

Today, let us go to Jesus again and learn from Him how to be humble and learn to live each day with Him.

Question for reflection:

1) In what ways do I tend to look for places of honour in my life? How can I learn from Jesus to be humbler each day?

Sunday, 1st November, All Saints Day

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

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.

Called to be saints

We are all called to become saints, friends of God, faithful disciples of Jesus. The path that saints walk is the same path of Jesus, which is the one of the Beatitudes.

"It's a path that's difficult to understand because it goes against the current, but the Lord tells us that whoever goes down this road is happy, that sooner or later, they become happy." (Pope Francis)

Jesus calls us to be 'poor in spirit' and this implies that our hearts are free from the desire to accumulate worldly power, wealth, popularity and fame. The 'poor in spirit' sets their hearts on God as their only treasure here and now.

Next, Jesus tells us to be gentle which is to let go of our anger, malice and resentment. This is a challenge for many of us as we

tend to react angrily instead of responding with love and tenderness.

In the next Beatitude, Jesus says, "*Happy those who mourn...*" It is strange to be happy and mournful at the same time. In our life journey, we will be sad due to an illness, grieve over the death of loved ones, mourn over our weaknesses, etc. However, when we live sadness in the light of faith, we hold onto the promise that God walks with us in our pain.

Jesus says, "*Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right...*" This is for us to have strong honesty and integrity as well as to have the courage to stand up for what is right. It is easier for us to sit on the fence and be indifferent to situations of injustices in our family, workplace, community, etc. Though speaking out for what is right means that we will have oppositions from others, our consolation is that God will be our reward. This is all that matters.

Jesus also says, "*Happy the merciful...*" implies that we have the capacity to identify with others in their suffering and pain. We also feel for what others are going through without judging and condemning. A merciful person opens his/her heart to forgive readily because there is this desire to reflect God's love to others.

Next, Jesus states "*Happy the pure in heart...*" and this means that we love God with our heart, mind and will. We centre our thoughts, desires and actions on God alone.

'Happy are the peacemakers...' Who are the peacemakers? We cannot generate peace by ourselves. First, we open ourselves to receive God's gift of peace. From His peace, we give peace to others. Living in this overwhelming experience of God's peace, we live with joyful freedom our identity as God's beloved children.

Lastly, Jesus ends the whole Beatitudes with the reality of persecutions. When we choose to live the values of love, peace, justice and truth and go against the currents of the world, we will face rejection, ridicule and even opposition from others. We, however, continue to persevere to walk with God down the path of true happiness.

Today, we are all called to be living saints and find our true happiness in living for God and with God alone.

Question to reflect:

1) Which beatitude strikes me today as I read the gospel?

Monday, 2nd November, All Souls Day

Wisdom 3:1-9, Romans 6:3-9, John 6:37-40

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day. Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.

I am here, O Lord, not to do my will, but Yours!

Many of us face with questions that we find it almost impossible to know the right answer to. For example, should I take this job, or is there something else better? Who should I marry? Which school should I send my child to? What am I going to do with my life?

To add to the complications, we often wonder, *'What is God's will for me? How can I discover his will for my life?'*

Rather as a program or plan, let us see the will of God as a process. Viewing it as a program, we might be stuck in seeking to follow some technique. However, when we see the will of God as a process, the emphasis is on the need to develop an intimate relationship with God.

In today's gospel, Jesus said, *'I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me.'*

As Christians, we are here, not to do our own will, but to do the will of God who has sent us. Is God someone far and distant from our lives? How well do we know the God of Jesus Christ?

God is not someone who will never overpower us in order for us to obey him. God, who loves us, speaks to us in a subtle and quiet voice. He speaks through a feeling of dissatisfaction or through giving ideas into our minds or through time of prayer, etc. We need to listen attentively to what God wants to share with us and how he wants to guide us each day.

When we consciously recognise his presence and depend on him, then we will make choices that will help us to do his will, not ours. Doing God's will is a means, not an end, of knowing God better and making him as our intimate companion in our lives.

Today, let us live the words of Jesus and make it a reality in our lives! We are here, O Lord, not to do our own will, but yours!

Tuesday, 3rd November, St. Martin de Porres

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 gave 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 of people 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 one 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 for 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 man 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 and do to be meaningful?

Wednesday, 4th November, St. Charles Borromeo

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.

Cost of following

Jesus calls us, not just selected few, to follow Him, He does not hide the cost involved in our following Him. Rather, Jesus lays all His cards out and honestly tells us what following Him demands.

For Jesus, to be His disciple is to hold Him 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 relationship should be placed first before Him. Thus, Jesus uses the word 'hate' figuratively in order to emphasize the need to put Him as the topmost priority above others.

There are many Christians who follow Jesus according to their own convenience and circumstances. Jesus does not want part-time disciples but people who are willing to follow Him full-time. He wants disciples who live His values full-time, to love unselfishly full-time, to humbly serve others full-time, to be sincere in words and actions full-time, etc.

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 despite the many challenges along the way? Or will we give up half-way due to lack of perseverance and determination?

If we want to be Jesus' disciples, let us be real and authentic ones!

Question for reflection:

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

Thursday, 5th November

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

The tax collectors and the sinners, meanwhile, 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.'

Lost and Found

The love of Jesus is not a sentiment, but an active love that shows itself in action. This is the heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who goes out to find the lost sheep in order to bring it home. For Jesus, every person is worthy of his merciful and unconditional love.

Today, Jesus invites us to imitate him by being shepherds with his heart who put love into action. There are many people who are lost—lost in living meaningless lives, in their addictions, in their anxieties and fears, in their pride and stubbornness, etc. As shepherds, we need to go out of our comfort zones and lead them back to the heart of God. To love with the heart of Jesus is not easy because we tend to express our concern and care for those, we get along well with. Jesus calls us out and love even the unlovable ones in our midst. Each person is worthy of our love.

In order to be shepherds after the heart of Jesus, we first need to experience being His sheep. Jesus is asking us to be found by him and to stop being lost in our own personal pride, anger, selfishness, fears, etc. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, stands beside us and desires to bring us back home to His heart today.

Let us not be afraid of Jesus but to go to Him and find in Him the love our hearts desire. Enter into our Shepherd's heart so that we can learn to love others with his merciful and unconditional love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who are the sheep that Jesus is inviting me to be a shepherd to?
- 2) How can I be a true shepherd like Jesus?

Friday, 6th November

Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 16:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There was a rich man and he had a steward denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, "What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer." Then the steward said to himself, "Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong

enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes." Then he called his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, "How much do you owe my master?" "One hundred measures of oil" was the reply. The steward said, "Here, take your bond; sit down straight away and write fifty". To another he said, "And you, sir, how much do you owe?" "One hundred measures of wheat" was the reply. The steward said, "Here, take your bond and write eighty". The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.'

Prudence is good

In today's passage, the dishonest steward suddenly found himself out of a job. He started to be very worried about his future. Thus, he devised a plan in such a way that he would ensure his survival. He went to his master's debtors and started to discount the amounts that they owed him so that these people would hopefully help him in future. The master, upon learning what his steward did, praised him.

What is Jesus' point in telling this parable?

Jesus was not praising the steward for his dishonesty. Rather, He commended him for being far-sighted in planning ahead so as to ensure his future. The steward valued his security, his future to the point that he invested his mind to plan for it. What about us? What is it that we value most? How do we invest our mind, heart and will in order to pursue what we value most?

If God is what we value most, we will invest all that we have to pursue this greatest treasure. We, who are children of light, need to be prudent in chasing God the greatest treasure and not to be

distracted by accumulating excessive wealth here on earth that will not last forever. We need to set our heart on God and allow Him to be the firm foundation of our lives. The joy that we have when we possess the true treasure can never be compared to the riches of this world.

Question for reflection:

1) What is the personal challenge God is inviting me to take on today?

Saturday, 7th November

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.'

Take, Lord, all that I have and possess

Who is my master?

Our 'master' is what controls and directs the desires of our hearts, the thoughts that enter into our minds, the values that shape our lives.

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus states plainly to us, *"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."*

We can have different masters controlling and directing us - money, lust, power, addictions, pride, etc. These masters make us into slaves that prevent us from living our lives in freedom. We have been created to live as God's children. We cannot at the same time commit ourselves to God our Father and become slaves to other masters that control us. It is not a matter of compromising, but we need to choose whom we want to serve - God or money, God or our passions, God or power, etc. It is not a matter of serving God part-time, but to love and serve Him alone, full-time.

"Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and thy grace, for this is sufficient for me." (St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Today, let us give to God all that we are and have and allow Him to guide our thoughts, feelings and will.

Question for reflection:

1) Who controls and directs my life?

Sunday, 8th November, Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 6:12-16, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: '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.

Be prepared always!

"The Bridegroom is the Lord, and the time of waiting for his arrival is the time he gives to us, to all of us, before his Final Coming with mercy and patience; it is a time of watchfulness; a time in which we must keep alight the lamps of faith, hope and charity, a time in which to keep our heart open to goodness, beauty and truth. It is a time to live in accord with God, because we do not know either the day or the hour of Christ's return. 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)

How ready are we to encounter Christ when He comes again? At baptism, we have received the light of faith, and it is our daily duty to keep that light shining brightly and not to let it die away. This can be challenging because we tend to be like the five foolish bridesmaids and allow distractions to take away our attention from what is really essential in life. In order to keep the light of faith burning strongly and brightly, we must constantly seek to serve God in every person that comes in our way. Love is what will keep our faith alive. We need to recognise that we do sometimes fail to love and do good deeds. However, we must never give up but continue to keep on seeking to love God and love those around us.

We do not know the day and hour when Jesus comes for us. We do know that we have today to ready and prepare ourselves for this beautiful encounter. Let us not fall asleep and forget God today but to be determined not to let the light of faith go out.

Question for reflection:

Today, how can I keep the light of faith burning bright?

Monday, 9th November, Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

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.

A sacred sanctuary of God

Is my heart and mind a marketplace occupied with making money, getting profits, winning peoples' love and approval? Am I a Temple of the Holy Spirit, a sacred sanctuary where God dwells?

Today, we celebrate the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, which is one of the oldest Basilica in Rome. However, more than a Basilica, no matter how old or precious, it remains just a temporary building made up of cement and bricks.

More than a basilica or a building, God is pleased to dwell in the hearts of men and women. This is because he created us and so we belong to him.

The Lord says, "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house, then could you build for me to live in? I myself created the whole universe! I am pleased with those who are humble and repentant, who fear me and obey me.*" (Isaiah 66, 1-2)

God is happy to live in an uncomplicated, humble and repentant heart who love him above all else.

Today, Jesus continues to cleanse our hearts and minds so that we can truly dedicate our lives to God as his rightful dwelling place. We are not meant to be marketplace where God is just one among many 'cattle and sheep' and 'money-changers and pigeon-sellers'. Many times we complicate our lives with chasing after desires for greater, better, grander things that the world offers to us. We cling

to things because we think that they will make us happier, more fulfilled, more contented. The more we cling, the more our hearts become restless for more, more and even more! We end up with a lot of frustrations and anger. Today, Jesus wants to clean our hearts and minds so that God can enter and dwell within. We need to stop looking for peace, contentment, fulfilment in external things that cannot satisfy. Let God in, and with him, he brings peace, joy, contentment.

Lord, you are happy to dwell in my poor life. Cleanse me so that you can become a permanent resident, not simply a guest. Stay with me today!

Tuesday, 10th November, St. Leo the Great

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".'

Putting on the apron of love

'I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God who is sending a love letter to the world.' (Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

Like Mother Teresa, we are merely little pencils in the hand of a writing God. We are merely servants at the service of our Master.

As servants, we have no right to demand compensation or reward for the duty that God has entrusted to us. As servants, we simply do our best to please our Master. By doing our very best, we simply say, 'Lord, I am your servant. I have done no more than my duty.' God calls us to be servants who gives of ourselves generously without counting the cost, without looking for rewards. Whether we are cooking a meal for the family, or helping a friend in need, or listening to a child's chatter about school, etc, we need to remember that we are putting on our apron of love and waiting on God who is in the person, the child, the friend, the colleague. This is our greatest happiness to know that we are pouring our life to serve God, our Friend and Master.

What we give to God is nothing compares to what he gives to us. We can never outshine God in generosity. Therefore, why are we holding back? What prevents us from being generous with our time, talents, energy, etc to serve God, to help others?

Lord, help me to be your instrument of Love. Help me to give myself generously to work for peace, for unity. Let me seek to serve and not to be served, so that I can find the joy of generously living each day for you, for others.

Wednesday, 11th November, St. Martin of Tours

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.'

Gratefulness

Ten lepers approached Jesus. Ten were healed. Only one came back to give thanks to Jesus. The other nine, where were they?

The healed leper, a Samaritan, came back because he was grateful for being healed by Jesus. This Samaritan teaches us a lesson about being grateful. In our lives, we have many blessings, such as a home, a family, a job, a stable income, food on table, friends who love us, etc. Yet, we, many times, overlook these blessings and take them for granted.

"Life without thankfulness is devoid of love and passion. Hope without thankfulness is lacking in fine perception. Faith without thankfulness lacks strength and fortitude. Every virtue divorced from thankfulness is maimed and limps along the spiritual road." (John Henry Jowett)

Today, let us reflect how many times have we used the word, 'Thank you'? How many moments we look up and our hearts are overflowed with gratefulness and bliss?

Let us learn to appreciate the small and big blessings that come our way. With faith, we can even give thanks for the moments of sufferings and pains, because we know that God is with us in those moments too.

Lord, help me to express my gratitude to you for your love, your presence, your blessings. Help me also to look around me at my

family, friends, colleagues, etc. and give thanks to you for the gifts of their lives. Thank you!

Thursday, 12th November, St. Josaphat

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.'

Kingdom of God is among us!

The Kingdom of God is among us, is within us. The kingdom of God is not a physical place. Rather, the Kingdom is the presence of God. Where there is God, there is love. And so, when we enter into the Kingdom, we enter and live the reality of God's love, that is unconditional and faithful.

The Kingdom of God is lived from within. Like a seed, God plants his Kingdom in the soil of our hearts. From within, the silent power of God's kingdom grows and transforms our hearts to be like God's.

'The way to 'enter' into God's kingdom 'does not permit shortcuts'; rather 'every person must freely welcome the truth of the love of God. He is love and truth and both love and truth never impose themselves; they knock at the door of the heart and mind and, wherever they may enter, they bring peace and joy. This is God's way

of reigning, this is his project of salvation, a 'mystery' in the biblical sense of the word, which is a plan that is revealed little by little throughout history.' (Pope Benedict XVI)

Love continues to knock gently at our doors today. Let us not be afraid but open wide the doors of our hearts so that the Kingdom of God, his presence of love, will dwell in us. We are Kingdom people who are also called to help others to recognise that God is not outside of themselves, but within.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I enter into God's kingdom and live in the reality of His presence of Love today?

Friday, 13th November

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'.

Remember Lot's wife

'Remember Lot's wife'- This is one of the shortest verses in the whole bible. Yet, these three words hold the key to live our Christian faith here and now, with much urgency, awareness, vigilant.

We do not know the name of Lot's wife. All we know that this poor woman looked back and immediately turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19, 26) Lot's wife looked back because she was broken-hearted over the loss of her material comforts, wealth, high social standing, admirations from the city of Sodom. She focussed on her loss, instead of her gain.

Today, Jesus reminded us to *'Remember Lot's wife'* and not to look back at our past, at all the things we have left behind for the sake of following Jesus, at all what the world offers to us, etc. Instead, we are called to look at Jesus and fix our eyes on him.

We need to urgently remember that by being Christians, we have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. There is no turning back!!!

Yet, complacency has the power to make us to look back...to regret...to forget. Complacency can make us to live our life focussing on this material world with all its attractiveness and comforts.

Each of us has to be responsible for our own following at the end of each day, at the end of our life. People can guide us, advise us, be good example for us. Ultimately, we cannot have any proxy or depend on the faithfulness of our friend, family member. We need to choose, to respond and be responsible on how we live our faith each day until the day we meet God face to face. Let us remember and not look back!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How have I been complacent in my faith?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation for me today?

Saturday, 14th November

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?'

Keep the faith!

The message of Jesus today is: *'You should always pray and never lose heart.'*

The problem is that we tend to become discouraged easily in our prayer life. We pray but sometimes feel that our prayers remain unanswered. We look at our lives or situations we are in and nothing seems to change or get better. Sometimes, we passionately and happily spend time with Jesus but over time, we become complacent and start to 'get tired' in keeping our personal date with Him and start making excuses instead.

Knowing how we are, Jesus never stops inviting us with these very tender words, *'Always pray and never lose heart. Why? Because you are praying to God who always hear you, to Him who takes delight in your life.'*

We must never lose heart and become discouraged or disillusioned because we belong to God. We are in His heart. Prayer- relationship with God- has to be the atmosphere we live in. When we do not 'feel' like praying, then all the more, we should! Pray hardest when it is hardest to pray.

Like the poor widow, we must never give up but keep going to God, keep asking, keep loving, keep hoping, keep trusting.

Jesus looks at us and asks us, *'Will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he comes? Will you keep the faith? Why you keep praying and living in a close intimate relationship with the One who takes delight in your life?'*

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Can I call myself a person of faith?
- 2) Do I keep praying, trusting, loving even when life is difficult?

Sunday, 15th November, Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus spoke this parable to his disciples: 'It is like a man on his way abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third is one; each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same

way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Now a long time after, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness". Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness". Last came forward the man who had the one talent. "Sir," said he "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back." But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have recovered my capital with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the five talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

The Master's trust

This beautiful parable of the talents speaks about TRUST- the Master's trust in his servants made him to take the risk to leave behind part of his fortune to them.

The two servants who received five and two talents responded with trust. They saw how much their master trusted them; they felt empowered by his love. They took risks and, in the end, they earned

a profit with their investment. In the end, they enjoyed their Master's happiness.

The third servant feared his master instead of trusting in him. He did not see his master's love or trust, but he saw him as a hard man who reaped what he did not plant and gathered harvest where he did not scatter seed. Fear made him to hide his talents.

Today, Jesus invites us to respond to God with love. Let us always remember that God, our Master, trusts in us first before we trust in him, or even in ourselves.

Let us stay with these words of Mother Teresa, *'We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.'* Let us not allow fear to stop us from giving, sharing, investing our talents.

Monday, 16th November,
Ss. Margaret of Scotland and Gertrude the Great
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.

Let me see again

Beggars are common sight near the city gates where they sat and begged for money. Today, we have a beggar who was blind as our main character. He sat at the city gate of Jericho, and on that fateful day, he sensed excitement in the air. He asked loudly, *'What is this? What is happening?'* *'Jesus of Nazareth is passing by'* he heard them saying.

The blind man started to shout as he never did before. He shouted, *'Jesus! Son of David! Have pity on me!'* Instead of shouting, *'Jesus of Nazareth'* as what he heard from the crowd, he said *'Jesus, Son of David'*. This blind man saw what the huge crowds could not see. His faith made him to perceive that Jesus was not just an ordinary man from Nazareth, but he was from God, the Promised Messiah. His faith made him to be courageous. He was told to keep quiet but he shouted even louder. He knew who Jesus was and so, he would not shut up.

The blind beggar reminds us of the persistent widow of Luke 18, 1-9. He persisted because he had faith that Jesus would answer him. At that moment, Jesus knew that he had found faith in this poor simple blind beggar. He stopped and asked him, *'What do you want me to do for you?'* Jesus knew but he wanted the blind beggar to vocalize his deepest desire, his innermost need.

'Let me see again.' was the answer from his heart.

Jesus healed the blind man, and so he went on from being seeing nothing to seeing God face-to-face, from being a beggar by the road to being a friend of Jesus, from sitting at the road to following Jesus and investing his whole life praising God, and leading people to praise God too.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which part of this story of the blind beggar strikes me?
- 2) What is Jesus inviting me today?

Tuesday, 17th November, St. Elizabeth of Hungary

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'.

Hurry down!

Today, we have Zacchaeus who more than being physically short, he was also spiritually short within of happiness and peace in his heart. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector with a huge appetite for money, power, material security, and so he cheated his own people for his personal interest. Thus, Zacchaeus was considered a public sinner and an outcast to the rest of his people. Yet, with all his wealth and power, he was not contented and felt that something was missing in his life.

That day, when he heard that Jesus was passing by, he was curious to see who Jesus was. Most likely, he had heard of all the good things Jesus did as well as heard that Jesus ate with tax collectors and even called Levi the tax collector to be his disciple.

Jesus knew Zacchaeus' inner need for love and acceptance and so he came to the tree where Zacchaeus was, and said to him *, 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.'* With these words, Zacchaeus' world was turned upside-down.

Zacchaeus heard his name called by Jesus with such deep tenderness that he hurried down with great joy. Having Jesus in his house, his life, Zacchaeus took the step to cross the threshold from deceit to honesty, from self-centredness to selfless giving.

Today, we might be up in our trees of greed, selfishness, anger, worries, etc. Yet, Jesus calls us by our name with love and asks us to open the door of our heart to him. Jesus wants to encounter us today because he desires to complete our lives.

Today, let us listen to Jesus as he invites us to hurry down from our trees in order to have a personal encounter with him who loves us the most.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I have the desire to encounter Jesus today?
- 2) Do I choose to allow Jesus to enter into my house and let him transform my life?

Wednesday, 18th November

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.

To be judged on love alone

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus knew that those following him were hoping that the Kingdom of God would take place soon so that the Promised Messiah would reign and liberate them from the Roman's domination.

Jesus, however, invited the crowd to examine their lives to see if they were ready to embrace the Kingdom, instead of being so preoccupied with anxious thoughts about its coming.

What about us? Each of us has been given gifts and talents by God our King in order to invest them for the good of the Kingdom. Our gifts and talents are meant to be shared with others in need, and but we should do so with love as our only motive. We love and so we encourage someone who is emotionally down, we help out in an orphanage, we do a kind deed to a stranger, we give alms to someone in need, etc. We are moved by love, and not by obligations or our need for others' praises.

At the end of our lives, God will not ask us for the amount we have accumulated in the banks, or the number of cars we have, or the number of seminars we attend, etc. The only question he will ask us is: How much love we have put into our actions and words.

'In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone.' (St John of the Cross)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How am I using my gifts and talents for the good of the kingdom?
- 2) Is love my only motive for my actions and words?

Thursday, 19th November

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 recognize your opportunity when God offered it!'

Perfect Peace

'Jerusalem' derived its name from the Hebrew word, 'Salem' which means 'peace'. In the gospel, we see Jesus drew near Jerusalem, the city he loved so well, and he wept because there was no peace neither in the city nor in the heart of each person.

What is peace? Peace does not mean the absence of wars or difficulties but it is about God's presence living and dwelling in the life of each person. Where God is present, peace reigns.

The people of Jerusalem missed seeing the presence of God in the life of Jesus because they chose to remain in the darkness of their own self-centredness, indifference and pride. They did not allow Jesus to bring God's peace into their lives. Jesus grieved because they, out of ignorance, did not recognise God who came to save them.

Jesus comes to our life today. Do we recognise him in the daily events and the people we meet?

Let us open our eyes and recognise that Jesus is here and he wants to live this day with us in his peace. Listen as he speaks to us

through the lyrics of this song, entitled 'Perfect Peace' by Laura Story:

Stay close by My side,
Keep your eyes on Me,
Though this life is hard,
I will give you perfect peace.

In this time of trial,
Pain that no one sees,
Trust me when I say,
I will give you perfect peace.

And you'll never walk alone,
And you'll never be in need,
Though I may not calm the storms around you,
You can hide in Me,
Burdens that you bear,
Offer no relief,
Let Me bear your load,
Cause I will give you perfect peace.
Stay close by My side,
And you'll never walk alone,
Keep your eyes on Me,
And you will never be in need,
Though this life is hard,
Know that I will always give you perfect peace,
I will give you perfect peace...

Friday, 20th November

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.

Not a den of thieves, but a house of prayer

We are a house of prayer where God is pleased to dwell. Do we realize this?

Often, we allow idols to dwell in us instead- idols whose names are materialism, laziness, selfishness, anger, lusts, etc. We abhor the idols that we notice in other people's lives, but we tend to be blinded by the ones we ourselves harbour within. Today, let us examine our hearts and root out the idols hidden within.

Why? This is because we are a house of prayer, a temple meant for communion with God, not a den made for thieves or idols that take our precious energy away from God, away from loving those who need it. Instead, oftentimes, the love within us is depleted and like the temple area that Jesus entered, he finds a place that is so much less than it could truly be.

'...loyalty demands we drive out our idols, that we uncover them: they are hidden in our personality, in our way of life. But these are hidden idols mean that we are not faithful in love. The Apostle James, when he says, whoever wants to be a lover of the world makes himself an enemy of God, begins by saying: 'Adulterers!' He gives out to us, but with that adjective: adulterers. Why? Because whoever is 'friend' of

the world is an idolater, is not faithful to the love of God! The path that is not distant, that advances, moves forward in the Kingdom of God, is a path of loyalty which resembles that of married love...We can now ask Jesus: 'Lord, you who are so good, teach me to be [on] this path so that every day I may be less distant from the kingdom of God, this path to drive out all of my idols.' It is difficult, but we must begin ... The idols hidden in the many saddles, which we have in our personalities, in the way we live: drive out the idol of worldliness, which leads us to become enemies of God. We ask this grace of Jesus, today.' (Pope Francis)

Let us today take the step to be faithful to a love that is so great and choose to be a house of prayer where God dwells with delight!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What are the thieves/idols that take the rightful place of God in my life?
- 2) How can I put into practice my love and loyalty to God today?

Saturday, 21st November, Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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.

God of the living, not of the dead

The Sadducees wanted to test Jesus and so they put to him a question about resurrection. They did so because they expected Jesus to prove himself to them.

However, Jesus came into this world to give us fullness of life, to give us true meaning and purpose in life. He did not come to prove himself or to gain the approvals of others. Instead of impressing the Sadducees with the theological answers, Jesus went beyond and pointed to them the reality that God is not God of the dead, but of the living.

This is the God we believe in! He who is the God of the living is also the God of love. Thus, we are called to live our lives centred on loving him and loving others. This is the true source of our joy when we start to live for God and others.

Like Jesus, we go beyond speaking or acting in order to prove ourselves or to gain the approvals of others. People might misunderstand our good intentions or even reject us, but we must never stop putting small and big efforts in loving. Jesus unites his love with our love, and from there, all our actions bear fruit.

'There is no place for selfishness- and no place for fear! Do not be afraid, then, when love makes demands. Do not be afraid when love requires sacrifice.' (Pope John Paul II)

Today, let us be not afraid when love makes demands or requires sacrifices, but to look at Jesus and follow him as he leads us towards the path of living for God.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' personal invitation for me this day?

Sunday, 22nd November, Christ the King

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17, 1 Corinthians 15: 20-26, 28, Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me". Next he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food; I was thirsty and you never

gave me anything to drink; I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, naked and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me". And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the virtuous to eternal life.'

You did it to me

In today's gospel, the group on the right side of the King and the one on his left encountered the same types of people- the hungry in need of food, the thirst in need of drink, the stranger in need of welcome, the naked in need of dignity, the sick in need of friendship, the prisoner in need of acceptance. Yet, the virtuous saw these people and recognised their need, and so they served them. They were living their lives centering on God and others instead of themselves. The other group, on the other hand, was living their lives looking out for themselves.

Jesus invites us today to make him as the King of our hearts and let him move us from within so that we can live a life driven by an authentic love of loving God and serving our neighbours.

Look at Jesus, our King, who has displayed the same authentic love that he asks from us. He lived his life all the way to the cross, not for some egoistic desire for fame and self-gain, but for God and for us.

'See Jesus in every human person. Live for others more than for myself.' (Charles de Foucauld)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which phrase/ word strikes me the most in this passage?
- 2) How can I concretely live a life driven by an authentic love?

Monday, 23rd November, St. Clement I

Revelation 14:1-3, 4-5, 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.'

T-I-M-E

Jesus saw many rich people putting their large offerings into the treasury. However, his eyes were drawn to a widow who put in two small coins, and he valued her love offering more than those of the wealthy people. Why? This was because he saw her heart and knew that she was giving the little she had out of genuine love for God.

Today, let us look at this poor widow and learn from her how to give the little we have out of genuine love for God. We live in a comfortable rich society where we have many things. However, our greatest poverty is often 'time'. Time is so valuable to us that we are constantly finding ways to get more of time so that we can do the things we want to do. Time is our 'two small coins' that Jesus is asking from us today to give to him out of genuine love. This might mean spending more time in prayer, or spending more time in helping out others in need, etc.

We might look at our many activities and packed schedules, shake our heads and say to Jesus, 'I have no time to give to you, Lord.'

Jesus wants our two small coins, not our surplus. Jesus yearns for us to give the little that we have for his sake.

Do we love him enough to give him our two small coins today?

Jesus, give me the awareness to know what you need my time. Grant me the simplicity of heart to give you my two small coins which is my most precious time, not just my surplus.

Tuesday, 24th November, St. Andrew Dung-Lac and Companions

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.'

I am here. Do not be frightened.

Take a walk down memory lane and recall the day you got married, or the day you took your first driving test, or the day you started your first job after graduation, or the day you gave birth to your first child. Were they not beautiful yet terrifying, extraordinary yet frightening?

As humans, we always experience fear while we journey through life.

What is Jesus' message for us today? Jesus calls us to fix our eyes on him, not on our fears, and to trust him. In order to live, we must trust. Without trust, we will never move. Without trust, we will be stuck in our fears and not experience the joy of going through a challenge, the freedom to make mistakes, the growth that comes with a new journey.

'Take care not to be deceived, 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.'

Jesus invites us to trust in him more than what we see, feel, encounter in our daily life. To trust him in our life and death. To trust him in our joy and sadness. To trust him in our comforts and pains. Jesus is God who walks through life with us, and so we have nothing to fear!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What prevents me from trusting in Jesus?
- 2) How can I increase my awareness that Jesus is present in my life and live this day with him?

Wednesday, 25th November, St. Catherine of Alexandria

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.'

Standing firm for Jesus

Standing firm for Jesus in the midst of persecutions! This is the message of the gospel today. Are we ready to face persecutions? In our society, we do not face overt persecutions. We might not be thrown to the lions' dens as the early martyrs had to undergo. We might not face physical tortures for our faith. However, there are some of us who still do face persecutions from our family members or from friends who disapprove of our Christian faith. Some of us have to constantly battle with dishonest work ethics that go against our personal beliefs.

Do we stand up for Jesus in moments like these? Do we only dare to share our Christian faith only with our Christian friends and family members? Or do we fall back into silence for fear of offending others?

Today, Jesus encourages us to stand up for him by living our Christian faith with persevering joy. When the opportunity comes for us to take our stand, we can courageously claim that the radical choices we make are done out of love for Jesus. We can then stand with faith that the Holy Spirit will give us wisdom to speak and act for Jesus.

Jesus, help me to live my faith with joyful perseverance. Give me the courage to testify to your love in my life!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I face oppositions for my faith in Jesus? In what ways?
- 2) Today in my prayer, what attitude can I ask Jesus for, so that I can testify to his love without fear? (For example, courage, perseverance, peace, etc)

Thursday, 26th 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.'

Stand erect and hold your heads high!

'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.'

In life, we often experience stress, frustration, depression and anxiety. We worry about the future, We agonize about our unfulfilled dreams. We become sad over our failures. These are signs- signs that we need to pray more deeply about our lives and that there are areas that we might need transformation, change.

Very often, we turn to Jesus in our challenging moments and difficulties. However, when our difficulties do not go away, we might be tempted to abandon Jesus and start doing things our own way. We easily lose hope in face of our worsening crisis.

Today, Jesus reminds us to stand erect, hold our heads high and not to lose our faith in him. The signs might get increasingly terrible. We might even face worse calamities. However, we must never lose sight of our liberation! Instead, we choose to stand erect and hold our heads high, fix our eyes on Jesus and walk on with him in this journey of life.

Friday, 27th November

Revelation 20:1-4, 11-21: 2, Luke 21:29-33

Jesus told them a parable, 'Think of the fig tree and indeed every tree. As soon as you see them bud, you know that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you solemnly, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.'

God is our Hope

In the Old Testament, one of the ancient signs of hope is the fruitfulness of fig trees. In today's gospel, Jesus used the fig tree as a reminder for his disciples (and us) to be hopeful, especially in moments of hardships.

What are we hoping for? What are we hoping for ourselves, our families, our world?

Maybe we may hope for good health, peace of mind or for a loved one to be happy, etc. Maybe we hope for a good bonus at the end of the year, or to go on a quick getaway for rest and relax, or to buy the car of our dreams, etc.

Christian hope points to the reality of God's loving presence in our daily life. That is why Jesus tells us, '... Know that the Kingdom of God is near. God is not far from you. He loves you and he stays with you.'

Therefore, hope in God brings us to look at the future with confidence and unshakeable faith that all will be well. It makes us to fall and get up. It gives us courage to forgive and love again. It leads us to live the events of life with deep certainty of God's loving presence.

To make room for hope to increase, we must make room for God to increase. That is why we need to set aside time and space for daily prayer where we listen to God and encounter his him loving us again.

"To have Christian hope means to know about evil and yet to go to meet the future with confidence. The core of faith rests upon accepting being loved by God, and therefore to believe is to say Yes, not only to him, but to creation, to creatures, above all, to men, to try to see the image of God in each person and thereby to become a lover. That's not easy, but the basic Yes, the conviction that God has created men, that he stands behind them, that they aren't simply negative, gives love a reference point that enables it to ground hope on the basis of faith." (Pope Benedict XVI)

Today, let us put our hope in God, more than in things that come and go, more than even ourselves.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What am I hoping for?
- 2) How can I make room for God to increase in my life?

Saturday, 28th November

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.'

Created by Love, in Love, for Love

Are we living our life with meaning?

We have been created by Love, in Love, for Love. Love is the fundamental reality that can truly give lasting purpose and meaning to our lives. The world offers us money, endless sensual pleasures, innovative gadgets that cannot give us the contentment and joy we long for deep within.

Today, look and examine the state of our heart. Is our heart coarsened with desires of good life of debauchery and drunkenness? Is our heart hardened with worries and anxieties about tomorrow? Is our heart ever ready to love and be loved?

'Watch yourselves! Stay awake. Pray' This is the desire of Jesus for us. To watch ourselves and not to lose the true direction of living a purposeful life. To stay awake and recognise God's loving presence in each person we meet, in each event we live. To pray and enter into our inner room within and seek God's loving presence.

'Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts. Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth. To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of life. Meaning does not lie in things. Meaning lies in us.' (Marianne Williamson)

Today, as we prepare ourselves to enter into the season of Advent, let us listen attentively and deeply to Jesus' invitation to open our hearts to love.

Prayer for Living

~THE WORD OF GOD FOR
DAILY PRAYER



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