

Monday, 1st October, St. Therese of the Child Jesus

Job 1:6-22, Luke 9:46-50

An argument started between them about which of them was the greatest. Jesus knew what thoughts were going through their minds, and he took a little child and set him by his side and then said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For the least among you all, that is the one who is great.' John spoke up. 'Master,' he said 'we saw a man casting out devils in your so name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said to him, 'You must not stop him: anyone who is not against you is for you'.

The power of simplicity

Immediately after Jesus spoke to His disciples regarding His coming passion and death on the cross, they started to argue among themselves which one of them was the greatest. They were wondering who would be in charge when Jesus was no longer with them. Each of them desired to be the leader over the others. They were full of their own worldly ambitions and desired for power.

Jesus read their hearts and knew all that took place among His disciples. Jesus took a little child and said, *"Anyone who welcomed this little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For the least among you all, that is the one who is great."*

Who is the greatest for Jesus? Not Peter, not John, not James, not Judas, not Simon, not Jude... none of his disciples who desired for power. Instead, a simple and powerless child represents what greatness means.

For all who desire to follow Jesus closely, the key to greatness is to be simple and humble as a little child. Unfortunately, there are many people who undervalue the power of simplicity. Yet, this is the path we need to take when we truly desire to follow Jesus.

"Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility." (St. Augustine)

In the next incident in today's gospel passage, John and James showed that they could not truly grasp Jesus' message of simplicity and humility. The two

brothers saw an outsider casting out devils in Jesus' name, and they felt threatened. They felt that only they, as true disciples of Jesus, had the power to do such a thing. Jesus came and said, "You must not stop him." This was because Jesus knew that God could use simple hearts to do great deeds.

"Provided that God be glorified, we must not care by whom." (St. Francis de Sales)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What does it mean to be great for me?
- 2) How can I be humbler and desire solely to bring glory to God alone?

**Tuesday, 2nd October, The Holy Guardian Angels
Job 3:1-3,11-17, Matthew 18:1-5,10**

The disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' So he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. Then he said, 'I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

The Simple Things

There was once a Count who lived in a great castle, and he had everything he needed - money, books, food, servants, etc. But he was never happy. One day, he came across a little child playing on the sea shore, happy and carefree. The Count started to talk to the little child, and he realised that the child lived in a place he called The Great Land. The Count asked how he might get to The Great Land, and he was told to learn to laugh, and when he had mastered this, to learn how to play, to dance, to cry. The Count went home, and tried to master all these, but he still could not reach The Great Land. One day, he had almost given up hope of getting what he wanted, he saw some children playing and decided to join them. It was then, through their child-like games, in learning truly how to laugh and play and to appreciate the simple things in life, that he realised that The Great Land is here.

God seeks for our happiness in the here and now, in the ordinariness of each day. We have to learn to let go of our tendencies to look for great things in

spectacular events or to grieve for things we do not have. Instead, we, with child-like hearts, need to rejoice for the things that we already have and to value the beauty of each ordinary moment of each today.

"...unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Unless we learn how to laugh, to play, to dance, to cry and appreciate the simple things in life, we will never enter into 'The Great Land', the Kingdom of God, where God is present.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Are there some experiences in my life when I find it hard to become like little children?
- 2) What is Jesus' message for me in this time of prayer?

Wednesday, 3rd October

Job 9:1-12,14-16, Luke 9:57-62

As Jesus and his disciples travelled along they met a man on the road who said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go'. Jesus answered, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'. Another to whom he said, 'Follow me', replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first'. But he answered, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God'. Another said, 'I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home'. Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God'.

I will follow you but...

How far will you go to follow Jesus?

In today's gospel passage, Jesus did not paint a rosy picture to people who came to Him and expressed their desire to follow Him. He told them bluntly what it would cost to be His disciples.

The first person came to Jesus and said, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus, instead of embracing a new disciple, warned him of the hard reality by saying, *"Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*

To follow Jesus implies a constant giving up of worldly attachments that might hold us back from following Him closely. What are some of such attachments? The comforts of our bed that might prevent us from spending quality time in prayer. The pleasure of watching television that puts off going out of our comfort zone and making better use of our time. The list goes on.

The last two people went to Jesus but each wanted somehow to delay their commitments to follow Jesus.

“Let me go and bury my father first.” This man wanted to follow Jesus but in his own time and own way. He simply gave an excuse because it was not convenient for him at that moment. Jesus challenged him to follow Him whether it was convenient or not. Likewise, we cannot follow Jesus according to our time and schedules. Jesus wants us to set Him above all other priorities.

The last person went to Jesus and said, *“I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.”* This person wanted to follow Jesus but he also liked his family. Thus, Jesus was inviting Him to stay focused and keep his eyes fixed on what was important. When ploughing a field, a farmer must never look left and right because the plough line would not be straight. He must fix his eyes on where he is going, and then the plough line would be straight. What are our distractions? We must look within ourselves and be honest with what tends to distract us from fixing our eyes on Jesus and following Him with determination.

How far will I go to follow Jesus?

Thursday, 4th October, St. Francis of Assisi

Job 19:21-27, Luke 10:1-12

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him, in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself was to visit. He said to them, ‘The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest. Start off now, but remember, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road.

Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, “Peace to this house!” And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it

will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the labourer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome, eat what is set before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you". But whenever you enter a town and they do not make you welcome, go out into its streets and say, "We wipe off the very dust of your town that clings to our feet, and leave it with you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God is very near." I tell you, on that day it will not go as hard with Sodom as with that town.'

Here I Am, Send Me!

"All of us are called to offer others an explicit witness to the saving love of the Lord, who despite our imperfections offers us his closeness, his word and his strength, and gives meaning to our lives. In your heart you know that it is not the same to live without him; what you have come to realize, what has helped you to live and given you hope, is what you need also to communicate to others." (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium No. 121)

As baptised Christians, we are called to live as witnesses to all what God has done in our lives. Jesus sends us out to the people - our parents, spouse, friends, children, colleagues - to communicate the treasure of our faith to them.

We will surely be faced with oppositions, resistance, critics and rejections. We might even be tempted to simply give up this challenging task and withdraw again into our comfort zone. Yet, we are not alone in this mission. Jesus sends us as labourers to His harvest and so He will also send us help.

Question for reflection:

1) I cannot give what I do not have. How can I increase my faith in Jesus so that I can truly communicate Him to others?

Friday, 5th October, St. Mary Faustina
Job 38:1,12-21;40:3-5, Luke 10:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. And still, it will not go as hard with Tyre and Sidon at the Judgement as with you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be exalted high as heaven? You shall be thrown

down to hell. Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me, and those who reject me reject the one who sent me.'

A simple message for today

Strong words from Jesus against Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. These were places where He went around, preaching and working intensely yet the people did not believe in His message. They rejected Jesus. In order to wake them from their indifference, Jesus did not mince His words but spoke the truth and made His point.

Are we like the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum? Are we so secure in our own convictions about life and faith that nobody can change us?

"Anyone who listens to you listens to me; anyone who rejects you rejects me, and those who reject me reject the one who sent me."

What is Jesus' main message behind these words?

Listen! Listen attentively to Jesus. Listen too to Him through His messengers who sincerely proclaim the Gospel by their words and lives.

Let us stop and reflect: Whose voice do I listen to? Who is influencing me in the way I live my life?

We walk out of having an intimate and loving relationship with Jesus when we fail to make the space to listen to Him. Today, He calls us back to re-encounter Him.

Jesus speaks. Today, we have the choice to listen attentively to Him or to turn a deaf ear to Him.

Saturday, 6th October, St. Bruno
Job 42:1-3,5-6,12-17, Luke 10:17-24

The seventy-two came back rejoicing. 'Lord,' they said 'even the devils submit to us when we use your name.' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Yes, I have given you power to tread underfoot serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven.'

It was then that, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, he said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Then turning to his disciples he spoke to them in private, 'Happy the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it'.

The Joy of Mission

'Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven.'

These are Jesus' personal words to each of us today. He wants us to know the true cause of our joy – it is not just because we are successful in bringing someone closer to Jesus or that we have invited someone to a prayer session, or that someone is entirely grateful for our dedication, etc.

Rather, joy comes from the fact that our names are written in heaven, i.e. in the heart of God. The mission that He has entrusted to us is not to be seen and measured by external 'success' or external great deeds.

God is our reward in this mission. We might not see flocks of people knowing Jesus through us. We might even be laughed at and some might even reject us. There might not be anyone thanking us for our desire to share with them the treasure that we have in us. People might not even appreciate the little acts of love we do for them. All these do not matter because God sees our little and big efforts and he will give us His eternal and faithful love as our best reward.

"In the end, dear friend, it is always between us and God, not between us and them." (Mother Teresa)

Question for reflection:

1) What is the cause of my joy?

Sunday, 7th October, Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Genesis 2:18-24, Hebrews 2:9-11, Mark 10:2-16

Some Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, 'Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?' They were testing him. He answered them, 'What did

Moses command you?’ ‘Moses allowed us’ they said ‘to draw up a writ of dismissal and so to divorce.’ Then Jesus said to them, ‘It was because you were so unteachable that he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide.’ Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them, ‘The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.’ People were bringing little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ Then he put his arms round them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

What God has United...

God created man and woman to be ‘one flesh’, as persons called to share love and intimacy, and to live in communion. The original plan of God for marriage is that what He has joined together, no one can divide. According to Jesus, Moses allowed repudiation because the Jews were so ‘unteachable’.

In many ways we too are unteachable when we allow our own selfish desires and ambitions to break unity, not just in the context of marriage, but also in friendships and communities. We tend to compete, condemn, judge, discriminate, etc.

Today, Jesus reminds us that the original plan for all of us is unity, not division.

“May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.” (John 17: 21-23)

This is the desire of Jesus - May we all be one. May our oneness in the family, in the parish communities, in our friendships be a reflection of God's love.

Question for reflection:

1) What can I do to help Jesus to build unity in my family, in the community I belong to, in the office, etc. today?

Monday, 8th October

Galatians 1:6-12, Luke 10:25-37

There was a lawyer who, to disconcert Jesus, stood up and said to him, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What do you read there?' He replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself'. 'You have answered right,' said Jesus 'do this and life is yours.' But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of brigands; they took all he had, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan traveller who came upon him was moved with compassion when he saw him. He went up and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him on to his own mount, carried him to the inn and looked after him. Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said "and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have." Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the brigands' hands?' 'The one who took pity on him' he replied. Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself'.

Wasting time

Do we allow God to disrupt our daily schedule and programme?

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, there are two characters who did not allow God to spoil their plans. They are the priest and the Levite. Both saw the half-dead man and continued on their journey. Both had their personal schedules to meet and were too busy to get involved in the situation. Both

failed to hear God's voice in the needs of the poor wounded man.

The Samaritan traveller went along the same way. He too had a destination to go and schedule to meet. However, he saw the half-dead man and his heart was filled with compassion. He stopped. He bandaged. He poured. He lifted. He carried. He looked after.

"It is a daily temptation... to not listen to God, not listen to His voice, not hear in one's heart His proposal, His invitation... Do you have the capacity to find the Word of God in the story of each day? Or are your ideas the ones that you hold up, and you do not let the surprises of the Lord speak to you?" (Pope Francis)

The Samaritan allowed Love to disrupt his journey, his plan. What about you?

Tuesday, 9th October

Galatians 1:13-24, Luke 10:38-42

In the course of their journey he came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha who was distracted with all the serving said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered: 'Martha, Martha,' he said 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her.'

Serving God with love, in love

"It is not fitting, when one is in God's service, to have a gloomy face or a chilling look." (St. Francis of Assisi)

Martha invited Jesus to her home. However, she was so distracted with all the serving that she felt frustrated at her sister who was not at all doing anything to help her. To the rest of the people who were present at that moment, they might see Martha as a hardworking and gracious host. However, Jesus saw her heart and knew that Martha was serving, not out of love, but anxiety.

Martha's anxiety flowed from her desire to gain approval and praises from Jesus for her service. She did all that was right to impress Jesus but for the wrong reasons. Despite all her efforts to please Jesus, Mary seemed to be getting all the attention for doing nothing!

In the family/ community/ parish context, what is our reason for our serving, caring and doing good? Do we serve in order to be praised? Do we care in order to be recognised? Do we do good in order to be affirmed? Is love for Jesus and others the motivation for all that we do?

Mary, on the other hand, listened to Jesus. She made Him her top priority. Thus, she did not mind her sister's comments or what others thought of her. For Mary, Jesus was the 'better part' at that moment.

Today, may our words and actions flow from the desire to please and love Jesus alone.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is my motivation for doing things for God and others?
- 2) What prevents me from making time and space to sit at Jesus' feet and simply rest in His presence?

Wednesday, 10th October

Galatians 2:1-2,7-14, Luke 11:1-4

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples'. He said to them, 'Say this when you pray: "Father, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come; give us each day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us. And do not put us to the test."'

Say this when you pray: Father

"Jesus was in a certain place praying..." Praying was something Jesus did habitually. This is because prayer was the time for Jesus to be in contact with God the Father. Prayer was the space for Jesus to actively seek and know His Father's will.

Sometimes, we think that prayer is something we do for God, rather than what God is doing in us. Too often, we also talk so much in our prayer that

God cannot say anything to us at all. The problem is that we do not listen attentively to what He has to say to us. Like Jesus, we need to go off away to a quiet place in order to be in contact with Him and allow Him to direct us in our decisions, feelings, thoughts and desires.

Seeing how Jesus prayed with such passion, the disciples too wanted to have the same prayer life as Jesus. *“Lord, teach us to pray...”* was their request.

Jesus started to teach the disciples how to pray with the word, *“Father...”* Prayer opens our heart to recognise that God is our loving parent and we are His beloved children. Prayer opens our eyes to see others too as our brothers and sisters. The questions that we need to stop and ask ourselves are: Who is God for me? Am I living today as a child of God? Do I really accept and love each person as my brother and sister despite the differences we encounter?

Today, let us stay in the inner peace that God is our Father. We are always in contact with God our Father with joyful trust because He is with us. God loves us and journeys with us in the ups and downs we experience in life. God never fails to bring us out of ourselves in order to love others as our brothers and sisters irrespective of race, nationality, age, social class, occupation.

“The child asks of the Father whom he knows. Thus, the essence of Christian prayer is not general adoration, but definite, concrete petition. The right way to approach God is to stretch out our hands and ask of One who we know has the heart of a Father.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

In this time of prayer, let us stay with God our Father as His beloved children.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Addressing God as “Father”, is there any resistance I find in myself with this reality of who God is?
- 2) How can I learn to relate to God with more trust and intimacy?

Thursday, 11th October, St. John XXIII

Galatians 3:1-5, Luke 11:5-13

Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, “My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing

to offer him”; and the man answers from inside the house, “Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it you”. I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it him for friendship’s sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants. So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’

Being loved by God

It is true that Christian living is about being loving. However, we must never forget that being a Christian is also about being loved. It is being loved by God that leads us to be loving people.

Rooted in His love, we have the courage to pray to Him with trust and confidence. Sometimes, we wonder if God loves us so much, then why are our prayers not answered quickly or in the way we want them to be. It is not because God loves us less but we need to believe that each prayer we make is never a waste. This is because God, in His time and way, will answer our prayer even if it is not in the way we have expected.

In life, there are many things that we do not understand if we simply see with human eyes. However, if we see with eyes of faith, we perceive God constantly giving, constantly loving, constantly faithful.

Therefore, let us never give up praying and believing. God’s love always gives us the best He has. The best gift He pours in our heart everyday is the Holy Spirit who is the fullness of His love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I struggle to believe that God loves me, cares for me and provides me with all that I truly need?
- 2) What is Jesus’ invitation to me in this time of prayer?

Friday, 12th October

Galatians 3:7-14, Luke 11:15-26

When Jesus had cast out a devil, some of the people said, 'It is through Beelzebul, the prince of devils, that he casts out devils'. Others asked him, as a test, for a sign from heaven; but, knowing what they were thinking, he said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin, and a household divided against itself collapses. So too with Satan: if he is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? - Since you assert that it is through Beelzebul that I cast out devils. Now if it is through Beelzebul that I cast out devils, through whom do your own experts cast them out? Let them be your judges then. But if it is through the finger of God that I cast out devils, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you. So long as a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than he is attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares out his spoil. 'He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man it wanders through waterless country looking for a place to rest, and not finding one it says, "I will go back to the home I came from". But on arrival, finding it swept and tidied, it then goes off and brings seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and set up house there, so that the man ends up by being worse than he was before.'

With God or against God?

Jesus had just cast out a devil, and some people reacted heatedly to His good work with malicious slander. They attributed His power to Beelzebub, the prince of devils, instead of to God. Jesus was not bothered with the comments of the people because He was not out to get love and approval from them. He knew that He was on God's side, and all that He said and did were out of love for His Father. This was all that matters for Jesus.

"He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters."

Are we with God or against God?

Many of us would most likely choose to say that we are with God. However, there are many times when we lose sight of God in our daily life and we start to do things, even good things, out of routine or simply to get love and

praises from people. We sometimes, like the people who spoke against Jesus, involve ourselves in slander and backstabbing others out of jealousy.

Thus, we need to go back to the motivation of why we do what we do. God is our motivation. We are with Him. We do things out of love for Him. Thus, our words and deeds reflect God's presence in us.

Today, let us be with God, not against Him!

Saturday, 13th October

Galatians 3:22-29, Luke 11:27-28

As Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said, 'Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!' But he replied, 'Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it!'

Greater happiness

We are made for happiness, and not just any kind of happiness but the fullness of happiness which we find in God.

In today's gospel passage, a woman in the crowd admired Jesus so much that she paid a compliment to His mother. However, Jesus answered her, "*Still happier those who hear the word of God and keep it!*"

What did Jesus mean by this?

True happiness comes from hearing and keeping the Word. Mother Mary is a perfect example of a person who heard, kept and lived according to God's Word. She was a truly happy woman not because of her achievements and wealth. In fact, Mary was a simple person. Rather, she was happy because she let the Word of God be her only and greatest treasure. Even in moments when she did not understand fully the Word of God or when it caused her to suffer and grief, Mary continued to keep it in her heart.

Mary, in the scene of the Annunciation, gave her 'Yes' to God's message when she said, "*Let it be done to me according to Your word.*" (Luke 1:26-38). Her final recorded words appeared in the wedding of Cana when she told the servants, "*Do whatever He tells you.*" (John 2, 1-11). Such depth of trust Mary had in God.

May we too desire to hear and keep God's Word so that we can truly

experience the real happiness which we have been created for.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I believe that I have been created to have fullness of happiness?
- 2) Today, how can I keep the Word which I have heard in prayer and keep it by letting it take root in my life?

Sunday, 14th October, Twenty-eight Sunday in Ordinary Time

Wisdom 7:7-11, Hebrews 4:12-13, Mark 10:17-30

Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, 'Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You must not kill; You must not commit adultery; You must not steal; You must not bring false witness; You must not defraud; Honour your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days'. Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, 'There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!' The disciples were astounded by these words, but Jesus insisted, 'My children,' he said to them 'how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' They were more astonished than ever. 'In that case' they said to one another 'who can be saved?' Jesus gazed at them. 'For men' he said 'it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God.' Peter took this up. 'What about us?' he asked him. 'We have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not be repaid a hundred times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land - not without persecutions - now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life.

Lose in order to Gain

A rich young man ran up to Jesus because he desired to learn from Him how to live his faith, more profoundly and in a fulfilling manner. Jesus told him to go and sell all that he had, give away everything and then follow Him. The

rich man loved God, and was loved by Him but he could not follow what Jesus said because of his attachment to his wealth. The real tragedy for this rich young man was that he missed the opportunity to have an intimate and deep relationship with God.

Jesus today looks at us with love, and invites us to take the steps to live our faith with greater authenticity and meaning. Is there anything that prevents us from entering into a deeper relationship with God? Why do we worry about losing the wealth of our pride and self-sufficiency when we can really experience the abundance of God's love?

What would have happened if the rich young man took up Jesus' call and followed Him? Have we ever wondered? Perhaps this young man would be like the rest of Jesus' disciples who had said 'Yes' to Jesus and lived their faith with greater joy and purpose.

Monday, 15th October, St. Teresa of Avila
Galatians 4:22-24,26-27,31-5:1, Luke 11:29-32

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

Real miracle starts with an encounter

The crowds got bigger and bigger. People kept coming to Jesus because they wanted to get a glimpse of Jesus, marvel and applaud Jesus and His miracles. They wanted a performance by a superstar and nothing more.

Jesus knew their hearts. He perceived that most of them were present for the sake of miracles. They did not want to listen to Jesus' message and repent accordingly. The prophet Jonah went to the Ninevites and preached to them. They heard and repented. The Queen of the South travelled a long distance to hear King Solomon. Upon hearing him, she recognised and valued

his wisdom. Unlike the Ninevites and the Queen of the South, most of the people in the crowd took Jesus and His message for granted. They did not listen nor heed His call for repentance.

Today, Jesus continues to call us to encounter God again. It is this intimate encounter of God's love that moves us to repent and return to Him. In fact, real miracle takes place when we start to experience God's love, and allow His love to be more powerful than our pride, lust, hard-hearted nature, anger, greed, indifference, etc. Real miracle happens when our lives change for the better, and we start to live with God and for God.

"I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord". The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace". (Pope Francis)

**Tuesday, 16th October, Ss. Hedwig, Margaret Mary Alacoque
Galatians 5:1-6, Luke 11:37-41**

Jesus had just finished speaking when a Pharisee invited him to dine at his house. He went in and sat down at the table. The Pharisee saw this and was surprised that he had not first washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, 'Oh, you Pharisees! You clean the outside of cup and plate, while inside yourselves you are filled with extortion and wickedness. Fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside too? Instead, give alms from what you have and then indeed everything will be clean for you.'

Clean inside-out

The Pharisees and religious people during Jesus' time spent a lot of time on rituals dealing with external cleanliness. There is nothing wrong with focussing on cleanliness.

Jesus, however, wanted to focus on a more essential matter than external cleanliness. He challenged the people to look inside and see if their hearts were clean. They might appear good and perfect on the outside, but their hearts could be full of greed, resentment, pride, selfishness, etc.

Today, Jesus continues to invite us too to take a look at our inner self. What is the content of our heart - Greed? Anger? Unforgiveness? Prejudices? Competitiveness? Pride? Lust? Is God in us?

More than just practising the externalities of our faith, let us also build and be strong in our relationship with God, so that He is able to transform us from within. Jesus desires to transform our anger to love, selfishness to generosity, competitiveness to compassion, resentment to forgiveness.

When we are transformed in our hearts to love with God's love, we will have able to live our faith and lives with greater joy and assurance.

Question for reflection:

1) How is God inviting me to be transformed from within today?

**Wednesday, 17th October, St. Ignatius of Antioch
Galatians 5:18-25, Luke 11:42-46**

The Lord said to the Pharisees: 'Alas for you Pharisees! You who pay your tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and overlook justice and the love of God! These you should have practised, without leaving the others undone. Alas for you Pharisees who like taking the seats of honour in the synagogues and being greeted obsequiously in the market squares! Alas for you, because you are like the unmarked tombs that men walk on without knowing it! A lawyer then spoke up. 'Master,' he said 'when you speak like this you insult us too.' 'Alas for you lawyers also,' he replied 'because you load on men burdens that are unendurable, burdens that you yourselves do not move a finger to lift.'

Pharisaism: It is still alive!

Jesus' words were strong and harsh as He spoke to the Pharisees and all those around Him. This was because Jesus, out of love, challenged them to look at their hearts and start living a true faith based on justice for their fellow brothers and sisters as well as love for God.

The Pharisees knew intellectually the fundamental concepts of their faith, i.e. to love God and their neighbours. However, these remained simply as ideas and not a reality in their lives. Instead, they spent much of their time and energy in scrupulous attention to minute matters of the external laws. They were full of pride and disdain for others and put needless burdens on the people.

Jesus' strong words to the Pharisees and the religious leaders of His time were to drive home the point: love God, love neighbour.

Today, let us honestly look at our hearts again. Perhaps Jesus' words still carry certain truth for us. We might be more anxious in keeping to some rules and regulations in the Church than to guide people to encounter Jesus. We speak of love, forgiveness and mercy to others but we do not practice what we say.

With all honesty, let us take a look at our hearts again. God is love. His love makes us always to be free to live and love. His love corrects us as well as affirms us. His love embraces and never puts burdens of guilt on us. Let us return to experience deeply God's love so that we will not forget the things that really matter in our Christian faith.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Can I identify with Jesus' message?
- 2) How can I love God and my neighbours more today?

Thursday, 18th October, St. Luke
2 Timothy 4:10-17, Luke 10:1-9

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him, in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself was to visit. He said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest. Start off now, but remember, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road.

Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the labourer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. Whenever you go into a town where they make you

welcome, eat what is set before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you".

Go forth and proclaim!

'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.'

Today, Jesus looks at the crowds of people who are seeking for meaning in life and yearning to hear the Good News of God's love. Today, He looks at us and asks us, *"Can I count on you?"*

We tend to associate this well-known phrase of sending more labourers to the harvest with the need to pray for more priestly and religious vocations. However, Jesus in today's gospel did not indicate specific people to be labourers to God's harvest. He does not exclude any person from the task of working in His mission. Whether we are elderly, young, married, working, studying, etc. we are all called to respond to Jesus' call to take part in His mission!

*"Mission is a passion for Jesus and at the same time a passion for his people. When we pray before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which gives us dignity and sustains us. At the same time, we realize that the love flowing from Jesus' pierced heart expands to embrace the People of God and all humanity. We realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people (cf. *ibid.*, 268) and all those who seek him with a sincere heart. In Jesus' command to "go forth", we see the scenarios and ever-present new challenges of the Church's evangelizing mission. All her members are called to proclaim the Gospel by their witness of life." (Pope Francis)*

Let us allow Jesus to make use of us so that we can bring more people closer to His love. May we also be filled with the passion for mission!

Friday, 19th October

Ephesians 1:11-14, Luke 12:1-7

The people had gathered in their thousands so that they were treading on one another. And Jesus began to speak, first of all to his disciples. 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees-that is, their hypocrisy. Everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be

made clear. For this reason, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in hidden places will be proclaimed on the housetops. To you my friends I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. I will tell you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has the power to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God's sight. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. There is no need to be afraid: you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.'

Be transparent, not hypocritical

Jesus warned His disciples regarding the 'yeast of the Pharisee' which was their hypocrisy. What is the connection between 'yeast' and 'hypocrisy'? For the Jews, yeast was seen as a corrupting agent. Thus, Jesus was clear that none of His disciples would have hypocrisy, this corrupting agent, to live in their hearts.

"Everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear."

Jesus invited His disciples to practice transparency, not hypocrisy.

A transparent person practices what he/she truly believes and professes. A transparent person is free to be himself/herself as a child of God. A transparent person builds relationships based on honesty and trust.

Jesus invites us today to take the risk of being transparent with our love for God and our Christian values. As Christians, we must reveal the presence of God to the world. We must not hide out of shame or fear.

In this world where people regard honesty as foolishness, it is dangerous to be transparent. It might be the cause of misunderstanding as well as rejections from others. Yet, Jesus tells us, *'Do not be afraid...No one is forgotten in God's sight.'*

Thus, we must uncover the Good News of the Gospel with honesty and fearlessness. We are not alone because God is with us always!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is being transparent a value that is important in my life?
- 2) How can I be a fearless witness of God's love today?

Saturday, 20th October, St. Paul of the Cross
Ephesians 1:15-23, Luke 12:8-12

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of men, the Son of Man will declare himself for him in the presence of God's angels. But the man who disowns me in the presence of men will be disowned in the presence of God's angels. Everyone who says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they take you before synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what to say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you must say.'

Experience Love Again

This passage must be seen in the context of the story before it. In Lk 11, Jesus drove a demon out from a man. However, some people accused Jesus of having the power of Beelzebul, the chief demon. Instead of recognising the power of God, they hardened their hearts and accused Jesus of evil.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus warned that: *'... he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.'*

Forgiveness comes only when a person is humble enough to turn away from his/her sins and walk towards the merciful gaze of God. If anyone, who is full of pride, refuses to acknowledge his/her sins, then forgiveness is impossible. Such a person, on his/her own accord, will close him/herself from God's love and there will be a moment when he/she simply cannot recognise God, and sees evil as good and good as evil.

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, comes again and again to offer us forgiveness and new life. However, when we reject the Holy Spirit and His gifts, we are telling God that we do not need His forgiveness because we do not trust Him, or have already given up on Him or we do not believe that He can still love us.

God, who is the God of mercy and love, will never give up on any of us. He runs to us like the father in the prodigal son. He searches for us like the shepherd who lost his sheep. He rejoices over the return of one sinner. This God calls us to be humble and to acknowledge our limitations and

weaknesses. Let us get rid of our pride - the pride that pulls us away from experiencing the forgiving love of God.

It is only through experiencing being forgiven by God, can we then truly go out and openly and courageously share the Good News of His love with all!

Jesus, give me humility to come back to you and experience the power of your love again, again, again, again....

Sunday, 21st October, Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 53:10-11, Hebrews 4:14-16, Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Jesus. 'Master,' they said to him 'we want you to do us a favour.' He said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' They said to him, 'Allow us to sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory'. 'You do not know what you are asking' Jesus said to them. 'Can you drink the cup that I must drink, or be baptised with the baptism with which I must be baptised?' They replied, 'We can'. Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I must drink you shall drink, and with the baptism with which I must be baptised you shall be baptised, but as for seats at my right hand or my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted'. When the other ten heard this, they began to feel indignant with James and John, so Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that among the pagans their so-called rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt.

Do I Love Enough to Serve?

Many in the world aspire to be great and seek power to control and extend their kingdom. Many wars have been fought and many powerful rulers and nations have come and gone. In politics, in almost any field of business or commerce, even in social and charitable organizations, those on top or in authority tend to 'lord it' over others. In the Church and in whatever groups or ministries we serve in, we need to guard against this.

This was one of the main lessons that Jesus had to teach his disciples. True discipleship is not just to give up material things, but to surrender our will - i.e. our desire to be great and to be in control and to want glory for ourselves. We are called to serve with humility.

Jesus could have come as a powerful king or great political leader. He had the authority and power to overthrow evil spirits; he undoubtedly had the power to overthrow kings and rulers of nations, however big or powerful, if he chose to do so. Instead Jesus chooses to set us the example and show us the way to true greatness. He came to serve and lay down his life for us. Let us respond more fully to God's call to share in his mission - to serve as Jesus served, to serve others in love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I make my personal mission to serve others with love?
- 2) What must I give up in order to serve like Jesus?

**Monday, 22nd October, St. John Paul II
Ephesians 2:1-10, Luke 12:13-21**

A man in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance'. 'My friend,' he replied-'who appointed me your judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?' Then he said to them, 'Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for a man's life is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs'. Then he told them a parable: 'There was once a rich man who, having had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, "What am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them, and I will say to my soul: My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time". But God said to him, "Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then?" So it is when a man stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God.'

More and more and more...

'Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for a man's life is not made secure by what he owns, even when he has more than he needs.'

A man made a request for his share of the inheritance. However, Jesus saw his heart and knew that this man was consumed by greed. He desired excessiveness and wanted more than what he already possessed.

Jesus made a very strong statement that contradicted our society's values. He said, "...for a man's life is not made secure by what he owns..." We are so

used to equate success with possessing wealth, degrees, achievements, properties, credit cards, country club memberships, cars, etc. We work hard to desire for more, to be more.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man who worked hard and planned on how to store all his abundant crops. God, however, called him, "Fool!" Why? This was because this foolish man put his security in his riches and not on God. At the end, his riches could not guarantee his life.

Greed cannot lead us to possess the real treasure. Let us put our hope in God and strive to be rich in good and loving deeds.

Questions for reflection:

1) Where do I put my trust and hope? Possession or God?

Tuesday, 23rd October, St. John of Capistrano

Ephesians 2:12-22, Luke 12:35-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'See that you are dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be like men waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. Happy those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. I tell you solemnly, he will put on an apron, sit them down at table and wait on them. It may be in the second watch he comes, or in the third, but happy those servants if he finds them ready.'

Faithfulness to the end

Jesus' parable today speaks to us about faithfulness: The servants who faithfully do their duty, day in and day out, regardless of the circumstances. These faithful servants would be greatly rewarded by their Master for their diligence by sitting them in the place of honour and waiting personally on them.

Faithfulness is the basis of any meaningful and lasting relationship. In our relationship with God, God commits Himself to be faithful to us here, now and forever. His unbreakable love for us is not deterred by the poverty of our response. God is not limited by our limitations in His commitment to each of us.

Faithfulness in our modern society is a virtue that is not much appreciated. Many people are willing to give up on their commitments and on

relationships when things get tough and difficult. They prefer to pursue their own interests than to work hard to persevere in making things work well.

Today, Jesus calls us to be faithful by putting love into action. Every time we show love to someone, every time we make use of our talents to help others, every time we care for the needy, we are being faithful to God. Many Christians know what to do, but very few Christians actually put this into action, and start living love.

Let us open our hands and humbly ask for the grace to be faithful to God.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I ever thanked God for His faithfulness to me?
- 2) How can I put love into action today?

Wednesday, 24th October

Ephesians 3:2-12, Luke 12:39-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what hour the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.' Peter said, 'Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?' The Lord replied, 'What sort of steward, then, is faithful and wise enough for the master to place him over his household to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Happy that servant if his master's arrival finds him at this employment. I tell you truly, he will place him over everything he owns. But as for the servant who says to himself, "My master is taking his time coming", and sets about beating the menservants and the maids, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful. The servant who knows what his master wants, but has not even started to carry out those wishes, will receive very many strokes of the lash. The one who did not know, but deserves to be beaten for what he has done, will receive fewer strokes. When a man has had a great deal given him, a great deal will be demanded of him; when a man has had a great deal given him on trust, even more will be expected of him.'

The unexpected hour

Is there any burglar who would inform the time and date of the burglary to his/her victim? Of course not! None of us know the day or the hour when a burglar would strike. In the same way, Jesus said that *'the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.'*

However, the time and hour do not matter because the attitude we must have each day is faithfulness to Jesus our Master. Despite the difficulties and uncertainties of life, nothing and nobody can take away our faithfulness to Him.

As Jesus' faithful servants, each one of us has been entrusted with a specific service. Some people are called to teach and guide, while others are called to build good families based on the Gospel values. Some others are called to religious life. Others are called to work honestly. Others are called to be caregivers to aged parents or a sick child. The list goes on. We have to respond each day with greater faithfulness.

Thursday, 25th October

Ephesians 3:14-21, Luke 12:49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over! Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

Fire of love blazes forth

Jesus' words in today's gospel passage might seem to be contradicting His own teaching. Why fire? Why division?

"I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!"

In the Old Testament, fire symbolises God's presence. Just as the Israelites led by Moses travelled through the desert with the pillar of fire guiding them in the night, the fire of God's presence continues to guide us as we journey through the dark nights of life. The fire of God's presence does not leave us

indifferent. Rather, this powerful fire burns and purifies our hearts, and makes us changed people with new love, new vision and new direction. Jesus desires to have the fire of God's love blazing in the hearts of all people.

Today, Jesus counts on us to keep the fire of God's love burning brightly so that we too can help to pass on the same fire to others.

This blazing fire of God's love brings about unity and also divisions. When we want to live the way of love, there will always be oppositions, even from the people closest to us.

To be honest to our convictions for the sake of Christ or to compromise them for the sake of avoiding confrontation - we need to choose. Whether people love us or reject us, praise us or misunderstand us, we must never stop loving. It is from loving them with God's love, in spite of their reactions, that we experience the inner peace of Christ within our hearts.

"Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong." (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In the face of oppositions to my faith, will I compromise for the sake of keeping external peace or stand firm for the sake of Christ?
- 2) How can I keep the fire of God's love burning in my heart in each moment of today?

Friday, 26th October

Ephesians 4:1-6, Luke 12:54-59

Jesus said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it will be hot, and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? Why not judge for yourselves what is right? For example: when you go to court with your opponent, try to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the bailiff and the bailiff have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny.'

Living the present with hope

We can be quite accurate in the short-term forecast of the weather by simply

looking at the formation and shape of the clouds, the strength of the wind, etc. Can we, with eyes of faith, perceive God and His actions in our lives?

In today's gospel passage, Jesus questioned the crowds to open their eyes and see the signs which He had done. He healed the sick, raised the dead, multiplied bread and fish, calmed the storm, taught with authority, etc. If only they could see the signs and recognise Jesus as the Messiah, they would live the present moment with hope.

What do we see? In our life that is sometimes marked by pain, routines, fear, boredom, anxiety, what do we perceive? Do we perceive God and His love in each moment of the day?

With eyes of faith, we see God in each present moment and thus we have hope that gives us strength to face life. We recognise opportunities for growth in difficulties and problems. We perceive moments of blessings in success and goodness.

"God puts rainbows in the clouds so that each of us - in the dreariest and most dreaded moments - can see a possibility of hope." (Maya Angelou)

Today, let us look at life with God.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I perceive God in the ordinary moments of each day?
- 2) How does living with God change the way I see life?

Saturday, 27th October

Ephesians 4:7-16, Luke 13:1-9

Some people arrived and told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.' He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three

years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."

Life, repentance and mercy

In today's gospel passage, two sensational incidents involving violent deaths were told to Jesus. In the minds of these people, the unfortunate incidents happened because God punished the victims for their sins. Jesus, however, cautioned the people not to equate calamities with punishment from God. Tragedies in life are not punishment from God. Good and bad things happen as part and parcel of life.

In our days, we too hear of deaths from natural disasters, accidents, wars, etc. We go to funerals of loved ones and mourn for the loss. Such events lead us to realise the shortness and fragility of life.

Jesus, in today's passage, did not give reasons why sufferings and deaths happen. Rather, He emphasised on the need to repent in this journey of life. Repentance does not mean being regretful, but it implies a changed mind, a new way of seeing, a new way of loving. It entails stepping out of the comfort zone of our bad habits and turning to God's merciful love instead.

Today, Jesus calls us to grab the chance and start living fully. He, our faithful gardener, is with us and patiently nurtures us. Every moment of life becomes opportunities for us to experience God's mercy and grow closer to Him. How long is our lifespan? We have no idea. However, we know that life starts today!

Question for reflection:

1) If today is my last day on earth, how do I want to live it?

Sunday, 28th October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Jeremiah 31:7-9, Hebrews 5:1-6, Mark 10:46-52

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and to say, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me'. And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on

me'. Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here'. So they called the blind man. 'Courage,' they said 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his so cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Rabbuni,' the blind man said to him 'Master, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you'. And immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

From blindness to sight

Blind Bartimaeus was a poor unfortunate beggar who was an outcast in his society. In those days, people saw blindness as a punishment from God for the sins of his parents or for his own personal sins. He was likely the scorn and mockery of those around him. Yet, the day Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by his way, he shouted and cried out persistently. Blind Bartimaeus' hopes and dreams to see again depended on whether Jesus would stop and give him a chance to present himself. He had heard of Jesus' miracles where He cured the lame, blind, lepers, and now, Bartimaeus wanted to be the next miracle.

This blind beggar called Jesus, *'Son of David'* which was the title of the Messiah. Although he was blind, he could somehow see more clearly than those crowds of people who followed Jesus but failed to recognise him for who he was. With inner light of faith, Bartimaeus recognised Jesus and knew that only He, the Messiah could open his eyes and see again, hope again, live again, love again.

What sort of blindness do we have? Do we, like Bartimaeus, recognise that we need Jesus to heal us from our blindness of pride, past hurts, pessimism, etc. that prevent us from seeing with hope, love, forgiveness and faith?

When Jesus called the blind beggar to Him, Bartimaeus responded to his call with joy. He hurried to Jesus and said to him, *'Master, let me see again'* Indeed, Jesus gave him back his sight because of the strong faith he had in Him.

What did Bartimaeus do after getting back his sight? He followed Jesus along the road, which means, that he followed Jesus as a disciple, walking behind his Master faithfully to the road that led to suffering, cross and resurrection. Bartimaeus, because of his faith in the person of Jesus, moved from being a blind beggar to a seeing disciple. His story is our story too.

Let us allow Jesus to heal us from our blindness so that we can see and follow him faithfully along the road of life.

Question for reflection:

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

Monday, 29th October

Ephesians 4:32-5:8, Luke 13:10-17

One sabbath day Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who for eighteen years had been possessed by a spirit that left her enfeebled; she was bent double and quite unable to stand upright. When Jesus saw her he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are rid of your infirmity' and he laid his hands on her. And at once she straightened up, and she glorified God. But the synagogue official was indignant because Jesus had healed on the sabbath, and he addressed the people present. 'There are six days' he said 'when work is to be done. Come and be healed on one of those days and not on the sabbath.' But the Lord answered him. 'Hypocrites!' he said 'Is there one of you who does not untie his ox or his donkey from the manger on the sabbath and take it out for watering? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan has held bound these eighteen years - was it not right to untie her bonds on the sabbath day?' When he said this, all his adversaries were covered with confusion, and all the people were overjoyed at all the wonders he worked.

The power of love

Jesus was teaching at the synagogue one Sabbath day. Most likely, He was surrounded by people who were eager to listen to His teachings. Yet, Jesus noticed a woman, bent double and not able to stand upright, and He called her to come to the front. Interestingly, this woman did not go to the synagogue looking for Jesus but He was the one who saw her and found her.

Jesus said to her, *"Woman, you are rid of your infirmity"* and He laid His hands on her. From His touch, the power of love healed her and she was never the same again. Immediately, she glorified God.

The synagogue official was indignant because he considered Jesus' act of love in healing the woman to be similar to working on a Sabbath. The official was angry with Jesus but he directed his anger at those, he claimed, who looked for healing on the Sabbath day. Jesus heard what the synagogue

official said and rebuked him and all his adversaries present, *"Hypocrites!"*

For Jesus, the Sabbath law is important but it must always bow to life, to love. The absolute law that must be obeyed is the law of love, i.e. to love God and to love our neighbours.

"There were rules in the monastery, but the Master always warned against the tyranny of the law. 'Obedience keeps the rules,' he would say. 'Love knows when to break them.'" (Anthony De Mello)

In our prayer, let us allow Jesus to find us and love us again. Jesus is waiting to lay His tender hands on the areas of our life that are bent from worries, hurts and pain. He wants us to stand straight up and start living life with joy. He wants us to praise God with grateful hearts for His goodness and love. From encountering the power of His love, we can truly let the law of love rule our hearts.

Tuesday, 30th October

Ephesians 5:21-33, Luke 13:18-21

Jesus said, 'What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it with? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and threw into his garden: it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air sheltered in its branches.' Another thing he said, 'What shall I compare the kingdom of God with? It is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'

The Kingdom of love

The Kingdom of God is about relationships rather than a concrete place. The Kingdom of God takes place when we let God's power of love reign in our lives, and we cooperate with Him in bringing about His love into the world.

In the person of Jesus, we have the Kingdom of God. In Him, God's love and mercy penetrate deep within the hearts of men and women. To those who listened and accepted His message, the kingdom was fulfilled.

As we read and reflect Jesus' two short parables regarding the Kingdom, let us ask ourselves: Today, how do I know if I am living in the reality of God's Kingdom?

The Kingdom of God is like the small mustard seed. Like the mustard seed in the garden soil, God's Kingdom enters into our hearts when we open ourselves to listen and accept His Word. Unnoticed and unseen, the Kingdom, like the seed, silently grows and transforms to be a colossal reality in us.

The Kingdom of God is also like a yeast. Without the yeast, a dough remains as it is. However, the dough changes when yeast is added to it. With just a small amount of yeast, the whole dough begins to rise and it is able to transform to bread once baking takes place.

The key word behind these two parables is: Transformation. The Kingdom of God, like the mustard seed and yeast, has the power to change us. When the Kingdom of God reigns in us, our lives start to transform us more and more into the likeness of Christ. Wherever we are, we try to think, act and love like Christ.

As Christians, we are called to be agents of the Kingdom. In our families, workplaces, schools, parish communities, society at large, we must bring about God's love that builds up and transforms the lives of people around us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I living in the reality of God's Kingdom?
- 2) How can my words and actions reveal this treasure of God's Kingdom in me?

Wednesday, 31st October

Ephesians 6:1-9, Luke 13:22-30

Through towns and villages Jesus went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem. Someone said to him, 'Sir, will there be only a few saved?' He said to them, 'Try your best to enter by the narrow door, because, I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed. Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself knocking on the door, saying, "Lord, open to us" but he will answer, "I do not know where you come from". Then you will find yourself saying, "We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets" but he will reply, "I do not know where you come from. Away from me, all you wicked men!"

Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves turned outside. And men from east and west, from north and south, will come to take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Yes, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last.”

A narrow door

‘Try your best to enter by the narrow door...’

What is this narrow door that Jesus spoke about in today’s gospel passage?

This narrow door that we, as His disciples, are called to strive to enter is the narrow door of love. Love somehow narrows our lives. For example, when a child falls ill, parents sacrifice time to care for him/her. When an elderly parent’s mind becomes feeble, the caregiver puts in extra patience to love. An unfaithful spouse, a misunderstood colleague, a depressed neighbour - the only way in is through the narrow door of love. Love that is patient, trusting, kind, forgiving, courageous, peaceful, faithful and self-giving. Entering into this narrow door of love makes us people of depth and maturity.

It is not easy to enter into this narrow door because the world tells us to hate, resent and divide. However, let us not be afraid to follow Jesus as He leads us daily to enter into this hard and narrow door of love.

“Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts. Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth. To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of life. Meaning does not lie in things. Meaning lies in us” (Marianne Williamson)

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from entering into the narrow door of love?