

Friday, 1st June, St. Justin, Martyr

1 Peter 4:7-13, Mark 11:11-26

After he had been acclaimed by the crowds, Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked all round him, but as it was now late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. Next day as they were leaving Bethany, he felt hungry. Seeing a fig tree in leaf some distance away, he went to see if he could find any fruit on it, but when he came up to it he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. And he addressed the fig tree. 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again' he said. And his disciples heard him say this. So they reached Jerusalem and he went into the Temple and began driving out those who were selling and buying there; he upset the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those who were selling pigeons. Nor would he allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. And he taught them and said, 'Does not scripture say: My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples? But you have turned it into a robbers' den.' This came to the ears of the chief priests and the scribes, and they tried to find some way of doing away with him; they were afraid of him because the people were carried away by his teaching. And when evening came he went out of the city. Next morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered to the roots. Peter remembered. 'Look, Rabbi,' he said to Jesus 'the fig tree you cursed has withered away.' Jesus answered, 'Have faith in God. I tell you solemnly, if anyone says to this mountain, "Get up and throw yourself into the sea", with no hesitation in his heart but believing that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. I tell you therefore: everything you ask and pray for, believe that you have it already, and it will be yours. And when you stand in prayer, forgive whatever you have against anybody, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your failings too. But if you do not forgive, your Father in heaven will not forgive your failings either

Have faith in God

Why did Jesus curse the fig tree? Why did He drive out those who were selling and buying in the Temple?

The answers to both questions come from Jesus' words to His disciples after the incidents. *"Have faith in God."* - This is the most fundamental foundation for every follower and disciple of Jesus. When we have no faith in God, we will be fruitless disciples like the barren fig tree. We will also turn to other idols, such as wealth, lust, power, etc. to replace God in our lives.

Having faith in God does not simply mean recitation of the Creed or to fulfil obligations. Faith in God is that we participate in an intimate relationship with God the Father. Being in a relationship with God brings us to enter into loving relationships with everyone, including those whom we cannot get along with. When we are one with God, we are able to have the courage and strength to forgive those who have hurt us or wronged us. No longer do we divide against one another but we work for the good of communion.

Today, let us have faith in God and let us bear the fruits of mercy and forgiving love.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?

**Saturday, 2nd June, Ss. Marcellinus and Peter
Jude 17:20-25, Mark 11:27-33**

Jesus and his disciples came to Jerusalem again, and as Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, 'What authority have you for acting like this? Or who gave you authority to do these things?' Jesus said to them, 'I will ask you a question, only one; answer me and I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism: did it come from heaven, or from man? Answer me that.' And they argued it out this way among themselves: 'If we say from heaven, he will say, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?" But dare we say from man?' - they had the people to fear, for everyone held that John was a real prophet. So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know'. And Jesus said to them, 'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this'.

Whose authority?

The chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Jesus asking for the source of His authority. Who gave Him the right to teach what He taught? Who gave Him the right to heal the sick? Who was He that the crowds hailed Him as He entered Jerusalem on a donkey? Who gave Him the permission to drive out the money changers and sellers from the temple?

The religious teachers considered themselves as the ultimate authority over the masses because of their official titles. Because of their authority, they had no fear of using scripture to submit to their whims and fancies (Matthew

15:6) They put heavy burdens on people but did nothing to lead them to know God more (Matthew 23:4). They had no love for God but sought to find honour for themselves instead (John 5: 42).

Jesus knew their hearts through and through. Regardless of Jesus' response to them, they would have already condemned Him. Thus, He turned the tables around and asked them instead, "*John's baptism: did it come from heaven or from man?*" They found themselves cornered and so they said, "*We do not know*" and slipped away one by one.

Jesus stood firm in what He truly believed. The question from His enemies did not shake Him or cause Him to doubt. He knew that His authority came from God the Father and He stood His ground.

Today, let us learn from Jesus how to be firm in what we believe so that we can stand firmly in moments of external oppositions and even internal doubts. Let us not be like the religious leaders whose hearts were so full of pride and love for power that they failed to see the source of Jesus' authority.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I follow Jesus' steadfastness in the face of oppositions?
- 2) Is my heart free from pride, jealousy, desire for positions, etc. that I cannot imitate Jesus in His freedom and love?

Sunday, 3rd June, Corpus Christi Sunday

Exodus 24:3-8, Hebrew 9:11-15, Mark 14:12-16, 22-26

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, his disciples said to Jesus, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city and you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him, and say to the owner of the house which he enters, "The Master says: Where is my dining room in which I can eat the Passover with my disciples?" He will show you a large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared. Make the preparations for us there,' The disciples set out and went to the city and found everything as he had told them, and prepared the Passover. And as they were eating he took some bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them. 'Take it,' he said 'this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had returned thanks

he gave it to them, and all drank from it, and he said to them, 'This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many. I tell you solemnly, I shall not drink any more wine until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God.' After psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives.

Take it, this is my body given for you

What does this feast of the Holy Eucharist mean for me today? How does it affect my life?

"Take it, this is my body"

Jesus gives us the bread which is His body. Out of total love for us, Jesus makes Himself a gift to all of us. He comes to be in union with each one of us to partake in our life's joys and pains with us. He comes to become food so as to sustain us as we journey through life. He brings us out of our individualism to live in communion with others.

Jesus does not want us to adore and admire Him, but He calls us to take Him and be in communion with Him so that we too can follow His path of total self-giving in our daily life.

"Let us ask ourselves: how do I follow Jesus? Jesus speaks in silence in the Mystery of the Eucharist. He reminds us every time that following him means going out of ourselves and not making our life a possession of our own, but rather a gift to him and to others." (Pope Francis)

Today, let us follow Jesus by going out of ourselves so that our life becomes a gift to Him and to others.

Question for reflection:

1) How do I live the Eucharist?

Monday, 4th June

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.

Disobedient tenants

Jesus was not afraid to challenge the religious leaders to change so that the moment of conversion will not slip away from them. In today's parable, the stubborn and disobedient tenants represent the religious leaders whose hearts are hardened with rebellion.

Jesus called His listeners to enter into a true relationship with God - one of obedience and love, no longer using religion for their own personal gains and ambitions.

Today, Jesus calls us to enter into the vineyard as tenants who are ready to be in a personal and intimate relationship with God. From this relationship, we work for God with hearts focussing on what truly matters - to bear fruits of the Kingdom and share all that we receive with others.

Let Jesus bring us into the vineyard today!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I the tenant that God has intended me to be?
- 2) How can I grow closer in my relationship with the Owner of the vineyard?

Tuesday, 5th June, St. Boniface

2 Peter 3:11-15,17-18, 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 Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God'. This reply took them completely by surprise.

Belonging 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 minds. 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 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, 6th June

2 Timothy 1:1-3,6-12, Mark 12:18-27

Then 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.'

God of the living

The Sadducees are a very conservative group of Jews who upheld the written law rigorously. In today's gospel passage, a group of them went up to Jesus and asked Him a question regarding the issue of resurrection; they used a bizarre example of seven brothers' marriage to the same woman to seek clarification about the issue.

Jesus answered them by going beyond the law to the essence of true faith. Jesus intentionally avoided debates over the correct interpretation of the law. Jesus genuinely wanted the people to know and love God, and to enter into a personal relationship with Him.

Today, Jesus calls us to come to know and love God more so that we can truly enter into the true essence of our Christian faith.

God is the God of the living, not of the dead. Therefore, He is the Friend of Life. He cares for our life. He suffers for our misery. He works for our wholeness. He is for us, not against us.

Let us be impelled by this God of life and put ourselves at the service of life

too. We cannot turn a blind eye to the realities of this world where there are so many people in need of care, forgiveness and compassion. We look around us with eyes of God and recognise the dignity of every single person. When the God of life is the centre of our very being, we will live each day differently.

Question for reflection:

1) Has my relationship with the God of the living make a difference in the way I live my life? Why?

Thursday, 7th 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.

The new law of love

Which is the first of all the commandments? This was the scribe's question to Jesus. Jesus' reply to him could be summed up in just one word, 'Love'. Nothing pleases God more. What is the point if we worship God but have no love in our hearts? What is the purpose of following one norm after another if we do not fulfil the commandment of love?

Love of God becomes a fib when we fail to love others around us.

"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)

With humility in our hearts, let us ask God to let His love fill us so that we can truly perceive this law of love. Today, we can live, and not just know, the commandment of love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is love the core, the centre of my life?
- 2) How can I live out this commandment of love today?

Friday, 8th June, Sacred Heart of Jesus

Hosea 11:1,3-4,8-9, Ephesians 3:8-12,14- 19, John 19:31-37

It was Preparation Day, and to prevent the bodies remaining on the cross during the sabbath - since that sabbath was a day of special solemnity - the Jews asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away. Consequently the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with him and then of the other. When they came to Jesus, they found he was already dead, and so instead of breaking his legs one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance; and immediately there came out blood and water. This is the evidence of one who saw it – trustworthy evidence, and he knows he speaks the truth - and he gives it so that you may believe as well. Because all this happened to fulfil the words of scripture: Not one bone of his will be broken; and again, in another place scripture says: They will look on the one whom they have pierced.

To You, I return it

Today, we celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What does this feast mean to us?

Jesus did not come into the world to be loved, instead, He came into the

world to love with an everlasting love. Jesus' heart that contained love was pierced by a lance. Today, we continue to pierce Jesus' heart with a lance each time we choose to respond to Him by our indifference, self-centredness, pride, laziness, etc. Yet, no lance can stop Jesus from loving more. It only opens His heart further to pour forth blood and water which symbolize His complete self-giving to us.

The experience of the passionate love of Jesus should move us to give Him our all. St. Ignatius, after reflecting and experiencing Jesus' love, responded with a prayer of making his own life a complete gift to Jesus. He prayed, *"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is Yours. Dispose of it wholly according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace. With these I am rich enough and want for nothing more."* (St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Jesus gives His all to us out of love. Let us be moved to give ourselves to Him again today.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I respond to Jesus' love today?

**Saturday, 9th June, The Immaculate Heart of Blessed Virgin Mary
2 Timothy 4:1-8, 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.

Not by sight but faith

Mary has been for many a figure of obscurity or a woman put on a pedestal to be honoured. As we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, let us look at Mary and see her as a person, a woman, a mother and a believer.

Mary was a woman who walked by faith, not by sight. She did not understand many things in her life. She had no assurances as to where her 'Yes' to be the Mother of God would lead her. Yet, she walked on with faith that God would never let her down.

In today's gospel, Mary lost Jesus but she walked with faith and trust that she would find Him in crowded Jerusalem. Finally, she must have experienced great relief to be with her Son again.

Yet, years down the road, she would 'lose' Him when she stood at the foot of the cross and witnessed her Beloved Son being crucified as a criminal. Here, she could only let go of her Son and continue to walk in faith.

How many of us can really learn from Mary to keep walking in faith - in moments when we do not see answers to our questions; in times when we have to let go of our loved ones; etc.? Today's celebration is not simply a devotional act towards Mary, but a day to be with Her and learn from Her what walking in faith really means.

Question for reflection:

1) In my life now, how can Mary help and guide me to never lose hope but to walk on always in faith?

Sunday, 10th June, Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Genesis 3:9-15, 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1, Mark 3:20-35

Jesus went home again, and once more such a crowd collected that they could not even have a meal. When his relatives heard of this, they set out to take charge of him, convinced he was out of his mind. 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 he 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 burgle 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'.

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.'

Who are Jesus' mother and brothers?

In today's Gospel, Jesus' mother and his brothers arrived to visit Jesus. However, as there was a crowd around Jesus, they could not reach him and they informed him of His mother and his brother. But Jesus looked at the people seated around Him, listening to Him preached and said: "Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus looked at every face in the crowd with eyes of love and saw each person listening to him as part of His family. He knew their hearts and how they yearned for God and desired to do His will in their lives. What about us today? Are we eager to set aside time to pray, to sit around Jesus and build this friendship with Him? Do our hearts yearn and desire to seek to do God's will in our lives?

Jesus calls us as His brother and sister each time we take action and live out what we understood from our prayers - when we choose to forgive someone who have hurt us, when we are patient with our co-workers, or when we take the courage to answer the call of God in our lives.

Dear Jesus, as you are eager to call me your brother or sister, help me to respond with the same eagerness too. Help me to see you as my Brother who walks with me to do the will of God today.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How is Jesus inviting me to do the will of God today?
- 2) Am I eager to be a brother or sister to Jesus?

Monday, 11th June, St. Barnabas, Apostle
Acts 11: 21-26; 13:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12

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

True happiness

In the time of Jesus, happiness in the Jewish culture means to be a male Jew, married to a fertile woman, have many male children and to gain respect and wealth. What about us? What is our definition of happiness? Perhaps for many, happiness is to have a successful career, many cars, country club memberships, properties, etc.

In today's gospel, Jesus presents to us a new happiness - one that is not based on the externals but internal. This was the happiness that Jesus Himself lived in His life. His happiness came from living in God, with God and for God.

Let each of the Beatitudes speak to us and inspire us to live them out in our own lives. Happy are the Spiritual poor: To be spiritual poor is to be aware that we need to depend on God alone, and not on our own strength and ability to live this life. Happy are those who mourn: To be people who have experienced God's comfort so that we can also be with others and comfort them in their sorrows. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for what is right: To stand for the truth and not for falsehood because the God of Truth

lives within us. Happy are the merciful: To have a love that forgives the unlovable parts of others because we ourselves have first experienced God's mercy in loving us. Happy the peacemakers: To be peacemakers who bring God's presence that we carry in our hearts to our family members, friends, strangers, the poor and needy. Happy those who are persecuted: To rejoice when we are misunderstood or rejected because we are trying to do what God requires.

True internal happiness is when we live in God, with God and for God. We become silent proclamation of the Good News because we show a happiness that the world with all its material things can never give.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which Beatitude speaks more to me right now? Why?
- 2) How can I witness Jesus by living this Beatitude in my daily life today?

Tuesday, 12th June

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.'

Be salt! Be light!

Many children grow up to become the labels that adults call them - "You are stupid", "You are such a loser", etc. When they keep hearing such remarks, they, sooner or later, tend to believe and become the labels being placed on them. It is absolutely untrue because nobody is stupid, loser, failure, bad, unloveable, worthless. God, who created each one of us, looks at us with faithful love. He sees our true selves and knows the potential we have within us.

Today, Jesus calls each of us: "*You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.*" This is the extraordinary truth of who we are.

Salt is useful, not useless. It is to give flavour to food and preserve meat.

Light is fundamental, not unnecessary. Light makes people see in the dark. Be salt! Be light! Be who we are called to be. We have the capacity to season our family, our society with the taste of God. We are called to let our faith shine so that God can be seen through our actions and words.

Let us not simply rush through Jesus' words, "*You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.*" Savour these words. Experience His trust behind these words. This is who we are meant to be.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I be salt and light to the world today?
- 2) What are the challenges I face in living as salt and light?

Wednesday, 13th June, St. Anthony of Padua

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.'

God's Law

God gave the Jews the ten commandments through Moses in order that they would be led to love Him and their neighbours more. Along the many centuries till Jesus' time, the religious leaders started to add many other ordinances or man-made laws which put heavy burdens on the ordinary Jews. Heavy penalties were given to those who fail to follow exactly the ordinances. Thus, the religious leaders became slaves and made others into slaves, to the letters of the laws. In today's gospel, Jesus wanted to remind the people that God's law is truth and love, and living His law brings freedom, peace, joy and faithfulness and makes them see others through the eyes of love.

Today, Jesus invites us also to respect God's law to live out the spirit, not the letters of the Law. He completes and fulfils it with the Law of Love, i.e. to love God and love others in our daily lives. Let us look deeper into our lives

and see that our hearts are full of love for God as we live our lives in accordance with His will. Let us also examine if our faith in God leads us to increase our love for others, even those whom we find it hard to love.

God's Law of Love calls each of us to be in union with Him and with others. If our lives do not reflect this, then we have failed to grasp the call of the Gospel.

Today, let us open our hearts and let God's love transform our lives so that we can truly keep the Law of Love and teach it to those around us by our own words and deeds.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How do I live God's Law of Love?
- 2) Do I view His Law of Love as a heavy burden or as a guiding light that makes me live fully as who I am called to be?

Thursday, 14th June

1 Kings 18:41-46, Matthew 5:20-26

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; 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.'

Killing with words

What is Jesus' message for us today?

The commandment not to kill extends to 'killing' the reputation and character of others by gossiping, slandering and judging. This is because

there is as much hatred in our hearts when we take a weapon to kill a life and when we use words to kill.

“If you speak ill of your brother, you kill your brother. And every time we do this, we are imitating that gesture of Cain, the first murderer in History.”

(Pope Francis)

Therefore, Jesus challenges us to have peace reign in our hearts and to make peace with one another before we can worship God with pure hearts.

This is not easy as we struggle many times with hatred and anger in our hearts. Our greatest assurance is that we can turn to Jesus and ask Him for the grace not to continue ‘killing’ but to have enough peace to try loving instead. Only Jesus, who lives in us, can remove the hatred we have in our hearts. Only He, who is with us, can open our eyes to recognise each person as our brother or sister. Only He, who works through us, can make us become sharers of God’s life and love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How do I express my hatred or anger against someone - through silently judging him/her, through listening to rumours, through spreading gossips, etc?
- 2) How can I have peace in my heart today?

Friday, 15th June

1 Kings 19:9,11-16, Matthew 5:27-32

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘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.

Tear, throw and live!

What is Jesus' message for us today?

Jesus uses rather strong words in today's gospel - *"If your right eye should cause you to sin, tear it out and throw it away... And if your right hand should cause you to sin, cut it off and throw it away..."* These words are not meant to be taken literally, but we must grasp the meaning behind these words.

A tumour growing in our body must be removed in order to be well again, similarly, we too must thus be ready to part with the thing which keeps causing us to sin.

What is this thing in us that makes us live apart from God and live in peace with ourselves and others?

Our hearts have been made to be pure. Jesus invites us to dare to be radical by having the courage to stop, to cut, to tear away, to throw away anything that truly prevents us from living a life of truth and love. Many times, we think that as long as we do not act, we are not breaking any laws. Today, Jesus challenges us - *"if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*

It is what we have in our hearts that matters. Lust, anger, greed, resentment, etc., must not be the residents of our hearts that control how we think and act. Rather, God must be the owner of our hearts that leads us to live as people of integrity and honesty.

Change my heart, O Lord, and make it true and pleasing to you!

Saturday, 16th June

1 Kings 19:19-21, Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Again, 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.'

To live a life of integrity

What is Jesus' message for us today?

Jesus tells us to be people of integrity and honesty. When others listen to us, can they trust the words we say? Is our 'Yes' a 'Yes' and our 'No' a 'No'?

This is what many of us tend to do - We hide our real selves behind endless streams of words. We paint our thoughts, our opinions, our feelings with thousands and thousands of words according to what we think will please others. We hide behind words because we are afraid to be vulnerable. At the same time, we are afraid to trust others' words too.

Jesus lived a life of integrity and honesty in His words and behaviour. He was always true to His character and He was not deceitful. Therefore, those who listened to Him were attracted to Him. They recognised that He taught as one with authority, and not like their teachers of the law (c.f. Matthew 7:29).

As Jesus' disciples, we must learn to speak truthfully and honestly without the need to call on the name of God to be our witness. Jesus calls us to be free from dishonesty and hypocrisy in speech and conduct, but to be true to God, others and ourselves.

Question for reflection:

1) How can Jesus the Word of God make me free to be true to myself, to others and to God?

Sunday, 17th June, Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Ezekiel 17:22-24, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowds, '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.

Open to collaborate with God

There are numerous negative news of wars, violence, illnesses, etc, that we look at the world as

if there is nothing good or very little good happening. Yet, God never gives up. He continues to sow His seeds of love in any one who is open to receive Him. Silently, the seed will sprout, grow and bear fruit. Are we one of those whose hearts are open to receive Him?

Sometimes, we think that it all depends on us to solve the world's crisis or to help a person in need. Everything does not depend on us. God is the one sowing His seed, and all we need to do is to collaborate with Him by letting the seed of love take root and grow within us. We collaborate by allowing God to use our talents and gifts, to let the love within us to flow through us and touch the lives around us. We also collaborate with God by the values we show in our words and deeds. We are sowing the seed of love, the seed of the Kingdom. In its own time, it will sprout and produce fruit in the life of the people.

Many times we do not see the seed because as Jesus says, it is as small as a mustard seed, but we believe that it will be fruitful. We are sure that there is much goodness in the world because there are many people open to receive God's Kingdom, to live it out and to share it around. We are one of those people who are ready to allow God to work in us and through us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I open to allow God to work in me and through me?
- 2) What are the obstacles I have that can choke the seed and prevent it from growing in me?

Monday, 18th 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.'

To respond with kindness

"Peter and his friend went to a newspaper vendor to get his morning papers. Peter greeted the newspaper vendor with a cheerful greeting, but the newspaper vendor stared at him with a glare. When Peter asked for the morning's paper, the newspaper vendor threw it at him rudely and took his money without bothering to look at Peter. Peter, however, remained jolly and thanked the vendor, and left. His friend noticed all what had happened, and he told Peter, "I bet you will go to another newspaper vendor tomorrow morning after such bad service!" Peter grinned and shook his head, "Why must I? I will still go to the same guy for my newspaper tomorrow." "But ...but the man was so rude to you. Why must you go to him?", the friend asked. Peter answered, "Why must I let someone determine my reaction? No glare can take away my choice to be kind. No rudeness can remove my happiness." (Unknown)

Our usual tendency when we encounter meanness or unkindness in others' demand or conduct, is to react against or refuse to give in to them. Today, Jesus tells us to offer the wicked man no resistance! If someone slaps us on the right cheek, we turn and give our left as well! If someone demands for our tunic, we give our cloak to him too! If someone orders us to go one mile, we go an extra mile without him asking. If anyone borrows something from us, we give it to them.

Is this our normal response? Is this our attitude when we bear insults and unreasonable demands? Today, let us simply ask ourselves, do we always react with anger and spite or respond with patience and kindness?

Jesus invites us to love without limits. However, it does not mean that we do not confront someone when we do see a need to. Jesus himself confronted the Pharisees and religious leaders too. He, however, was never malicious and spiteful in his words, his actions and his thoughts.

Today, let us respond and not react!

Tuesday, 19th 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.'

Perfect love

"I am not going to wait. I will live each present moment, filling it to the brim with love." (Monsignor John Walsh)

Jesus makes it very clear that the goal of every Christian is perfection. Thus, He said that we must be perfect just as our heavenly Father is perfect. God's notion of perfection is quite different from our concept of perfection. We see perfection in terms of law-abiding and righteous all the time. Such perfection is too burdensome and even impossible.

Perfection in love begins when we are in intimate relationship with this God of Love. Today, He calls us to let His love fill our hearts to the brim and let this love flow to others, without discrimination. God is not vengeance but compassion. He is great, not because of the power to destroy his enemies, but His merciful love that forgives all. He does not restrict His love to only those faithful to Him. He made the sun rise on the good as well as the bad, without distinguishing between the guilty and the virtuous. He does not treat anyone according to what they do or not do. Rather, the God of love responds to all with love.

It is not easy to love with God's perfect love. We see our fears to be vulnerable, and wish that we can build barriers to keep certain people out of our lives. However, God invites us to dare to love and to love deeply. Now, it is time to take action to live perfect love in our lives.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What fears do I have in living out perfect love the way God wants me to?
- 2) How can I put my prayer into action?

Wednesday, 20th June**2 Kings 2:1-6-14, 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.'

The reason for everything

We need to constantly examine ourselves by asking these questions: Why are we doing what we are doing? Are we constantly preoccupied with how others view us? Are we trying to appear perfect externally? Are we aware of hypocrisy in us? What are our inner motivations and desires?

In today's gospel, Jesus is challenging us to go into our inner room and seek to have an intimate communion with God our Father. In Him alone, we find fullness of life and love. From this union of love with God, we give alms, fast, pray, do good deeds, etc. because we want to please the One who loves us so much. Thus, our love for God is the motivation of doing all that we do each day.

“Without love, deeds, even the most brilliant, count as nothing.” (St. Terese of Lisieux) “Love God, serve God; everything is in that.” (St. Clare of Assisi)

Today, may our love for God be the inner motivation for us.

Thursday, 21st June, St. Aloysius Gonzaga
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 loving Father

The “Our Father” is a prayer so close to the hearts of Christians all around the world. It is the prayer that Jesus taught each of us to say from our hearts with simplicity and trust in God our Father.

In today’s gospel passage, Jesus told His disciples not to fill their prayers with thousands of words but simply to be in the presence of the One who knows them and cares for their deepest needs. Today, Jesus tells us the same. It is not to utter many words and repeat our prayers countless of times because we think that God needs our flattery and so He will be more likely to hear us and grant our requests.

Who is God for us? Is God really our Father whom we trust?

Jesus started the prayer with these words: “Our Father...” - We need to know God as our Father and we as His children. We belong to Him here, now and forever. Our loving Father is waiting for us and listening to us in the secret room within ourselves. All He wants from us is to go to Him and trust in His love.

Let us reflect on the requests in the prayer the 'Our Father'. *"Give us today our daily bread"*- Our daily bread goes beyond physical nourishment, but also our deep need for peace, strength and joy. Today and each day, we can ask from our loving Father all that we need. *"And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt against us."* – We ask our Father to forgive our failures to love because we are confident that He is mercy Himself. However, we are also called to be merciful towards others who have wronged us. Like our Father, we must never give up on any person but open ourselves to work for unity with him/her. *"And do not put us to the test but save us from the evil one."* - We are daily bombarded by temptations to forget who we are and to live our lives apart from God, as well as to put other idols of material wealth, power and status as the centre of our lives. By praying these words, we recognise our fragility and our need for God to lead us always close to Him.

Friday, 22nd June, Ss. John Fisher and Thomas More, Martyrs
2 Kings 11:1-4,9-18,20, Matthew 6:19-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moths and woodworms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworms destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be all darkness. If then, the light inside you is darkness, what darkness that will be!

You are the treasure that I seek

"'Money, vanity and power' don't make us happy. The real treasures, the riches that count, are 'love, patience, service to others and worshipping God'". (Pope Francis)

Jesus today cautions us not to put our hope on wealth and all temporal things that can be here today and gone tomorrow. Rather, we are reminded to invest and build up on that which truly lasts. What is this spiritual treasure which can never be taken away from us? It is the intimate experience of having God as the centre of our lives. It is the tremendous joy of knowing that we are loved forever by this loving God. With God in us, we enjoy the fruit of deep peace. Nobody and nothing on this earth can ever take away

God's love from us. This is the richness that we possess when God is present in our hearts.

We need new eyes that are truly sound to illumine us to be aware of what is taking our hearts away from God. Through being in union with God, He is the one who gives us these new eyes to see the things that keep our hearts chained and not free to truly live with God and for God.

Today, let us ask Jesus to give us new sight to look within ourselves and desire for the *riches that truly count*.

Jesus, be my centre, be my sight, be my guide.

Question for reflection:

1) Where is my treasure found? Is God the treasure that I seek? Why?

Saturday, 23rd June

2 Chronicles 24:17-25, Matthew 6:24-34

Jesus said to his disciples: 'No one 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. That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. Surely life means more than food, and the body more than clothing! Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are we not worth much more than they are? Can any of you, for all his worrying, add one single cubit to his span of life? And why worry about clothing? Think of the flowers growing in the fields; they never have to work or spin; yet I assure you that not even Solomon in all his regalia was robed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will he not much more look after you, you men of little faith? So do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? How are we to be clothed?" It is the pagans who set their hearts on all these things. Your heavenly Father knows you need them all. Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'

God is my centre

“This split between faith which many profess and their daily lives deserved to be counted among the most serious errors of our age... Let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other.” (Vatican II’s Gaudium et Spes No 43)

If God is our only Master, our only Love, He should be the one directing our 24 hours of each day, and not just when we are in church grounds. In our 86,400 seconds of each and every day, God our Father is there caring for us. He is present even when we are not aware of it and live each day rushing for deadlines, stressing over our problems, planning our day, etc.

As Christians, we must no longer split God from our daily lives. Rather, we must be God-centred people who constantly return to Him with our needs. It is in a living relationship with God that we can worry less and trust more.

Today, let us set our hearts on His Kingdom, His presence of love within us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is God the centre of my life? Is He my only Master whom I love and serve?
- 2) How can I grow in my awareness to be more God-centred and live each day trusting in Him alone?

Sunday, 24th June, Nativity of St. John the Baptist Isaiah 49:1-6, Acts 13:22-26, Luke 1:57-66,80

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.

God is gracious

"His name is John."

The meaning of the name John means, *"The Lord is gracious"*. Looking at the life of St John the Baptist, we can truly say that this is true.

God was gracious to his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, when He gave them the precious gift of their child. Zechariah and Elizabeth, no longer childless, experienced the profound joyful moment to see God's graciousness toward them in the person of their baby boy. When their boy grew up and entered into adulthood, they knew that they had to let him go as they watched him walk away from them into the desert. Yet, Zechariah and Elizabeth entrusted their son into the hands of God, knowing that John was meant for a higher calling.

God is gracious to us by giving us the life of St. John the Baptist who showed us that our own life too has a purpose, a calling. We need to seek the purpose of our life here on earth. More than just listening to the callings of technology and pleasures of this world, we need to allow God to speak to us and reveal His special calling to us. Is there more to life than just working for money and more money? As a married person, a working professional, or a student, how can I use my gifts and talents to bring goodness to the world?

May we find people, family members and friends, who can encourage us, rejoice with us, journey with us as we discover and live our life for a greater purpose.

Monday, 25th June

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.'

Judge not

We tend to be quick to judge and form opinions about people because of their mannerisms, speech, style of dressing, etc. Many times, we like to play the judge so that we can control and put people into their correct places by putting labels, to classify and evaluate them.

In today's gospel, Jesus warned His disciples about being too quick to judge and condemn others for their failures. He also pointed out the disciples' unwillingness to recognise their own big planks in their eyes.

Today, let us stop, pause and reflect: Who are we to judge? Did God send us to the world to play the role of a judge or a lover, a friend?

As Christians, we are called to recognise the 'plank' in our own eyes first before we can see clearly to help others to remove their 'splinters' of faults and weaknesses.

"To die to our neighbours means to stop judging them, to stop evaluating them, and thus to become free to be compassionate. Compassion can never coexist with judgment because judgment creates the distance, the distinction, which prevents us from really being with the other." (Henri Nouwen)

To stop playing the judge means to keep choosing to be honest with ourselves and to dare to see our own faults, and to ask God for His mercy and compassion. By acknowledging ourselves as sinners in need of God's mercy, we will be more compassionate with others.

Today, let us encounter Jesus and let Him open our hearts to let Him love us so that we can learn how to love ourselves and love others as well.

"The heart grows hard when it does not love. Lord, give us a heart that knows how to love." (Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' personal invitation to me this morning?

Tuesday, 26th 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.

A sharing on dogs and pigs

Dogs and holiness? Pearls and pigs? What is Jesus trying to tell us today from these images?

There are some things that do not go together, like fire and water, heat and cold, night and day, etc. In the Jewish culture, dogs and pigs are considered to be unclean animals. If precious gems are put on pigs and dogs are given holiness that radiates God's beauty and truth, we become unsettled by such sights. Jesus' message to us is that there are some people who are not ready to hear the Good News we want to share with them. Perhaps they might hear and reject it and consider our words to be foolish words. Do we give up on them then? We wait patiently for their openness to receive Jesus and His message. We continue living with joy in our Christian faith, and show them, through our silent words, that God is alive.

As Christians, we must always treat others as we would like them to treat us. It calls for us to have a mature love that always seeks for the good of others. An unconditional love that has no limitations and inhibitions. This is the narrow road that we are called to choose to walk - the path of self-emptying love, of absolute love. This way leads to life. The constant temptation is to walk the wide and spacious road where we follow our self-centredness, our instincts, our likes, our time, our expectations. This way does not certainly lead to fullness of life.

Jesus, your way is not easy to walk. It implies that I de-centre from my pride, selfishness and laziness in order to walk the path of love. You have placed people in my life in order that I can guide them more to you. Please give me your love so that I will never give up on them but to journey with them with patience and untiring love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there someone in my life that I find it hard to share my faith with because of his/her resistance?
- 2) How can I continue without giving up?

**Wednesday, 27th June, St. Cyril of Alexandria
2 Kings 22:8-13, 23:1-3, Matthew 7:15-20**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves. You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, a sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I repeat, you will be able to tell them by their fruits.'

Good tree, good fruit

Jesus wants us to be the good tree that bears good fruit. It is time to look deep down inside us and see with honesty what kind of tree we are? If we somehow recognise that we are not bearing good fruit as we are meant to be, then draw close to Jesus and let His love nourish the soil of our hearts. Let Him love us and strengthen our faith once more to live His way of life.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

If we do not remain united in Jesus, the great temptation is to allow spiritual worldliness to creep into our hearts. Spiritual worldliness is the subtle temptation of convincing oneself that this and that is done for God's glory but it is actually for the glory of oneself. We end up doing activities after activities for this organisation or that parish but we forget Jesus and seek our selfish interests. The more we plunge into spiritual worldliness, the more we become trees producing bad fruit. This is because such a tree will bear fruit of disunity.

Jesus invites each of us to remain united to Him. In Him, we will grow strong and sturdy to be good trees bearing good fruit. On our own, we can do nothing.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I remain in Jesus each moment of the day, and not just in my prayer time?
- 2) How can I allow Jesus to help me to become a tree bearing good fruit?

**Thursday, 28th June, St. Irenaeus, Bishop and Martyr
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.

Build on Rock

There are people who constantly speak about God but they do not speak to God. They use the name of Jesus but they do not have a personal encounter with Jesus. To be Jesus' real disciples, it is not enough for us to speak or do things for Jesus and neglect the most fundamental thing, i.e. relationship with Jesus, the Person, the Friend, the Master.

Is Jesus the centre of our life? Is He the Rock on which we build our life?

Today, Jesus calls us once more to build our lives on Him. He is the rock which will support us in moments of storms and trials. With Him as our strong foundation, nothing can separate us from His loving presence.

It is not to put our security on the sand of worldly wealth, pleasures, power,

prestige, gaining honour from others, etc. All these come and go. Only God remains constant.

“God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in Him. His dynamic presence enters into us and then seeks to spread outward to others until it fills the world, so that His love can truly become the dominant measure of the world.”

(Pope Benedict XVI)

God is within us and we are in Him. Standing on this eternal presence of God, we go out and truly live to spread His love to all.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I building my life on rock or on sand? Why?

Friday, 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.’

The Imperfect vessels

Today, we celebrate the feast of Ss. Peter and Paul. What made them great? What made them become such important figures in the church? Were they perfect and flawless that God used their lives as His instruments?

Peter’s and Paul’s imperfections and their humanity enabled God to use their lives to reveal His greatness and glory.

Peter, the leader of the apostles, was also the one who denied Jesus his Master. Paul, the chosen apostle for the Gentile world, was once the

persecutor of the early Christians. Their failures did not make them 'failures' in the eyes of God, but God looked at them with love and called them for mission.

As we celebrate this beautiful feast, we also rejoice at the good news that God does not call only perfect people to love and serve Him.

Whether we are called to use our talents in certain ministries, or to guide someone in their faith, or to share our faith stories with those around us, we must never forget that God calls us, and uses our life to bring even more people back to His love. Regardless of our imperfections and faults, we are His instruments in this world.

Today, Jesus asks us again, *"Who do you say I am?"*

Only when we truly experience Jesus as our Friend and Companion, Teacher and Master, can we place ourselves in His hands to be used for His purpose and glory. In this time of prayer, let us encounter Jesus again, and be loved by Him.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I know God's will for me?
- 2) How can I let myself be an instrument of God to be used for His purpose?

**Saturday, 30th June, The First Martyrs of the Roman Church
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 man for others

Jesus healed the Roman Centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law as well as multitudes of people who went to Him for healing. What can we see from Jesus' actions? A man centred on Himself and His own needs? A man open to serve others and their needs?

Jesus' whole life was spent putting Himself at the service of others. Why? It was not because He wanted to impress His disciples nor to gain the approval of the masses. He served others because He felt the pain of those suffering and He was afflicted by their pain. By being with the sick and afflicted, Jesus revealed God's presence of love.

"There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried."
(Oscar A. Romero)

Our time is now. There are so many people around us who are suffering from loneliness, anxiety for the future and pain from the past. There are many in need of inner peace that only Jesus can give. If our hearts are focussed solely on ourselves and our personal needs, we will be indifferent to others. If our hearts are set to imitate Jesus in His same spirit of love and compassion, we will see people and events through eyes that have cried and hearts that have loved. May we always manifest God's presence today.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from following Jesus' footsteps of love?