

Thursday, 1st February

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

Jesus made a tour of 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.

Take nothing!

"Take nothing for the journey except a staff - no bread, no haversack, no coppers..."

Jesus continues to call us to follow Him in the spirit of poverty and simplicity, not prosperity. Instead of putting our trust in His love and providence to lead and guide us, we tend to put our trust in our human means, such as worldly securities, strength, knowledge, etc., that can distract us from the message that we want to give. This message is none other than Jesus Himself - of His tender love, His forgiveness, His mercy. When we put our focus on our means, we might end up giving ourselves, and not Jesus, to others.

"The whole Christian life is a life in which the further a person progresses, the more he has to depend directly on God...The more we progress, the less we are self-sufficient. The more we progress, the poorer [in spirit] we get so that the man who has progressed most, is totally poor [in spirit] - he has to depend directly on God. He's got nothing left in himself." (Thomas Merton)

We need to humbly learn and re-learn every single day how to depend directly on God, and less on ourselves.

In the Gospel passage, the disciples heard Jesus' instructions and went off to do good deeds. They did so with Jesus' power, and not their own. Jesus calls us to make a loving surrender into God's loving hands, and let Him be the one leading us in our journey of discipleship.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I depend more on my worldly securities, human strength and knowledge, than God?

**Friday, 2nd February, The Presentation of the Lord
Malachi 3:1-4, Hebrews 2:14-18, Luke 2:22-40**

... 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'. As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected- and a sword will pierce your own soul too-so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare'.

Guided by the Spirit

Jesus' parents complied with the requirements of the Jewish Law, despite the fact that their baby was special. Their humility enabled Simeon to meet Jesus.

Simeon trusted in God's promise to send a saviour, and he knew that, even though he would not live long enough to hear Jesus' teachings, his life was also saved through Jesus' coming.

Yet, how did Simeon recognise our saviour in that little baby, accompanied by such simple parents? The answer is faith. Simeon allowed God's spirit to lead and direct his life. This may sound utterly supernatural, but think again.

How about the time we felt prompted to hold our tongue in an argument? Or decided to turn off the TV/radio/computer so as to spend time with the family? Or to refrain from joining in the office gossip, and instead offered kindness to the one everyone ostracises?

Do we recognize the Spirit's prompting for us to pause in our daily hectic lives, to meet Jesus, our saviour?

Even if the people we try to love do not appreciate our efforts, we know for sure that each time we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and actions, He will certainly lead us to encounter our Lord.

Holy Spirit, help me to be sensitive and obedient to your guidance today. Lead me, dear Spirit, to encounter Jesus, living in the people I meet today.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I be more sensitive to the Holy Spirit within me?

Saturday, 3rd February

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.

Rest in order to be renewed

Every day, we rush ourselves and others to accomplish as many things as possible. We get upset when things are not done fast enough. We work so hard that we have little time to stop. Many times, we find ourselves doing our work senselessly and forgetting the purpose for doing what we are doing. Since we are extremely busy, we have no time for others too. Today, Jesus invites us to stop and rest for a while with Him, so that His presence can renew our passion for work, and to place God back into our family life, friendships, jobs, etc.

Listen to Jesus as He tells each one of us, *"You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while with Me."*

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus' disciples came to Him and told Him all they

had done and taught. Jesus gave them time to rest. Yet, when they went off to a lonely place, the crowds saw them and went there ahead of them. Jesus saw the large crowd and He responded to their needs. He taught them at some length. The disciples, most likely, stayed close to Jesus and listened to Him as He spoke about God, about life and love. This was the rest the disciples needed by simply staying with Jesus and letting themselves be renewed by Him.

Jesus is our shepherd who always seeks for our good. Today, He calls us to stop for a while and find our rest in Him again.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' personal invitation for me today as I read and reflect on this Gospel passage?

Sunday, 4th February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Job 7:1-4, 6-7, 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23, 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, 'Everybody 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.

Praying like Jesus

After teaching in the synagogue, Jesus went to Peter's house and healed his mother-in-law. He then went on to heal crowds of people who came to Him. Jesus had a tiring and busy day. Isn't this what we all experience nearly everyday? We rush through the day with so many activities and we end the day feeling tired.

What did Jesus do after a full hectic day? Did he take the next day off?

No. Today's gospel tells us that Jesus went off to a lonely place and prayed there. He knew that He needed to be with God alone. During the time alone with his Father, Jesus found direction for His life. He understood that He had to move away from the successful mission in Capernaum and travel to other villages and towns to bring the Good News there.

We are busy but all the more we are too busy not to pray. We need to make time and space to be with God so that we can also find the direction for our life. Today, let us develop a personal relationship with God through prayer, and not allow our busy schedules to remove time for prayer.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I set time and space for daily prayer? If not, what is my excuse? Too busy? Not enough time?
- 2) How can I make prayer part of my daily practice?

**Monday, 5th February, St. Agatha
1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13, Mark 6:53-56**

Having made the crossing, Jesus and his disciples 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.

To love like Jesus

Jesus is our Lord, our God, our Friend, our Lover who has only one word for us today: 'COME!'

Jesus will never turn away from us or send us away empty-handed. He is Love. Love always seeks to make us happy, content, fulfilled. Do we know who we have before us right now in this time of prayer? Do we know the heart of Love that Jesus has for us right now?

In today's passage, crowds and crowds of people hurried to see Jesus and to

be with him. Some wanted to be healed, others wanted their sick friends or family members to be touched by Jesus, others were curious to meet this man called 'Jesus', etc. Whatever their motives were, Jesus did not turn them away but he stayed with them because he loved them.

Today, can we show the same love of Jesus for others? When people come to us and ask for help, do we turn them away? It is easy to simply say 'I have no time' or 'Leave me alone... not now.' Do we reflect the heart of Jesus by loving others?

Jesus, help me today to go to you and learn from you how to love without counting the cost, to give myself without wanting anything in return. May I not turn people away by my attitude and words. Love seeks to make others happy and so help me to live with these words in mind.

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

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 Jesus, 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 market place 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.'

Path that leads to God

Jesus did not mince His words with the scribes and the Pharisees. Ruled by legalism, they equated observing external religious observances with being zealous believers of God. They applied the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law. Thus, they wrapped themselves up in their moral rigidity and self-righteousness. Instead, Jesus called them, 'Hypocrites' because of their inflexibility and coldness. He challenged them about the essence of their religion - which was to love God and their neighbours.

Today, let us look at our lives and see if we too might have a bit of the Pharisee in us, and judge others based on what they do and do not do. We get scandalised when we see others not following some external rulings. We ourselves can become over-scrupulous with doing the number of penances and fasting as well as the external demonstration of piety during worship; while forgetting to change our hearts to become more loving, more forgiving, more understanding each day.

"This is the path that Jesus teaches us, totally opposite to that of the doctors of law. And it's this path from love and justice that leads to God. Instead, the other path, of being attached only to the laws, to the letter of the laws, leads to closure, leads to egoism. The path that leads from love to knowledge and discernment, to total fulfilment, leads to holiness, salvation and the encounter with Jesus. Instead, the other path leads to egoism, the arrogance of considering oneself to be in the right, to that so-called holiness of appearances, right?" (Pope Francis)

Jesus constantly calls us to step out of our legalistic, hypocritical ways and choose to walk the path of love and mercy that leads to God instead.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I been in a rush to judge and condemn when I look at how others live their Christian faith?
- 2) How can I walk the path of love and mercy today?

Wednesday, 7th February

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

Jesus 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.'

Renew my heart, Lord!

Today, Jesus invites us to examine our hearts. Why? Our heart directs our actions. It is the feelings of our hearts that lead us to act.

'For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge...'

In the biblical language, the heart refers to our inner self, the centre of our being where God is fully present, fully alive. Jesus wants us to take care of our spiritual heart. God is supposed to dwell in our heart, not sin! How many of us are working to have a less sinful heart?

"Let ourselves be embraced by the mercy of God; let us trust in his patience which always gives us more time. Let us find the courage to return to his house, to dwell in his loving wounds, letting ourselves to be loved by him. We will feel his tenderness and we too will become more capable of mercy, patience and forgiveness." (Pope Francis)

In this time of prayer, let us simply be loved by Jesus so that He can be the one transforming our heart to be like His. Let us never get tired of going to Jesus so that we can have hearts capable of mercy, patience and forgiveness.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I take care of my spiritual heart?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?

Thursday, 8th February, St. Josephine Bakhita

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

Jesus left Gennesaret 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 woman's faith

Most people, including ourselves, have major needs in our lives and we are uncertain how these needs can be met. Some of us are facing family crisis, others are at a loss with a problematic child, others are having financial issues, etc. In the midst of all the difficult situations we face, we need to turn to God to help us and inspire us.

In today's gospel, we see a burdened mother, whose love for her child, led her to seek Jesus and persist in her request till she got what she came for.

Jesus' response to this woman, '*... because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs*', seems rather harsh and mean.

However, the word 'house-dogs' meant 'little puppies' and it does not refer to dirty, scabby dogs, but a little puppy that is a beloved pet in a household. The image here is one of a little puppy eagerly waiting under the table, hoping and expecting its owner to feed it with scraps of food. The woman understood Jesus' reply and did not take offence but played along with Him, as she replied that she, like the little puppy, too deserved the scraps, the little crumbs of mercy, goodness and love.

Jesus tested her faith with challenging words and yet she did not give up on Him. Amazed at her great faith, Jesus healed her little daughter.

In this time of prayer, let us draw close to Jesus and place our small and big needs at His feet. Like this Syrophenician woman, we too continue to have faith in Jesus, even when our problems continue to overwhelm us. We should never lose hope!

Friday, 9th February

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

Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus 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.'

God in our busy life

Our greatest problem is that we are too busy to hear Jesus. We are always busy, busy, busy! We are busy trying to make ends meet, keeping to deadlines, taking care of children/ elderly parents, etc. We are so busy with all the comings and goings that we do not hear what God has to say to us about the great joy and meaning of life.

God speaks to us but we do not hear Him because of all the 'noise' around and within us. For this reason, we need silence. Silence to listen to all what God desires to communicate with us.

The real journey in life is the constant withdrawal from all the distractions and busyness of the world, to enter into our interior and to be with God in solitude.

In solitude with God, we begin to grow in new understanding and vision for our life.

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

Today, Jesus wants to lead us aside in private, away from our busyness and distractions, in order to speak to us. Let us follow Him and let Him open our ears to hear Him again.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is silence and solitude with God essential for me? Why?
- 2) How can I set time and space for God each day

Saturday, 10th February, St. Scholastica

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

And now once again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat.

So Jesus 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.

God provides!

Jesus fed the crowd of 5000 people in the previous chapter of the gospel of Mark (Mark 6:34-44). Today, Jesus taught and fed a different crowd which was much smaller compared to the previous story.

Jesus, once more seeing the crowd's hunger, felt sorry for them because they had nothing to eat. However, the disciples, panic-stricken at the thought of having the responsibility of feeding the crowd, asked Jesus, *"Where could anyone get bread to feed these people in a deserted place like this?"*

The disciples' response makes us wonder if they had forgotten about the miracle that they had witnessed previously. How forgetful can they get?

Before, we 'throw stones' at the disciples for their extreme uncertainty in Jesus' ability, let us look at our own lives. We too have seen and experienced the works of God in our lives and in others' lives. We have prayed and experienced God's loving presence. Yet, how often do we forget to turn to God when we face a problem in our lives? How often have we allowed ourselves to be overwhelmed with fear and start to doubt God instead? Too often, when all else have failed, then we go to God as our last option.

May we never stop trusting in God who provides!

Sunday, 11th February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, 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.

If you want, you can cure me

Leprosy is a repulsive disease. During the time of Jesus, a leper had to ring a bell to warn others of his coming and people would steer clear of his way out of fear that they would catch this dreaded disease. Leprosy has the power to make the person less human, as the disease eats away fingers, toes, nose,

and the person loses his senses. Imagine the loneliness and rejection that the leper must have felt.

Nowadays, leprosy continues in the form of a spiritual disease - sin. Sin is like a disease slowly eating into our being, and overtime, destroys who we are. It makes us less human, breaks our relationships. Like leprosy, we hold onto loneliness and face rejections.

Each of us has this leprosy in us. It can be sin of lust, anger, greed, selfishness, jealousy, pride etc. Let us approach Jesus, like the leper in the passage today. Let us daringly tell Jesus, *'If you want to, you can cure me.'* Listen as Jesus tells us, *"I do want to. Be cured."*

Let His Love embrace us from within and give us the strength to choose to live our lives according to His values, His ways.

Jesus comes to us and wants to bring healing to all the heavy burdens we carry: burdens of guilt and shame, burdens of past regrets and future anxieties. He wants us to live as human beings reflecting the image of God, not the image of pride, lust, anger, greed, jealousy, etc.

Jesus, if you want to... Heal me!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' message for me in this time of prayer?

Monday, 12th 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 while refusing to see the many miracles he had performed. They had no faith and were wrapped in their own self-righteousness and judgements against Jesus. Because of 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. They missed the point. What a pity!

'Harden not your hearts today, but listen to the voice of the Lord.' (Ps 94)

Is my heart hardened TODAY? Do I listen to the voice of Love, that gentle voice that says *'I am your God and you are mine. I love you and I am with you. Do not be afraid.'*? Do I see the presence of Love in the events that happen, in the people I meet, in the beauty of nature, in the silence of my heart?

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. Let us be open to Jesus today. Let us not be deaf to this Voice of Love.

Let us pray the beautiful prayer of St Patrick and experience again the presence of Love, the presence of God with us right here, right now.
"As I arise today, may the strength of God pilot me, the power of God uphold me, the wisdom of God guide me. May the eye of God look before me, the ear of God hear me, the word of God speak for me. May the hand of God protect me, the way of God lie before me, the shield of God defend me, the host of God save me. May Christ shield me today. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit, Christ when I stand, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen."

Tuesday, 13th 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?'

Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees

After leaving the Pharisees, Jesus and His disciples were on a boat to go to the other side of the lake. In the boat, the disciples saw, to their dismay, that they had just one loaf of bread. Most likely, they panicked and perhaps started to blame one another for not remembering and not checking well, etc.

Haven't we all had such experiences before? We realized somewhere along the journey that we had forgotten to bring more food, more securities, more...more... etc. We became anxious and angry with ourselves or others. We started to blame others. We kept repeating, *'If only I was the one...'* *'If only you did not come...'* *'If only...'*

What did Jesus tell the disciples as they anxiously became worried about not having enough and the desire to have more? What does Jesus have to say to us?

Jesus warned his disciples to be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod. Yeast is the agent needed for inducing fermentation in the baking of bread. Here, Jesus was using 'Yeast' as the symbol to show the subtle but dangerous effect or influence of the Pharisees who were blind and deaf to his words and actions. They missed the presence of Jesus, the greatest sign of all signs, because of their hardness of heart. What about the disciples?

They had Jesus who had multiplied loaves of bread and fed thousands out of the little they had. Shouldn't they trust Him?

In situations when we find ourselves with only one loaf of energy, one loaf of joy, one loaf of forgiveness, one loaf of love, shouldn't we trust in Jesus? Are our minds closed? Have we eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear? Are we still without perception?

Wednesday, 14th 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.'

Please God Only

What is the reward that the world offers us? Often, we are too concerned about people's opinions: what they are going to think about us or our actions, what they will say etc. We become so concerned about seeking others' approval that in the process, we compromise our own convictions and values. Positive opinions of others become the very oxygen which we breathe. Like leaves carried by the wind, we will live life without direction and strong convictions.

But, what if we were to seek God's approval?

Lent is a time to draw closer to God by strengthening our friendship with Him through more intense and committed prayer life. We are also invited to practice self-denial so that we can be freer to live for God and do His word. Jesus wants us to live for God and not on the opinions of others.

During the Journey of Lent, let us try to please God, and try to make choices and options according to his will. His reward for us is that he will mould and

re-mould his image in us so that we can have a clearer image of love within us.

Help me Lord to get closer to your heart as I journey this Lent.

Question for reflection:

1) How do I want to live this Lent?

Thursday, 15th 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?'

Losing my Life for Jesus' Sake

Are you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled, made nothing? Are you willing to be made nothing, dipped into oblivion? If not, you will never really change. The phoenix renews her youth only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down to hot and flocculent ash. Then the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest with strands of down like floating ash shows that she is renewing her youth like an eagle, Immortal bird. (D.H Lawrence, The Phoenix, 1932)

Jesus, because of love, was destined to suffer, be rejected and face death. As his followers, we too are called to embrace this path to the cross by losing ourselves so as to gain eternal life. This path of dying to self is not at all pleasant and pleasurable. It requires us to go against our desires and to change by giving up certain worldly ambitions, pride, selfishness, etc. It calls us to become nothing in the eyes of the world, but great in the eyes of God.

Are we willing then to be made nothing, tossed into oblivion? Like the phoenix, do we have the courage to burn our ego completely so that the life of God springs forth and renews us from within?

Jesus, I want to take up the cross and follow you. I know that this requires me to die to myself and lose my life so that I can gain your fullness of life. Jesus, help me to be willing to be nothing for your sake.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I willing to walk through the path of losing myself in order to gain eternal life?
- 2) How can I learn to follow Jesus in the way of the cross?

Friday, 16th February

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

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.'

Fast in order to Feast

In this time of prayer, let us reflect deeper on how we want to prepare ourselves for this Lenten season. However, let us not busy ourselves with chores and fasting that we forget to experience the deep profound joy of growing in our relationship with the bridegroom, Jesus.

Jesus is here in our midst. He is present in our lives. Why then do we lead sad and mournful lives? Why then do we live these 40 days of Lent as a period of heavy burden and obligations?

Instead of fasting from just food, let us fast from discouragement and negative complaints and feast on God's love. Let us fast from excessive worries and feast on a greater dependence on God. Let us fast from sadness and gloom and feast on God's deep joy.

Jesus desires that we journey through this Lent without losing sight of His presence. He invites us to stay close to Him, in prayer and our personal Lenten commitments.

Today, let us fast from all that makes us forget Jesus, our Bridegroom and

feast on all that leads us more into His friendship as He is already in our midst.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What must I fast from that makes me forget Jesus' presence today?
- 2) What is the one thing that I can feast on which will lead me to live with Jesus more closely today?

Saturday, 17th February

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

Jesus 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.'

Follow Me!

'For God, we are not numbers! We are important; indeed, the most important of all his creatures, the closest to his heart whether we are saints or sinners.'
(Pope Francis)

Jesus loves each person - whether he is a public sinner or a saint. Jesus has come for all of us. However, not everyone is willing to turn to Jesus and acknowledge his/her need for Him - His love, mercy, friendship, etc.

The self-righteous Pharisees, in today's passage, looked at the table of sinners and they immediately separated themselves from them. On the other hand, the sinners, i.e. the tax collectors and outcasts, knew that they had limitations and faults, and so they drew close to Jesus whom they saw as a Teacher, a Prophet from God, and as someone who could offer them God's love and mercy.

Which group do I identify with? Am I somehow like the self-righteous Pharisees who judge and condemn the weaknesses of others? Do I unconsciously think that I am fine and that I do not need God at this point in my life? Or, am I like Levi and all the sinners who yearn for Jesus?

Jesus calls us, no matter how we see ourselves as the healthy or the sick, in order to make us experience His Love again and again. We need, however, to recognise his presence of love, who is here to love us today.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, if Jesus were to say, *"Follow me,"* what will be my response to Jesus' invitation?

Sunday, 18th February, First Sunday of Lent
Genesis 9:8-15, Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:12-15

Immediately afterwards the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him. 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.'

Entering into the Wilderness

Lent is a time to go into the wilderness. This wilderness is not a physical place but this wilderness is our inner state of being with God. We all know that during Lent, we have and want to pray more, to reach out more to those around us, to control our temper, etc.

We desire to be more with God: to love him more, to please him more, etc. Yet, the more we try, the more we experience ourselves to be weak and tired of trying that we even begin to fall into temptation.

Well, this is our inner wilderness where we struggle and fight, where we fall and rise up. Yet in all these challenges we face, we begin to discover that we are not alone. With faith, we begin to sense God's gentle hand picking us up and encouraging us to try again. With faith, we start to enjoy God forgiveness again and again. With faith, we start to acknowledge that we need to depend more on God, and not on our own limited strength and capabilities.

Jesus cries out to us the same message that he proclaimed in Galilee, *'The time has come, and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'*

Let us repent and move away from all that prevent us from loving and depending on God alone. Let us believe the Good News which is the Word of God, the Word of Life!

Jesus, stay close to me. Give me the determination that I need to stay in my wilderness. Help me to discover that you are there in my wilderness with me.

Question for reflection:

1) In this time of Lent, how can I break free from the chains of the tempter and draw closer to God?

Monday, 19th February

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.'

Recognising the face of Jesus

“Lift up and stretch out your hands, not to heaven but to the poor; for if you stretch out your hands to the poor, you have reached the summit of heaven. But if you lift up your hands in prayer without sharing with the poor, it is worth nothing. ... Every family should have a room where Christ is welcomed in the person of the hungry and thirsty stranger. The poor are a greater temple than the sanctuary; this altar the poor, you can raise up anywhere, on the street, and offer the liturgy at any hour. (St. John Chrysostom)

There are no strangers in God’s house. We, regardless of our social status, are known and loved by God. In this time of Lent, we are called to deepen our experience of God’s love so that we can open our hearts to solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need, and move to action.

“To love God and neighbour is not something abstract, but profoundly concrete: it means seeing in every person and face of the Lord to be served, to serve him concretely. And you are, dear brothers and sisters, in the face of Jesus.” (Pope Francis)

Today, let Jesus inspire us to live our lives for Him, for others.

Question for reflection:

- 1) In whom do I have difficulty in seeing the face of Jesus?
- 2) In this time of Lent, whom am I called to welcome more in my life?

Tuesday, 20th February

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.’

Our Father

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

God our Father knows our needs before we ask Him. If so, why pray? The aim of prayer is not to get things from God, but to realise more deeply our needs and our total dependence on Him. Today, Jesus teaches us again how to pray this rather challenging and formidable prayer. Why challenging? Why formidable?

It is challenging and formidable because we address God as 'Our Father'. It is challenging and formidable because we are recognising that God is the source of life and everything we have come from Him. It is challenging and formidable because we are admitting that every human person, from the most loveable to the most unlovable, is a child of God and also my brother and sister. Thus, it is a challenging and formidable prayer because we are not just supposed to babble the words but to live it out in our daily life. If we are not ready to depend on God and/or accept every single person as our fellow brother or sister, we will have problems to really say this prayer.

The 'Lord's Prayer' is a beautiful prayer that basically sums up our innate desire to live with God and for God. Let us not become so familiar with this prayer that we rattle it as rapidly as possible. Instead, let us ask for the grace to make this prayer a central part of our way of life.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I find meaning and relevance in praying the Lord's Prayer? Why?

Wednesday, 21st February

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.'

A Sign of God's Power

Jesus, looking at the huge crowd around him, knew that they were there because they were interested in looking for a sign, for external manifestations of power. They had little faith and constantly expected spectacular displays of powers from Jesus. Jesus had harsh words for such people: 'This is a wicked generation!' What about us? How is our faith? Are we simply going to Jesus and asking for external signs, like the crowd?

The only sign that Jesus will give to us is that of His passion, death and resurrection. The crowds in today's passage were looking for glory and greatness without the cross. Yet, the sign that Jesus presented of Himself was of one that had to undergo great sufferings and humiliating death on the cross before experiencing resurrection. Did the crowd understand his message? Can we, today, accept this sign of God's power and greatness on the cross?

In our own life, what kind of sign do we want to show to others? Do we want to put ourselves as a very successful sign where others can admire our power, money, degrees, material things, etc? Or do we want to follow the footsteps of Jesus to be a sign of humility and love, often mistaken for weakness? The way of Jesus is the way of the cross that leads to resurrection and new life.

Lord, when people look at me, what sign do they see? Lord, please help me to be a sign where they can see your presence and glory, not mine.

Thursday, 22nd February, The Chair of St. Peter the Apostle

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.'

Jesus, you are...

Jesus asked His disciples, *"Who do people say I am?"* They gave various answers spontaneously - John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets. Jesus then asked them another question, *"Who do you say I am?"*, and there was silence until Peter spoke up, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Today, Jesus asks us the same question, *"Who am I for you?"* What will our response be?

Will we simply be rattling off answers we have learnt from catechism classes, like *'You are Jesus the Messiah', 'You are the Son of God', 'You are the second person in the Trinity.'*? Jesus does not want textbook answers from us. Rather, He is asking us to answer from our hearts.

"Who do you say I am? Who am I for you?"

We need to journey with Jesus and learn who He is. We need to have a daily encounter with Jesus and experience Him loving us through our weaknesses as well as strengths. It is in walking with Him as a friend that we draw closer to Him and come to know Him deeply.

Jesus, who are you? Walk with me today and show me your love so that I can come to know you more!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who is Jesus for me?
- 2) Have I experienced the joy of knowing and loving Jesus?

**Friday, 23rd February, St. Polycarp
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.'

Respond, not react

An author once wrote: 'Anger is a killing thing: it kills the man who angers, for each rage leaves him less than he had been before - it takes something from him.'

Anger is a normal human condition that we all face and perhaps struggle with. Yet, it is like venom that enters and poisons our hearts. It degrades, kills the quality of our life as well as the life of the other person. Anger leads us to desire for revenge, for getting back at the person who has hurt us. Ruled by our anger, we curse the driver who honks at us, vent our frustration at our children, etc. Anger blinds us from seeing the other person as a person and it opens our mouth to say words that we might regret later.

In today's passage, Jesus invites us not to choose to react in anger, but to respond with compassion and love. Jesus does not just want us to be good people but he invites us to go a step further and aim to be like Him.

The greatest expression of love is Jesus on the cross. Jesus had every reason to curse the people who unfairly accused Him, treated Him cruelly and then nailed Him to the cross to die a horrible death. Instead, Jesus forgave. He chose not to react with anger but respond with compassion and love.

Jesus, help me not to react angrily but to respond with your love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I often react in anger against those around me?
- 2) How can I respond with concrete love today?

Saturday, 24th February

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.'

The capacity to love

'And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional?'

Jesus invites us to step out of our comfort zone, of our familiar environment consisting of family and friends, and He calls us to do more to share his love. God has created us to be courageous, resilient and loving enough to go out to love against all odds.

The reason is very simple. Since we are God's children, we have our heavenly Father with us all the time: giving us enough courage to reach out to a stranger, even to our enemies, giving us strength to persevere against our own weaknesses and for us to once again, raise ourselves from sin, giving us enough love and compassion to see past our everyday prejudices of others.

Let us accept Jesus' challenge to really love each person who comes our way today, the loveable and unlovable ones. In this time of Lent, let us not waste time but get up and grasp our Father's hand, to walk out of our comfort zone and to love our 'enemy' with concrete actions.

'We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.' (Martin Luther King, Jr)

Question for reflection:

1) As a child of God, how can I love each person I meet today, even those whom I find it difficult to love?

Sunday, 25th February, Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18, Romans 8:31-34, Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus: 'Rabbi,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'. He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them anymore but only Jesus. As they came down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

Listen to Him!

We are called to love God with all our heart, mind and strength every day. Jesus lived His life doing just that! He loved God with His heart, mind and strength. In fact, He lived His life totally for God and with God alone. In Jesus' life, we can see a person truly free - free to live, love and die.

Jesus experienced God in such a personal manner and He was ready to head down to Jerusalem to face the cross because He knew that He was not alone, but His Father would be with him. He knew that the cross was not the end, but Love would triumph. Thus, His transfiguration was a taste of what He would be experiencing soon.

In our journey of life, we face many challenges and difficulties. Who or what do we turn to? Do we pray? Do we include God in our confusion, doubts, and problems? Our personal crosses do not have the last word, but God's love! Let us remember this!

Today, God the Father offers Jesus to us and tells us, in the same way he told the disciples - *'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.'*

Let us listen to Jesus and allow him to lead us up the mountain in order to

have a strong encounter with God, so that we can continue our Lenten journey with confidence and hope.

Question for reflection:

1) How is God inviting me to live as I enter into the second week of Lent?

Monday, 26th February

Daniel 9:4-10, 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.'

...As your Father is Compassionate

The standard of our love should be God's standard. Thus, we must be compassionate as God is. Our relationship with others should not be based on our human judgement or condemnation. Rather, we must be compassionate enough to forgive others. The standard way we relate with others must be according to the standard of God, not our own limited and conditional standard.

When we love with the love of God, we will spontaneously give ourselves for the good of others. We will share our joy, our faith, our love. We will want to share the Good News of God's life, love with those around us. We will want to give others our time, our energy, our creativity, etc so that they can also experience God and His unconditional love for them. It is in giving of ourselves that we will receive the reward that God has in store for us. He will shower us with His endless gifts of His loving presence in our lives. The more we give, the more we will receive.

Today, let us take God's unconditional and compassionate love to be our standard of love. Let us take this time of prayer to be renewed by God's love, so that we can truly exercise this love towards others, especially those in our family and those closest to us.

Questions for reflection:

1) Have I experienced the unconditional love and mercy of God in my life?

2) How can I let go of my own limited standard of love so that I can love others with God's love?

Tuesday, 27th February

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.'

Authority as a Child of God

The ways of the Pharisees and the scribes are very different from the ways of Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes taught the people how to live an upright life, but their words did not tally at all with their own lives. They placed themselves, their egos, above their love for God and for others.

Jesus, on the other hand, made a deep impression on his listeners because He taught them with authority (Mark 1: 22). This authority came from His awareness of His identity as the Beloved Son of God. He was so close to the heart of his Father that He desired always to do His will and to please Him alone. The people were able to sense the difference in between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes.

The challenge for us today as God's beloved children is to have the same authority to share the Kingdom of Love with those around us. Thus, we need to relate with God everyday - to know intimately His heart, to grow in love with Him and to experience His unconditional love for us. Failing to do this,

we will be a modern-day Pharisee or scribe who speaks beautiful words about love but do not bother to practice love.

Jesus, the Son of God chose the path of lowliness, the path of servant-hood in order to reflect in His own life what love entails. No longer are we to look for honour or glory from humans and to be served by others, but we are to humble ourselves so as to serve others with love, like Jesus.

Let this Lenten season be a time to show to others what love is all about and to be true witnesses of God's presence today!

Wednesday, 28th February

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.'

True Power is Service

Upon hearing that the mother of James and John made the request of asking Jesus to let her sons sit beside him in His kingdom, the other ten disciples became angry. None of them understood Jesus when He spoke about his coming passion and death. Instead, they were looking for honour, prestige

and glory. The disciples were holding onto their own pride and desire for power. They missed the point of their Master's way of life.

Jesus' message is that of humility and service.

"We must not forget that true power, at whatever level, is service, which has its luminous summit on the Cross. With great wisdom Benedict XVI reminded the Church many times that for man, authority is often synonymous with possession, dominion, success. For God authority is always synonymous with service, humility, love. It means to enter into Jesus' logic, who bends down to wash the feet of the Apostles (cf. Angelus, January 29, 2012), and who says to his disciples: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them it shall not be so among you; in fact, the motto of your assembly, no? 'it shall not be so among you'; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Matthew 20:25-27). (Pope Francis)

What about us? Do we understand the message of our Servant King? Do we accept the life that he calls us to have and follow?