

A REPRINT

PRAYER FOR LIVING~ THE WORD OF GOD FOR DAILY PRAYER

Liturgical Year C

eBook version

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Sunday, 2nd December, First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 33:14-16, 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2, Luke 21:25-28,34-36

Jesus said to his disciples, 'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand. Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'

God comes

St. Luke paints a picture of earth and heaven in turmoil: nations in agony, clamouring of the ocean and waves, people dying of fear... Reading these words of Jesus would certainly cause anxiety and fear in our hearts. However, he continues, "... *the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.*" This gives us comfort that no matter how bad things seem to be, God comes. We can still stand erect with our heads held high. There is still hope.

We might perhaps face a bleak future with numerous uncertainties and worries. We might even feel the heavy burden of expectations, financial insecurities, and failures on our shoulders. We see a world filled with wars and violence, and we think that everything is a mess.

Let us take comfort in today's gospel passage and understand that God comes in the midst of our turmoil. When God comes, He brings peace and goodness. His presence of love steadies our trembling hearts and gives us the inner strength to journey on.

Someday, God will make all things new - no more injustice, no more weeping, no more sadness. In the meantime, God stays close to us. Thus, we can hold our heads high and stand with hopeful confidence.

Question for reflection:

1) At the start of this Advent season, how can I remain hopeful in the midst of the daily challenges of life?

Monday, 3rd December, St. Francis Xavier
Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 8: 5-11

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven.'

Growing in love and humility

In today's gospel, the humble faith of the Roman centurion amazed Jesus. He, who was a man of authority, was in touch with the suffering of his servant and was so concerned that he sought help from Jesus, an itinerant preacher from Galilee. This Roman centurion humbled himself by 'giving up' his prominent status in order to concentrate on loving his servant.

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

"Humility is the mother of all virtues; purity, charity and obedience. It is in being humble that our love becomes real, devoted and ardent. If you are humble nothing will touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because

you know what you are. If you are blamed you will not be discouraged. If they call you a saint you will not put yourself on a pedestal.”
(St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Humility is the key to open the vault of love. Today, let us allow ourselves to take time to pause and stop in order to exercise this beautiful virtue of humility and learn to concentrate on giving our love to someone in need.

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

Question for reflection:

Today, how can I put into practice this virtue of humility?

Tuesday, 4th December

Isaiah 11:1-10, Luke 10:21-24

Just at this time, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, Jesus 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 little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it has 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 by themselves, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, or 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.’

To see with the heart

The world admires and exalts the learned while Jesus praises the ‘unlearned’. Who are the unlearned? According to Jesus, they are the little children who dare to wonder about circumstances, people, God and even themselves. To ‘wonder’ about something or someone is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is the inner ability to appreciate and enjoy the marvels of God’s presence in and around us. It is seeing with an uncomplicated and childlike heart. Living life without wonderment leads us to miss the presence of Jesus: Immanuel, God-is-with-us.

Too often, we forget to wonder because of our busyness to keep pace with the expectations of the rat race: pursuing happiness and accumulating wealth, success and power.

“Each year, God asks us to shed one more coat of awareness, one more dream state and come alive to the vision of God’s plan for each of us and the world-at-large. The older we get, the harder this is to do. As children, we had a sense of wonder. Our eyes were wide open and drinking in the fascinating gifts we beheld... our thirsty souls could not have enough of the wonders of creation. Then, somehow, we grew too old to dream. We, tired of the abundance of the world, or at least grew weary of keeping up with the feast of life, and stepped away from the banquet of life. The natural gift of wonder God gave us as children was meant to be kept alive... Instead we let wonder go to sleep. We entered the typical dream state of most humans. Why else does Jesus tell us today, ‘Stay awake!’? Advent says, ‘Wake up and realize the gifts of love you have received.’ Psychology says, ‘Let go’. Spirituality says, ‘Wake up’. In both cases there is a withdrawal from the busyness of daily life (our dream state) and a waking up to the subconscious and spiritual depths of ourselves.” (Fr. Alfred McBride)

Wednesday, 5th December
Isaiah 25:6-10, Matthew 15:29-37

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

crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected what was left of the scraps, seven baskets full.

A child-like humility

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

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Thursday, 6th December, St. Nicholas Isaiah 26:1-6, Matthew 7:21,24-27

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

Jesus, my Rock!

Jesus calls us to follow Him sincerely by living out what we believe and profess because He does not want us to be enthusiasts who simply appreciate and admire His life from afar.

Today, we are called to listen to His words and act on them. There is no shortcut to this, except through continuous daily practice. In every decision we have to make, let us seek to know and do His will. In every experience that we have, let us allow Him to have a say in it. the more we allow Jesus and His words to guide and lead us in every gesture and action, we start to build our life on Him as our rock, our firm foundation. Today, we are called to be more Christ-centred and less self-centred. This is not easy because we tend to be preoccupied with ourselves – our personal affairs. There, today, we have to pause again and enter into the silence of our hearts in order to listen attentively to Jesus' gentle voice. We need to learn to make time to be still and enjoy the sacred space for us to be with Jesus. The more we stay with Jesus, the more we let go of our need to be in control of our life.

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

Question for reflection:

Is Jesus the Rock on which I build my life?

Friday, 7th December, St. Ambrose Isaiah 29:17-24, Matthew 9:27-31

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

I cannot help but speak

Who among us can manage to keep quiet upon receiving a real piece of good news? When we pass a difficult exam that we thought we would surely fail, or the joyful birth of a baby in our family, or when we unexpectedly get a promotion, or maybe the doctor has told us that we are totally cured of the sickness we had! Wouldn't we like to share this news with others?

In today's Gospel, two blind men received their sight. Imagine their tremendous joy and amazement at such great blessing of being able to see!

Even though Jesus warned them sternly to keep quiet and not to tell anyone, these two men eagerly went out and shared with everyone what Jesus did for them.

In our personal story of faith, have we ever experienced moments when Jesus gave us vision to see the reality of life in a different and wider horizon and open our hearts to live with more hope and greater joy?

When we have the faith to believe in His power of love, Jesus continues to perform miracles in and through us. Are we aware of God's actions in us and do we value them? Do we, like the two blind men, spread the wonders of God to those around us? Or do we keep quiet for fear of what others would say?

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

Question for reflection:

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

Saturday, 8th December, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David;

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

What you have said be done to me

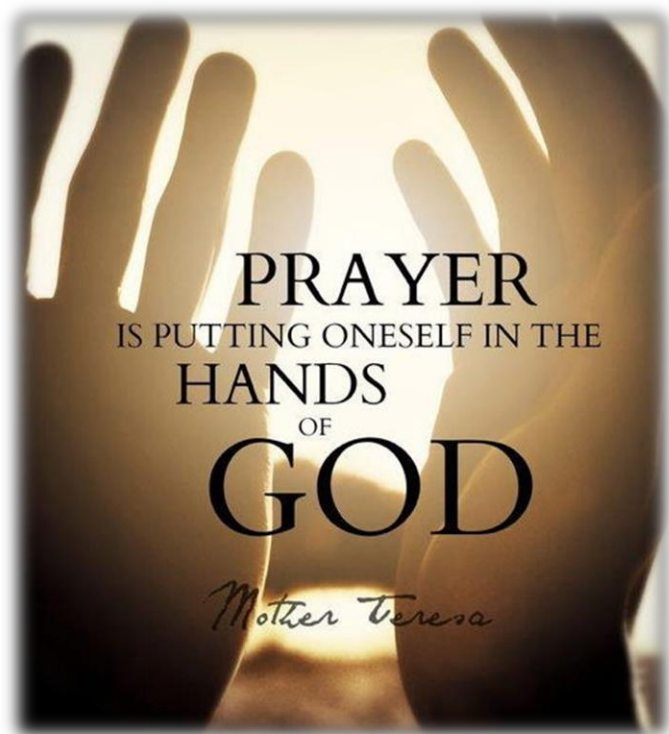
Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary who received the special and unique privilege of being born without original sin. Mary, "full of grace", was chosen and called by God to be the mother of His son. Despite her fears, Mary cooperated with God in total obedience. She said,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

What does this Feast speak to us about our lives today?

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

Question for reflection:

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



Sunday, 9th December, Second Sunday of Advent
Baruch 5:1-9, Philippians 1:4-6,8-11, Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrach of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah: A voice cries in the wilderness: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled in, every mountain and hill be laid low, winding ways will be straightened and rough roads made smooth. And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.

Metanoia

Who was Tiberius Caesar? Who was Pontius Pilate? Who was Herod tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip? What about Annas and Caiaphas? All we know about these people is that they were historical leaders in the political and religious arena. They held great powers and were feared by many. Within this concrete political, social and historical scene, John the Baptist appeared with a firm and assertive message of repentance for forgiveness of sins.

In our own political, social and historical context, we are also invited to repent and prepare our hearts for Jesus to come. Jesus is not just another political king or a High priest, but He is the Son of God, the Word made flesh. In order to welcome Him, we need to make spiritual preparation by cleaning our messy and complicated hearts.

What is repentance? In Greek, the word for repentance is 'Metanoia' which means "a change of mind". Advent is a time for metanoia. We are called to have a complete change of our lifestyle, habits, attitudes so that we can turn back to God.

This Advent, let us take the necessary steps to repent and prepare our hearts for Jesus to come and dwell within.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me as I continue this Advent journey?

Monday, 10th December**Isaiah 35:1-10, Luke 5:17-26**

Jesus was teaching one day, and among the audience there were Pharisees and doctors of the Law who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judaea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was behind his works of healing. Then some men appeared, carrying on a bed a paralysed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front of him. But as the crowd made it impossible to find a way of getting him in, they went up on to the flat roof and lowered him and his stretcher down through the tiles into the middle of the gathering, in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith he said, 'My friend, your sins are forgiven you'. The scribes and the Pharisees began to think this over. 'Who is this man talking blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' But Jesus, aware of their thoughts, made them this reply, 'What are these thoughts you have in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven you" or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' - he said to the paralysed man - 'I order you: get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.' And immediately before their very eyes he got up, picked up what he had been lying on and went home praising God. They were all astounded and praised God, and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today'

Towards Jesus

Advent is a grace-filled season to be with Jesus and allow Him to draw us to a deeper intimacy with Him.

In today's Gospel, there are three types of audiences watching the drama unfolding before them. One was the Pharisees and doctors of the Law who were among the crowd, but kept to themselves and looked at Jesus as cynical critics. The other was the ordinary crowd whose openness to Jesus led them to witness the glorious manifestations of God. The last group was the four friends who longed for their friend's healing, and made every effort to place their friend in front of Jesus.

As Christmas approaches, do we go through Advent with a spirit of cynicism, like the Pharisees and doctors of the Law? Are we open to see the actions of God in the daily events of each day, like the crowds who were amazed and filled with praise? Are our hearts longing to bring a loved one closer to Jesus this Advent, like the faith-filled friends who were determined to help their paralysed friend?

Advent is a grace-filled season to recognise Jesus' presence in our life as well as to bring people to experience His closeness to their own needs and problems. He is waiting for us. May our hearts be stirred to recognize more than ever that we want more of Jesus in our lives as well as to bring more of Jesus into the lives of others.

Question for reflection:

1) As I start this new week, how can I live more with Jesus and give Him to those around me?

Tuesday, 11th December
Isaiah 40:1-11, Matthew 18:12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? In truth I tell you, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Jesus, my Shepherd

In the real world, no Shepherd would risk his 99 sheep for the sake of one sheep lost in the wild. It is extremely foolish to do so. Yet, Jesus the Good Shepherd did just that because His faithful love moves Him towards those who are lost and most vulnerable. Many times, we are like that one lost sheep who wandered away from the safety of the Shepherd. Advent is a time to trust that our Good Shepherd wants to love us and pardon us. All He wants from us is to be close to Him and stay in the safety of His protection and love.

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

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is waiting to embrace us, to pardon us. We need to have greater trust that His love is more than our weaknesses and mistakes.

On the other hand, if we find ourselves happily with the other ninety nine sheep and not bothered about the missing Shepherd or the one missing sheep, then we are also lost in our false sense of security. Maybe it is time for us to find the Shepherd! To find the Shepherd, we also need to look out for the lost sheep. When we find the lost sheep, we will find the Shepherd with it. This is because Jesus our Good Shepherd is always with the lost, the separated, the weak and the poor.

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

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' message to me today?

Wednesday, 12th December, Our Lady of Guadalupe
Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6, 10, Luke 1:26-38

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

To Jesus through Mary

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

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

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

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

Questions for reflection:

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

Thursday, 13th December, St. Lucy
Isaiah 41:13-20, Matthew 11:11-15

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'I tell you solemnly, of all the children born to women, a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen; yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is. Since John the Baptist came, up to this present time, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm. Because it was towards John that all the prophecies of the prophets and of the Law were leading; and he, if you will believe me, is the Elijah who was to return. Anyone who has ears to hear, let him listen!'

The greatest gift of all

John the Baptist is an important figure during the time of Advent. He is the finger that points to the Messiah. He is the voice that cries out in the desert, calling out to all those willing to listen, to repent.

When the Jewish authorities asked him: *"Who are you?"* He answered, *"I am not... I am not the one you are expecting, I am not the one who can bring salvation, I am not the light, I am not the Word, I am not the bridegroom..."* (cfr Jn 1,19-28) This humble man defines himself simply as the voice, as the friend of the bridegroom who rejoices when he hears the Bridegroom's voice (cfr Jn 3: 27-30) His whole life was dedicated to bring Christ to people and people to Christ.

John the Baptist teaches us what it is to be a real Christian. A Christian is the person, whose words and deeds, point to Jesus. Today, we are called to be truly authentic Christians whose mission is to go out of our comfort zones and point the way to Jesus. As we busy ourselves to buy

Christmas presents for our loved ones, let us come to realise that the greatest gift we can ever give to them is Jesus, who is the source of love and life.

Thank you, Jesus, for being the source of my joy. Help me, Jesus, to be like John the Baptist so that many people can come to know and love you through my life.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In this time of Advent, how can I, through my words and deeds, point Jesus to others?
- 2) What help can I ask from Jesus so that I can start living like a committed Christian? (For example, for more courage, for more joy in living my faith, etc)

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

Isaiah 48:17-19, Matthew 11:16-19

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

Dancing with God

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

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

Thus, Jesus was calling those people around him who refused to accept his message as 'spoiled'. They were neither contented nor satisfied with whatever was given to them. John the Baptist came with his message

of repentance yet they would not repent. Jesus came with the joyful message of forgiveness, loving the outcasts in society, but they would not dance accordingly.

Today, we are also like those children playing in the marketplace. We want a God who dances to our tune, rather than us dancing to his.

We put God in our own small box and expect God to act, to do and to love according to what we think and feel is the best. Many times, we are afraid to let God be God, and to dance with trust according to his rhythm. Like spoiled children, we insist on our own ways, our own plans, and refuse to give way to allow God to be God in our lives. 'I am the Lord your God, the one who wants to teach you for your own good and direct you in the way you should go.' Let us take courage and dance with God today!

Question for reflection:

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

Saturday, 15th December
Sirach 48:1-4, Matthew 17:9-13

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

Your ways, Lord, not mine!

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

John the Baptist is the Elijah that the Jews have been waiting for. However, he did not come according to what the world expected. He

was a lowly person who lived in the desert, wore camel skin and ate honey and locusts. However, the heart of John the Baptist was dedicated totally to God and he lived his life doing the will of his God.

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

Question for reflection:

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

**Sunday, 16th December, Third Sunday of Advent
Zephaniah 3:14-18, Philippians 4:4-7, Luke 3:10-18**

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do, then?' he answered, 'If anyone has two tunics he must share with the man who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same'. There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than your rate'. Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!' A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

Expectancy

"Christmas has lost its meaning for us because we have lost the spirit of expectancy. We cannot prepare for an observance. We must prepare for an experience." (Handel Brown)

The season of Advent is about expectancy. In our society, however, we have lost our sense of expectancy because of our consumer culture

that deals with fast and instant gratification, for example, instant noodles, fast food outlets, smartphones, remote controlled gadgets, etc. Today, we are called to allow the sense of expectancy to grow in us. An expectancy, filled with hope and longing for Jesus our Saviour.

Let us prepare our hearts to welcome Jesus by asking the same question that the people posed to John the Baptist: *"What must we do, then?"* Hold intimate dialogue with Jesus, let Him speak to our heart and show us what we must do in order to prepare ourselves for a deep and joyful experience of love this Advent.

"Let's approach Christmas with an expectant hush, rather than a last-minute rush." (Anonymous)

Question for reflection:

1) In this 3rd week of Advent, what must I do to prepare myself for a joyful experience of Christmas?

Monday, 17th December

Genesis 49:2,8-10, Matthew 1:1-17

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

God at work

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

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

God used each person in the genealogy of Jesus to bring about the life of Jesus. Likewise, in the midst of our own brokenness, God is at work and He shines in us and through us.

As we approach Christmas, let us deepen our trust in God both in our life and in the lives of others.

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

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 18th December
Jeremiah 23:5-8, Matthew 1:18-25

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

Emmanuel

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

every hurt, every grief, every anger and every joy. We can find Him in every person and in our very own lives.

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 19th December
Judges 13:2-7,24-25, Luke 1:5-25

In the days of King Herod of Judaea there lived a priest called Zechariah who belonged to the Abijah section of the priesthood, and he had a wife, Elizabeth by name, who was a descendant of Aaron. Both were worthy in the sight of God, and scrupulously observed all the commandments and observances of the Lord. But they were childless: Elizabeth was barren and they were both getting on in years. Now it was the turn of Zechariah's section to serve, and he was exercising his priestly office before God when it fell to him by lot, as the ritual custom was, to enter the Lord's sanctuary and burn incense there. And at the hour of incense the whole congregation was outside, praying. Then there appeared to him the angel of the Lord, standing on the right of the altar of incense. The sight disturbed Zechariah and he was overcome with fear. But the angel said to him, 'Zechariah, do not be afraid, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son and you must name him John. He will be your joy and delight and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord; he must drink no wine, no strong drink. Even from his mother's womb he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah, he will go before him to turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the disobedient back to the wisdom that the virtuous have, preparing for the Lord a people fit for him. Zechariah said to the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years.' The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel who stand in God's presence, and I have been sent to speak to you and bring you this good news. Listen! Since you have not believed my words, which will come true at their appointed time, you will be silenced and have no power of speech until this has happened.' Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he stayed in the sanctuary so long. When he came out he could not speak to them, and they realised that he had received a vision in the sanctuary. But he could only make signs to them, and remained dumb. When his time of service came to an end he returned home. Sometime later his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept to herself. 'The Lord has done this for me' she said 'now that it has pleased him to take away the humiliation I suffered among men.'

Faith, not doubt

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Thursday, 20th December**Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 1:26-38**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?' 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your

kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

When God asks...

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Friday, 21st December

Songs 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18, Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

Share your Joy!

In today's Gospel, we see two women filled with joy upon seeing each other! Our pragmatic minds might think: Shouldn't they, instead, be worried with so many uncertainties going on in their lives? Elizabeth must have been worried about her pregnancy at her old age and she must have been concerned with what the child she was carrying would grow up to be.

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

Both had no concrete guarantees but were filled with uncertainties. Yet, they trusted! Their faith led them to share their joy with each other, instead of focusing on their worries and anxieties.

Many times, when we meet up with close friends or family members, we tend to share only our worries. In the process, we share our pessimism and discouraging thoughts with one another. Let us follow the example of Mary and Elizabeth who, instead of focusing on their problems, shared their joy.

"If we just worry about the big picture, we are powerless. So my secret is to start right away doing whatever little work I can do. I try to give joy to one person in the morning, and remove the suffering of one person

in the afternoon. If you and your friends do not despise the small work, a million people will remove a lot of suffering.” (Sr. Chan Khong, a Vietnamese Nun and Peace Activist)

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

Question for reflection:

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

Saturday, 22nd December

1 Samuel 1:24-28, Luke 1:46-56

Mary said: ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy - according to the promise he made to our ancestors-of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’

A song of praise

Mary gave joyful thanks to God for the great things He has done for her. The greatest thing that God has ever done for Mary is His choice of her to be the Mother of His Son.

Today, God has chosen us too in the same way He chose Mary. He calls us to be His instruments to bear the Good News of Jesus to the world. Do we give thanks to God? Or do we regard His choice as a burden, a heavy responsibility that we want to escape from?

Why don't we write our own song of praise to God today? In this time of prayer, we can write our own song of praise to God for all the good things and blessings in our life. What about the misfortunes in our life? When we encounter suffering, we tend to blame God and question why He has allowed this problem to happen to us. Suffering is part of life. The hardships that we endure make us stronger and more matured people. Real faith is to praise and give thanks to God in the midst of our sufferings. Like Mary, she sang her Magnificat while facing one of the most challenging moments in her life.

Only a heart that is truly humble can be grateful and give thanks to God at all times. Mary was humble to see the presence of God in her life and she truly rejoiced in God in her good times as well as bad times. Let us ask for the grace to possess a humble heart to recognise God's presence and give praise to Him today!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is my heart humble enough to see God's greatness in my life and give praise to Him?
- 2) How can I best live my life today so that I can give praise to Him through my words and deeds?

Sunday, 23rd December, Fourth Sunday of Advent
Micah 5:1-4, Hebrews 10:5-10, Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

Elizabeth and Mary

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, she felt honoured to have her cousin visit her. Such humility! Elizabeth was honoured by God because of her miraculous pregnancy at her old age. Yet, there was no hint of

jealousy or pride on her part. Instead she cried out with joy, *“Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord?”*

What about us? Do we allow jealousy or pride to enter into our relationships with our family members and friends? It is so common for us to get jealous of a friend's good fortune or a colleague's promotion, or a sibling's achievement. Our pride makes us raise ourselves and put others down as much as we possibly can. Pride and jealousy create resentment and divisions.

Elizabeth was humble because she recognised the work of God in her life. She was simply His poor instrument in God's greater scheme of things. Thus, she was happy and contented with her blessings, and thus, she was able to rejoice in God's actions in Mary.

As we journey to trust and hope more in God, we also learn how to release jealousy and pride from our hearts.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Are there periods in my life when I feel jealous and proud?
- 2) What is God's invitation to me today?

Monday, 24th December

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

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

of our God who from on high will bring the rising Sun to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

Blessing and praise

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

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 25th December, The Nativity of the Lord Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-6, John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become

children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself. The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Christmas: God's meeting with us

Jesus, the Word made flesh, is the light that shines in the dark and He is the light which darkness could not overpower. In our personal stories, we have moments of experiencing the darkness of pride, selfishness, lies and hatred. We find ourselves far away from living in the truth that we are God's beloved sons and daughters.

As we celebrate Christmas, we look at Jesus who comes to us in order to bring His light of grace and truth. The world tells us many lies about who we are: "You are what you have", "You are the opinions of others", "You are the positions/ titles you hold". All these lies make us run the rat-race and work hard to gain the approval of others.

Christmas affirms in us the truth of who we are and who God is for us. We are God's beloved children. God our Father sends Jesus to be our Light to guide us to be in the truth. God loves us with an everlasting love, regardless of whether we feel it or not.

"It is to encounter Jesus. God has always sought out his people, led them, looked after them and promised to be always close to them. The Book of Deuteronomy says that God walks with us; he takes us by the hand like a father does with his child. This is a beautiful thing. Christmas is God's meeting with his people." (Pope Francis)

Today, let us take some quiet time away from the feasting and partying in order to savour on the mystery of God's love for each one of us, for humanity as a whole.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the meaning of Christmas for me?
- 2) Is it a challenge to always remember and live in this reality that I am God's beloved child?



Find happiness in
making others happy.

Mary MacKillop

 quotelandy

Wednesday, 26th December, St. Stephen
Acts 6:8-10, 7:54-59, Matthew 10:17-22

Jesus said to his apostles: 'Beware of men: they will hand you over to Sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the pagans. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name; but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved.'

Fix our gaze on Jesus

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

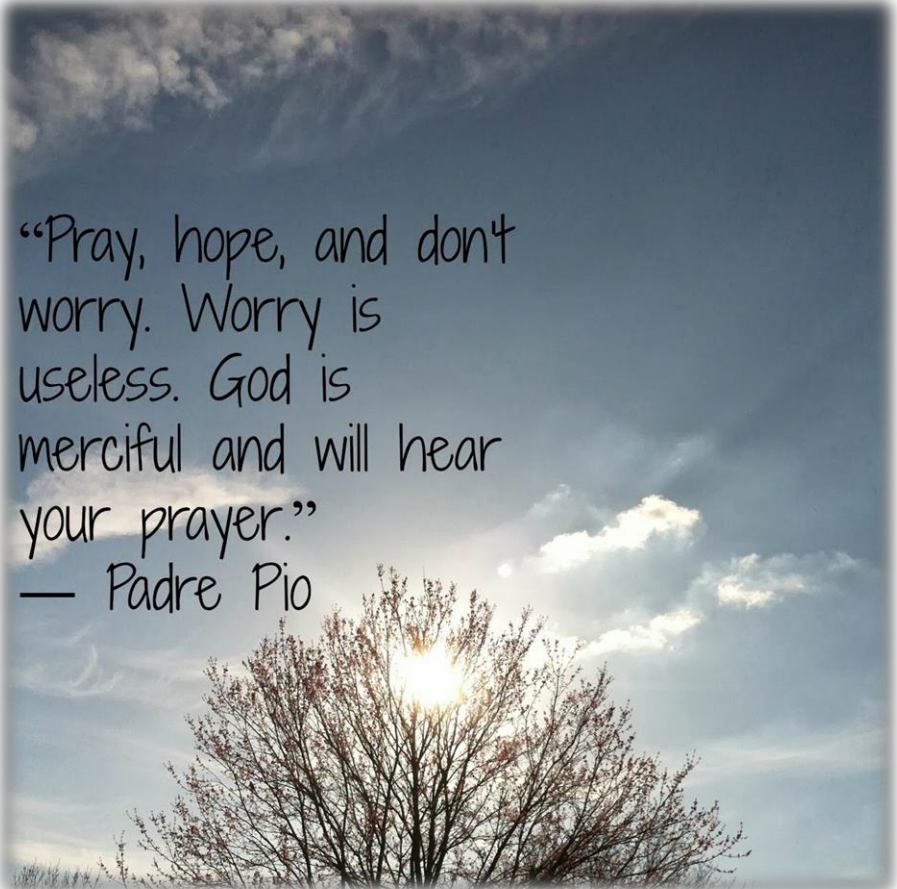
In the atmosphere of joyful celebration, we celebrate the Feast of the First Martyr who imitated Jesus, even in death. This is a reminder for us that Christianity is not simply celebrating the birth of Jesus, but a call to lay down our lives for Him. It does not mean physically dying for our faith, but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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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



“Pray, hope, and don’t
worry. Worry is
useless. God is
merciful and will hear
your prayer.”
— Padre Pio

Thursday, 27th December, St. John, Apostle and Evangelist
1 John 1:1-4, John 20:2-8

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

John The Beloved

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

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

When we allow ourselves to be loved by Jesus, we will spontaneously want others to know and experience the treasure we have.

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every

Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples". If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: "We have found the Messiah!" (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans came to believe in him "because of the woman's testimony" (Jn 4:39). So too, St. Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, "immediately proclaimed Jesus" (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21)." (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, pt. 120)

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

Question for reflection:

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

Friday, 28th December, The Holy Innocents

1 John 1:5-2:2, Matthew 2:13-18

After they had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him'. So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I called my son out of Egypt. Herod was furious when he realised that he had been outwitted by the wise men, and in Bethlehem and its surrounding district he had all the male children killed who were two years old or under, reckoning by the date he had been careful to ask the wise men. It was then that the words spoken through the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled: A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loudly lamenting: it was Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were no more.

Herod, Joseph and the Wise men

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

In the same way that Herod lives, 'Joseph' and the 'three wise men' continue to live on as well. When there is care, protection, sacrifices and love, the 'Joseph' of today continues to bring God's hope into the world. When there is desire for truth and openness to be guided by love, the 'three wise men' continue to illuminate the long journey towards God.

Herod killed and annihilated while Joseph looked after and protected. The three wise men encountered and believed. Today, God invites us to choose love and life.

Questions for reflection:

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

Saturday, 29th December, St. Thomas Becket 1 John 2:3-11, Luke 2:22-35

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord. Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his

arms and blessed God, saying: "Lord, now let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you prepared in the sight of every people, a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Open my eyes, Lord!

Simeon was a person of faith who allowed the Holy Spirit to move and lead him. That fateful day, Simeon was nudged by the Holy Spirit to go to the Temple. When he entered the temple, his eyes rested on a simple lowly couple making their way to have their baby circumcised. With eyes of faith, he recognised the presence of God in the unexpected form of a little baby boy.

Imagine the joy of Simeon! Imagine His excitement! He went towards the parents, took the baby into his arms and blessed God!

"He came in the Spirit..."

Do we allow ourselves to be prompted, moved and nudged by the Holy Spirit in our ordinary life? Do we open our eyes and see God's presence and His work in us and around us? Today, let us be sensitive to the soft and gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit so that He can lead us to live our ordinary life in extraordinary ways!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit within me and do as He tells me?

Sunday, 30th December, Holy Family

Sirach 3:2-6,12-14 or 1 Samuel 1:20-22,24-28, Colossians 3:12-32 or 3:12-27 or 1 John 3:1-2,21-24, Luke 2:41-52

Every year the parents of Jesus 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 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. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men.

Holiness is....

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, let us ask ourselves: What does Holiness mean?

"Holiness includes such concepts as humour and laughter, compassion and understanding, and the capacity to forgive and be forgiven, to love and be loved. That's holiness. Holy families are not free from conflict, nor do they never hurt one another. Holiness in families, rather, comes from learning to forgive and to be reconciled, and learning to face our problems and do something about them." (Mitch Finley, Catholic Digest, Jan 1993)

For three days, Mary and Joseph lost the child Jesus as they did not realize that He was not with them. We share their anxiety as they travelled back to Jerusalem to look for Him. We feel their relief when

they found Him safe and sound. We hear them reprimanding Jesus. We sense their confusion when they did not understand what He was telling them. We wonder how such an incident could have happened to the Holy Family!

Holiness does not mean being perfect in accordance to worldly standards. Holiness does not mean that there are no mistakes or no conflicts. Mary, Joseph and Jesus are holy because they learned in this journey to lead loving lives, even in moments of conflicts, misunderstanding and anxiety. As a family, they focussed on God and lived in communion with Him. In union with God, they lived in loving service to those around them. Today, God desires to make our families holy too. Let us open ourselves to receive and respond to this gift of holiness.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I help my family to take steps to grow in holiness?

Monday, 31st December
1 John 2:18-21, John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came to be, not one thing had its being but through him. All that came to be had life in him and that life was the light of men, a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower. A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, as a witness to speak for the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, only a witness to speak for the light. The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had its being through him, and the world did not know him. He came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him. But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself. The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John appears as his witness. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me ranks before me because he existed

before me'. Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received - yes, grace in return for grace, since, though the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

To receive or not to receive!

Life is full of choices. In today's Gospel, we are told that there were some people who chose to reject Jesus while others opened their hearts and received Him.

To 'receive' means to welcome Jesus and allow Him to affect the way we live our life. Jesus wants to live in our life today. However, He will never force us to receive Him, but waits for us to choose to open ourselves to Him.

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

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Tuesday, 1 January, Mary, Mother of God
Numbers 6:22-27, Galatians 4:4-7, Luke 2:16-21

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

Wish versus Resolution

On this first day of the New Year, people make resolutions, but some do nothing to fulfil them. In fact, such people make wishes, not resolutions. What is the difference between a wish and a resolution?

A person who makes a wish sees and recognises a goal, for example, "I wish to be a more prayerful person this coming year." In contrast, a person who makes a resolution diligently spells out the steps that have to be taken to reach that goal. For example, he/she might say "I will set aside this TV programme at this specific time so that I can spend quality time to pray." Making resolutions require us to actively do it, and not simply say we'll do it.

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

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

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

Questions for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 2 January, Ss. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen

1 John 2:22-28, John 1:19-28

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

Witness to Christ

Who are we? This is a key question which we must ask in order to be true witnesses of Jesus and to point Him to others.

In today's gospel, John the Baptist was asked by the priests and Levites from Jerusalem, "*Who are you?*" John the Baptist knew who he was and who he was not. He was not Christ, Elijah or the Prophet. John the Baptist knew that he was a witness to Christ. He was the voice pointing others to Jesus so that they too can come to encounter Him. John the Baptist was humble and did not want to draw attention

to himself. All he wanted was to be faithful to the call God has given to him.

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

**Thursday, 3 January, The Most Holy Name of Jesus
1 John 2:29-3:6, John 1:29-34**

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

Only Jesus can complete me

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him and he recognised that this man was the One who would come after him, the One whose sandals

he was not good enough to untie. Joyously, he proclaimed, "There is the Lamb of God..."

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

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

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

Someone once said, "I'm just a beggar telling other beggars where I found bread." Like John the Baptist, let us be happy beggars who point Christ to others so that others may also find Him, the Lamb of God - the One who will truly satisfy the hunger of each person.

Question for reflection:

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

Friday, 4 January, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
1 John 3:7-10, John 1:35-42

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

'What do you want?'

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

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

The two disciples asked Jesus, "Where do you live?" This question signifies their desire to be with Jesus and to be part of His life. We have the tendency to go to Jesus with our list of requests and problems. Can we simply desire to be with Jesus and to be part of His life?

As His friends, we need to seek His presence in our ordinary life. Jesus will never turn any of us away when we go to Him with the desire to know Him more, to love Him deeper, to live each day with Him. He

will never stop calling us, “Come and see”. When we truly encounter Jesus, only then can we go and tell others, with joyful enthusiasm, “We have found Jesus. We have found the Messiah. Come and see.”

Questions for reflection:

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

**Saturday, 5 January, St. John Neumann
1 John 3:11-21, John 1:43-51**

After Jesus had decided to leave for Galilee, he met Philip and said, ‘Follow me’. Philip came from the same town, Bethsaida, as Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, the one about whom the prophets wrote: he is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth’. ‘From Nazareth?’ said Nathanael ‘Can anything good come from that place?’ ‘Come and see’ replied Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, ‘There is an Israelite who deserves the name, incapable of deceit’. ‘How do you know me?’ said Nathanael ‘Before Philip came to call you,’ said Jesus ‘I saw you under the fig tree.’ Nathanael answered, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel’. Jesus replied, ‘You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.’ And then he added ‘I tell you most solemnly, you will see heaven laid open and, above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending’.

Passing on the baton of faith

In today’s Gospel, Jesus met Philip and called him to follow Him. Philip did not want to keep Jesus just for himself. He thought of his friend, Nathanael, and wanted to bring him to know and encounter Jesus. Philip had no other intention than to simply desire what was good for his friend.

“Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.”

(Pope Francis)

We too are Jesus' disciples. This means that we must all be ready to bring the love of Jesus to others. We are always so eager to share the latest bargains, the most recent food craze, the most amazing recipes for certain dishes, etc. with our friends and family members. Are we excited to share Jesus with others?

Philip simply told Nathanael, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, the one about whom the prophets wrote: he is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth" However, Philip's passion when he spoke about Jesus must have sparked an interest in Nathanael and he went to Jesus in order to check Him out for himself.

When Nathanael approached Jesus, Jesus told him, "There is an Israelite who deserves the name, incapable of deceit" Nathanael was surprised with Jesus' description of his character - a person of integrity. Curious, he asked Jesus, "How do you know me?" Jesus' response caught Nathanael by surprise. 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.'

Pious Jews used to find secluded places under a fig tree in order to pray and mediate God's Word in private. No one would have known that Nathanael was doing just that! He knew then that he was dealing with someone who was truly from God. Nathanael started to follow Jesus.

The steps Nathanael took to follow Jesus started with Philip's eagerness to bring Jesus to his friend. Today, let us, like Philip, share Jesus with others. So, what are we waiting for?

Question for reflection:

1) Am I constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others?

Sunday, 6 January, Epiphany of the Lord
Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6, Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem in Judaea during the reign of King Herod, some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east. 'Where is the infant king of the Jews?' they asked. 'We saw his star as it rose and have come to do him homage.' When King Herod heard this he was perturbed, and so was the whole of Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, and enquired of them where the Christ was to be born. 'At Bethlehem in Judaea,' they told him 'for this is what the prophet wrote: And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are by no means least among the leaders of Judah, for out of you will come a leader who will shepherd my people Israel'. Then Herod summoned the wise men to see him privately. He asked them the exact date on which the star had appeared, and sent them on to Bethlehem. 'Go and find out all about the child,' he said 'and when you have found him, let me know, so that I too may go and do him homage.' Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward, and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod.

Homage to you, my Lord

The Magi, who were pagans, travelled from the East to search for 'the infant king of the Jews' and desired to do Him homage. King Herod, however, heard what they had to say, and was troubled. He saw that this infant would be his rival to power. Consumed by fear, Herod wanted this 'infant King of the Jews' to be destroyed. The 'chief priests and the scribes of the people' knew the Scriptures and were aware that this new born King of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem. However, they did not bother to set out to search for Him and pay homage to Him.

In contrast, The Magi left the city and continued searching for the King. Finally, they followed the bright star to a stable in Bethlehem. The sight

of the Child and the star filled their hearts with deep joy. They fell to their knees and paid Him homage. They humbly offered the most precious treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh, to the Child. These three Magi, without any doubts, accepted Him as their King and Lord.

This passage challenges us to examine ourselves: Whom do I truly pay homage to? Do I fall on my knees to pay homage to Jesus, my King and Lord? Do I kneel in front of wealth, comfort and power like King Herod, the chief priests and the scribes in Jerusalem? Do I offer all that I have and all that I am in front of Jesus?

May we have a deeper encounter with Jesus today!

Monday, 7 January

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

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

Go out and share your joy with all!

In today's gospel, Jesus went to Capernaum, a Gentile area where the people of the town were labelled as sinners by the Jewish authorities. He did not go to the great city of Jerusalem where many of the self-righteous Jewish leaders lived. Instead, Jesus chose to be

with “the people that lived in darkness” and “those who dwell in the land and shadow of death”.

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

“Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but “by attraction”.

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

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 8 January

1 John 4:7-10, Mark 6:34-44

As Jesus stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length. By now it was getting very late, and his disciples came up to him and said, 'This is a lonely place and it is getting very late, so send them away, and they can go to the farms and villages round about, to buy themselves something to eat'. He replied, 'Give them something to eat yourselves'. They answered, 'Are we to go and spend two hundred denarii on bread for them to eat?' How many loaves have you?' he asked 'Go and see.' And when they had found out they said, 'Five loaves and two fish'. Then he ordered them to get all the people together in groups on the green grass, and they sat down on the ground in squares of hundreds and fifties. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing; then he broke the loaves and handed them to his disciples to distribute among the people. He also shared out the two fish among them all. They all ate as much as they wanted. They collected twelve basketfuls of scraps of bread and pieces of fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

A heart full of unfailing love and mercy

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

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

In today's gospel, Jesus' heart was full of pity when He saw the needs of the crowd, and He sat down and taught them. Later, he did not send them away to look for their own food, but He performed the miracle of the five loaves and two fish and fed them.

The heart of God - the heart of the Good Shepherd is not for us to admire from a distance. Rather, we are called to actively imitate so as to make His heart ours.

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

Wednesday, 9 January

1 John 4:11-18, Mark 6:45-52

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

With Jesus in my boat, I stand firm!

Is Jesus in my boat as I face the strong winds in my daily life?

In today's passage, Jesus saw the worn-out faces of His disciples as they struggled against the strong winds. He came to their boat, walking on water in order to show them that He was in control of the storm.

We, in our lives, struggle with many strong winds and frightening storms that come in the form of temptations, family problems, rejections, illnesses, loss of loved ones, etc. Jesus wants us to know that He is in control of the situations and longs to guide us through the concrete storms we face.

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

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

Questions for reflection:

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

Thursday, 10 January

1 John 4:19-5:4, Luke 4:14-22

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

God loves us!

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

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

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

"Faith is God's precious gift, which opens our mind to know and love him. He wants to enter into relationship with us and allow us to participate in his own life in order to make our life more meaningful, better and more beautiful. God loves us! Faith, however, needs to be accepted, it needs our personal response, the courage to entrust ourselves to God, to live his love and be grateful for his infinite mercy. It is a gift, not reserved for a few but offered with generosity. Everyone should be able to experience the joy of being loved by God, the joy of salvation! It is a gift that one cannot keep to oneself, but it is to be shared." (Pope Francis, World Mission Sunday Message, 2013)

Friday, 11 January

1 John 5:5-13, Luke 5:12-16

Jesus was in one of the towns when a man appeared, covered with leprosy. Seeing Jesus he fell on his face and implored him. 'Sir,' he said 'if you want to, you can cure me.' Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, 'Of course I want to! Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once. He ordered him to tell no one, 'But go and show

yourself to the priest and make the offering for your healing as Moses prescribed it, as evidence for them'. His reputation continued to grow, and large crowds would gather to hear him and to have their sickness cured, but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray.

A person worthy of love

Lepers are shunned by society because of their condition and appearance. Yet Jesus, instead of turning away from the leper, reached out and touched him!

Jesus' touch restored the man's dignity and humanity. He was no longer a carrier of an infectious disease but a person worthy and capable of friendship and love. Jesus heals the man in body and in spirit. He clears his body of the wounds of leprosy and his spirit of the pains of rejection.

Like the leper, let us release our pride and doubts, and throw ourselves at Jesus' feet, asking Him to remove from our lives our tendencies to sin – our selfishness, our greed, our pride, our laziness, etc.

Even though the man begged only for physical healing, Jesus saw his deeper yearning for human friendship and He granted that to him. We know that when we encounter Jesus in prayer, He also sees our deeper yearnings and grants them. He sees our hunger for true joy, for acceptance, for forgiveness, for truth, etc, and He reaches out to touch us, to answer our prayers. We can be joyful, because we trust in the generosity of our God

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I recognise the people who are considered 'outcasts' in society as human persons with dignity?
- 2) How can I learn to be generous like Jesus in the way I approach people?

Saturday, 12 January

1 John 5:14-21, John 3:22-30

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

Be yourself!

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

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

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

presence.

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Sunday, 13 January, Baptism of the Lord

Isaiah 40:1-5,9-11, Timothy 2:11-14, 3:4-7, Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.' Now when all the people had been baptised and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you'.

I am God's beloved child

One of the greatest challenges for many of us is to fully accept the truth that we are God's children, His Beloveds. This is because the world tends to bombard us with many lies about who we are - "You are what you have. You are what you wear. You are what others say about you, etc."

Today, Jesus affirms again that we are God's beloved children just as He is the Beloved Son. We belong to God the Father, and we are unconditionally loved for all eternity. We need to keep reminding ourselves of this truth again and again.

Rooted in this truth that we are God's beloved children, we can then be free to recognise and love others as God's beloved children as well as our brothers and sisters too. As children of God, we can turn to each other, not with suspicion or fear, but with new trust and understanding. As beloveds of God, we are sent to break down walls of individualism and division, and work always for reconciliation and unity.

Today, let us dare to believe that we are God's beloved children, and that we are here to reach out to those around us as people loved unconditionally by God our Father.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I dare to fully live my identity as God's beloved child?
- 2) What prevents me from recognising others as God's beloved children and love them as God wants me to?

Monday, 14 January

Hebrews 1:1-6, Mark 1:14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.' As he was walking along by the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake - for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men'. And at once they left their nets and followed him. Going on a little further, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending their nets. He called them at once and, leaving their father, Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.

Come, follow me

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

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

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

Today, in our ordinary life, Jesus comes and calls us to live with him so that our life can be extraordinarily filled with His love, joy and peace. *Jesus, help me to listen to you as I go through my routine today. Give me an attentive ear to hear you as you call me once more to follow you.*

Questions for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 15 January

Hebrews 2:5-12, Mark 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went as far as Capernaum, and as soon as the Sabbath came he went to the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. In their synagogue just then there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit and it shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw the man into

convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant. 'Here is a teaching that is new' they said 'and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him.' And his reputation rapidly spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

A heart like Jesus

In the Gospel, the crowd was impressed with Jesus' teaching because He taught with authority. His authority came from His inner self for He knew His identity as God's Beloved Son. Rooted and grounded in His Father's love, Jesus led a life doing good deeds for others' sake.

While teaching in the synagogue, Jesus saw a man possessed by an unclean spirit. The unclean spirit recognised the Presence of Love in the Person of Jesus and it became afraid and cried out, "Have you come to destroy us?"

Reaching out in love, Jesus released the man from the unclean spirit so that he would be accepted and loved by others again.

Many times, "unclean spirits", such as our pride, laziness, lust, greed, etc. prevent us from deeply knowing and living our identity as God's beloved children. These "unclean spirits" want us to live by serving our own desires and seeking our own good. In prayer, Jesus encounters us and comes to free us from these 'unclean spirits' so that we can love again.

As children of God, we too have been given the authority of love. Rooted and grounded in God's love, we are called each day to love, accept, care, and help others, by not seeking our own self-serving desires but seeking goodness for our brothers and sisters.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I exercise the authority to love?

Wednesday, 16 January
Hebrews 2: 14-18, Mark 1:29-39

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

Lightening the burdens of others

When Jesus heard that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with fever, He immediately went to her. In the time of Jesus, fever was often life-threatening and a sick person plagued with fever required complicated remedies which did not guarantee success. Jesus simply went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up.

The simple touch of Jesus was enough to heal her. What meaning does the healing of Peter's mother-in-law have for us today? Fever is no longer life-threatening but there are many people who are suffering from other life-threatening illnesses. Do we, like Jesus, immediately go to them and help them with our words of encouragement, hope and raise them up with our simple touch of love and care?

There are also many people suffering from 'illnesses' such as depression, low self-esteem, anger, guilt and addictions that prevent them from functioning well in life. Do we go to them immediately and help them? Are we too busy with our own world that we become oblivious of the suffering of others?

Jesus was surrounded the whole day with sick people and he patiently spent time with each person by relieving them of their pain, worries, etc. He did not reject anyone because each person, no matter how unimportant, was a person worthy of his time and attention.

Today, we are also surrounded by many people throughout the day - our children, siblings, colleagues and elderly parents. Each person is worthy of our time, attention and love. Do we reach out and keep helping them?

"Let us make one point, that we meet each other with a smile, when it is difficult to smile. Smile at each other, make time for each other in your family." (St. Mother Teresa)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I give my time, attention and love to those around me?

**Thursday, 17 January, St. Anthony, Abbot
Hebrews 3:7-14, Mark 1:40-45**

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

If you want to, you can cure me

The man with leprosy, most likely, heard about Jesus and how He had no fear or disgust for lepers or other outcasts of society. He knew deep within him that only this great prophet could heal him. Taking a leap of faith, he went up to Jesus. He did not know what would happen but

he somehow believed that Jesus would be able to help him. Thus, he uttered these words of faith *“If you want to, you can cure me.”*

Moved with compassionate love, Jesus stretched out His hand with tenderness and touched the wounds of the leper. Immediately, he was healed.

Today, we might not suffer from leprosy but we might carry within us the wounds of leprosy due to our sins. We all yearn, like the leper, to be healed and find inner peace. We want to be healed from depression or an addiction. We want to be free from a wounded past or an anticipatory anxiety.

Do we humble ourselves and tell Jesus, *“If you want to, you can cure me.”*? In this time of prayer, let us allow Jesus to give us His peace.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the specific wound within me that prevents me from experiencing Jesus' peace in my life?
- 2) Today, am I allowing Jesus' healing presence to come to me?

Friday, 18 January

Hebrews 4:1-5, Mark 2:1-12

When Jesus returned to Capernaum some time later, word went round that he was back; and so many people collected that there was no room left, even in front of the door. He was preaching the word to them when some people came bringing him a paralytic carried by four men, but as the crowd made it impossible to get the man to him, they stripped the roof over the place where Jesus was; and when they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'My child, your sins are forgiven'. Now some scribes were sitting there, and they thought to themselves, 'How can this man talk like that? He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God?' Jesus, inwardly aware that this was what they were thinking, said to them, 'Why do you have these thoughts in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say, "Get up, pick up your stretcher and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' - he said to the paralytic - 'I order you: get up, pick up your stretcher, and go off home.' And the man got up, picked up his stretcher at once and walked out in front of everyone, so that they were all astounded and praised God saying, 'We have never seen anything like this'.

Friends who care

In the Gospel, the four friends were friends who cared. They saw the powerlessness of their paralyzed friend and so they were moved to do something to help him to be healed and to be made whole again.

Thus, these four friends carried their paralytic friend to Jesus. The crowd, however, made it impossible for them to bring their friend close to Jesus. But, they did not turn away in hopelessness. Instead, they did the most amazing thing of climbing up to the roof and making an opening to lower their friend down to Jesus. Jesus, seeing the love and faith of the four friends, was moved to heal the paralysed man.

Today, in our self-centred society, we tend to be preoccupied with our own needs and wants. Sometimes, we forget to be real friends whom

others can depend on in their time of need. It is a challenge for us to be friends who care.

Let us, through our words and deeds, become committed friends who bring those we care for to Jesus because He is the One who can heal them and make them whole. Today, let us also remember concrete people in our lives who are wounded, confused and experiencing despair, and offer them to Jesus' care.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I love my friends deeply that I want to bring them close to Jesus?

Saturday, 19 January

Hebrews 4: 12-16, Mark 2:13-17

Jesus went out again to the shore of the lake; and all the people came to him, and he taught them. As he was walking on he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus, sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, 'Follow me'. And he got up and followed him. When Jesus was at dinner in his house, a number of tax collectors and sinners were also sitting at the table with Jesus and his disciples; for there were many of them among his followers. When the scribes of the Pharisee party saw him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this he said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'

Follow me

Our Christian faith is a story of LOVE. It is a call of love and it is a response to love.

In the Gospel, Jesus was with a crowd of people but among the crowd, He saw Levi, the tax collector sitting in his office. Most probably, Levi was busy with his work that he did not even realise that Jesus was walking past him. Jesus, however, did not miss him. He saw in Levi, not just a tax collector but a person with the potential of understanding and loving God. Thus, He extended His invitation with these words: *"Follow me."*

We can only imagine the love and acceptance that Levi experienced in these words and in the gaze of Jesus. But, what we do know is that Levi immediately got up and followed Jesus. From that day onwards, he became a disciple of Jesus, a close and beloved companion of Jesus. Today, Jesus calls us too to follow Him. When He calls us, it is always to walk in His path of love.

The scribes of the Pharisee party thought Jesus' choice of friends was scandalous. They saw Levi and the rest of the tax-collectors as public sinners. How could Jesus as a respectable Rabbi be with public sinners? Thus, they judged Jesus as well as Levi and his friends.

"In reality, before the Lord we are all sinners and all in need of forgiveness. All of us. Indeed, Jesus told us not to judge. Fraternal correction is an aspect of the love and the communion that should reign in the Christian community. It is a mutual service that we can and must render to each other ... and it is possible and effective only if each person recognizes himself as a sinner and in need of the Lord's forgiveness. The same awareness that enables me to recognize the errors of the other; first of all reminds me that I myself have made, and make mistakes, many times." (Pope Francis)

Let us not be too quick to judge others for their mistakes. Instead, let us draw close to the heart of Jesus and experience His forgiving love for our own waywardness. When we are grounded in Jesus' love, we can then look at others with mercy and compassion and open our hearts to them. Let us follow Jesus and walk in His path of love today!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I follow Jesus today?

**Sunday, 20 January, Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 62:1-5, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, John 2:1-11**

Three days later there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. When they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the wedding was all finished, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine'. Jesus said 'Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet.' His

mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you'. There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water', and they filled them to the brim. 'Draw some out now' he told them 'and take it to the steward.' They did this; the steward tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from - only the servants who had drawn the water knew - the steward called the bridegroom and said; 'People generally serve the best wine first, and keep the cheaper sort till the guests have had plenty to drink; but you have kept the best wine till now'. This was the first of the signs given by Jesus: it was given at Cana in Galilee. He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him.

Water to wine

Today's Gospel passage is not just telling us a story of a wedding in Cana. It speaks to us about our story, our wedding, our life. Just as Jesus changed the ordinary water into extraordinary wine, He too wants to change our ordinary life into an extraordinary life with joy.

We hold the gift of life in our hands each day. How do we want to live our life? God does not create us to live the ordinary life of going to work, surviving the rat-race, being content with material securities, going for holidays, etc. We are not meant to be 'water' but 'wine'. He wants us to live life with a certain quiet joy that comes from a deep experience of knowing that we are unconditionally loved by Him, and that we belong completely to Him. Even when we face our greatest pain and grief, we can still have this joy within that leads us to say with confidence the words of the Psalmist, *"Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me."* (Psalm 23)

In the Gospel passage, after Jesus changed the water into wine, He told the steward to give the best wine to the guests. This is what He wants to do with our life too. He changes our ordinary water to the best wine of all so that we too can share our best wine with others.

Today, let us enter into the wedding feast and allow Jesus to change our water into wine.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is my 'water' that Jesus wants to transform to His wine of joy?
- 2) Today, with whom can I share my best wine of joy?



PATIENCE IS
THE COMPANION
OF WISDOM.

~ST.

AUGUSTINE

Monday, 21 January, St. Agnes
Hebrews 5:1-10, Mark 2:18-22

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

An invitation to joy

When our lives are filled with the simple desire to welcome the presence of Jesus, our ordinary life becomes extraordinary.

In the Gospel today, the Pharisees missed the bridegroom because their hearts had become rigid like old wineskins. They were like old wineskins that had already a definite shape and were no longer flexible. They, in their old mind-sets of observing the Law and rigidity of ritual purity, could not accept Jesus and the newness that He brought to their lives. Thus, they could not experience the joy of His presence.

Today, we are called to be like new wine skins by opening ourselves to allow Jesus to transform us internally and totally. This is because we, like the Pharisees, tend to cling to our old wineskins that we are unable to welcome the new wine of Christ. We find comfort in our old wineskins: in the way we pray, in the routines we have developed, in the knowledge we have of God and of our faith, etc. Perhaps, it is time to let go of our old wineskins and open ourselves to the new horizon of our faith, to deepen our relationship with Jesus and to live a more authentic discipleship.

In the same way, as it ferments, the new wine expands the new wineskins; Jesus our new wine will also stretch us beyond our comfort zones. He always works for our good and so we must humbly trust in Him.

“Brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened, and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think that we won’t be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up.” (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) Today, am I open to the new wine of Christ?

Tuesday, 22 January

Hebrews 6:10-20, Mark 2:23-28

One Sabbath day Jesus happened to be taking a walk through the cornfields, and his disciples began to pick ears of corn as they went along. And the Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing something on the Sabbath day that is forbidden?’ And he replied, ‘Did you never read what David did in his time of need when he and his followers were hungry - how he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the loaves of offering which only the priests are allowed to eat, and how he also gave some to the men with him?’ And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; the Son of Man is master even of the Sabbath’.

Jesus, Lord of my life

We are always so actively busy that we sometimes forget the true essence of the Sabbath - the Day of the Lord. Sabbath is a day of rest when we allow ourselves to be renewed and refreshed by God. In fact, we can say that every new day is the Day of the Lord where we make Him our top priority.

When God is the centre of our life, we experience true rest from all our doubts, fears, and worries. He never fails to bring His restful peace to us. Having God as our Master and Lord, He will always bring us out of ourselves in order to love others.

In the Gospel, the Pharisees criticised the actions of Jesus' disciples because they picked ears of corn to satisfy their hunger. In their preoccupation with observing ritual custom on the Sabbath day, they had forgotten the real significance of it. The judgements they had against Jesus' disciples revealed that their hearts were not with God. Instead, they were filled with self-righteousness and pride.

God and others cannot be separated. *If we love God, then we will surely love our brothers and sisters* (1 John 4:20). Our love for God is shown in how we look at others and how we treat them. Every day can be a 'Sabbath' day when we open ourselves to love God and to love others.

Today, let us allow God to renew and refresh us with His peaceful presence. Staying close to Him, we will have the heart to love our brothers and sisters with His compassion and mercy. In love, we find our true rest.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I make God my top priority today?

Wednesday, 23 January, St. Vincent of Saragossa
Hebrews 7:1-3, 15-17, Mark 3:1-6

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

To follow the Master's footsteps

The Pharisees as religious teachers zealously followed the Law but they had no mercy for the people who were in need. They saw Jesus

heal the withered hand of a man but they could not rejoice in the miracle they had witnessed. Their hearts were hardened with their own self-righteousness.

Jesus, on the other hand, had eyes only for those who were in need of His help. God's mercy was the core of His mission. He preached about God's love. He showed in very concrete ways the endless capacity of God's love.

Today, we are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps and to dare to walk along the loving mercy path. We need to learn from Jesus how to have compassion for people, especially the needy and the weak in our society. We resolve to make mercy our identity, and to put mercy into action.

"With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity... His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favour of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I consciously follow Jesus' footsteps by having mercy as my identity and putting mercy into action?

Thursday, 24 January, St. Francis De Sales
Hebrews 7:25-8:6, Mark 3:7-12

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lakeside, and great crowds from Galilee followed him. From Judaea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, Transjordan and the region of Tyre and Sidon, great numbers who had heard of all he was doing came to him. And he asked his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, to keep him from being crushed. For he had cured so many that all who were afflicted in any way were crowding forward to touch him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw him, would fall down before him and shout,

'You are the Son of God!' But he warned them strongly not to make him known.

Drawing close to Jesus

Crowds and crowds of people kept going to Jesus because they saw the great miracles He did, and so they kept coming from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Tyre and Sidon. They came and kept coming because they saw that there was something special about this man called Jesus. Thus, they pushed their way through so as to get something from Him.

Today, let us ask ourselves: What is our reason for coming to pray? Why do we draw close to Jesus?

Like the crowds, many Christians tend to go to Jesus with a long list of prayer demands that He has to solve and respond to. Jesus becomes for many a superman possessing superpowers, out to save the world. If He fails to do their bidding, then their faith is shaken and they start to doubt. A mature faith leads us to know, love and trust Jesus more and more. We go to Jesus because we need Him and not for the things we can get from Him.

Today, let us have the desire to draw close to Jesus, with no other intentions than to fall in love with Him and to stay in love with Him

'To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek Him the greatest adventure; to find Him, the greatest human achievement.'
(St Augustine)

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I want to draw close to Jesus? Why?

**Friday, 25 January, The Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle
Acts 22:3-16 or Acts 9:1-22, Mark 16: 15-18**

Paul said to the people, 'I am a Jew, and was, born at Tarsus in Cilicia. I was brought up here in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was taught the exact observance of the Law of our ancestors. In fact, I was as full of duty towards God as you are today. I even persecuted this Way to the death, and sent women as well as men to prison in chains as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify, since they even sent me with letters to their brothers in Damascus. When I set off it was with the intention of bringing prisoners back from there to Jerusalem for punishment. I was on that journey and nearly at Damascus when about midday a bright light from heaven suddenly shone round me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" I answered: Who are you, Lord? and he said to me, "I am Jesus the Nazarene, and you are persecuting me". The people with me saw the light but did not hear his voice as he spoke to me. I said: What am I to do, Lord? The Lord answered, "Stand up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told what you have been appointed to do". The light had been so dazzling that I was blind and my companions had to take me by the hand; and so I came to Damascus. Someone called Ananias, a devout follower of the Law and highly thought of by all the Jews living there, came to see me; he stood beside me and said, "Brother Saul, receive your sight". Instantly my sight came back and I was able to see him. Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Just One and hear his own voice speaking, because you are to be his witness before all mankind, testifying to what you have seen and heard. And now why delay? It is time you were baptised and had your sins washed away while invoking his name."

A call to be like St Paul

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. Interestingly, before his conversion, St Paul thought that he was a good Jew, a moral person. When he encountered Jesus in his life, his vision of life changed and he re-examined everything in his life. From a persecutor of the early Church, St. Paul gave his life to be a zealous apostle of Christ.

What does this feast speak to us about our own personal conversion? All of us need to undergo some form of daily conversion - for example, in the way we perceive ourselves or others, in certain habits we have, in the manner we treat others, etc. Daily conversion leads us to become daily disciples of Jesus with greater faithfulness and joy. Thus, every moment of every day is a moment to encounter Jesus and allow Him to lead us to our daily conversion.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of this great Saint, let us also celebrate with joy that Jesus calls us for a higher calling. We are not meant simply to live our life by building a successful career or bringing our children up to become prosperous people or achieving wealth for ourselves. Like St. Paul, Jesus calls us to be His witnesses of God's love through our lives. Like St. Paul, we have been entrusted to pass on the eternal richness and treasure of our faith in Jesus to our family and friends. This treasure of faith is what matters at the end of the day, as people receive God's life and love that will never pass away.

As we reflect on the conversion story of St. Paul in this time of prayer, let us fall in love with Jesus and renew our friendship with Him. Together with St. Paul, we too can say *"It is not I but Christ living in me."* (Galatians 2:20)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What obstacle do I have that prevents me from following Jesus closely?
- 2) How can I live my life with Jesus and for Him?

Saturday, 26 January, Ss. Timothy and Titus
2 Timothy 1:1-8 or Titus 1:1-5, Mark 3:20-21

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.

A happy fool for Christ

Was Jesus out of his mind? Yes! He was 'mad' with love for God and for His people. He was so 'mad' that he dedicated every moment when He was awake to the mission.

Jesus was out of His mind, not in the sense of being mentally unsound, but He was passionate for God and for the people. He was so full of love that even His closest family could not understand him.

What is our passion? What is THE THING that takes away our mind, our time, our creativity? We are called to be Fools for Christ - Fools whose lives are totally with Christ, for Christ, in Christ. The world needs Fools for Christ in order to make sense of this world of hatred, revenge, injustice, oppression and greed. People need us to show them that God still exists and that He has not abandoned them to the chaotic mess.

Let us look at Jesus and ask him to reveal His heart to us so that we can see what it is beating for. Let us imitate His heart so that we may also be mad for God, and passionate in bringing His love to those around us. May we be a happy fool for Christ!

Questions for reflection:

1) Is Jesus my passion? Am I willing to be a fool for Christ?

Sunday, 27 January, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Nehemiah 8:2-6,8-10, 1 Corinthians 12:12-20, Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received. Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'.

Jesus the Bringer of Good News

What words would we use to encapsulate who we are - our ideals, our purpose in life, our commitments, our values? In today's Gospel, Jesus stood up in the synagogue on a Sabbath day and read the words of the prophet Isaiah which reflects the very essence of Himself.

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit had come to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to give new sight to the blind and to set the downtrodden free. He came to bring God's love to those suffering and in sorrow. He came to tell the people that God stood with them, not against them.

"This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen." Jesus ended by telling His listeners that they needed to wait no more. He was the fulfilment of the Scriptures.

Today, Jesus is with us and shares with us His same Spirit, and we too are sent to be part of the mission to bring God's love to the people around us. We are called to transmit what we have received from Jesus.

Let Jesus' mission and life bring purpose to us and the essence of who we are. Let us step up and start showing His love to those around us today!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I allow the Holy Spirit to lead me in my words and actions?

Monday, 28 January, St. Thomas Aquinas
Hebrews 9:15,24-28, Mark 3:22-30

The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem were saying, 'Beelzebul is in him' and, 'It is through the prince of devils that he casts devils out'. So 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'.

Come, Jesus! Enter into me!

Jesus was going around healing people and touching the lives of many. Moved constantly by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was doing good deeds of love. By saying that 'Beelzebul' was in Jesus, the scribes from Jerusalem were deliberately closing their hearts to recognizing any goodness in Jesus. They refused to see the hand of God in all the works of Jesus.

Yet, the simple and humble crowd around Jesus could see the wonders of God through the actions of Jesus and rejoiced in Him.

What about us? Do we harden our hearts and close our minds to God's presence in our lives? Do we humble ourselves to draw close to God and experience His merciful love?

"... but let anyone blaspheme against the Holy Spirit and he will never have forgiveness: he is guilty of an eternal sin." What did Jesus mean in the above statement? Does it mean that God's mercy has limits and His love has conditions?

God never fails to show His mercy because He loves us faithfully despite our many mistakes. However, if our hearts are hardened and our minds are closed to God, He cannot offer us His forgiveness and mercy. God never forces His way into our lives if we do not choose to open ourselves to Him. God always forgives but we must come to our senses and take steps to walk back to Him.

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

God is always standing at the door of our hearts and knocking gently. He yearns for a deeper relationship with us. It is our choice to open or remain closed.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how open am I to allow Jesus to enter into my life and work wonders through me?

Tuesday, 29 January
Hebrews 10:1-10, Mark 3:31-35

The mother and brothers of Jesus arrived and, standing outside, sent in a message asking for him. A crowd was sitting round him at the time the message was passed to him, 'Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside asking for you'. He replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking round at those sitting in a circle about

him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of God, that person is my brother and sister and mother.'

A new family

Jesus was teaching to a great crowd. His family members came and wanted His attention. Most likely, they wanted Jesus to stop teaching and go home with them. Jesus, however, used this opportunity to teach the crowd a very important lesson on belonging to the Family of God and its consequences.

"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.'

This is the Family of God that goes beyond blood ties and human relationships. All those who seek to do God's will are Jesus' brother, sister and mother.

Today, let us reflect and ask ourselves: Do we truly seek to do God's will and belong to God's family?

As Christians, we are called to love others, especially our family members. However, there are some instances when our loved ones prevent us from growing closer to God and doing His will. We must choose our relationship with God as our top priority. Doing God's will implies sometimes persecutions and misunderstandings from others closest to us, but our hearts must find the courage to love Him above all. God must always be our number 1!

Today, let us pray that we may always seek to do God's will and find joy in belonging to God's Family.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I seek to do God's will?

Wednesday, 30 January
Hebrews 10:11-18, Mark 4:1-20

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

What type of soil do I desire to be?

God generously sows His Word every day in our hearts. But, it is up to us to decide how we welcome, keep and allow the Word to grow in our lives.

This parable speaks of the freedom that God gives to us. He sows and gives us the freedom to choose the kind of soil we want to be: the edge of the path, the rocky ground, the thorns or the rich soil. Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew 11: 6: *'Happy the person who does not lose faith in me.'* In choosing to become like the good soil, we are working to keep our faith in Jesus and allowing His Word to grow and take root in our lives.

Today, Jesus asks us the same question He posed to his disciples, *'Do you not understand this parable?'* Parables are stories that trigger change in us; we cannot remain indifferent but choose Jesus or go against Him.

What is the choice that we are making today?

Thursday, 31 January, St. John Bosco Hebrews 10:19-25, Mark 4:21-25

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

A generous heart that gives without limits

A Christian is a person who is generous. Yet, there are many who fail to listen to the call of Jesus, to take notice of what He is saying: *'The amount you measure out is the amount you will be given.'* Do we model our hearts after the Heart of our God who gives Himself to the end, unconditionally and without any expectations for rewards?

To be generous is not just about giving out money to the poor. But, it is to give our time to our family members, to give words of life and love to our friends and to share our faith with those who have yet to know Christ. There are so many ways that we can be generous.

Someone once said, *'You do not need to be rich to be generous. If he/she has the spirit of true generosity, a pauper can give like a prince.'* Do we have the spirit of true generosity?

Today, let us give like a prince/princess, not our material wealth, but rather, let us give away our love, smiles, words of kindness, time, patience, forgiveness, etc, so that we can become true Christians, real friends of Jesus, authentic witnesses for God.

"I must be willing to give whatever it takes to do good to others. This requires that I be willing to give until it hurts. Otherwise, there is no true love in me, and I bring injustice, not peace, to those around me."
(St. Mother Teresa)

May our light shine brightly so that all may see God in us!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I try to put generosity into practice today?

Friday, 1 February

Hebrews 10:32-39, Mark 4:26-34

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

capable of understanding it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were alone.

Kingdom of God

Jesus reached out to His listeners and shared about the Kingdom of God in simple images which people could easily relate to. He did not speak in parables to confuse people but in a direct manner so as to challenge His listeners to discover the deeper meaning of His words.

The Kingdom of God does not happen in spectacular and extraordinary events, but it begins in seemingly small and insignificant moments of ordinary life.

When someone smiles and friendship is forged, the Kingdom of God is present. When enjoying a breath-taking sunset, the Kingdom of God is present. When a loved one says, 'I love you', the Kingdom of God is present. Jesus reminds us to open our eyes and recognise God's presence everywhere. The Kingdom of God grows where love is.

We are invited to have trust that God is the one who makes the tiny seeds of love to grow. We are simply servants in His fields of mission.

May we allow God to use our lives - to be like the mustard seed and grow into trees that provide shelter for our friends, community members, family members and all those we meet so that they can find His love.

Question for reflection:

1) When have I experienced the joy of recognising the presence of the Kingdom of God?

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

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord and also to offer

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

The Light is with me!

"Today the Church blesses the candles which give light. These candles are, at the same time, a symbol of the other light, the light that is Christ. He began to be light from the moment of his birth. He was revealed as light to the eyes of Simeon on the fortieth day after his birth. Then he remained as light for thirty years in the hidden life of Nazareth. Subsequently, he began to teach, and the period of his teaching was a short one. He said: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). When he was crucified "there was darkness over all the land" (Mt 27:45), but on the third day this darkness made way for the light of the resurrection. The light is with us!" (St Pope John Paul II)

Jesus, the Light, is with us. There is no reason for us to live our lives in the shadows of fear and useless anxiety. Jesus the Light brightens our darkness and guides our feet to walk in the way of peace.

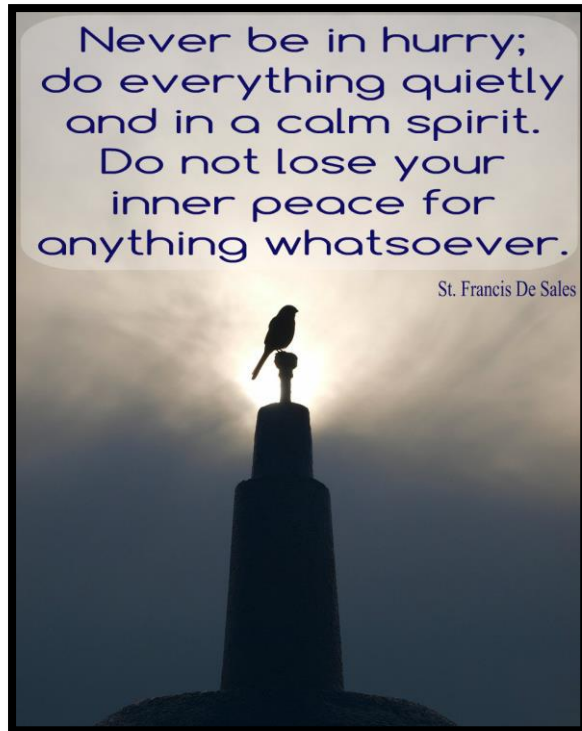
Jesus, the Light, is with us. There is no place for darkness of sin and ignorance in our hearts anymore. Jesus the Light pierces through all our pretence, our neediness, our pride and self-sufficiency. His presence brings us to live life with true freedom.

True encounter with Jesus the Light will change the way we live our lives - not with fear but peace; not in sin but freedom.

May we not be fearful to encounter the Light of Christ, and to follow Him closely. The light is with us! Let us not miss Him today!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I have Jesus, the Light of the world, in me?
- 2) How can I follow Jesus with more joy and determination today?



Sunday, 3 February, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 1:4-5,17-19, 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13, Luke 4:21-30

Jesus began to speak in the synagogue, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'. And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself" and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside"'. And he went on, 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. 'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

Never be afraid to stand for truth

Jesus went to His hometown and started to preach to the people who knew Him as a child. They were astonished by the wisdom of His teaching, but at the same time, they were also sceptical. They murmured among themselves: "*This is Joseph's son, surely?*"

No doubt, the crowd at Nazareth knew Jesus, but He knew them even better. He knew that these people would not welcome His message that he had come to preach. Jesus came to bring the Good News to everyone because God's compassionate love reaches all people, regardless of religion and nationality. He came to proclaim God's mercy by healing those whom no one else could heal; blessing and welcoming the tax collectors, prostitutes and Samaritans; forgiving the sinners. Through His words and actions, Jesus opened the door of God's love to everyone.

Jesus spoke the truth in order to expose the narrowness and exclusivity of his listeners. Using the stories of the widow at Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, He implied that others would be healed but not them if they were not keen to change their mind-set. Hearing these words, the crowd became angry with Jesus.

What courage and strength! Jesus could have just basked in the amazement of the people, and be admired as a prophet. However, Jesus would not and could not silence the Truth. The people were so enraged that they wanted to get rid of Him. Jesus slipped through the crowd and walked on without bending to fear or cowardice.

Let us never be afraid to speak the truth for what we believe!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I run away from situations just to avoid confrontations and rejections?
- 2) Do I find it a challenge to be the voice of honesty and truth in my family, work place, parish, etc.?

Monday, 4 February

Hebrews 11:32-40, Mark 5:1-20

Jesus and his disciples reached the country of the Gerasenes on the other side of the lake, and no sooner had he left the boat than a man with an unclean spirit came out from the tombs towards him. The man lived in the tombs and no one could secure him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been secured with fetters and chains but had snapped the chains and broken the fetters, and no one had the strength to control him. All night and all day, among the tombs and in the mountains, he would howl and gash himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and fell at his feet and shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God? Swear by God you will not torture me!' For Jesus had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, unclean spirit'. 'What is your name?' Jesus asked. 'My name is legion,' he answered 'for there are many of us.' And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the district. Now there was there on the mountainside a great herd of pigs feeding, and the unclean spirits begged him, 'Send

us to the pigs, let us go into them'. So he gave them leave. With that, the unclean spirits came out and went into the pigs, and the herd of about two thousand pigs charged down the cliff into the lake, and there they were drowned. The swineherds ran off and told their story in the town and in the country round about; and the people came to see what had really happened. They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his full senses - the very man who had had the legion in him before - and they were afraid. And those who had witnessed it reported what had happened to the demoniac and what had become of the pigs. Then they began to implore Jesus to leave the neighbourhood. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to be allowed to stay with him. Jesus would not let him but said to him, 'Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in his mercy has done for you'. So the man went off and proceeded to spread throughout the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

What do you want with me, Jesus?

In today's Gospel, the man possessed by an unclean spirit came out from his tomb and drew near to Jesus. He most likely recognised that Jesus had the power to heal him. Deep within, he wanted to be healed. He wanted to live a normal life again. Yet, on the other hand, he was perhaps afraid. He was afraid to let Jesus enter his life because there were so many demons of old that had been living in him for so long.

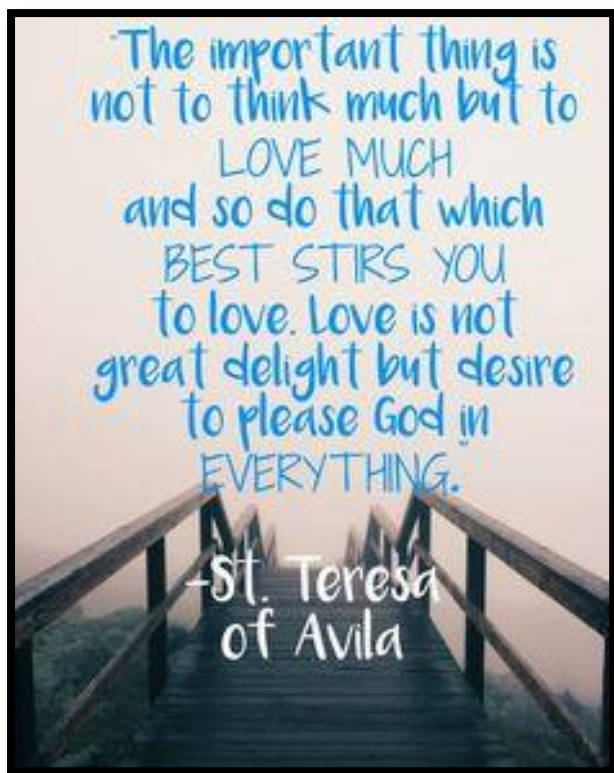
So he shouted, '*What do you want with me, Jesus, son of the Most High God...*' He was afraid of what Jesus would do with him. Would he lose his 'freedom' living among the tombs? Would he lose what he was so used to after so many years? Like this man in the passage, we tend to be afraid of changes. Changes imply that we make the effort to leave behind our old ways by giving up the 'demons' of bad habits and unhealthy obsessions that we have somehow become used to.

When we draw close to Jesus, He invites us to let go of those 'demons' that prevent us from living our life to the fullest. We are never alone in this process because Jesus is with us. We can place our lives in His loving hands with trust. He is here to love us, not to harm us.

Today, let us never get tired of seeking to draw close to Jesus and letting Him bring newness to our life.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I afraid to allow Jesus to work in my life?



Tuesday, 5 February, St. Agatha
Hebrews 12:1-4, Mark 5:21-43

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

they were overcome with astonishment, and he ordered them strictly not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

Only have faith!

“Do not be afraid; only have faith.” How many times in our life, do we need to hear these exact words? In life, we often face situations when we are afraid as things seem to be out of control. These are moments when we need to cling onto God, to the one who assures us that we need not be afraid. We can face the uncertain future, the family problem, the worries, the heartaches etc. with Jesus because He lives in us. He comes with us to our homes, to bring life and hope in ways we do not expect or understand.

The world can dishearten us with messages that tell us that life is not worth the fight, that no one can help us, etc. Let the voice of Jesus be stronger than all these voices that pull us away from faith. Today, let the voice of Love calm our fears with His words, *“Do not be afraid; only have faith.”*

“I do not pray for success, I ask for faithfulness.” (Mother Teresa)

Today, let us pray for the grace to be faithful to Jesus in every moment of our life.

Question for reflection:

1) Is my life characterised by faith in Jesus?

Wednesday, 6 February, St. Paul Miki and Companions Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15, Mark 6:1-6

Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, ‘Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?’ And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is only

despised in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, though he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Open the door to Jesus

"There is no middle way between light and darkness, pride and humility, truth and lie. Either we open the door to Jesus, who comes to save us, or we close ourselves in the sufficiency and pride of self-deliverance." (Pope Francis)

The people in Jesus' town could not accept Jesus as a prophet. They chose to close their doors to Jesus, and enclose themselves in their own sufficiency and pride.

Jesus did not make a big scene or perform great miracles just to proof how wrong the people were about Him. He simply chose to walk on.

There are times when Jesus and His teachings seem too familiar, unattractive and boring for us. With pride, we think that we 'know' everything and we can live our lives independently from Jesus.

Let us open the door to Jesus with humility and welcome Him fully into our lives. Jesus is a Friend whom we can trust. Out of love, Jesus will never force us to open the door of our heart to Him because He gives us the freedom to choose.

There is no middle way - either we open our door to Jesus or close ourselves in 'the sufficiency and pride of self-deliverance.'

Today, what would you choose?

Question for reflection:

1) Am I open to recognise Jesus in my life as my Friend, my Lord, my God on whom I can trust and depend?

Thursday, 7 February

Hebrews 12:18-19, 21- 24, Mark 6:7-13

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

Mission

'Take nothing for the journey...' By the fact of our baptism, we are all called to mission. God is the one who entrusts us with this responsibility of bringing more people to encounter His unconditional and merciful love. We need to step out of our comfort zone and enter into the homes, the lives of the people who have yet to know or hear about Christ. We need to take courage and look for those who once believed but now they have turned away from God and the church.

Many of us are afraid because we do not want to intrude or impose. How can we keep quiet if we ourselves have received the love which gives meaning to our lives? How can we selfishly keep the Good News of Jesus to ourselves?

We speak about our faith through our words and deeds - through a smile of acknowledgment, through the joy we have, through the dedication we put in our work, through sharing our personal faith stories, etc.

Jesus tells us today not to take anything for the journey as we go out of our comfort zone and take the step to mission. All what we need in this journey is Jesus himself. He will guide us and give us the courage we need.

Jesus, open my eyes to see that there are people around me who need to experience your mercy and love. I want to be your joyful disciple today who will bring you to the people I meet.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I aware that I am called to mission?
- 2) Today, what small steps can I take to share Jesus' love with those around me?

Friday, 8 February, St. Josephine Bakhita
Hebrews 13:1-8, Mark 6:14-29

King Herod had heard about Jesus, since by now his name was well-known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him'. Others said, 'He is Elijah'; others again, 'He is a prophet, like the prophets we used to have'. But when Herod heard this he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead'. Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife'. As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him; but she was not able to, because Herod was afraid of John, knowing him to be a good and holy man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you'. And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom'. She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist'. The girl hurried straight back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, here and now, on a dish'. The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. So the king at once sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in prison; then he brought the head on a

dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

From darkness to light

'But when Herod heard this he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead'. Herod Antipas was a cruel leader who murdered many enemies, even members of his own family. However, of all the people he had killed, John the Baptist was the one he could not forget. He could not wash himself clean of the blood of John the Baptist. He, out of cowardice, killed the great prophet whom he himself regarded as a good and holy man. Thus, his past deed returned to haunt him as his guilt made him think that John the Baptist had come back from the dead in the form of Jesus.

Like Herod, we might also spend our lives trying to hide skeletons locked in our closets. Yet, we are afraid that these skeletons would one day come out of the closet and force us to confront our darkest secrets. What would happen if Herod approached Jesus and spoke to Him? Would his life be touched and transformed by Jesus? What about us? Why are we hiding? Will we open our hearts and let Jesus love us so that He can bring all the dark skeletons out to the light of His merciful love?

Today, Jesus cleanses and loves all who come to Him. Let us find the courage to enter and enjoy the Light of His love.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I allow my past mistakes, regrets and fears to be in the light of God's merciful love?

Saturday, 9 February

Hebrews 13:15-17,20-21, Mark 6:30-34

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

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

Sheep without shepherd

In the Gospel today, Jesus was deeply moved with pity when He saw crowds of people who were like sheep without a shepherd. We too can identify moments in our life when we feel like sheep without a shepherd.

We could be tired with work, parish activities and responsibilities at home. Jesus, our Shepherd, comes and invites us, "*You must come away with me... and rest for a while.*" We need moments to rest with our Shepherd and be renewed by His love again.

When we are renewed by Jesus, He will teach us how to become shepherds for others who are 'shepherdless'. Today, let us stay with Jesus and let Him give us the rest we need so that we can go out and look at the crowd with the compassionate heart of Jesus. Let us be generous to allow Jesus to use our 5 loaves and 2 fish, the little that we have in order that He can create miracles through us for others' sake.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from going back to the source of peace and getting the rest that my heart needs?

Sunday, 10 February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Isaiah 6:1--8, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 5:1-11

Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats close to the bank. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats it was Simon's and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water

and pay out your nets for a catch'. 'Master,' Simon replied 'we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled the two boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man'. For he and all his companions were completely overcome by the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is men you will catch'. Then, bringing their boats back to land, they left everything and followed him.

It is Jesus who is calling us

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus saw Peter and knew the potential that he had in him. The world might label Peter as merely a 'fisherman' but Jesus saw Him as something more – a disciple, a shepherd to His flock.

Thus, Jesus called Peter to leave his worldly securities, and push his boat into deep water.

Today, Jesus is also calling each one of us to do something more - not just to be a mere worker or student, but to be His disciples, His friends, His beloveds in this world.

"In calling you God says to you: 'You are important to me, I love you, I am counting on you'. Jesus says this to each one of us! Joy is born from that! The joy of the moment in which Jesus looked at me. Understanding and hearing this is the secret of our joy. Feeling loved by God, feeling that for him we are not numbers but people; and we know that it is he who is calling us." (Pope Francis)

Jesus calls us but never forces. We have the choice to play it safe by keeping to our shallow shore or following Him with trust. Deep down, we know that true joy comes when we hear and understand Jesus' call to us, 'Push your boat to deep water... Do not be afraid; follow me.'

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I allow Jesus to enter into my boat, my life today?
- 2) What prevents me from experiencing the joy of knowing that I am loved and called by Jesus?

Monday, 11 February, Our Lady of Lourdes
Genesis 1:1-19, Mark 6:53-56

Having made the crossing, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and tied up. No sooner had they stepped out of the boat than people recognized him, and started hurrying all through the countryside and brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, to village, or town, or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were cured.

To love like Jesus

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

Jesus will never turn away from us or send us away empty-handed because He loves us and wants to fill us with His presence. Do we know who we have before us right now in this time of prayer?

Do we know the heart of Love that Jesus has for us right now?

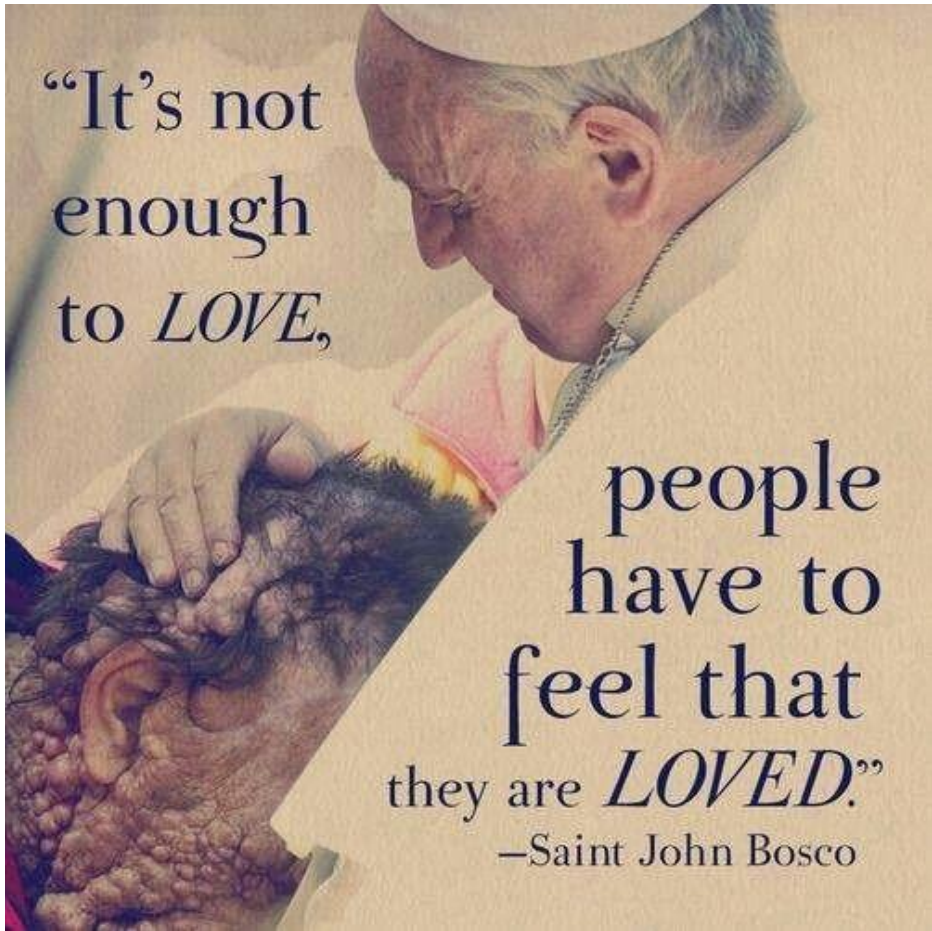
In today's Gospel, crowds and crowds of people hurried to see Jesus and to be with Him. Some wanted to be healed, others wanted their sick friends or family members to be touched by Jesus and others were curious to meet this man called 'Jesus', etc. Whatever their motives were, Jesus did not turn them away but He stayed with them because He loved them.

In this time of prayer, let us draw close to Jesus and allow Him to touch us: in our loneliness, our worries, our fears and our anxiety. Peace flows from Him into our hearts and calms us. Love enters and gives us the strength to journey through life.

Like the crowds of people who recognised Jesus, let us also open our eyes of faith and be aware of His Presence of Love today!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I have the enthusiasm the crowd had for Jesus?



“It’s not
enough
to *LOVE*,

people
have to
feel that
they are *LOVED*.”
—Saint John Bosco

Tuesday, 12 February

Genesis 1:20-2:4, Mark 7:1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture: This people honour me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless, the doctrines they teach are only human regulations. You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.' And he said to them, 'How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition! For Moses said: Do your duty to your father and your mother, and, Anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is Corban (that is, dedicated to God), then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother". In this way you make God's word null and void for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.'

Consistent Christians

Jesus used very strong words against the Pharisees today. He called them, "*Hypocrites*". This was because they were inconsistent in what they said and what they actually did, between word and manner of life.

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

Let us look with all honesty at our life and ask ourselves if we have been inconsistent in what we say and what we do, between word and manner of life.

In His lifetime, Jesus was consistent in what He said and what He did, between word and manner of life. He had nothing to hide. Therefore, people were attracted to Him because they saw coherence in his life and teaching.

Today, people need consistent Christians who walk the walk and talk the talk. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and draw close to Him so that we can be true living witnesses of our faith!

Question for reflection:

1) Is my Christian faith and life coherent? In what way?

Wednesday, 13 February

Genesis 2:4-9,15-17, Mark 7:14-23

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

Renew my heart, Lord!

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

Today, Jesus invites us to examine our hearts. Why? Real uncleanness comes from the heart. From within us, we form evil intentions that lead us to act unlovingly.

We have been created by God to love, not hate; to do good, not evil. Therefore, Jesus calls us to protect our hearts by staying close to God and letting Him love us. God is the one who can create in us clean hearts that seek to do good.

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26)

The more we experience being loved by God, the more capable we will be of loving. In this time of prayer, let us simply be loved by Jesus so that He can be the one transforming our heart to be like His.

Let us never get tired of going to Jesus so that we can have hearts capable of loving.

Question for reflection:

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

**Thursday, 14 February, Ss. Cyril and Methodius
Genesis 2:18-25, Mark 7:24-30**

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

A woman's faith

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

However, Jesus' response to this woman seemed harsh and cruel.

'The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs'.

What did Jesus mean when He said those words to her? The word 'house-dogs' means 'little puppies' and it does not refer to dirty, scabby dogs, but a little puppy that is a beloved pet in a household. The image here is one of a little puppy eagerly waiting under the table, hoping and expecting its owner to feed it with scraps of food.

The woman understood Jesus' reply and did not take offence but played along with Him, as she replied that she, like the little puppy, too deserved the scraps, the little crumbs of mercy, goodness and love.

Another important question to ask is what was Jesus intention when he said those words? Jesus, who knew the hearts of people (John 2:24), was aware that this woman, though a 'pagan', had great faith in God. He wanted His disciples to learn from this humble woman the valuable lesson of faith. At the end, the woman went home, happily, because her daughter was well again.

Let us learn from this Syrophoenician woman to have faith in Jesus, in God, even when our problems seem to overwhelm us. Lord, we do have faith, but increase our little faith!

Question for reflection:

1) Can I identify with the faith of the Syrophoenician woman? In what way can I do so?

Friday, 15 February
Genesis 3:1-8, Mark 7:31-37

Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened'. And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. Their admiration was unbounded. 'He has done all things well,' they said 'he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

Be opened

Our greatest problem is that we are too busy to hear Jesus. We are always busy, busy, busy! We are busy trying to make ends meet, keeping to deadlines, taking care of children/ elderly parents, etc. We are so busy with all the comings and goings that we are no longer aware of God and all the love that He has for us.

We might not be physically deaf but many of us are suffering from spiritual deafness. God speaks to us but we do not hear Him because of all the 'noises' around and within us. God is with us but we are not aware because we are simply too caught up with many things. We live in our own world of worries, anxieties and exhaustion.

For this reason, we need to open to God and let Him communicate with us. Openness to God is essential if we really want to grow in our prayer life. This is because openness leads us to be fully aware of the presence of God in the silence of prayer, in the daily routines of life and in the people we encounter each day.

Today, Jesus tells us, "*Ephphatha. Be opened!*" Today, Jesus wants to lead us aside in private, away from our busyness and distractions, in order to speak to us. Let us follow Him and let Him open our hearts to be aware of Him again.

"Late have I loved You. O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace." (St. Augustine of Hippo)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be aware of God's presence today?

Saturday, 16 February
Genesis 3:9-24, Mark 8:1-10

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

Trust that He will multiply!

'I feel sorry for all these people...'

Jesus Himself expressed how He felt in His heart for the large crowd who had nothing to eat. He felt sorry, or in other words, He felt deep, abiding compassion for them. Jesus cared!

Isn't it easier to care for a person rather than faceless masses of people? Yet, Jesus felt compassion for the crowd of people. For Him, each person in that crowd was in His heart. His compassion made Him do something to relieve the hunger of the people.

Jesus invited His disciples to see the crowd through His eyes. Today, He also invites us to do the same. Every day, we are surrounded by crowds of faceless people: in the train, along the street, in the office, etc. The crowds of today are hungry, not for bread, but for love, acceptance, hope and peace. Today, we can be His instruments to meet the needs of the people.

Unlike Jesus, the disciples were not moved by the sight of the hungry people. They were practical people who were concerned with their lack of resources for so many people. They only had 7 loaves and a few small fish, and these could do nothing to feed the huge hungry crowd!

'Where could anyone get bread to feed these people in a deserted place like this?'

Jesus knew. He trusted that God would provide in the same way that He provided for the 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish (Mark 6:34-44). Jesus took the little that the disciples could offer, gave thanks, said a blessing and told the disciples to distribute the food to the crowd. *'They ate as much as they wanted...'* The message for each one of us is to trust that Jesus will always work with the little that we have.

In this time of prayer, let us stay close to Jesus and learn from Him again how to have compassion for people as well as how to trust that He is the one multiplying the loaves and fish to feed the people.

Question for reflection:

1) When I look at the crowds of people around me, am I moved with compassion and love?

Sunday, 17 February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jeremiah 17:5-8, 1 Corinthians 15:12,16-20, Luke 6:17,20-26

Jesus came down with the Twelve and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. Fixing his eyes on his disciples Jesus said: 'How happy are you who are poor: yours is the kingdom of God. Happy you who are hungry now: you shall be satisfied. Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh. Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets. 'But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep. Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.'

A Life with God's Joy

Jesus offers us the Beatitudes as our way of life that brings us to possess fullness of joy that the world can never give us.

Every day, hundreds of people around us move in all directions, rushing to reach some unknown goal. Many people are so busy pursuing power, pleasures, productivity and fame. Many people have this constant fear of not making it in life.

So self-absorbed they are with their personal concerns that they remain oblivious to the suffering and needs of so many people who are in need.

Let us today be still and quiet. Let Jesus speak to us about what it means to live a life with God's joy.

"How happy you who are poor... How happy you who are hungry now... How happy you who weep now... Happy are you when people hate you..."

Jesus' way to happiness is for us to choose to live a life of simplicity, a life hungering for justice, a life weeping in solidarity with those who are suffering. To live the Beatitudes implies that we first have to die to our desire for worldly riches, fame, popularity and power. We follow Jesus who lived His life among the marginalized, and who did not desire to use His power and influence to seek His own glory, but to relieve the suffering of those in need. Jesus chose to live for God and for others.

Money, power and success do not make us happy. We need to let Jesus show us another path to happiness that the world can never give us.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to walk the path of the Beatitudes?

Monday, 18 February

Genesis 4:1-15, Mark 8:11-13

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

Jesus, the greatest sign

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

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

presence of God around us and in us. Can we also give our lives like Jesus to help others in need?

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 19 February

Genesis 6:5-8,7:1-5, Mark 8:14-21

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

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

The disciples had seen Jesus performing the miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and fish twice. Yet, they worried about the predicament they had gotten themselves into. They had forgotten to

bring along food and had only one loaf of bread with them. They must be thinking, 'How can one loaf be enough for all of us? Will we be hungry? Where can we get more bread?'

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

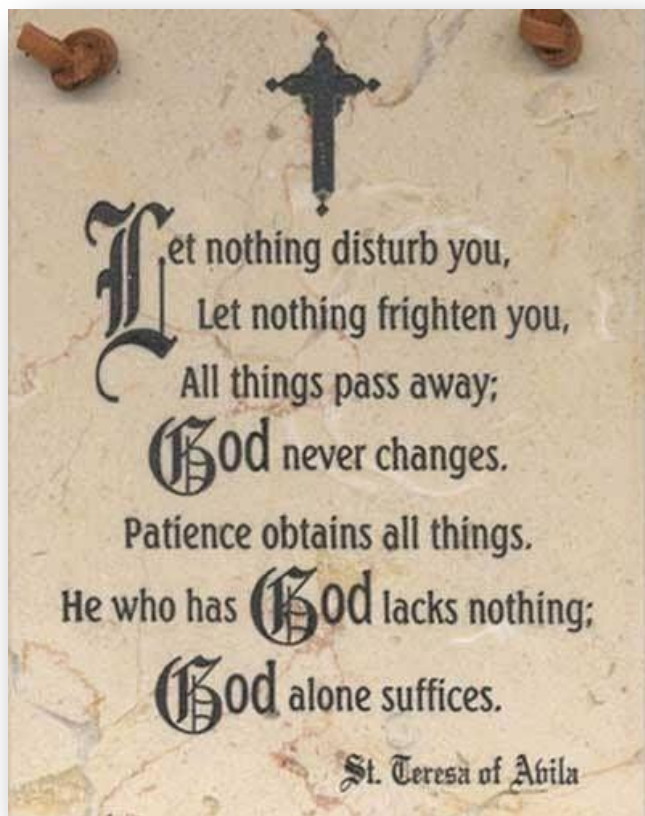
When Jesus mentioned 'yeast', the disciples associated this with their immediate personal need of only having one loaf. They failed to understand the warning of Jesus and to see the meaning beyond his words. Despite their lack of understanding and faith, Jesus patiently told them to trust in him, reminding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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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



Wednesday, 20 February

Genesis 8:6-13, 20-22, Mark 8:22-26

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

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

Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. The blind man walked alongside with Jesus, trustingly. He felt Jesus' touch and heard the voice asking him, '*Can you see anything?*' The man looked and started to see but not clearly, he said,

'I can see people; they look like trees to me, but they are walking about.' Again, he felt Jesus' hands on him. Lo and behold! He saw clearly. This is the only miracle performed by Jesus in stages. Why? Did Jesus fail the first time and so had to try again? What was Jesus' reason for doing this?

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

This passage today shows that faith, like the sight of the blind man comes gradually. The disciples' eyes were gradually opened to see and understand who Jesus was for them. The more their eyes were opened, the more their passion for Jesus was ignited and they went and preached the Good News, unceasingly. What does this incident tell us here and now?

We, like the blind man, have been touched once, twice... but we continue somehow not to see things, events, people, ourselves, and

especially God, clearly. Our vision is blurred by ambition, worries, prejudices, greed, lust, anger and selfishness. How many of us see, but do not see? Helen Keller, a great thinker who was deaf and blind said, *'The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but no vision.'*

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

Question for reflection:

1) What situations and people in my life and my faith am I not seeing clearly?

Thursday, 21 February, St. Peter Damian
Genesis 9:1-13, Mark 8:27-33

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him. 'John the Baptist,' they said 'others Elijah; others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ'. And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man was destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

Walking behind the Master

From this moment of the Gospel, Jesus was making His way to the cross. He knew that each step was a step closer towards his passion, death and resurrection. Thus, at this point of His journey, Jesus asked His disciples a fundamental question, *"Who do you say I am?"*

Today, this is the very same question that Jesus is asking each one of us, His disciples.

“Who do you say I am?”

The response we give will reveal the level of our discipleship. It is not a matter of verbally giving our answers, but more importantly, it is about living out our individual responses to Jesus’ question.

Jesus, our Master, Teacher and Friend, loved to the very end and laid His life for us. As His disciples today, do we too dare to take up our cross and follow Jesus, to lay down our life for others?

Even though Peter answered that Jesus was the Messiah, He was not ready to follow the path of his Master. He therefore wanted to remould the mind of Jesus and correct the vision of Jesus. Jesus rebuked Peter in front of all the rest of the disciples, *‘Get behind me, Satan! Because the way you think is not God’s way but man’s.’* For Jesus, discipleship means to follow the Master’s footsteps.

Who is Jesus for us? Who are we for Jesus? Are we ready to follow Jesus, to answer the call to embrace sufferings and challenges for his sake and the sake of the Gospel?

Jesus wants us to correct our vision of him so that we might strive to live in Him, and to trust Him even though we might not fully understand the path He is leading us on.

Question for reflection:

1) How do I want to live this day so that my life reflects who Jesus is for me?

Friday, 22 February, The Chair of St. Peter the Apostle

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

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'. 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God'. Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'

An ordinary life

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter. What is this Feast all about? This feast celebrates St. Peter who was chosen by Jesus to be a servant-leader of his flock.

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

An ordinary person with an extraordinary calling - this is also how Jesus calls us to follow him. Yes, ordinary us with our many fallen

moments, yet also with our strengths. The world is often impressed by people with great talent, wealth, beauty, popularity, accomplishments and high levels of education. Yet, Jesus looks at the inner hearts of men and women who desire to seek him alone and to do whatever he tells them to do.

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

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

Question for reflection:

1) How can I follow Jesus with greater faithfulness today?

**Saturday, 23 February, St. Polycarp
Hebrews 11:1-7, Mark 9:2-13**

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

be treated with contempt? However, I tell you that Elijah has come and they have treated him as they pleased, just as the scriptures say about him.

Transformation

What is the significance of the story of Jesus' transfiguration for us today?

In the Gospel, Jesus was transfigured and his clothes became dazzling, blinding white. Jesus' glory was revealed for a moment to Peter, James and John on that high mountain. Today, we are also invited to be in this daily constant process of transfiguration or transformation. It is not simply a minor change or an external modification. Instead, it is a radical internal change of our old selves to our new selves.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:1-2)

The secret to have this radical transformation is given in today's Gospel.

"...there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.'"

To "listen" means that we ponder and keep His Word in our hearts. Thus, we need to set time and space to be with Jesus in prayer and listen attentively to what He has to say to us.

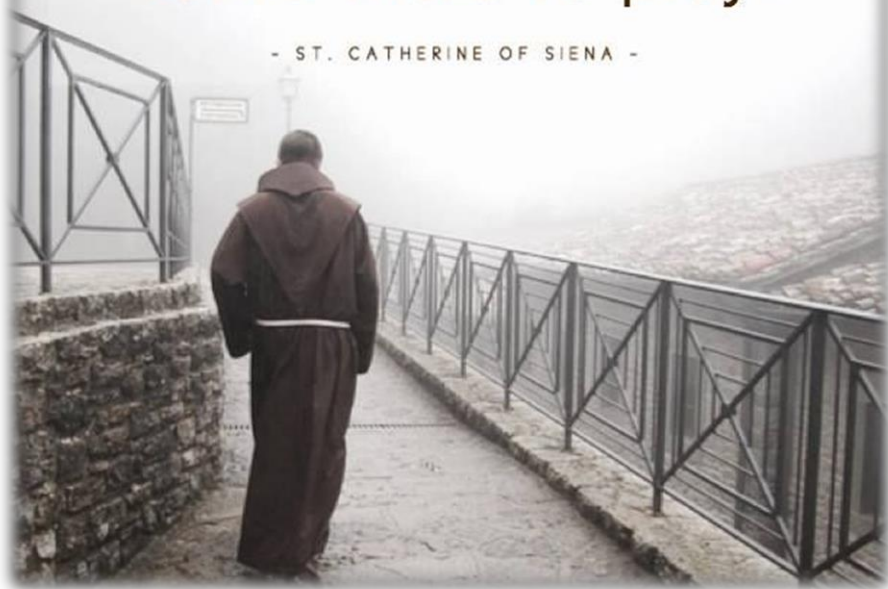
However, we must also remember that transformation is not instantaneous but a process where we allow Jesus to work in our life, day by day. We are also called to trust in Jesus as we allow Him to change our hearts to be like His.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

"Build yourself
a cell in your heart and
retire there to pray."

- ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA -



Sunday, 24 February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
1 Samuel 26:2,7-9,12-13,22-23, 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, Luke 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'But I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To the man who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek too; to the man who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from the man who robs you. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. Instead, love your enemies and do good, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

The Power of Love

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

(Leo Buscaglia)

The people we encounter each day are there in our life for a reason. God puts them in our way so that we can love, not hate; show compassion, not judgement.

As God's beloved children, we can love our friends and enemies because He has given us the capacity to love with His compassionate

love. The greatest tragedy in life is when we start building barriers against others because of our prejudices, fears and insecurities.

Today, let us go back to the gentle voice within us that calls us again and again, "*You are my Beloved child. I love you, and my favour rests on you.*"

This is the truth of who we are. It is this truth that will lead us to break down the walls we have built and learn to love others with God's love.

Be compassionate as God our Father is compassionate. Be loving as God our Father is loving. Be forgiving as God our Father is forgiving. Be merciful as God our Father is merciful.

Today, let us not underestimate the power of love - a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, the smallest act of caring - to the people around us, especially to those whom we find it hard to love.

Let us pray and listen to the voice of God as He affirms us and strengthens us to choose love today!

Monday, 25 February
Sirach 1:1-10, Mark 9:14-29

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

The life of faith is a journey

How many of us ever experienced struggles in our faith? In today's Gospel, the simple prayer of the father of the sick boy, "*I do have faith. Help the little faith I have!*" can help us in moments of our own unbelief.

Once a teenage boy told Pope Francis in an audience that he was trying hard to believe in God and that he struggled with doubt. He

asked the Pope what his advice is for people like him. Below is the reply of Pope Francis to this teenage boy:

“Journeying is an art because if we’re always in a hurry, we get tired and don’t arrive at our journey’s goal. If we stop, we don’t go forward and we also miss the goal. Journeying is precisely the art of looking toward the horizon, thinking where I want to go but also enduring the fatigue of the journey, which is sometimes difficult. ... There are dark days, even days when we fail, even days when we fall ... but always think of this: Don’t be afraid of failures. Don’t be afraid of falling. What matters in the art of journeying isn’t not falling but not staying down. Get up right away and continue going forward. This is what’s beautiful: This is working every day, this is journeying as humans. But also, it’s bad walking alone: It’s bad and boring. Walking in community, with friends, with those who love us, that helps us. It helps us to arrive precisely at that goal, that ‘there where’ we’re supposed to arrive.”
(Pope Francis)

Let us walk on this journey of faith together with Jesus. In the times when we struggle to believe and stumble along the way, let us not be ashamed but get up and walk on. Jesus listens to our deep desires. He welcomes the little faith that we have. All we need to do is to trust and keep asking Jesus to strengthen our little faith!

Question for reflection:

1) Have I experienced moments of faith and moments of doubts?

Tuesday, 26 February

Sirach 2:1-13, Mark 9:30-37

After leaving that place they made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, ‘The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again’. But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him. They came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the road?’ They said nothing because they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and

said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all'. He then took a little child, set him in front of them, put his arms round him, and said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

To be a servant of all

"We must not forget that true power, at whatever level, is service, which has its luminous summit on the Cross. With great wisdom Benedict XVI reminded the Church many times that for man, authority is often synonymous with possession, dominion, success. For God authority is always synonymous with service, humility, love. It means to enter into Jesus' logic, who bends down to wash the feet of the Apostles, and who says to his disciples: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them It shall not be so among you..." (Pope Francis)

In today's Gospel, Jesus must have been disappointed with His disciples who did not seem to understand that He would soon face His passion - the moment of His self-giving love. While the disciples were walking along the road, they were arguing which amongst them was the greatest.

Jesus, the patient Teacher, did not give up on His disciples. He continued to teach and remind them again of the true meaning of power and greatness. Today, Jesus reminds us too what "to be great" means for Him. The life of Jesus is a life for others.

The life of Jesus is a life of love and service. As His disciples, this too is our life. Today, Jesus asks us again to make ourselves last of all and servant of all. What will be your response?

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 27 February
Sirach 4:12-22, Mark 9:38-40

John said to Jesus, 'Master, we saw a man who is not one of us casting out devils in your name; and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him.' But Jesus said, 'You must not stop him: no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us.'

Let us not limit God!

In today's gospel, John saw someone who was casting out devils in Jesus' name and tried to stop him because he did not recognise the man as one of them. However, Jesus tells his beloved disciple clearly that anyone who works a miracle in His name is for Him and not against Him.

Perhaps we can ask ourselves if we are sometimes like John, in being exclusive in our ways. Are there moments where we ostracise a new colleague in the office, or a new member in our Christian community, or someone who thinks or behaves differently from us. When we label that person as "not one of us", we start to treat him/her differently.

However, Jesus also invites us to take a step out of our narrow-mindedness and to look at others with a wider vision and bigger hearts. Today, He reminds us very clearly not to fall into the trap of being exclusive in the differences that we may have with others. Instead, it is to look at the similarities and the gifts of each other.

There may be others around us who are different in terms of perception, religion, behaviour, but it does not mean that God is unable to work miracles through them. So let us not limit how God can work with our limited minds and perception!

Question for reflection:

1) How is God inviting me to look at others without my limited vision and mindset?

Thursday, 28 February
Sirach 5:1-8, Mark 9:41-50

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If anyone gives you a cup of water to drink just because you belong to Christ, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward. But anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck. And if your hand should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that cannot be put out. And if your foot should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye should cause you to sin, tear it out; it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell where their worm does not die nor their fire go out. For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is a good thing, but if salt has become insipid, how can you season it again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another.'

Be seasoned with salt in the path of following Christ!

An Arab saying goes like this: '*There is salt between us.*' What does this mean? Salt was an important staple in the ancient world. It was used for preserving meat in the hot desert climate, as well as a seasoning agent to add flavour to food. Symbolically, salt was also known as the emblem of fidelity and friendship in the Arab world. The Jews, listening to Jesus, would also connect salt with the covenantal fidelity and friendship between God and His people (Numbers 18:19; 2Chronicles 13: 5).

What does this mean for us today?

Jesus invites us to be seasoned daily with the salt of a true loving relationship with God and with one another. We are called to be salty Christians who bring the flavour of God's love to our families, friendships and communities, so that we can be at peace with one another.

Jesus also warns us that we should not scandalize and cause anyone to go away from walking the path towards God. Looking around us,

the reality is that there are many Catholics who have stopped going to Church and stopped believing in God. Why? Do the ways we live and speak reveal our love for Jesus? Do we live our faith with passion and conviction? Are we people of prayer? Are we people of integrity?

Today, let us allow Jesus to purify us with the light of His love so that He can remove all that prevents us from living our Christian faith with authenticity and conviction. Let us never stop being salty Christians!

Question for reflection:

1) In this time of prayer, what concrete change is Jesus inviting me to make?

Friday, 1 March

Sirach 6: 5-17, Mark 10:1-12

Jesus came to the district of Judaea and the far side of the Jordan. And again crowds gathered round him, and again he taught them, as his custom was. Some Pharisees approached him 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.'

From Unteachable to Teachable

'From the beginning': These are critical words in today's passage. The Pharisees tested Jesus with a question, 'Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?' Jesus answered by pointing out God's design for marriage as seen in 'the beginning'. In the Book of Genesis, a marriage was made when Adam, upon seeing the woman, exclaimed 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' God then said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall be one flesh.' (Genesis 2, 21-25) Jesus answered the Pharisees by going to the Original Plan of God. Moses placed a law that allowed men to put their wives away because they were 'so unteachable', but from the beginning it was not in the plan.

Did the Pharisees understand the words of Jesus? Most likely not! They were so 'unteachable' in many ways because their hearts were hardened to learn and relearn. They had built loopholes in their religion in order that they might live to please themselves and not God.

Are we unteachable? Maybe it is time for us to humbly ask God for the grace to be teachable so that we can motivate ourselves to live a purposeful, meaningful life of love as God meant for us from the beginning.

From the beginning, God created each of us in his image and likeness that is love. From the beginning, God created men and women to live in communion with him and one another. At the very beginning, there were neither wars, infidelity, greed, selfishness nor broken friendships. We are 'unteachable' because of pride, because we think we know what is best for ourselves and yet our myopic and narrow-minded view falls far short of the greater plan of a life of love that God initially planned for us.

Jesus always sees us with hope because he sees that the 'unteachable' can become 'teachable'. He is our Teacher who stays faithfully by our side and He teaches us patiently the true ways of life and love so that we can live the plan that God had for us from the beginning.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be open to learn from Jesus about life and love?

Saturday, 2 March

Sirach 17:1-15, Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus, 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.

Child-likeness

We all struggle with Jesus' invitation to go back to being like little children. We are called to become like little children with a child-like attitude of trusting in God, our Father, and to let go of our fears and resistance to trusting God.

Our experiences in the world teach us to be cautious, sceptical and even suspicious of others, and even of God. How can we trust God if we cannot see Him? How do we know if He will be true to His promises and not let us down?

Thus, we find it easier to give our time, money and resources to God. In contrast, we find it impossible to surrender our will, our independence and our right to control to Him.

*“Father, I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures –
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul:
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.”* (Bl. Charles de Foucauld)

This is a prayer of abandonment written by Blessed Charles de Foucauld. This is a prayer that is challenging for many of us to really say it with conviction. Today, let us be less complicated and ask Jesus for the grace to have a child-like trust in God.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which line in the prayer of Bl. Charles de Foucauld strikes me?
- 2) Today, how can I strive to be like a little child in the sight of God?

Sunday, 3 March, Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sirach 27:4-7, 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, Luke 6:39-45

And Jesus told them this parable: “One blind man cannot lead another one; if he does, both will fall into a ditch. No pupils are greater than their teacher; but all pupils, when they have completed their training, will be like their teacher. “Why do you look at the speck in your

brother's eye, but pay no attention to the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Please, brother, let me take that speck out of your eye,' yet cannot even see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. "A healthy tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a poor tree bear good fruit. Every tree is known by the fruit it bears; you do not pick figs from thorn bushes or gather grapes from bramble bushes. A good person brings good out of the treasure of good things in his heart; a bad person brings bad out of his treasure of bad things. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

What do our hearts speak of?

Our physical hearts, as a vital organ to our body, pump blood throughout the body, supplying oxygen and nutrients to keep our body working. Thus, it is important to have a healthy and nourished heart.

"For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

Apart from the physical aspect, Jesus invites us to reflect about the spiritual, intangible aspect of our heart too. What we have and hold in our hearts, we proclaim with our lips and show in our behaviour and actions too.

A heart that speaks of self-centred love for ourselves focuses only on our own needs and wants, unable to accommodate the concerns of others, unable to see the good in others or to forgive others.

Jesus' constantly invites us to renew our hearts, to shift the focus from ourselves to others, to store treasures of good fruits that are from Him so that we can have the patience, the love, the openness to love and accommodate the many people in our lives too.

Jesus, in our journey of the daily renewal of our hearts to speak of love for God and others, help us to always seek You and grant us the necessary graces so that we can love others as You have loved us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What does my heart speak of?
- 2) How is Jesus inviting me to renew my heart today?

Monday, 4 March, St. Casimir
Sirach 17:20-24, Mark 10:17-27

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.'

The problem of being rich

In today's Gospel, we have the encounter of a rich man and Jesus. This man was searching for something more in his life, and he asked Jesus, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus replied to his question by going through the list of commandments. However, the man was already doing all these. He wanted more than just commandments. He looked at Jesus and pestered Him, "What more?" Jesus looked at the man with love, and suggested a deeper action for a more matured following. Jesus told him, "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"

The man walked away sadly because he was too rich.
What is in our hearts that prevents us from following Jesus?

“And if we ask how are we to know where our hearts are, the answer is just as simple - everything which hinders us from loving God above all things and acts as a barrier between ourselves and our obedience to Jesus is our treasure, and the place where our heart is.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Like the rich man, we too can let our hearts be possessed and controlled by our wealth, pride, lust, power, money, etc. These riches prevent us from entering into a more trusting and loving relationship with Jesus. Today, let us not be afraid to be looked upon by Jesus with love and listen to His voice calling us to a deeper following and a mature friendship.

Question for reflection:

1) What is in my heart that prevents me from following Jesus and loving Him more?

Tuesday, 5 March

Sirach 35:1-12, Mark 10:28-31

At that time Peter began to tell Jesus, 'What about us? 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. Many who are first will be last, and the last first.'

Losses and gains

There is a cost for being a disciple of Jesus. How much are we willing to let go of our old ways in this journey of discipleship?

In today's Gospel, Peter asked Jesus, "What about us? We left everything and followed you. What would we gain?"

Like Peter, would we dare to be honest and frank with Jesus? Do we dare to ask Jesus, "Jesus, I have left many things all these years in order to follow you closely and so what do I gain? What will I receive?"

Jesus will never turn us away for asking such questions. Instead, He will tell us that if we leave behind all that hinders us from loving God and serving Him faithfully, we will not lose but gain. The greatest gain that we can ever have is to experience having God as our treasure, and living a life of deep peace and quiet joy.

'Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that he might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? So we not then risk ending diminished and deprived of our freedom?... No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great.... And so today, with great strength and conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young

people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything...' (Pope Benedict XVI)

How far are we willing to let go? What will be our gain?

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 6 March, Ash Wednesday

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

Jesus said to 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.'

Rend your heart

"Even now," declares the Lord,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning."
Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God,

for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love..." (Joel 2:12-13)

This is God's cry to each one of us as we begin this season of Lent. He calls us to return to Him with all our heart.

It is not simply a time for performing external actions, such as donating material goods, fasting or abstaining, without including God in our lives. Everything we do during this time of Lent should lead us to a greater communion with God. Our communion with God then should lead us to a greater communion with others.

"No act of virtue can be great if it is not followed by advantage for others. So, no matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great." (St. John Chrysostom).

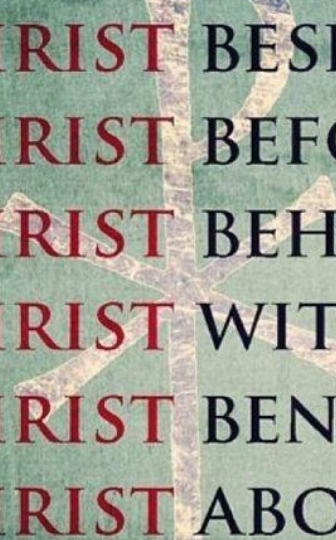
In today's Gospel, Jesus warns us not to parade or to display ourselves when we fast or give alms or pray. Rather, we need to examine our hearts and see our intention for our Lenten sacrifices.

Lent is a time to be transformed by God so that we can open our hearts to feel love and compassion for our brothers and sisters, especially those in need.

"Indifference to our neighbour and to God also represents a real temptation for us Christians. Each year during Lent we need to hear once more the voice of the prophets who cry out and trouble our conscience... 'What are you giving up for Lent?' It's a question a lot of people will get these next few days. If you want to change your body, perhaps alcohol and candy is the way to go. But if you want to change your heart, a harder fast is needed. This narrow road is gritty, but it isn't sterile. It will make room in ourselves to experience a love that can make us whole and set us free" (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How do I want to live this Lent?



CHRIST BESIDE ME,
CHRIST BEFORE ME,
CHRIST BEHIND ME,
CHRIST WITHIN ME,
CHRIST BENEATH ME,
CHRIST ABOVE ME.

Saint Patrick

H

Thursday, 7 March, Ss. Perpetua and Felicity
Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Luke 9:22-25

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

In the way of the cross, there is Life

A young man was at the end of his road, seeing no way out, he dropped to his knees in prayer. "Lord, I can't go on," he said. "I have too heavy a cross to bear." The Lord replied, "My son, if you can't bear its weight, just place your cross inside this room. Then, open that other door and pick out any cross you wish." The man was filled with relief and said, "Thank you Lord," and he did as he was told. Upon entering the other room, he saw many crosses; some so large the tops were not visible. Then, he spotted a tiny cross leaning against a far wall. "I'd like that one, Lord," he whispered. The Lord replied, "My son, that is the cross you just brought in." When life's problems seem overwhelming, it helps to look around and see what other people are coping with. You may consider yourself far more fortunate than you imagined. (Anonymous)

As we start this Lenten journey, Jesus tells us, 'The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders...' In the same way Jesus experienced suffering, we, as his followers, must also face our own sufferings.

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

(Pope John Paul II)

Today, Jesus whispers these words to our hearts, 'Renounce yourself, pick up your cross and follow me.'

Instead of running away from our crosses, let us pick up our cross and walk on with faith because Jesus has taken the lead on the way of the cross.

*Whatever your cross
Whatever your pain
There will always be sunshine
After the rain
Perhaps you may stumble
Perhaps even fall
But God's always there
To help you through it all. (Anonymous)*

Question for reflection:

1) How can I learn to follow Jesus in the way of the cross?

**Friday, 8 March, Day of Abstinence
Isaiah 58:1-9, Matthew 9:14-15**

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

Fasting for Love

"The second key element of the Lenten journey is fasting. We must be careful not to practice a formal fast, or one which in truth "satisfies" us because it makes us feel good about ourselves. Fasting makes sense if it questions our security, and if it also leads to some benefit for others, if it helps us to cultivate the style of the Good Samaritan, who bends down to his brother in need and takes care of him. Fasting involves choosing a sober lifestyle; a way of life that does not waste, a way of life that does not "throw away". Fasting helps us to attune our hearts to the essential and to sharing. It is a sign of awareness and responsibility in the face of injustice, abuse, especially to the poor and the little ones, and it is a sign of the trust we place in God and in his providence." (Pope Francis)

Many Catholics nowadays tend to fast for the wrong reasons. They fast to slim their waistlines or to feast on seafood or simply as an obligation.

At the start of this Lent, Jesus tells us that the greatest form of fasting is not from chocolates or meat, but fasting from everything that prevents us from loving, such as selfishness, greed and indifference.

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

Question for reflection:

1) How can my fasting today benefit others?

**Saturday, 9 March, St. Frances of Rome
Isaiah 58:9-14, Luke 5:27-32**

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

Priceless forever

A well-known speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, "Who would like this \$20 bill?" Hands started going up. He said, "I am going to give this \$20 to one of you but first, let me do this." He proceeded to crumple the dollar bill up. He then asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. "Well," he replied, "What if I do this?" And he dropped it on the ground

and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now all crumpled and dirty. "Now who still wants it? My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. Because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20. Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God's eyes. To Him, dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to Him."
(Anonymous)

In the eyes of the Pharisees and scribes, Levi and the other tax-collectors were worthless because of their dishonest life-style. However, Jesus asked Levi to follow Him and ate with the tax-collectors because He recognized that they were priceless for God.

Levi was ready to welcome Jesus into his life. Are we ready to experience God in our daily encounters?

We will never lose our value in God's eyes. Despite the wrong decisions we make and the circumstances we live in, we are always His beloved children. He will never stop calling us to follow Him and make Him our Master and Teacher, our Lord and God.

Question for reflection:

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

**Sunday, 10 March, First Sunday of Lent
Deuteronomy 26:4-10, Romans 10:8-13, Luke 4:1-13**

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf'. But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone'. Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me,

then, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone'. Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said to him 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again: They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.' But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.' Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

A time for renewal


In today's gospel passage, Jesus was tempted three times by the devil. First, Jesus was offered instant gratification of His hunger by having bread to eat. Then, He was offered instant power of dominance over all kingdoms of the world. Lastly, He was offered instant glorification by coming down from on high like a glorious Messiah into Jerusalem. Yet, Jesus' relationship with God the Father helped Him to resist the temptations.

As Christians, these are our daily temptations too - of following materialistic world of getting and buying in order to gratify our hunger for more in life, of getting power to control and dominate others, as well as of having people to constantly affirm and honour us in order to feed our egoistic pride. We, however, cannot resist temptations without Jesus' help. Therefore, at the start of our Lenten journey, we are invited to take a step towards Jesus who is always waiting for us with open arms. He calls us to trust Him for strength. He offers us His friendship once again.

Let us never get tired of seeking for a renewed encounter with Jesus by allowing Him to love us again. With Jesus, we can stand firm against all temptations of lust, anger, laziness, pride, gossips, etc. In Jesus, we can always find our place where we feel safe.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What are some temptations that I face in my daily life?
- 2) How can I make my relationship with Jesus as my firm foundation this Lent?

THE WORLD OFFERS YOU COMFORT.
BUT YOU WERE NOT MADE FOR
COMFORT.  YOU WERE MADE FOR
GREATNESS.

– POPE BENEDICT XVI

Monday, 11 March

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

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

A terrible hunger for love

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

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 12 March

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

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

yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.

Father, you know what I need!

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us the very basic method of how to pray. He tells us, 'Your Father already knows what you need before you ask him.'

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

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

It is only with an uncomplicated and trusting heart that one can utter those words of the prayer, 'Our Father.' Jesus taught us to address God as 'Father' and thus invites us to enter into a loving relationship with God. It is from this dependence on God, who takes care of us, that we can face temptations with courage. It is from this intimate loving relationship with God that we can learn to love and forgive others in their failures and weaknesses. This prayer is not meant to be recited mechanically but to be lived out in our daily lives.

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

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

Questions for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 13 March
Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11:29-32

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

The greatest sign

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

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Thursday, 14 March

Esther C:12,14-16,23-35, Matthew 7:7-12

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

Ask and you will receive

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

With trust, we believe that God our loving Father will answer our prayer in His time and in His way.

Like Esther in the first reading, let us call on God with trusting hearts,
*"My Lord, our King, the only one,
Come to my help, for I am alone
And have no helper but you..."*

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

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

Question for reflection:

1) Do I pray to God from my heart?

Friday, 15 March

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

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

Making a choice to reconcile

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

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

"Two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument; and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand: "Today my best friend slapped me in the

face.” They kept on walking, until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone: “Today my best friend saved my life.” The friend who had slapped and saved his best friend asked him, “after I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?” The friend replied “when someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it.” (Anonymous)

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

Question for reflection:

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

Saturday, 16 March

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

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

A clean heart to love again

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”

As children of God, we are called to do more, love more and to be more. We step out of our comfort zone and the familiar environment of family and friends and venture into the ‘enemy’s’ zone. In this

'enemy zone', people might not be nice to us or like us for who we are. Yet, we do not answer dislike with dislike, but offer peace and friendship instead.

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

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Sunday, 17 March, Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 15:5-12,17-18, Philippians 3:17-4:1 or 3:20-4:1, Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning. Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'. - He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.' And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

Listen to Jesus

The story of the Transfiguration happens when Jesus was on His way to face His passion and death in Jerusalem. He showed His glory to His disciples, Peter, James and John, in order to strengthen their faith in the face of the cross. Today, what does this story speak to us in our concrete struggles and joys?

'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him'

As Jesus' disciples, we are called to listen attentively to Him and let Him be the only and decisive Word. Do we dare to place Jesus at the centre of our lives, our families, our communities?

"What are the duties of a Christian? Perhaps you will tell me: to go to Mass on Sundays; to fast, and abstain during Holy Week - do these things... But the first duty of a Christian is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because He speaks to us and He saves us with His Word - and with His Word, He also makes our faith stronger, more robust: Listen to Jesus!" (Pope Francis)

Today, let us go with Jesus up the mountain, the place of prayer, the place of silence, to be with Him and listen to Him again. Jesus renews and strengthens our faith once more so that we can face our personal crosses with greater peace.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I listen to Jesus and allow His Word to be the only and decisive Word in my life?
- 2) How can I transfigure my life, my family life, my community with my renewed faith in Jesus?

**Monday, 18 March, St. Cyril of Jerusalem
Daniel 9:4-10, Luke 6:36-38**

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

The yardstick we use

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

The secret to Jesus' compassionate heart was His openness to receive the Father's love. Today, we are also called to depend on God our Father as the source of our loving.

Therefore, we need to pray and go back to God with open hands to receive His love. He is always ready to give us what we need in order to be loving and compassionate as He is. With His love in our hearts, we can then truly give compassion to others.

"Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities

which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us.” (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I treat the people around me with more compassion instead of judging or condemning them?

Tuesday, 19 March, St. Joseph

2 Samuel 7:4-5,12-14,16, Romans 4:13,16-18,22, Matthew 1:16,18-21,24

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.’ When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Humility and hiddenness

“In all of this he showed himself, like his spouse Mary, an authentic heir of Abraham’s faith: faith in God who guides the events of history according to his mysterious salvific plan. His greatness, like Mary’s, stands out even more because his mission was carried out in the humility and hiddenness of the house of Nazareth. Moreover, God himself, in the person of his Incarnate Son, chose this way and style of life - humility and hiddenness - in his earthly existence. From the example of St Joseph, we all receive a strong invitation to carry out with fidelity, simplicity and modesty the task that Providence has entrusted to us.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

In humility and hiddenness of the house of Nazareth, Joseph lived his ordinary days with Mary and Jesus. His life was great, not because of the power and riches he had, but because his simple heart trusted God. When the angel appeared to him in a dream and asked him to take Mary home as his wife even though she was pregnant with a child, Joseph simply said 'Yes' and did what the angel told him. Even though he did not understand what was going on, he continued to trust in God.

How much can we learn from this great saint. We tend to lead our life in pursuit of riches, power and status so that we can be seen as great and important in the eyes of the world. Yet, there is a restlessness in our hearts that can never be satisfied by the achievements and praises we have.

Today, as we celebrate this feast, let us learn and follow the example of this silent saint who displayed his greatness in his humility and hiddenness.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I imitate the footsteps of St Joseph in my life?

Wednesday, 20 March

Jeremiah 18:18-20, Matthew 20:17-28

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, and on the way he took the Twelve to one side and said to them, 'Now we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the pagans to be mocked and scourged and crucified; and on the third day he will rise again.' Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom'. 'You do not know what you are asking' Jesus answered. 'Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can'. 'Very well,' he said 'you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to

those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.' When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Imitating my Master

Jesus' disciples did not understand that the way of their Master was not about being powerful and admired but it is about humility, self-giving and service. They failed to realise that their Master's ambition was not to have titles or status, but to be the servant of all.

Do we understand the way of Jesus and desire to have His same ambition?

"Remember that the Christian life is one of action; not of speech and daydreams. Let there be few words and many deeds, and let them be done well." (St. Vincent Pallotti)

Today, let us put into action the path of humble service and joyfully seek to be servant of all, out of love for Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I humbly serve my family and friends and not expect them to serve me instead?

Thursday, 21 March

Jeremiah 17: 5-10, Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even came and licked his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 'In his torment in Hades he looked up

and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his bosom. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames". "My son," Abraham replied "remember that during your life good things came your way, just as bad things came the way of Lazarus. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to stop anyone, if he wanted to, crossing from our side to yours, and to stop any crossing from your side to ours." 'The rich man replied, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too". "They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham "let them listen to them.". "Ah no, father Abraham," said the rich man "but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead".'

A heart that loves

In the first reading of today, God said, *"The heart is more devious than any other thing, perverse too: who can pierce its secrets? I, the Lord, search the heart, I probe the loins, to give each man what his conduct and actions deserve."* (Jeremiah 17:9-10)

In the Gospel, there was a rich man, who was enslaved by his wealth and self-indulgence. He was blinded to the needs of Lazarus, a poor beggar who was sickly with sores and hungry for food. Both died.

The rich man went to the eternal fires of hell while Lazarus was carried by angels to eternal glory. The rich man, when he was still alive, had sewn his pockets tight and chose not to take notice of the needs of others. He thus stitched his fate by the choice he made while he was still alive.

Knowing that he had stitched his fate, the rich man wanted to warn his five brothers who most likely had the same lifestyle as he did. These five brothers represent anyone who live their lives by immersing themselves in wealth, pleasures and power.

Money is and should always remain as a resource that is used. It is not something to be hoarded for selfish needs. Let us open our eyes to the many Lazarus that are in need of our time, attention, kind words, smile, forgiveness so that we can live each day at peace with ourselves, others and God.

“At the end of our life, we will be judged on love” (St. John of the Cross)

Question for reflection:

1) What wealth can I share with those around me during Lent?

Friday, 22 March

Genesis 37:3-4,12-13,17-28, Matthew 21:33-43,45-46

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: ‘Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. “They will respect my son” he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, “This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.” So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ They answered, ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives’. Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures: It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord’s doing and it is wonderful to see? I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.’ When they heard his parables, the chief priests and the scribes realised he was speaking about them, but though they would have liked to arrest him they were afraid of the crowds, who looked on him as a prophet.

If you hear God’s voice today, harden not your heart

In this parable, Jesus is reading to us the history of the Old Testament where prophets were rejected because of their radical call to conversion and living the faith. History repeats itself in the life of Jesus and continues to happen today as well.

Today, God continues to send us his messengers to speak to us about God and his ways. He sometimes sends those we least expect to be his instrument to tell us His Good News. From a child to the cleaner in the office, God can use anybody to bring us words of truth and reminders of love. No person is too 'small' or 'insignificant' for God to use as his prophets of today.

In Jesus' time, the crowd considered Jesus as a prophet, a man of God. In contrast, the Pharisees and the religious leaders rejected him because his teachings and actions were too new, too people-orientated, instead of rule abiding. They saw him simply as the Nazarene, the son of a lowly carpenter, an itinerant preacher. They closed their hearts to his message, and thus, closed their hearts to God.

Today, let us open our hearts to the messengers He is sending our way. Let us embrace Jesus' call to faith and take joy in being able to respond with love.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I recognise that God can come and speak to me through people around me, even the most unexpected ones in my life?

Saturday, 23 March, St. Toribio de Mogrovejo
Micah 7:14-15,18-20, Luke 15:1-3,11-32

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man,' they said, 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them: 'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me". So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. 'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So he left the place and went back to his father. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate. 'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate

with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his women - you kill the calf we had been fattening." The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

God delights in showing mercy

*"What God can compare with you: taking fault away,
Pardoning crime,
Not cherishing anger for ever
But delighting in showing mercy?" (Micah 7:18)*

The father, in today's Gospel, showed a compassionate heart for his two sons who were both somehow far from home. The younger son took his part of the inheritance and strayed away by spending all on loose living. The elder son, though he stayed in the house, was working as a slave and not living his identity as his father's son.

When the younger son decided to return home after he had lost everything, he was greeted by his father who ran to him, embraced him with love and compassion.

When the elder son drew closer to his house, he found out that his brother was back and his father had a party for him. He could not understand the heart of his father. In his anger, he refused to enter the house. Yet, the father did not give up on him. The father came out of the house and invited the elder son to come back home again.

Today, let us realise that God's love for us, like the love of the father in the parable, is compassionate and merciful. Let us go back to God our Father who is waiting with open arms for us. When he sees us taking the step towards him, he will run to us with love and say, 'My child, come and rest in me. All is well and all will be well.'

Questions for reflection:

1) Which son do I identify myself with, at this point of my Lenten journey?

2) How can I draw closer to God and experience Him loving me with His compassionate and merciful love again?

Sunday, 24 March, Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 3:1-8,13-15, 1 Corinthians 10:1-6,10-12, Luke 13:1-9

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.' He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'"

The barren fig tree

When we hear news in which people suffer and die, we tend to ask: Why? Why them? Why were so many people killed in this plane crash? Why did this person die of cancer at such a young age? Why did this tragic event happen to this family? Perhaps we might even look at all the bad things that happen in our own lives and we too ask: Do I deserve this suffering? Is God punishing me for all the wrongs that I did in my life? What did I do to deserve this illness, this loss, etc?

In today's gospel, some people told Jesus about a group of Galileans who was killed by Pilate. Jesus knew that they were thinking that these unfortunate Galileans were killed because God was punishing them for the sins they had committed. Jesus did not agree with such reasoning.

“Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered in that manner were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you.”

Jesus warned the people around Him that they would eventually face death too. Would they be ready for it? Thus He told them, “...*unless you repent you will all perish as they did.*”

Jesus went on to illustrate His point with a parable of a man with a fig tree that did not produce fruit. He decided to cut it down, but his gardener pleaded to give one more year to the tree. In the meantime, he would carefully give the fruit extra care and attention.

What about us? We too would one day face our death. Are we ready for it? Today is a new day to start living a fruitful life. Instead of asking: Why? Let us ask ourselves today: How? How can we repent and change our ways so that we can bear the fruit of God’s love? How can we live a life that we have been created for?

Let Jesus be our loving gardener who will never fail to tend and nourish our lives so that we can grow mature in love and be fruitful.

Monday, 25 March, Annunciation of the Lord
Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10, Hebrews 10:4-10, Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. He went in and said to her, ‘Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.’ She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, ‘Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God’s favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?’ ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you’ the angel answered ‘and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself

conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God' 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her.

I come to obey your will, Lord

As we celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation, the 'Yes' of Mary, Jesus draws us to His Mother and calls us to contemplate and imitate her faithfulness in doing God's will.

In the Gospel passage, Mary was asked to offer her whole life to God by being the mother of His Son. Mary may not have fully understood the invitation from God when she said those words, 'I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me.' Yet, she trusted in the plan of God for her. Mary trusted because she loved God with her whole heart, mind and will.

As we approach the last weeks of Lent, we are also called by God to offer more than just external sacrifices of fasting. Like Mary, we are called to give to God our lives so that He can use us to bring goodness and love to the world. Even though we might not understand the ways of God, we continue to trust in Him.

"... this is what Christ said, on coming into the world: You, who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepare a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sins; then I said, just I was commanded in the scroll of the book, 'God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will.'" (Hebrews 10: 5-7)

Question for reflection:

1) In my following of Jesus now, how can I concretely say 'Yes' to him?

Tuesday, 26 March

Daniel 3:25,34-43, Matthew 18:21-35

Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. 'And so the kingdom

of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; but he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet. "Give me time" he said "and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him. "Pay what you owe me" he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, "Give me time and I will pay you". But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for him. "You wicked servant," he said "I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.'

Forgive as God forgives

Forgiveness has no limits! This is Jesus' message to us today. We are called to forgive again and again even though someone wrongs us repeatedly. Why? This is because God forgives us again and again when we ourselves repeatedly go away from Him because of our pride, our choice to remain by ourselves, our lack of love, etc.

Sometimes, we need to be the one taking the initiative to apologise when we are in the wrong. This is because our top priority is always to work towards reconciliation.

"I am sorry" and "I forgive" are two very essential words in order to heal wounds in relationships. Let us have concrete people in our prayer today whom we need to humbly work for reconciliation.

"Loving and forgiving are the concrete and visible signs that the faith has transformed our hearts and allows us to express in ourselves the same life of God...Loving and forgiving as God loves and forgives...This is a program of life that cannot know interruptions or exceptions, but pushes us to always go beyond without ever tiring, with the certainty of being sustained by the paternal presence of God."
(Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be an instrument of reconciliation in my relationships with my family, friends and parish community?

Wednesday, 27 March

Deuteronomy 4:1,5-9, Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'

The greatest commandment of love

"But take care what you do and be on your guard. Do not forget the things your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your heart all the days of your life; rather, tell them to your children and to your children's children." (Deuteronomy 4:9)

Jesus has come, not to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to complete them with His Law of Love. Right before He embraced His death, Jesus gave a new commandment of loving one another as He has loved.

'And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.' (John 13:34).

We must not forget and let this Law of Love slip from our heart but remember it by putting it into practice every day. Do we really want to follow Jesus? If our answer is a firm 'Yes', then we should be daring to imitate the way He loves - which is with a love that is patient, forgiving and self-giving.

It goes against our nature to love like Jesus. Thus, we need to ask Jesus for the courage to take up His simple appeal of the commandment of love, and to take small steps to love. Let us strive today to dedicate ourselves once more to put love into action!

Question for reflection:

1) What is stopping me from practising this law of love?

Thursday, 28 March

Jeremiah 7:23-28, Luke 11:14-23

Jesus was casting out a devil and it was dumb; but when the devil had gone out the dumb man spoke, and the people were amazed. But some of them 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.'

Think leniently of others

In today's Gospel passage, people saw Jesus casting out a devil from a man. They were amazed. However, their amazement did not lead them to faith, but to judge Jesus instead. They could not see goodness

in His actions and words, and even attributed His good work to Beelzebul, the chief demon.

Jesus, knowing what was in their hearts, started to reason with them that it was the finger of God, not Beelzebul, that cast the demon out from the man. Jesus was the “stronger” man because He had God’s power in Him, and thus, He had the strength to overcome evil.

Today, Jesus invites us not to look at others with judgmental eyes, but eyes of loving acceptance. When someone has something good, let us rejoice at the goodness of the person.

“And it is the Lord, it is Jesus, who is my judge. Therefore, I will try always to think leniently of others, that He may judge me leniently, or rather not at all, since He says: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.” (St. Therese of Lisieux)

Let God’s love enter and fill our hearts to the brim. In this way, we choose to love. Having God’s love in us, we will be the “stronger” ones to overcome the evils of jealousy, hatred, anger, lust, pride, etc. in us and around us.

Today, let us not harden our hearts but open our ears of faith to listen to Jesus again.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus’ personal invitation to me today?

Friday, 29 March

Hosea 14:2-10, Mark 12:28-34

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

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

Love God, Love Others

A boy saw his elder neighbour, who had just lost his wife, crying as he sat on his yard. The boy went over to the neighbour's yard and just sat there with the old man. After the boy got home, his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbour. The little boy said, "Nothing. I just cried with him." (Anonymous)

In today's Gospel, Jesus gave two commandments: Love God, Love neighbour as ourselves.

Who are our neighbours?

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

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

We are invited again today to put love into action. To love is to be with a person in his/her pain and suffering. To love is to sacrifice time to simply listen to a friend. To love is to offer words of peace instead of anger. To love is to give a smile of friendship.

In this time of Lent, let us allow ourselves first to be loved by God, and then to take small steps to love our neighbours.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I struggle to put love into action? Why?

Saturday, 30 March

Hosea 6:1-6, Luke 18:9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get." The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner". This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'

The Pharisee and the tax-collector

In today's gospel, the Pharisee stood before God and started a litany of virtues that could be heard by others around him. His prayer was fully centred on "I". In contrast, the tax collector stood apart from others, and his words were simple and directed solely to God. He merely said, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*" Tis tax collector put his hope in God's mercy and trusted that God would listen to his prayer.

Which one do we identify ourselves with? Many of us would not want to identify ourselves with the Pharisee because we do not want to be seen as arrogant. we would rather choose to identify ourselves with the tax collector.

Before we cast aside the Pharisee, let us relook at his prayer and wonder if we somehow have thoughts and prayers like his: "*Thank God, I am not like this person. I go to mass every day. I go for confession regularly. I am not like this person...that person...*" Perhaps like the Pharisee, our prayers focus on ourselves and the litany of good things we have done. We take pride secretly with our goodness and righteousness. Like him, we too put a dividing line between us and those whom we despise and look down upon.

Today's parable forces us to confront ourselves with all honesty and

see how we relate to God in prayer and how we regard others in our relationships.

We cannot enjoy God's mercy and love if we despise others. Jesus invites us to humbly come before Him with all our flaws and receive His mercy and love once again. With a renewed experience of His love, we learn to look at others with eyes of love, not judgement.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What prevents me from asking God to show me mercy and love?
- 2) Do I show mercy and love to people around me?

Sunday, 31 March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,10-13, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam (a name that means 'sent'). So the blind man went off and washed himself, and came away with his sight restored. His neighbours and people who earlier had seen him begging said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one'. Others said, 'No, he only looks like him'. The man himself said, 'I am the man'. They brought the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see'. Then some of the Pharisees said, 'This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath'. Others said, 'How could a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was disagreement among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' 'He is a prophet' replied the man. 'Are you trying to teach us,' they replied 'and you a sinner through and through, since you were born!' And they drove him away. Jesus heard they had driven him away, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' 'Sir,' the man replied 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You are looking at him; he is speaking to you'. The man said, 'Lord, I believe', and worshipped him.

Jesus, our Greatest gain

The blind man, in today's gospel, experienced the greatest miracle of his life - he regained his sight! Yet, although he regained his sight, this did not 'improve' his life. He was, in fact, left alone and cut off from his own parents who were too afraid to stand by his side and he was also driven away from the temple he loved so dearly.

Isn't this how we sometimes experience life? We get something great but the next moment, we find out that something else is being taken away. It is so easy to blame God, 'Why God? Why me?' Did the man look back and regret that moment when Jesus touched his eyes and

gave him his sight? Did he wish that Jesus had never entered his life? Did he blame God?

The man neither blamed God nor regretted the miracle he experienced. In fact, the more problems he faced with the Pharisees, the more he grew in his faith. In the end, he even reprimanded the Pharisees for their unbelief. This brave man was driven out because of his growing conviction in Jesus.

Jesus did not leave him alone. He went to look for the man and brought him into a deeper faith in God. This was the greatest gain, more than the gift of his eyesight! The man saw Jesus with eyes of faith and professed with joy, 'Lord, I believe!'

In our ups and downs in life, our gains and losses, let this man in today's gospel be our inspiration. Let us not focus on what we gain or lose here on earth, but on Jesus who comes to us and leads us always into a deeper faith in God. Jesus is the greatest treasure, our greatest gain!

'Every time there are losses there are choices to be made. You choose to live your losses as passages to anger, blame, hatred, depression and resentment, or you choose to let these losses be passages to something new, something wider, and deeper.'
(Henri Nouwen)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I allow myself to be led to a deeper faith in God?

Monday, 1 April

Isaiah 65:17-21, John 4:43-54

Jesus left Samaria for Galilee. He himself had declared that there is no respect for a prophet in his own country, but on his arrival the Galileans received him well, having seen all that he had done at Jerusalem during the festival which they too had attended. He went again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a court official there whose son was ill at Capernaum and, hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went

and asked him to come and cure his son as he was at the point of death. Jesus said, 'So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!' 'Sir,' answered the official 'come down before my child dies.' 'Go home,' said Jesus 'your son will live.' The man believed what Jesus had said and started on his way; and while he was still on the journey back his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. 'The fever left him yesterday' they said 'at the seventh hour.' The father realised that this was exactly the time when Jesus had said, 'Your son will live'; and he and all his household believed. This was the second sign given by Jesus, on his return from Judaea to Galilee.'

'Go home, your son will live'

In today's Gospel, a court official went to Jesus and begged Him to heal his son who was lying with fever at the point of death.

Jesus seemed to dismiss the man by replying, "So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!" In fact, Jesus was not addressing these words to the distressed father. Jesus was talking in plural and thus He was referring to the crowd around Him who was seeking for signs and miracles.

However, the court official desperately told Jesus, "Come down before my child dies." Once again, all he heard was Jesus' words, "Go home, your son will live." Instead of going with him, Jesus sent him away with simply the words that his son would live.

The court official chose to accept Jesus' way of healing his son. He believed and went on his way even though he was most likely troubled with uncertainty.

Faith is active; it is what we actually do and not what we know and feel.

As we draw close to Jesus, let us learn to take leaps of faith and trust in Him. Jesus responds to us in ways that we might not understand but we still continue to walk on with trust.

Question for reflection:

1) In this Lenten journey, how can I choose to take the leap of faith in the concrete situations I am facing?

Tuesday, 2 April
Ezekiel 47:1-9, John 5:1-16

There was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now at the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem there is a building, called Bethzatha in Hebrew, consisting of five porticos; and under these were crowds of sick people - blind, lame, paralysed. One man there had an illness which had lasted thirty-eight years, and when Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been in this condition for a long time, he said, 'Do you want to be well again?' 'Sir,' replied the sick man 'I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way someone else gets there before me.' Jesus said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk'. The man was cured at once, and he picked up his mat and walked away. Now that day happened to be the Sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the Sabbath; you are not allowed to carry your sleeping-mat'. He replied, 'But the man who cured me told me, "Pick up your mat and walk"'. They asked, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Pick up your mat and walk"?' The man had no idea who it was, since Jesus had disappeared into the crowd that filled the place. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said, 'Now you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you'. The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had cured him. It was because he did things like this on the Sabbath that the Jews began to persecute Jesus.

'Do you want to be well again?'

Jesus saw a crippled man by the pool, and he went up to him and asked, 'Do you want to be well again?' Reading this line, we might think that Jesus was asking the obvious! Who wouldn't want to be well again? Yet this is not true. Oftentimes, when a person has been "crippled" for so long, trapped in a particular way of life that handicaps one from growing and moving forward, habit and fear prevent one from "wanting to be well again."

Jesus asks this question because He knows the heart of each person. Perhaps the crippled man might not really want to be healed. He was crippled for 38 years and might be comfortable in his condition. He might have fears of what it meant to be well again. If he was to really

get well, he would have to look for a job and sustain himself and try to fit into society once more. Life would surely become more complicated.

We are like the crippled man sometimes. Fear of what it means to be well again, what it means to be free again, what it means to follow Jesus radically, etc. keeps us from fully and completely choosing Jesus in every aspect of our lives. We are afraid of changing what we are already comfortable with.

Today, Jesus is asking us, 'Do you want to be well again?' This question implies choosing a different way -- new challenges, an uncertain future, letting go of living in our comfort zones, etc. Jesus wants to heal us and make us well again, whole again, free again, happy again, fruitful again. We are not meant to be crippled in our life of faith.

The words of Jesus to the crippled man are meant for us today, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping mat and walk.' In this time of Lent, let us take the courage to "be well again."

Wednesday, 3 April

Isaiah 49:8-15, John 5:17-30

Jesus said to the Jews, 'My Father goes on working, and so do I'. But that only made the Jews even more intent on killing him, because, not content with breaking the Sabbath, he spoke of God as his own Father, and so made himself God's equal. To this accusation Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing: and whatever the Father does the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself, and he will show him even greater things than these, works that will astonish you. Thus, as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to anyone he chooses; for the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father. Whoever refuses honour to the Son refuses honour to the Father who sent him. I tell you most solemnly, whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life; without being brought to judgement he has passed from death to life. I tell you most solemnly, the hour will come - in fact it is here already - when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and all who hear it will live. For the Father, who is the source of life, has made the Son the source of life; and, because he is the Son of Man, has appointed him supreme judge. Do not be surprised at this, for the hour is coming when the dead will leave their graves at the sound of his voice: those who did good will rise again to life; and those who did evil, to condemnation. I can do nothing by myself; I can only judge as I am told to judge, and my judging is just, because my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.'

Working for God

In the first reading, we hear God telling us, "Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the son of her womb? Yet, even if these forget, I will never forget you." (Isaiah 49:15)

As we continue on this Lenten journey, let us hold onto these words of God that we are never forgotten by Him. Regardless of the circumstances we might be living in, God never abandons us. He is with us in order to give us the strength to journey on.

'My Father goes on working, and so do I'

Jesus knew at this point of His mission that He was not accepted by the Jewish leaders. He experienced rejections and persecutions from them. Jesus, however, lived His life depending on His Father and not on the approval of others. Out of love, He sought only to do the will of God. Even when others did not understand Him, Jesus never stopped working for God His Father. He never stopped doing good and loving others.

We are sons and daughters of God. This is the reality that we have to root ourselves securely in. We too are called to work for God and live a life doing good and loving like Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) 'My Father goes on working and so do I'- what work have I been entrusted to do by God the Father?

**Thursday, 4 April, St. Isidore of Seville
Exodus 32:7-14, John 5:31-47**

Jesus said to the Jews: 'Were I to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid; but there is another witness who can speak on my behalf, and I know that his testimony is valid. You sent messengers to John, and he gave his testimony to the truth: not that I depend on human testimony; no, it is for your salvation that I speak of this. John was a lamp alight and shining and for a time you were content to enjoy the light that he gave. But my testimony is greater than John's: the works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me. Besides, the Father who sent me bears witness to me himself. You have never heard his voice, you have never seen his shape, and his word finds no home in you because you do not believe in the one he has sent. 'You study the scriptures, believing that in them you have eternal life; now these same scriptures testify to me, and yet you refuse to come to me for life! As for human approval, this means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you. I have come in the name of my Father and you refuse to accept me; if someone else comes in his own name you will accept him. How can you believe, since you look to one another for approval and are not

concerned with the approval that comes from the one God? Do not imagine that I am going to accuse you before the Father: you place your hopes on Moses, and Moses will be your accuser. If you really believed him you would believe me too, since it was I that he was writing about; but if you refuse to believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?’

People pleaser or God pleaser?

“As for human approval, this means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you.”

Jesus was addressing these words to the Jewish authorities whose hearts were so full of self-righteous pride and self-love that the Word of God could not find a home in them. Jesus saw their hearts and knew that they were insecure with God’s love because they neither knew Him nor had a personal relationship with Him. Thus, they sought the approval of human beings more than God’s.

Look at our own lives. We want affirmation and appreciation. We want others to approve the things we do and words we say. Seeking people’s approvals make us into people-pleasers and live in a state of insecurity.

We tend to forget that we are loved deeply and unconditionally by God. He freely gives us His acceptance and love. In Him, we find our desire for love and approval complete. In Him, we find our security. This Lent, let us go back to God again and humbly let Him love us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there someone from whom I am seeking constant approval?
- 2) How can I live freely to seek God’s approval rather than humans’?

Friday, 5 April, St. Vincent Ferrer
Wisdom 2:1,12-22, John 7:1-2,10,25-30

Jesus stayed in Galilee; he could not stay in Judaea, because the Jews were out to kill him. As the Jewish feast of Tabernacles drew near. However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went up as well, but quite privately, without drawing attention to himself. Meanwhile some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Isn't this the man they want to kill? And here he is, speaking freely, and they have nothing to say to him! Can it be true the authorities have made up their minds that he is the Christ? Yet we all know where he comes from, but when the Christ appears no one will know where he comes from. Then, as Jesus taught in the Temple, he cried out: 'Yes, you know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of myself: no, there is one who sent me and I really come from him, and you do not know him, but I know him because I have come from him and it was he who sent me.' They would have arrested him then, but because his time had not yet come no one laid a hand on him.

Jesus' commitment to the mission in the face of conflict

The Jews were waiting to capture and eliminate Jesus as soon as they had the chance. Yet, the gospel tells us that Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles despite the threat of death. Jesus could have stayed in Galilee and hide somewhere safe where no one could find him. Why did he put himself in danger? Why did he go to Jerusalem, the hub of all Jewish authority? This was because Jesus' only desire was to carry on his mission. He saw the urgency of preaching and teaching the people about God, His Father.

Jesus was a person who was committed to preaching the message of God and bringing His love to the people, even in the midst of great difficulties. Nothing and nobody could remove him from living His life for God, his Father.

As Christians, we are all called to live the mission of living out Christ-like values of love, compassion, peace, unity and forgiveness. We are all invited to stand up and speak the Truth in the face of injustice. We are called to be different in the way we work, speak and live our lives.

Yet, it is so easy to run away from this mission when we are faced with disapproval or rejection from others.

As we come closer to the end of this Lenten season, let us learn to contemplate on Jesus' life and learn from Him what it means to be committed Christians who live out our Christian mission even in the face of conflicts.

Question for reflection:

1) What holds me back from truly living my mission of living the Good News of love entrusted to me by Jesus?

Saturday, 6 April

Jeremiah 11:18-20, John 7:40-52

Several people who had been listening to Jesus said, 'Surely he must be the prophet', and some said, 'He is the Christ', but others said, 'Would the Christ be from Galilee? Does not scripture say that the Christ must be descended from David and come from the town of Bethlehem?' So the people could not agree about him. Some would have liked to arrest him, but no one actually laid hands on him. The police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought him?' The police replied, 'There has never been anybody who has spoken like him'. 'So' the Pharisees answered 'you have been led astray as well? Have any of the authorities believed in him? Any of the Pharisees? This rabble knows nothing about the Law - they are damned.' One of them, Nicodemus - the same man who had come to Jesus earlier - said to them, 'But surely the Law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?' To this they answered, 'Are you a Galilean too? Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not come out of Galilee.'

Taking a stand

Jesus caused divisions among the people who had been listening to Him. Some of them had insufficient evidence about Jesus being a prophet. Some went further and claimed that He was the Christ, the long awaited Messiah. This group was right in their perception but they were not committed to take the step to follow Jesus. Another group

was the chief priests and the Pharisees who were determined to condemn Jesus because they claimed that He broke the law.

The only person who truly stood up to defend Jesus was Nicodemus, the Pharisee who went to Jesus at night and entered into a dialogue with Him (John 3). Surely, Nicodemus was impressed then by Jesus and kept a deep respect for Him in secret as he feared the comments of his fellow Pharisees. At that moment, Nicodemus felt that he needed to do something to help soothe the hatred of those around him, and so he said, "But surely the Law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?" In response, they piled insults on him.

Finally, Nicodemus took a stand and associated himself with Jesus when he and Joseph of Arimathea went to request for Jesus' body and buried Him later in a tomb (John 19:38-42).

A real encounter with Jesus requires us not just to have opinions about who we think He is, but to make a decision to really take a stand and follow Him, even if we face ridicule and rejection from others. We cannot sit on the fence anymore but have to allow Jesus to influence the way we live our life each day.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I make a stand and follow Jesus faithfully?

Sunday, 7 April, Fifth Sunday of Lent
Ezekiel 37:12-14, Romans 8:8-11, John 11:1-45

The sisters sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill'. On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will end not in death but in God's glory, and through it the Son of God will be glorified'. Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judaea'. On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathize with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you'. 'Your brother' said Jesus to her 'will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day'. Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' Jesus said in great distress, with a sigh that came straight from the heart, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man, could he not prevented this man's death?' Still sighing, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha said to him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: 'Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I knew indeed that you always hear me, but I speak for the sake of all these who stand round me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me.' When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, here! Come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with bands of stuff and a cloth round his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free'. Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what he did believed in him.

Do you believe?

“Seeing Martha and Mary and those who had come to console them weeping, Jesus “was deeply moved in spirit and troubled,” and lastly, “wept” (John 11:33, 35). Christ’s heart is divine-human: in him God and man meet perfectly, without separation and without confusion. He is the image, or rather, the incarnation of God who is love, mercy, paternal and maternal tenderness, of God who is Life. Therefore, he solemnly declared to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.” And he adds, “Do you believe this?” (11:25-26). It is a question that Jesus addresses to each one of us: a question that certainly rises above us, rises above our capacity to understand, and it asks us to entrust ourselves to him as he entrusted himself to the Father. Martha’s response is exemplary: “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world” (11:27). Yes, O Lord! We also believe, notwithstanding our doubts and darkness; we believe in you because you have the words of eternal life. We want to believe in you, who give us a trustworthy hope of life beyond life, of authentic and full life in your kingdom of light and peace.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

At moments in our life, we can be spiritually dead in the same way that Lazarus was physically dead. Jesus wants to give us the gift of eternal life which starts the moment we choose to live in a relationship of love with God. Therefore, He comes to us and wants to break the bonds of sin that bind us tightly and make us live in the darkness of the tomb, instead of the light of God’s presence.

Today, let us draw close to Jesus, the incarnation of God who is love, mercy and tenderness. He comes to us and calls us to entrust ourselves to Him. Let us tell Jesus, “Lord, I want to believe in You!”

Questions for reflection:

1) Which word/phrase strikes me most as I pray with this Gospel passage? Why?

Monday, 8 April

Daniel 13:1-9,15-17,19-30,33-62, John 8:12-20

Jesus spoke to the Pharisees again. "I am the light of the world," he said. "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness." The Pharisees said to him, "Now you are testifying on your own behalf; what you say proves nothing." "No," Jesus answered, "even though I do testify on my own behalf, what I say is true, because I know where I came from and where I am going. You do not know where I came from or where I am going. You make judgments in a purely human way; I pass judgment on no one. But if I were to do so, my judgment would be true, because I am not alone in this; the Father who sent me is with me. It is written in your Law that when two witnesses agree, what they say is true. I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me also testifies on my behalf." "Where is your father?" they asked him. "You know neither me nor my Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." Jesus said all this as he taught in the Temple, in the room where the offering boxes were placed. And no one arrested him, because his hour had not come.

Jesus, the Light of the world

"I am the light of the world: anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; he will have the light of life."

Today, we are called to step into the light of Christ and remain there. Only in His light will all pretences, hypocrisy, pride, sadness and misery melt away, and we will experience ourselves being loved for who we are - i.e. children of God. His gentle light has the power to expose the darkness of sins in us as well as heal us of our sinful infirmities within us. His light brings warmth with God's love and leads us to walk in the truth.

Do we dare to step into the light of Christ and let His illuminating love reveal all the darkness we have within? Do we allow His light to touch and heal us? Do we let His light lead us?

The Pharisees, in today's Gospel, refused to step into the light but

preferred to remain hardened in the darkness. They judged according to human standards - i.e. their prejudices and personal interests. What about us? Do we judge others according to our human standards? Are our hearts hardened against others because of the judgments we make?

Lord, guide my feet to enter deeper into Your light of truth and love. I want to live my life, not in darkness, but in Your light of life

Tuesday, 9 April

Numbers 21:4-9, John 8:21-30

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'I am going away; you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' The Jews said to one another, 'Will he kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' Jesus went on: 'You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I have told you already: You will die in your sins. Yes, if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.' So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus answered: 'What I have told you from the outset. About you I have much to say and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is truthful, and what I have learnt from him I declare to the world.' They failed to understand that he was talking to them about the Father. So Jesus said: 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of myself: what the Father has taught me is what I preach; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him'. As he was saying this, many came to believe in him.

I have come from God and am going to God

In today's Gospel, Jesus told the Pharisees that He was going away. The Pharisees, however, did not understand what He meant. In fact, Jesus was talking about His return to God His Father. He told Mary Magdala, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' (John 20:17) Jesus told the Pharisees that they could not go to where He was going, i.e. to His Father, because they had closed their hearts to him and refused to believe in Him.

"...He who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself..."

Jesus' security was that God His Father would never leave Him to be by Himself in every moment of His life.

Our life is also a journey back to God the Father, and we are called to walk the same path that Jesus has left for us. With Jesus opening the way to the Father, we walk without tying ourselves to any obstacles of greed, worldly ambitions, accumulation of wealth, etc. As Jesus' disciples, we choose to walk through this life by carrying a baggage

full of trust and faith in God alone. We journey through life with the daily desire to do what pleases God.

Like Jesus, God will never leave us alone by ourselves, but He will always stay close to us and walk with us in our journey. As we get closer to Holy Week, let us fix our eyes on Jesus!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus telling me as I reflect on His Word today?

Wednesday, 10 April

Daniel 3:14-20,91-92,95, John 8:31-42

To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: 'If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free'. They answered, 'We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, "You will be made free"?'. Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now the slave's place in the house is not assured, but the son's place is assured. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descended from Abraham; but in spite of that you want to kill me because nothing I say has penetrated into you. What I; for my part, speak of is what I have seen with my Father; but you, you put into action the lessons learnt from your father.' They repeated, 'Our father is Abraham'. Jesus said to them: 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do as Abraham did. As it is, you want to kill me when I tell you the truth as I have learnt it from God; that is not what Abraham did. What you are doing is what your father does.' 'We were not born of prostitution,' they went on 'we have one father: God.' Jesus answered: 'If God were your father, you would love me, since I have come here from God; yes, I have come from him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent, and by him.'

Chosen and sent

"...since I have come here from God; yes, I have come from him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent, and by him."

Jesus knew that He had come from God and sent by Him on a mission to share the joy of God's love and mercy. Despite the many rejections

by those around Him, Jesus continued to communicate, through His words and actions, the Good News of love.

As Christians, we too have been chosen by God and sent by Him to become missionaries of the Gospel. He chose us and sent us because He loves and trusts us. Sometimes, we tend to consider ourselves unworthy, unlearned and unimportant to be chosen and sent by God as His instrument of love.

Look at the following sentences:

"Vvxn though this typxwritxr is an old modxl, it works vxry wxll, xxcxpt for only onx kxy. You'd think that with all the othxr kxys working, onx kxy would hardly bx noticxd. But just onx kxy out of which sxxms to ruin thx wholx xffort. Havx you vxvr said to yoursxlf, "I'm only onx pxrson. No onx will noticx if I don't do my bxst." But it doxs makx a diffxrxncx, bxcausx to bx xffctive, a family, an organization or a businxs nxxds complxtx participation by vxvryone to the bxst of his or hxr ability. So if You'rx having onx of thosx days whxn you think you just arxn't vxry important and you'rx txmptxd to slack off, rxmxmbxr this old typxwritxr. You arx a kxy pxrson, and whxn you don't do your bxst, nothing xlsx around you works out thx way it's supposxd to." (Unknown)

The letter 'E' is missing and yet it makes a difference. Likewise, if we are not serious in living our mission as Christians because we think that we are unimportant and come up with all kinds of excuses as to why we cannot possibly be used by God. Think again! The unexplained love of God our Father called, chose and sent us to continue the same mission of Jesus, His Son. He wants to work through us and bring His message of love to the world today!

Question for reflection:

1) Will I allow God to use my life as His instrument to bring His message of love to those around me?

Thursday, 11 April, St. Stanislaus
Genesis 17:3-9, John 8:51-59

Jesus said to the Jews: 'I tell you most solemnly, whoever keeps my word will never see death.' The Jews said, 'Now we know for certain that you are possessed. Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead, and yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never know the taste of death". Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? The prophets are dead too. Who are you claiming to be?' Jesus answered: 'If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all; my glory is conferred by the Father, by the one of whom you say, "He is our God" although you do not know him. But I know him, and if I were to say: I do not know him, I should be a liar, as you are liars yourselves. But I do know him, and I faithfully keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see my Day; he saw it and was glad.' The Jews then said, 'You are not fifty yet, and you have seen Abraham!' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, before Abraham ever was, I Am'. At this they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

Stop picking stones to throw...

"At this they picked up stones to throw at him..."

The Jews picked up stones to throw at Jesus with the intention to kill Him. Their hardened hearts could not understand the works and words of Jesus. Most of all, they could not accept Jesus for who he is.

In the relationships we have with others, do we also pick up stones to throw at others out of anger, hatred and jealousy?

We might not pick up physical stones to throw at people but we might say an angry word, spread rumours, give cold treatment, carry resentment, criticize, etc. By doing this, we are imitating the actions of the Jews of picking and throwing stones all over again.

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (Ephesians 4:31)

We can never imagine Jesus picking up stones to throw at anyone. Let us ask Jesus to change our hearts to love like Him.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus inviting me to do in this time of prayer?

Do not forget
that true love
sets no conditions;
it does not calculate
or complain,
but simply loves.

Pope John Paul II



Friday, 12 April

Jeremiah 20:10-13, John 10:31-42

The Jews fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them, 'I have done many good works for you to see, works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?' The Jews answered him, 'We are not stoning you for doing a good work but for blasphemy: you are only a man and you claim to be God.' Jesus answered: 'Is it not written in your Law: I said, you are gods? So the Law uses the word gods of those to whom the word of God was addressed, and scripture cannot be rejected. Yet you say to someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming", because he says, "I am the son of God". If I am not doing my Father's work, there is no need to believe me; but if I am doing it, then even if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for sure that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' They wanted to arrest him then, but he eluded them. He went back again to the far side of the Jordan to stay in the district where John had once been baptising. Many people who came to him there said, 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true'; and many of them believed in him.

I believe!

"...you will know for sure that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

Jesus' declaration that He and the Father are one made the Jews see red because He was blaspheming.

Jesus, knowing the hardened hearts of His listeners, asked them to judge Him by His works, and not just His words. As the saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words".

We too, as Christians, are called to allow our actions to reflect the authenticity of our words.

Every act, every doing, every gesture, every movement must make clear the goodness and love we carry in our hearts.

The Jews chose not to believe in Jesus, His words and even His works. The simple people across Jordan, however, saw the works of

Jesus and many believed in him. What is our stand today? Do we believe?

If we believe, then is it time for us to start living our faith by our words and deeds?

Question for reflection:

1) How can I put my faith into action today?

**Saturday, 13 April, St. Martin I
Ezekiel 37:21-28, John 11:45-56**

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him, but some of them went to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting. 'Here is this man working all these signs' they said 'and what action are we taking? If we let him go on in this way everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy the Holy Place and our nation.' One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, 'You don't seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed'. He did not speak in his own person, it was as high priest that he made this prophecy that Jesus was to die for the nation - and not for the nation only, but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God. From that day they were determined to kill him. So Jesus no longer went about openly among the Jews, but left the district for a town called Ephraim, in the country bordering on the desert, and stayed there with his disciples. The Jewish Passover drew near, and many of the country people who had gone up to Jerusalem to purify themselves looked out for Jesus, saying to one another as they stood about in the Temple, 'What do you think? Will he come to the festival or not?'

Open your minds and hearts

Intolerance and fundamentalism between individuals and groups are getting more frequent in our society. The increasing diversity makes us look at each other with fear and discrimination, rather than acceptance and openness.

In today's passage, some Jewish people and their leaders, out of intolerance and fundamentalism, schemed to kill Jesus who stuck out like a sore thumb with His different beliefs and ideas. Narrow-mindedness made them disregard Jesus as a fellow human being who deserved their respect.

'...that it is better for one man to die for the people' These words of Caiaphas sealed Jesus' fate.

What about us? Do we dare to live the value of respect and love beyond all differences? Do we, out of intolerance, try to 'kill' those with different skin colour, ideals, beliefs, etc, by our indifferent attitudes and bigotry?

'Let us break our heart open and believe in the Gospel, not in the fake Gospel, not in the light Gospel, not in the watershed Gospel, but in the Gospel of truth.' (Pope Francis)

As Christians, we are called to open and believe in the Gospel of truth that pushes us out to look beyond differences and respect each person, whatever their skin colour, practices, ideas, etc., as a child of God.

Today, let us break our heart open and stand for life, not death!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I struggle to look at people, especially those who are different from me, with respect and love?

Sunday, 14 April, Palm Sunday

Isaiah 50:4-7, Philippians 2:6-11, Luke 19:28-40

Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near Bethphage and Bethany, close by the Mount of Olives as it is called, he sent two of the disciples, telling them, 'Go off to the village opposite, and as you enter it you will find a tethered colt that no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" you are to say this, "The Master needs it".' The messengers went off and found everything just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owner said, 'Why are you untying

that colt?’ and they answered, ‘The Master needs it’. So they took the colt to Jesus, and throwing their garments over its back they helped Jesus on to it. As he moved off, people spread their cloaks in the road, and now, as he was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole group of disciples joyfully began to praise God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen. They cried out: ‘Blessings on the King who comes, in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!’ Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, ‘Master, check your disciples’, but he answered, ‘I tell you, if these keep silence the stones will cry out’.

Can you hear the stones?

People spread their cloaks on the road, and the whole group of disciples joyfully praised God at the top of their voices. The Pharisees, however, found the whole scene embarrassing, loudish and unrefined. They asked Jesus to tell His disciples to be quiet. Jesus told them, *“I tell you, if these keep silence the stones will cry out.”*

The Good News could never be silenced or killed. This was what happened to Jesus’ disciples. After they experienced the power of Jesus’ resurrection, they came out from their hiding place and spread the Good News to the whole world.

As Jesus’ friends, we too cannot be silent. We will cry out with our words that we have a God who loves us so much. We will shout out with our actions that God cares. We will joyfully speak out the actions of God in our own lives.

Do we dare to shout even when we face hostility? Will we be silent to please those around us?

Today, as we enter into Jerusalem with Jesus our humble King, let us join in the crowds, shouting, *“Blessings on the King who comes, in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens!”*

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I play it safe by keeping quiet and not sharing my faith in Jesus and my love for Him with others?

2) Are there 'stones' in my life who are shouting? How can they inspire me to do the same?



Monday, 15 April

Isaiah 42:1-7, John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot - one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him - said, 'Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions. So Jesus said, 'Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me.' Meanwhile a large number of Jews heard that he was there and came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Then the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.

Be patient with all things...

"God's infinite patience with man is reflected in the infinite patience that Jesus has with Judas. This is shown in the scene of the Gospel in which Judas criticizes the decision of Mary, Lazarus's sister, to anoint the feet of Jesus with three hundred grams of priceless ointment; it would have been better, Judas says, to have sold the ointment and given the proceeds to the poor. John notes in his Gospel that Judas was not interested in the poor but in the money, which he stole. And yet "Jesus did not say to him: 'You are a thief.' He was patient with Judas, seeking to draw him to himself with his patience, with his love. It would do us good to think about the patience of God during this Holy Week, about the Lord's patience with us, with our weaknesses, with our sins." (Pope Francis)

Jesus is an example of patience for us. Many times, we tend to get irritated and impatient with others, especially with their imperfections. Our impatience with others reflects also our own impatience with ourselves and our weaknesses and sins.

“Have patience with all things, but chiefly have patience with yourself. Do not lose courage in considering your own imperfections, but instantly set about remedying them – every day begin the task anew.”
(St. Francis de Sales)

Let us contemplate on Jesus as He patiently loved Judas even though He knew his heart was full of greed and pride. He patiently sat and enjoyed the time with Lazarus, Mary and Martha even though He knew that His hour would soon come. Let us be grateful to Jesus for His love that is always so patient and strive to imitate His patience with ourselves and with others.

Question for reflection:

1) What am I provoked to do as I contemplate on the patient love of God?

Tuesday, 16 April

Isaiah 49:1-6, John 13:21-33,36-38

While at supper with his disciples, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, ‘I tell you most solemnly, one of you will betray me’. The disciples looked at one another, wondering which he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter signed to him and said, ‘Ask who it is he means’, so leaning back on Jesus’ breast he said, ‘Who is it, Lord?’ ‘It is the one’ replied Jesus ‘to whom I give the piece of bread that I shall dip in the dish.’ He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus then said, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly’. None of the others at table understood the reason he said this. Since Judas had charge of the common fund, some of them thought Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the festival’, or telling him to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. Night had fallen. When he had gone Jesus said: ‘Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. ‘My little children, I shall not be with you much longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you

cannot come. Simon Peter said, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now; you will follow me later'. Peter said to him, 'Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' 'Lay down your life for me?' answered Jesus. 'I tell you most solemnly, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'

Friends

"When Judas leaves the upper room to betray Jesus, outside — as the evangelist John states — it is night." This remark on the setting leads to a brief reflection that urges us to plumb the depths of the human conscience. The night that envelops Judas is also the night in which his heart is stumbling about. It is the worst night, the "night of the corrupted," a "definitive night, when the heart is closed" in such a way that "it cannot and does not want to come out" from itself. The "night of the sinner" is different; this is a "temporary" night that we all "experience." How many of these nights "have we had," how many "times when the 'night' comes and it is pitch black in the heart . . ." Then hope bursts through and drives us to a new encounter with Jesus." (Pope Francis)

Jesus continued to love Judas and gave him the freedom to choose his path. Judas chose to enter into the darkness of night and sold His Master for 30 silver pieces.

Peter, another key character in this passage would deny Jesus even though he had zealously affirmed that he would follow Jesus to wherever he was heading. Jesus knew the sincere heart of Peter but He also knew that Peter would disown Him three times. Yet, Jesus never gave up on Peter. Jesus knew that he would one day give his life for Him but that night would not be the right moment.

In the same way, Jesus is patient and has high hopes for each of us, despite our weaknesses. He calls us 'Friends' and waits for us, in our own time, to pick up our cross and follow him with joy and love.

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 17 April

Isaiah 50:4-9, Matthew 26:14-25

One of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray him. Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' 'Go to so-and-so in the city' he replied 'and say to him, "The Master says: My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with my disciples."' The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover. When evening came he was at table with the twelve disciples. And while they were eating he said 'I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me' They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, 'Not I, Lord, surely?' He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me, will betray me. The Son of Man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' Judas, who was to betray him; asked in his turn, 'Not I, Rabbi, surely?' 'They are your own words' answered Jesus.

Judas

Judas has much to teach us about betrayal. We might think that we do not betray anyone and much less Jesus. Let us rethink.

The betrayal of Jesus continues today in many other ways. When a spouse betrays his/her marriage vows, when a Christian betrays his/her conscience, when a person works hard to gain the world's approval, when someone spreads gossip, etc. all these are moments when we open our hands to receive our 'thirty silver pieces' and betray Jesus all over again.

Jesus knew that Judas has chosen to betray Him. Jesus, however, had never stopped loving Him. In the scene of the Last Supper, Jesus bent down and gently washed the feet of his disciples, including Judas'. He loved his friends unconditionally.

Today, let us contemplate on Jesus who never gives up on any of us even though we choose to walk away from His love. Let us root ourselves in Jesus' faithful love!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I have true love for those around me?

Thursday, 18 April, The Lord's Supper

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14, 1 Corinthians 11:23-36, John 13:1-15

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand'. 'Never!' said Peter 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me'. 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'

You should wash each other's feet...

We have the tendency to be preoccupied with our self-esteem and self-love. In the Gospel passage, Jesus knew that He would soon suffer the passion of the cross. Instead of being preoccupied with His death, He chose to love His disciples, one by one, personally by bending down to wash their feet.

"...now he showed how perfect his love was..."

What about us? How do we love? Our love cannot just be words but should be expressed in concrete actions. "My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action." (1 John 3:18)

It is not easy also for us to be at the feet of the people whom we find difficult to love. Yet, Jesus, our Master, calls us once more to imitate His example of perfect love.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, what prevents me from following Jesus way of loving?

Friday, 19 April, Passion of the Lord

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9, John 18:1-19:42

... Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son. Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home. After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the scripture perfectly he said: 'I am thirsty'. A jar-full of vinegar stood there, so putting a sponge soaked in the vinegar on a hyssop stick they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the vinegar he said, 'It is accomplished'; and bowing his head he gave up his spirit.

Do you hear... "I thirst"?

As we contemplate Jesus on the cross, let us listen to His cry, "I thirst".

This cry of Jesus continues to address each one of us today. We look at ourselves and wonder how is it possible to quench the thirst of Jesus today.

Jesus thirsts for us to give our love to Him by dedicating more time to pray and listening attentively to His words. Many times, we busy ourselves with so many activities and projects that we forget to simply be still and know that Jesus is with us. We are not aware that Jesus

wants to give us His peace. Thus, Jesus cries out to us, "I thirst". Do we hear Him?

Jesus thirsts for us to give our love to our brothers and sisters around us. He continues to thirst in the people suffering from injustice, in the elderly hungering for attention, in the sick suffering in pain, etc. He continues to thirst in a loved one whom we have no time for, in a friend who is searching for love, in a child who needs a listening ear.

Jesus was thirsty while hanging on the cross at Calvary. Today, He continues to thirst for us.

In this time of prayer, let us dare to truly listen to Jesus and respond to Him with our life.

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus on the cross inviting me to quench His thirst today?

Saturday, 20 April, Holy Saturday

Genesis 1:1-2:2 or 1:1,26-31, Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2,9,10-13,15-18, Exodus 14:15-15:1, Isaiah 54:5-14, Isaiah 55:1-11, Baruch 3:9-15,32-4:4, Ezekiel 36:16-17,18-28, Romans 6:3-11, Luke 24:1-12

On the first day of the week, at the first sign of dawn, the women went to the tomb with the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, but on entering discovered that the body of the Lord Jesus was not there. As they stood there not knowing what to think, two men in brilliant clothes suddenly appeared at their side. Terrified, the women lowered their eyes. But the two men said to them, 'Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here; he has risen. Remember what he told you when he was still in Galilee: that the Son of Man had to be handed over into the power of sinful men and be crucified, and rise again on the third day?' And they remembered his words. When the women returned from the tomb they told all this to the Eleven and to all the others. The women were Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. The other women with them also told the apostles, but this story of theirs seemed pure nonsense, and they did not believe them. Peter, however, went running to the tomb. He bent down and saw the

binding cloths but nothing else; he then went back home, amazed at what had happened.

He is not here, He has risen!

How many times do we keep thinking that Jesus is buried behind a sealed tomb, and thus we live through life without hope? How many of us attend Mass faithfully on weekends, and even every single day, but we do not really believe that Jesus is alive?

“Why look among the dead for someone who is alive? He is not here, he has risen. Remember what he told you when he was still in Galilee...”

Jesus is alive! He lives with us every moment of our life. He cares for us in good and bad times. It is up to us to believe that Jesus is risen and is with us or that He is still buried in the sealed tomb. Believing in the risen Lord gives us hope to walk on despite the various pessimistic and hopeless situations we face in our life.

Today, let us listen to Jesus as He tells us: I am here. I am with you always. I am alive.

“Let the risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk: you won’t be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don’t be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do” (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) What is the Risen Lord’s message to me in this time of prayer?

Sunday, 21 April, Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34,37-43, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20:1-9

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

Awakened faith

Easter is here again. We are so familiar with celebrating Easter year in and year out that it can be reduced to a mere liturgical routine. We fail to appreciate the gift of Jesus' resurrection. Let us not take Easter for granted. Today, we celebrate the beautiful joyous reality that Jesus has been raised by God from death to life. The tomb is empty! Alleluia, He is alive!

"It is not just a return to life but entering into God's very life. And possessing God's life, Jesus is no longer confined to and determined by time and space. He can enter closed doors. He can penetrate closed and fearful hearts. He can walk with us, even if we do not recognize him. Oh, the life with God." (Cardinal Tagle)

Today, we do not just commemorate an event of Jesus' life. Rather, our faith must be awakened and we must believe again that Jesus is alive and is with us. Because Christ is risen, we can look at the events in our lives, even the negative and painful ones, with eyes of hope.

In today's gospel passage, the three disciples saw the empty tomb. We were told of the reaction of the other disciple. "...he saw and he believed."

What was it that he saw that he believed? He saw with his heart and made the connection between the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection. This invoked faith in him.

Let our faith be awakened and let us have the hope that Jesus, who is alive, walks with us today

Question for reflection:

1) What does Easter mean experientially for me?

Monday, 22 April, Monday within the Octave of Easter

Acts 2:14,22-23, Matthew 28:8-15

Filled with awe and great joy the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples. And there, coming to meet them, was Jesus. 'Greetings' he said. And the women came up to him and, falling down before him, clasped his feet. Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers that they must leave for Galilee; they will see me there'. While they were on their way, some of the guard went off into the city to tell the chief priests all that had happened. These held a meeting with the elders and, after some discussion, handed a considerable sum of money to the soldiers with these instructions, 'This is what you must say, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep". And should the governor come to hear of this, we undertake to put things right with him ourselves and to see that you do not get into trouble.' The soldiers took the money and carried out their instructions, and to this day that is the story among the Jews.

Witnesses of Jesus' story

When the chief priests and the elders heard about the empty tomb, they decided to change the story and claimed that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body. They gave money to the soldiers so that they would spread their version of the story.

Yet, the story of the empty tomb, the story of Jesus' resurrection will never go away. It continues to bring great joy to our hearts, like the women who first saw the risen Lord.

Interestingly, Jesus appeared first to his women disciples. When they saw the empty tomb, they quickly ran to tell the rest of the disciples. However, along the way, they met Jesus who spoke to them and told them to announce the Good News to His disciples.

Women, in the time of Jesus, were seen as insignificant people. The testimony of women carried no value. Then, why did Jesus appear to them first and not to the male disciples? The story of the empty tomb would be more believable if Jesus had appeared to Peter or John or any of the male disciples first. Why didn't Jesus appear to the soldiers who were guarding the tomb? If He had appeared to them, the story that they would tell would be more believable. Who would believe the story of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary?

Yet, the risen Lord came first to the meek and humble ones, to the ones who faithfully stood at His cross and risked their lives to approach the tomb early on Easter morning. Jesus valued their faithfulness and so they became the first witnesses of this amazing story of His resurrection.

Today, the risen Jesus tells us to carry the story of His resurrection in our hearts and to be joyful witnesses to this amazing story that He is not dead, but alive in our lives.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I, through my words and actions, a credible witness to the resurrection story?

**Tuesday, 23 April, Tuesday within the Octave of Easter
Acts 2:36-41, John 20:11-18**

Meanwhile Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away' she replied 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the

gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him'. Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' - which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

Where is my Lord?

Mary of Magdala was overcome with deep grief and wept bitterly at the missing body of her beloved Master. She was totally consumed by her grief that she missed recognising Jesus, alive and no longer dead. What about us?

Many times, our focus is on our work, money, latest gadgets, in pleasures, greed, selfishness, pride and other distractions that we do not bother to concentrate on Jesus. We live our lives chasing dreams that do not make us fully happy. Amidst all our busyness and distractions, we fail to recognise Jesus our Risen Saviour calling us by our name, inviting us to take the step to follow Him again.


Where is my Lord? Mary's question expressed her heart's desire. She simply wanted Jesus and nothing else.

We, on the other hand, are more concerned perhaps with: Where is my money? Where is my job leading me? Where are the affirmations and praises from people? Do we focus on where our journey of faith is going? Do we focus on the presence of our Risen Lord and walk with Him each day?

Jesus calls us today by our names because He wants to increase and renew our faith in Him. Let us fix our eyes on Him and walk with Him.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I recognize the presence of the risen Lord in my life today?



*We are the
Easter people
and Alleluia
is our song.*

Pope John Paul II

Wednesday, 24 April, Wednesday within the Octave of Easter
Acts 3:1-10, Luke 24:13-35

Two of Jesus' disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, 'What matters are you discussing as you walk along?' They stopped short, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days'. 'What things?' he asked. 'All about Jesus of Nazareth' they answered 'who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.' Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself. When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. 'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story

of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

Along the road to Emmaus

After the event that had taken place, the two disciples of Jesus were disappointed and disillusioned. With heavy hearts, they walked away from the rest of the disciples. The more they talked to each other, the more doubtful they became.

Jesus, always the Good Shepherd, drew close to these lost sheep of His, and listened attentively to their concerns and doubts. He patiently opened their minds to what the scriptures meant and how to interpret all the events that had happened from the moment of the Resurrection. The more Jesus spoke to them, the more their hearts started to glow with deep hope and joy. Finally, when Jesus broke bread, their eyes were opened and they recognised Him.

Each of us has our own road to Emmaus. Along this journey, we experience moments when we are downcast and feel it's hopeless. Jesus walks with us and accompanies us along the way even though we do not recognise Him. He patiently talks to our hearts and makes our faith alive again. He takes opportunities to open our eyes to recognise Him. When we do recognise and encounter the Risen Lord, we start to walk again with hope and joy. Our road to Emmaus is not a one-off journey, but a constant life-long process of not seeing and seeing again, not having hope and having hope again.

Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we need to learn how to walk with Jesus beside us.

Question for reflection:

1) What are the moments in my life when I have found myself in this journey to Emmaus?

Thursday, 25 April, Thursday within the Octave of Easter
Acts 3:11-26, Luke 24:35-48

The disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread. They were still talking about all this when he himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them his hands and feet. Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it, and they stood there dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes. Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms has to be fulfilled'. He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.'

Peace I leave with you

The disciples found it difficult to swallow the reality of Jesus' resurrection. After hearing the accounts of those who witnessed the resurrection, they were still alarmed and frightened when Jesus appeared and said, 'Peace be with you!' Perhaps, today we cannot imagine the fear of the disciples. For many of us, Jesus' resurrection does not really make any difference in our lives. We fail to be amazed during this time of celebration because Easter is just a season we go through each year. Believe! Understand and enjoy that Jesus' resurrection is real! Jesus is alive! The Risen Lord brings peace to us, a peace that nobody and nothing can ever give to us.

Jesus says to each of us today 'Peace be with you. Peace in your troubles. Peace in your fears about the future, Peace in your regrets of the past. Peace be with you.'

Jesus wants us to be at peace each day as we face the challenges that life brings. When our hearts are filled with His peace, we become channels where forgiving love flows.

In this time of prayer, let us open our hearts to receive His peace once again.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I open to receive Jesus' peace and give His peace to others today?

**Friday, 26 April, Friday within the Octave of Easter
Acts 4:1-12, John 21:1-14**

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing'. They replied, 'We'll come with you'. They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night. It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Have you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No', he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something'. So they dropped the net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord'. At these words 'It is the Lord', Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on, wrapped his cloak round him and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net and the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land. As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught'. Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast'. None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and

gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

Light of Christ, shine on me!

In today's Gospel passage, Simon Peter said, 'I am going fishing.' Peter and the rest of the disciples decided to return to their old way of life because it seemed as though nothing had changed with Jesus' resurrection. Thus, it was back to work, back to routines, back to the old lifestyle. The disciples got into the boat and it was soon night. 'Night' also referred to their inner state of being, without the light of faith and hope. In their troubled states, they caught nothing.

In our journey of faith, we too experience moments without the light of faith and hope in us. Nothing seems to change with Easter: Problems in the family remain the same, sadness tends to be stronger than joy, endless worries trouble us. We experience the internal darkness within us.

"It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus."

Jesus appeared to His disciples along the Lake of Tiberias. He also comes to us and stands by the shore of our daily life. With His presence, He changes darkness into light, despair into hope, sadness into joy.

In the light of His love, He told them to cast their net out to starboard. They obeyed and caught so much fish that they could not haul the net in. Likewise, Jesus always fills our boat with fish because He is a God who always provides. We need to trust Him and allow Him to lead us.

Easter does make a difference in our life. With His resurrection, Jesus opens our eyes to look at ourselves, others and situations with more faith. His light makes us live with new hope, trust and joy.

Question for reflection:

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



St. Peter
Canisius

**"If you have too
much to do,
with God's help
you will find
time to do it all."**

Saturday, 27 April, Saturday within the Octave of Easter
Acts 4:13-21, Mark 16:9-15

Having risen in the morning on the first day of the week, Jesus appeared first to Mary of Magdala from whom he had cast out seven devils. She then went to those who had been his companions, and who were mourning and in tears, and told them. But they did not believe her when they heard her say that he was alive and that she had seen him. After this, he showed himself under another form to two of them as they were on their way into the country. These went back and told the others, who did not believe them either. Lastly, he showed himself to the Eleven themselves while they were at table. He reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. And he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation.'

An irreplaceable encounter with the Living Lord

The media carries a lot of bad and grim news about violence, wars and death. We read and watch about men, women and children forced to leave their homes, people without food, etc. Such news tend to bring hopelessness and fear into our hearts. Yet, there are so many people who are living and spreading goodness through their self-giving service to the poor, homeless and suffering. There are so many people who dedicate their lives to bring the Good News of Jesus in order to bring His message of love and peace to others. Sadly, these seldom make it to the news.

As Easter people, shouldn't we carry the Good News of Jesus to those around us? Shouldn't we be active messengers who speak and live the Good News?

Jesus appeared to His disciples and told them to go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. In order for them to share His message, Jesus knew that each of them needed to encounter Him personally so that they can be strengthened in their faith.

Today, Jesus encounters us so as to renew and strengthen our faith. He needs us to go out and share the Good News with all the people we meet.

Our little faith is not an excuse for us to have a laid-back attitude in our mission. The more we go and share, the more we find ourselves growing in our own conviction of Jesus.

In this time of prayer, Jesus shows Himself to us again and tells us, 'Go out. Go out of your comfort zone. Go out of your small world. Proclaim the Good News. Share with others the greatness of God.'

Questions for reflection:

1) Whom can I share the Good News with today?

**Sunday, 28 April, Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday
Acts 5:12-26, Revelation 1:9-13,17-19, John 20:19-31**

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you. 'As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.' After saying this he breathed on them and said: 'Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.' Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe'. Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.' There were many other signs that Jesus worked

and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

Fear not

"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore." We hear these comforting words in the Second Reading taken from the book of Revelation. They invite us to turn our gaze to Christ, to experience his reassuring presence. To each person, whatever his condition, even if it were the most complicated and dramatic, the Risen One repeats: "Fear not!"; I died on the Cross but now "I am alive for evermore"; "I am the first and the last, and the living one." (Pope St. John Paul II)

Today, let us turn our gaze and set our hearts on the Risen Jesus who comes to bring us His peace and love once again. As Christians, it is not enough to acknowledge intellectually that the Lord has risen or to hear the Easter message being preached week after week, but more important is to experience that Jesus is truly alive in our daily ordinary life and that He cares for us right here, right now.

Out of love, Jesus appeared to Tomas in order to bring him to a greater experience of faith. Tomas, seeing Jesus alive, was transformed from a doubter to a believer.

Jesus invites us to turn our gaze on Him alone, and listen to Him as He tells us, *"Peace be with you.... Fear not because I am alive and I am with you."*

Let us doubt no longer but experience and believe in Jesus!

Question for reflection:

1) As I read and reflect on today's gospel, what is Jesus' message to me?

Monday, 29 April, St. Catherine of Siena
Acts 4:23-31, John 3:1-8

There was one of the Pharisees called Nicodemus, a leading Jew, who came to Jesus by night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who comes from God; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him'. Jesus answered: 'I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Nicodemus said, 'How can a grown man be born? Can he go back into his mother's womb and be born again?' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God: what is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit.

To be born from above

Though Nicodemus saw Jesus as a man of God, he was afraid to be seen by the other Pharisees to be associating with Jesus. Thus, he approached Jesus cautiously at night with the desire to listen to Jesus and learn from Him. In the gospel of St. John, night represents the internal state where one has not yet come to believe in Jesus. It also represents the inner state of Nicodemus who admired Jesus but did not have the courage to take a deeper step into faith.

Throughout their conversation, Jesus patiently led him to journey from night to day, from darkness to light by inviting Nicodemus to be 'born from above' in order to really experience the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus did not understand the meaning of Jesus' words as he took 'born again' in a literal sense. Jesus was not talking about physical birth but new and radical spiritual birth. Those born from above are people who allow the Holy Spirit to blow and move them to do what God desires of them. Nicodemus was afraid to be born from above because it implied losing control. As a Pharisee, he was comfortable to follow rules and regulations that define who was upright and who was a sinner, what to do and what not to do, etc. He was afraid to enter into a deeper step of faith that Jesus was inviting him to take.

Jesus invites us to be born from above, and to allow the Spirit to lead and guide us into a deeper life of faith. Come, Holy Spirit, come!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me deeper into faith?

Tuesday, 30 April, St. Pius V

Acts 4:32-37, John 3:7-15

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Do not be surprised when I say: You must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit." 'How can that be possible?' asked Nicodemus. 'You, a teacher in Israel, and you do not know these things!' replied Jesus. 'I tell you most solemnly, we speak only about what we know and witness only to what we have seen and yet you people reject our evidence. If you do not believe me when I speak about things in this world, how are you going to believe me when I speak to you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven; and the Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

Jesus, the source of eternal life

Nicodemus, a very respectable Jew, thought he knew God because he methodically learnt all the principles and laws of his faith. Jesus, however, challenged him to go beyond his intellectual understanding of God and enter into an intimacy with God. Nicodemus found himself standing at the threshold of something new, something profound.

Would he dare to choose to trust Jesus and follow Him into newness or would he walk away from Him and continue his old way of life?

There are many things that we perhaps might not understand - things regarding our faith, events that are happening in our life, etc. Like Nicodemus, we are invited by Jesus to enter into a new relationship

with God - one of not just knowing about God but personally experiencing a deeper trust and love for Him.

"...the Son of Man must be lifted up" Jesus the Son of Man by His death, Resurrection and Ascension has been lifted up. He is now the only way that shows us how to live a relationship of love, trust and intimacy with God. In the same way as those Israelites bitten by serpents in Moses' time, looked at the bronze serpent on a pole and were saved, we too must keep looking at Jesus all the time. Only Jesus can lead us always to newness in our relationship with God. Only Jesus can lead us to eternal life.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I fix my eyes on Jesus? Or do I pay attention to Him only in certain circumstances and situations?
- 2) How can I experience more of God and His love in my life?

Wednesday, 1 May, St. Joseph the Worker Acts 5:17-26, Matthew 13:54-48

Jesus came to his home town and taught the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were astonished and said, 'Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude. His sisters, too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?' And they would not accept him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country and in his own house', and he did not work many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

The dignity of work

"In the Gospel of St. Matthew, in one of the moments when Jesus returns to his town, to Nazareth, and speaks in the synagogue, the amazement of his fellow townspeople at his wisdom is emphasized, and... they ask: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (Matt 13:55). Jesus comes into our history among us, born of Mary by the power of God, but with the presence of St. Joseph, the legal father who cares for him and also teaches him his work. Jesus is born and lives in a family, in the Holy Family, learning the craft of carpenter from St. Joseph in his

workshop in Nazareth, sharing with him the commitment, effort, satisfaction, and also the difficulties of every day. This reminds us of the dignity and importance of work. The book of Genesis tells us that God created man and woman entrusting them with the task of filling the earth and subduing it, which does not mean exploiting it, but nurturing and protecting it, caring for it through their work (cf. Gen 1:28; 2 15). Work is part of God's loving plan, we are called to cultivate and care for all the goods of creation and in this way participate in the work of creation! Work is fundamental to the dignity of a person. Work, to use an image, "anoints" us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts (cf. Jn 5:17); it gives you the ability to maintain ourselves, our family, to contribute to the growth of our nation. And here I think of the difficulties which, in various countries, today afflict the world of work and business; I think of how many, and not just young people, are unemployed, many times due to a purely economic conception of society, which seeks selfish profit, beyond the parameters of social justice.... And then I would like to speak especially to you young people: be committed to your daily duties, your study, your work, to relationships of friendship, to helping towards others; your future also depends on how you live these precious years of your life. Do not be afraid of commitment, of sacrifice, and do not look with fear towards the future; keep your hope alive: there is always a light on the horizon" (Pope Francis)

As we celebrate the Feast of St Joseph the Worker, let us be committed to take our work - the easy tasks as well as the tough responsibilities - with the determination to do them all well because they are part of God's loving plan for us. Many times, we simply look at our work as means to get more money, praises and success. Our work is not just for seeking profits and satisfying our ambitions, but can be our way of glorifying God. How? When we strive to become people of integrity and try to love those whom God has placed along our way each day, we are bringing glory to Him. When we allow God to use our talents to make a difference to our world, we are bringing glory to Him.

Despite the challenges of work, let us also find its joys so that we can, like St. Joseph, work for God and bring glory to Him alone. Let us find dignity in the work that we do!

Question for reflection:

1) In all that I do, how can I bring glory to God?

Thursday, 2 May, St. Athanasius
Acts 5:27-33, John 3:31-36

John the Baptist said to his disciples: 'He who comes from above is above all others; he who is born of the earth is earthly himself and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen and heard, even if his testimony is not accepted; though all who do accept his testimony are attesting the truthfulness of God, since he whom God has sent speaks God's own words: God gives him the Spirit without reserve. The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to him. Anyone who believes in the Son has eternal life, but anyone who refuses to believe in the Son will never see life: the anger of God stays on him.

Living in the light of God's love

"He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen and heard, even if his testimony is not accepted; though all who do accept his testimony are attesting the truthfulness of God, since he whom God has sent speaks God's own words: God gives him the Spirit without reserve."

Jesus comes from heaven in order to reveal the loving and merciful heart of God the Father. There is no pretence in Jesus as He speaks of what He Himself has seen and heard.

What about us? If we have experienced God's love and mercy in our own lives, how can we not bear witness to it through our words and actions?

"...he who is born of the earth is earthly himself and speaks in an earthly way."

Do we speak in an earthly way by focusing on topics like making money, finding the best food, purchasing the latest gadgets rather than to speak about the Good News of God's love? Do we tend to use our gift of speech by gossiping and slighting others?

As Easter people, God has given us His Spirit without reserve and sent us to speak His own words of love, peace, joy, mercy and

forgiveness. We speak God's language and not the earthy language of power, riches and status.

"Anyone who refuses to believe in the Son will never see life: the anger of God stays on him."

We wonder as we reflect on the final words of today's gospel: 'The anger of God stays on him', what does this mean? Is God an angry and unforgiving God? Is He a God who is constantly in need of us appeasing Him?

'The anger of God stays on him' does not mean that we have a God with lightning rods ready to strike and punish. Rather, when we choose not to live in the light of truth and love, we ourselves encounter sadness, frustrations and pain within. We become restless despite surrounding ourselves with worldly pleasures, power and status. This is because we are not living our true selves as God has created us to.

"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in You." (St. Augustine)

When we find God, we find rest. Thus, God, who loves us, continues to call us back to Him. He desires only what is good and life-giving in our lives. He does not want us to experience the pain of choosing to live outside of His love.

God today wants to give us His Spirit without any reservation. Let us open our hearts to receive His Spirit so that we can choose to live for God and with God.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I make the effort today to make choices that lead me towards God?

Friday, 3 May, Ss. Philip and James
1 Corinthians 15:1-8, John 14:6-14

Jesus said to Thomas: 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.' Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied'. 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me? 'To have seen me is to have seen the, Father, so how can you say, "Let us see the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason. I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask for in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask for anything in my name, I will do it.'

To aim high with Jesus

"A final question: what can I, a weak fragile sinner, do? God says to you, Do not be afraid of holiness; do not be afraid to aim high, to let yourself be loved and purified by God; do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us be infected by the holiness of God. Every Christian is called to sanctity (see Dogmatic Constitution, Lumen gentium, nos. 19–42); and sanctity does not consist especially in doing extraordinary things, but in allowing God to act."

(Pope Francis)

Today, as we celebrate the feast day of St. Philip and James, let us remember that Jesus called them, not because they were perfect and flawless. But rather, they were called because Philip and James were among the disciples who argued about who was the greatest (Luke 22:24), and they were also the ones who ran away from Jesus when He was captured to be crucified. Yet, Jesus called them again and renewed their discipleship after His resurrection. Their personal encounter of love and forgiveness from the Risen Lord led them to give their lives. Both were martyred for their faith.

Today, listen to Jesus as He tells us, *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."* We are all fragile sinners, yet we are all called to holiness. Holiness is not perfectionism. Holiness is to be like Christ, who is fullness of love. Each day, we are called to follow Jesus faithfully because He is the way to show us the narrow path of love that we must walk. We are called to root ourselves in the truth that is God's love. We are called to embrace the fullness of life that Jesus brings to us. Only He can lead us to be *'infected by the holiness of God'*.

Let us aim high with Jesus!

Question for reflection:

1) Is Jesus my only way, truth and life? Why?

Saturday, 4 May

Acts 6:1-7, John 6:16-21

In the evening the disciples went down to the shore of the lake and got into a boat to make for Capernaum on the other side of the lake. It was getting dark by now and Jesus had still not rejoined them. The wind was strong, and the sea was getting rough. They had rowed three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming towards the boat. This frightened them, but he said, 'It is I. Do not be afraid.' They were for taking him into the boat, but in no time it reached the shore at the place they were making for.

Mantra of our lives: It is I. Do not be afraid

Weren't there moments when we felt that God seemed to be so far away from our life? Weren't there times when we felt frightened as we battled with the storms in our lives?

"It is I. Do not be afraid."

In today's Gospel, Jesus invites us to trust and keep trusting Him as He will never let us out of His sight. *"It is I. Do not be afraid."* - These words from Jesus are addressed to us all of the time.

There is a well-known anecdote, *'Footprints in the sand'* that reminds us that we have no need of fear if we keep trusting in Him.

"One night, a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Scenes from his life flashed across the sky and he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life had flashed before him, he recalled that at the lowest and saddest times of his life there was only one set of footprints. Dismayed, he asked, 'Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me.' The Lord replied, 'My Friend, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering when you saw only one set of footprints, that was when I carried you.'"

Let us trust Jesus more and believe that He is with us in every moment of our life.

Question for reflection:

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

Sunday, 5 May, Third Sunday of Easter

Acts 5:27-21,40-41, Revelations 5:11-14, John 21:1-9

Jesus showed himself again to the disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing'. They replied, 'We'll come with you'. They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night. It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Have you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No', he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something'. So they dropped the net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord'. At these words 'It is the Lord', Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on, wrapped his cloak round him and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net and the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land. As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught'. Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast'. None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'Who are you?'; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead. After the meal Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes Lord, you know I love you'. Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs'. A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He replied, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you'. Jesus said to him, 'Look after my sheep'. Then

he said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was upset that he asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you'. Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. 'I tell you most solemnly, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go.' In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me'.

Do you agape me?

In Greek (which is the language of the New Testament), there are four words to describe the word 'love'. They are: eros (sexual love), philio (love between friends), storge (love between family members) and agape (unconditional love).

In today's gospel, Jesus approached Peter and asked him, "*Simon son of John, do you love (agape) me more than these others do?*" What Jesus desired to know was whether Peter's love for Him was unconditional.

Peter, a broken man after his denials, knew that he loved Jesus his Master, his Friend, but not to the extent of unconditional love. Thus, with humility, Peter replied, "*Yes Lord, you know I love (philio) you.*"

Jesus accepted Peter's love, and gave Him the mission to look after His lambs.

The second time, Jesus asked Peter once more, "*Simon son of John, do you love (agape) me?*" Peter repeated the same, "*Lord, you know I love (philio) you.*" Once more, Jesus accepted all that Peter could give, and He affirmed Peter, "*Take care of my sheep.*"

Jesus asked Peter for the final time the question but He no longer asked for agape love but philio. "*Simon son of John, do you love (philio) me?*" Peter understood that Jesus loved Him beyond his poor limited love. He cried out, "*Lord, you know everything; you know I love (philio) you.*" Jesus answered, "*Feed my sheep.*"

This is the heart of Jesus our Friend who will never force us to give more than what we can. Jesus, ever so patient, comes to us where we are and loves us for who we are.

Jesus told Peter that he would one day offer his life for the glory of God. However, for now, Peter still needed to grow in his love for Jesus. Today, Jesus comes to us and to our reality, and asks us the same question that He once asked Peter at the Sea of Tiberias, *“Do you love (agape) me? Do you love (agape) me that you can give yourself completely to me and follow me?”*

Question for reflection: 1) What is my response to Jesus’ question: “Do you love me?”

Monday, 6 May

Acts 6:8-15, John 6:22-29

After Jesus had fed the five thousand, his disciples saw him walking on the water. Next day, the crowd that had stayed on the other side saw that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not got into the boat with his disciples, but that the disciples had set off by themselves. Other boats, however, had put in from Tiberias, near the place where the bread had been eaten. When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’ Jesus answered: ‘I tell you most solemnly, you are not looking for me because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.’ Then they said to him, ‘What must we do if we are to do the works that God wants?’ Jesus gave them this answer, ‘This is working for God: you must believe in the one he has sent’.

Search for God first

Do we search for the Giver or the gifts?

In today's gospel, the crowd went looking for Jesus for free bread and free food. They ate the bread that Jesus had multiplied for them, and they wanted more. Jesus knew their motive for coming to Him, not for Him but for bread.

Many people till today go to Jesus because they want favours from Him. *"Lord, give me a good partner in life...Lord, give me a stable job... Lord, let my children be obedient."* How many people simply go to Jesus because they want to be with Him and to love Him for who He is?

Jesus does not want to be our personal vending machine. He desires to enter into a relationship of intimacy and trust with us first, and the rest will flow from there.

Listen to Jesus as He says these words to us, *"Work for God... By searching for Him first."* Jesus, bring me to a greater search for you alone!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who is Jesus for me? Do I search for Him or simply go to Him to fix my problems and load on Him all my requests?
- 2) How can I let Jesus bring me into a deeper relationship with Him?

Tuesday, 7 May

Acts 7:51-8:1, John 6:30-35

The people said to Jesus, 'What sign will you give to show us that we should believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers had manna to eat in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat'. Jesus answered: 'I tell you most solemnly, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world'. 'Sir,' they said 'give us that bread always.' Jesus answered: 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst.'

I hunger for you!

"Give us this bread always." The request of the people revealed the deep hunger in them. What about us? What do we hunger for in our lives?

When we taste His unfailing love in the Eucharist and come to realise that nothing else can satisfy our hunger and thirst for happiness and love, we will yearn for His presence of love. *"Give me this bread always. Give me this love always. Give me this peace and joy always."*

Many of us always desire to be loved well and cherished deeply by others. A lot of our insecurities come when we fear that a spouse, a child, a friend will simply one day stop loving us.

The greatest challenge is for us to believe that only Jesus can fully nourish us. He is the Living Bread that can nourish our hunger. The money in the bank, the number of cars, the exotic vacations - all these cannot give us the real inner fulfilment. Jesus does not want us to go to other substitutes that cannot give us what we long for. Only Jesus, the true bread from heaven, can fill and nourish our hunger.

"Come to me, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry, and He who believes in me will never thirst."

Let us recognise Jesus in the Eucharist and believe that He can truly satisfy our deep hunger.

"I hunger for the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ...; I long to drink of his blood, the gift of unending love." (St. Ignatius of Antioch)

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I hunger for Jesus and His unfailing love in the Eucharist? Do I take His presence in the Eucharist for granted?

Wednesday, 8 May
Acts 8:1-8, John 6:35-40

Jesus said to the crowd: 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; he who believes in me will never thirst. But, as I have told you, you can see me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day. Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.'

Imitating the heart of Jesus

Today, as we enter into God's sacred space to be with Him once again, let us open our hearts and ask Him, *"Lord, what do you want to tell me today?"*

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away..."

This is the mystery of Jesus' love - a love that rejects no one, a love that welcomes everyone. Jesus, the Bread of Life, gives Himself to each person who comes needy of Him. He never gives up on anyone.

"...the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me..."

Such great comfort to know that Jesus will never lose any one of us because each one is precious to Him. No matter what we have done or failed to do, Jesus values us.

What about us? We tend to be quick to 'lose' people and reject them over misunderstandings and quarrels. We think that one friend less, one family member less, one parishioner less, one colleague less is fine.

Jesus invites us to open our hearts to grasp that one friend, one relative, one member as that person is important and valuable. We

must learn to love like Jesus by not rejecting or losing any person that comes into our life.

Let us enter into the mystery of Jesus' heart that loves all, welcomes all.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there one person missing in my life now?
- 2) How can I open my heart to welcome and love this person again and not reject or lose him/her?

Thursday, 9 May

Acts 8:26-40, John 6:44-51

Jesus said to the crowd: 'No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets: They will all be taught by God, and to hear the teaching of the Father, and learn from it, is to come to me. Not that anybody has seen the Father, except the one who comes from God: he has seen the Father. I tell you most solemnly, everybody who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that a man may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.' Then the Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied: I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.'

God always and in everything

"... the bread that I shall give is my flesh."

Jesus, the Bread of Life, is always there for us. In the Eucharist, He is objectively and physically present in front of us. Do we recognise His ever-faithful presence?

Jesus, the Bread of Life, offers us real life by leading us into a deeper relationship of trust in God and a closer union of love with Him.

We have been created to live forever, and not merely to be here on this earth for a little while. That is why material things can never satisfy us completely or give us the peace and joy that we long for. We are made by God and for God.

When we eat the Bread of Life, we enter into a deep communion with the One who made us to be with Him eternally.

"I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible" (St. Ignatius of Antioch)

In this time of prayer, let us be drawn towards Jesus, our Bread of Life.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I recognise, with love and gratitude, the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?

**Friday, 10 May, St. Damien of Molokai
Acts 9:1-20, John 6:52-59**

The Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied: I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me. This is the bread come down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.' He taught this doctrine at Capernaum, in the synagogue.

Take and eat

In today's gospel, Jesus' words scandalized the Jews and divided His disciples. They were shocked at Jesus' command about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. They simply could not understand Jesus' hard teaching.

Today, Jesus continues to tell us, 'For my flesh is real flesh and my blood is real drink.'

Jesus makes a gift of Himself. He becomes food in order to nourish us, especially when we experience difficulties and sadness in life. Do we take Jesus' love expressed in the Eucharist for granted? Do we allow His Eucharistic love to transform our sadness, loneliness, frustrations into fullness of peace and joy?

Each time we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, we are not doing something for God, but rather, God is doing something for us. He is our source of nourishment. He gives us the peace, the rest, the courage and the strength we need to carry on walking in this journey of life.

Jesus invites us 'Take and eat.' He is never tired of drawing near to us. He is the real food who can truly make us fully alive!

Let us receive the Bread of Life with all our love!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I let Jesus transform the darkness in me into light and life?

Saturday, 11 May
Acts 9:31-42, John 6:60-69

After hearing it, many of the followers of Jesus said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this upset you? What if you should see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me unless the Father allows him'. After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Do you also want to leave?

"After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him."

The people who could not accept Jesus' teaching and chose to walk away were not simply casual listeners, but disciples who had followed Him closely. Yet, they took the decision to break away from Jesus. They walked away because their hearts were hardened, hence they were unable to listen to Jesus' teaching. Yet, Jesus did not lighten His message or change His tone in order to please His disciples and make them stay.

Next, Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked them, *"What about you, do you want to go away too?"*

Peter replied on behalf of the rest of the Twelve, *"Lord, to who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God."*

Peter and the Twelve did not fully understand Jesus and His teaching. They, however, trusted in Jesus and put their faith in Him because they recognised that He was speaking from God.

What about us? What will our response be if we find Jesus' teachings and ways too hard for us to handle? Would we choose to walk away or stay?

Today's gospel passage shows us the capacity of our human heart. We have the capacity to reject Jesus despite experiencing His call to follow Him, like many of His followers who chose to walk away. We are also capable of taking steps to trust Jesus even when we do not fully understand His ways like Peter and the rest of the Twelve.

In this time of prayer, let us ask Jesus to give us the gift of a docile heart that listens to His Word and trusts in His love.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my inner disposition towards Jesus and His teachings?

Sunday, 12 May, Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 13:14,43-52, Revelation 7:9,14-17, John 10:27-30

Jesus said: "The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me. The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone, and no one can steal from the Father. The Father and I are one."

Listening to the Shepherd's voice

How can we learn to listen to the gentle, still voice of the Shepherd if we don't allow ourselves to be in silence?

Jesus our Shepherd speaks to us, and we, His sheep listen to Him. We can listen only when we are calm and we shut out all other noises: those from our egos, our ambitions, our worries, our anger and our lust. In learning how to listen, we first need to let go of all the noises and allow ourselves to be led gently by the Shepherd.

Listening leads us to encounter Jesus and follow Him with trust and tranquillity. Many times, we follow ideas we have about Jesus. But, when problems surface, it is so easy to be preoccupied and lost in our emotions that we flee from Jesus.

Today, let us take this moment of prayer to be still and open to listen, once more to the Shepherd's voice. Let us have a more intimate encounter with Jesus, so that we can truly experience Him as our Good Shepherd who knows and loves us even in our stubbornness, deafness and indifference.

"Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what life is. We are not some causal and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd - the task of the fisher of men - can often seem wearisome. But it is

beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God's joy which longs to break into the world." (Pope Benedict XVI)

How wonderful it is to know and experience deeply that we are so loved by Jesus, our Shepherd who comes to encounter us. In loving Him, we can then bring the Shepherd's love to others. Today, be still and listen.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Have I ever experienced the love and care of Jesus in my life?
- 2) Do I rejoice in listening to the Shepherd's voice?

Monday, 13 May, Our Lady of Fatimah

Acts 11:1-18, John 10:1-10

Jesus said: 'I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers.' Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them. So Jesus spoke to them again: 'I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.'

Jesus, the gate and Shepherd

Jesus is the gate of life, and there is no other. He never ceases to be our gate through which we enter and find God's presence of tender love.

"Don't be afraid: He's waiting for you. Be lively, have the courage to enter through His gate. All are invited to pass through this gate, to pass through the gate of faith, to enter into His life, and to allow Him

to enter into our life, because He transforms it, renews it, the gifts of full and lasting joy.” (Pope Francis)

Let us find comfort and peace in this reality that Jesus is our gate. He is trustworthy and is with us to protect and provide for us.

Likewise, Jesus is also our Good Shepherd who is also here to guide and lead us always to fullness of life. He will never abandon us when trouble comes but stays close to us. Once more, how beautiful it is to experience Jesus as our Shepherd.

“... the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out.”

We are invited to listen attentively to the voice of our Shepherd. Too often, we allow the many conflicting noises of this world to encroach into our thoughts and hearts, and make us forget to listen and follow our Good Shepherd's voice. Jesus never stops calling us by name and inviting us to follow Him closely and experience His gentle presence that gives us deep peace and joy.

In this time of prayer, let us stay close to Jesus our gate and our Shepherd.

Question for reflection:

1) Whose voice do I hear and listen to?

**Tuesday, 14 May, St. Matthias
Acts 1:15-17,20-26, John 15:9-17**

Jesus said to his disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete. This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants anymore, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my

Father. You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another.”

No longer servants, but friends

Jesus calls us, “Friends”. Let us stay in this intimate reality that we are Jesus’ friends who are called to be with Him, and not simply workers or servants doing things for Him. We are Jesus’ friends! To be Jesus’ friends means to have the same heart of Jesus. To be Jesus’ friends means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus - to serve rather than to be served. To be Jesus’ friends means to be in constant relationship of mutual love and trust. Do we willingly accept Jesus’ friendship? Do we rather do things for Jesus?

It is not something for us to boast about. Rather, it is a gift given that we are called to receive and live it out, and it is in this friendship that we experience ourselves fully loved, fully alive.

“Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? . . . No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live this day with the awareness that I am Jesus' friend?



Wednesday, 15 May

Acts 12:24-13:5, John 12:44-50

Jesus declared publicly: 'Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in the one who sent me, and whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me. I, the light, have come into the world, so that whoever believes in me need not stay in the dark any more. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them faithfully, it is not I who shall condemn him, since I have come not to condemn the world, but to save the world: he who rejects me and refuses my words has his judge already: the word itself that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For what I have spoken does not come from myself; no, what I was to say, what I had to speak, was commanded by the Father who sent me, and I know that his commands mean eternal life. And therefore what the Father has told me is what I speak.'

True light from true light

"I, the light, have come into the world, so that whoever believes in me need not stay in the dark anymore."

Listen attentively and carefully to Jesus' words. Savour them. Take comfort and delight in them.

Jesus is the Light. He has come into the world. We, who believe in Him, need not stay in the dark anymore. We remain now in the light of God that brings deep peace.

How wonderful it would be if people can sense God's light of peace shining through us. This is not just a lofty idea but a reality for those whose heart is totally in love with and enlightened by the true light, Jesus.

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home - Lead Thou me on! Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene - one step enough for me." (Cardinal John Henry Newman)

Today, let us put our faith in Jesus. He, the Light, will always lead us along the way to eternal life. With Jesus, we are not afraid. Let our

faith lead us to live for others who are still living in darkness. Let us be lights that shine and point them in the direction of Jesus, the Light.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I live in the light of Christ today?
- 2) Is there someone who needs to move out from darkness into the light of Christ? How can I lead this person to Jesus?

Thursday, 16 May

Acts 13:13-25, John 13:16-20

After He had washed the feet of his disciples, Jesus said to them: 'I tell you most solemnly no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the man who sent him. Now that you know this, happiness will be yours if you behave accordingly. I am not speaking about all of you: I know the ones I have chosen; but what scripture says must be fulfilled: Someone who shares my table rebels against me. I tell you this now, before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe that I am He. I tell you most solemnly, whoever welcomes the one I send welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.'

Happiness is yours

Today's gospel is taken right after Jesus had washed His disciples' feet. In the context of the washing of the feet, Jesus told His disciples, *"I tell you most solemnly no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the man who sent him. Now that you know this, happiness will be yours if you behave accordingly."*

Jesus was telling His disciples to go and do the same - to serve one another in the same way He did. This is because to serve is to put love into action.

The world understands love as an intense romantic feeling towards someone. It is often mistaken for dependency, possessiveness as well as looking at the other to meet one's needs.

For Jesus, love is about placing oneself at the service of the other, and to desire for the good of the other. Love is not self-centred or self-seeking. Rather, it is to be other-centred.

Jesus promises us happiness when we put love into action. As His disciples, we are called to joyfully fix our eyes on Jesus and walk His same path of love and service.

“Remember that the Christian life is one of action; not of speech and daydreams. Let there be few words and many deeds, and let them be done well.” (St. Vincent Pallotti)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I put love into action today?

Friday, 17 May

Acts 13:26-33, John 14:1-6

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus said: ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.’

Jesus cares!

Do we tend to allow suffering and problems in life to take away God’s peace? In this time of prayer, take comfort in Jesus’ words to us, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me.”*

Allow His words to embrace us and bring us to experience real peace from within. Jesus will not take away our problems and the pains we face in life, but He promises us today that we have a place in God’s house where we can always find refuge, peace and joy. In our Father’s house, i.e. in His heart, is where we can find renewed strength to carry on as we come face-to-face with life’s problems.

Jesus reminds us too that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus, our Friend, does not simply give us advice or direction on how to go to God, the Father. He becomes our way for us to go. He becomes

our Truth that leads us to live securely as God's beloved children. He becomes our life where we can find true meaning for our own lives, even meaning in our suffering.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5: 7)

Today, Jesus calls us to share all our worries and anxieties with Him and trust that He truly cares. Let us not let the troubles and difficulties we face each day block our hearts from trusting Him and staying close to Him.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from fully placing my trust in Jesus?

Saturday, 18 May

Acts 13:44-52, John 14:7-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If you know me, you know my Father too. From this moment you know him and have seen him.' Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied'. 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me? 'To have seen me is to have seen the, Father, so how can you say, "Let us see the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself: it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work. You must believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason. I tell you most solemnly, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, he will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask for in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask for anything in my name, I will do it."

To be a reflection of God's love

Jesus is the perfect reflection of God, the Father, and thus, to see Jesus is to see the face of God. Jesus lived His whole life loving with deep compassion and mercy, even towards those who opposed him vigorously. Today, Jesus calls all of us, who are His disciples, to follow

Him in the same way. This is because we too are meant to reveal the face of God the Father through the way we love.

We might look at all our limitations and think, 'Me? Reveal the face of God? Impossible!' Yes! It is indeed impossible to live a life of love by our own efforts. Therefore, Jesus shares with us His secret:

"I am in the Father and the Father is in me"

Being in union with God, we can reveal His presence of love to others. For this, we need to be constantly aware of His presence and live with Him each moment of today. With God in us, we are moved to love with His heart of compassion.

How happy we are if people look at our life and recognise God's presence in us!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be aware of God's presence, not just in this time of prayer, but also during moments of this day?

Sunday, 19 May, Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 14:21-27, Revelation 21:1-5, John 13:31-35

When Judas had gone Jesus said: 'Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. 'My little children, I shall not be with you much longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come. I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.'

The language of love

This is a little story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody's job. Everybody

thought that Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done...

This short story can be applied to today's gospel: Love is a task that Jesus entrusts not just to everybody in general or anybody or somebody or nobody. Instead, He calls each one of us who are His friends, His disciples to love one another.

Jesus gives us a commandment to love. He does not give us an option that we can choose to love or not to love.

In order to put love into practice, we need to learn to use the three languages: of the mind, the heart and the hands.

"What you think - you must feel and put into effect. Your information comes down to your heart and you realise it in real works."

(Pope Francis)

This is the way Jesus Himself loved. He did not simply think about loving. He did not feel love as a wonderful sentiment in His heart. He did not serve out of obligation or duty. Rather, Jesus spoke the three languages of love perfectly. He thought, He felt, He translated it into real works.

Today, let us not make excuses anymore but truly learn the three languages of love that will make us into authentic disciples of Jesus.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I reflect the love of Jesus today?
- 2) Who are the concrete people who really need me to practice the three languages of love?

Monday, 20 May, St. Bernardine of Siena
Acts 14:5-18, John 14:21-26

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him.' Judas - this was not Judas Iscariot - said to him, 'Lord, what is all this about? Do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus replied: 'If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him. Those who do not love me do not keep my words. And my word is not my own: it is the word of the one who sent me. I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.'

The Holy Spirit, always and forever, in my life

The Holy Spirit is our Advocate, our Helper who always leads us to follow Jesus closely. We need the Holy Spirit in a very special way in these times of consumerism and intense pursuit of worldly pleasures. We have no more room to listen to God's voice and our conscience becomes blunt and dull. We tend to live our Christian faith without enthusiasm and joy.

Today, Jesus reminds us that He gives us His Holy Spirit to be our Advocate who will teach and remind us of all what is essential for us to become authentic Christians living our faith in the midst of our society. He always pushes us to give ourselves to live a life of love.

"To put it simply: the Holy Spirit bothers us. Because he moves us, he makes us walk, he pushes the Church to go forward. And we are like Peter at the Transfiguration: 'Ah, how wonderful it is to be here like this, all together!' ... But don't bother us. We want the Holy Spirit to doze off ... we want to domesticate the Holy Spirit. And that's no good. because he is God, he is that wind which comes and goes and you don't know where. He is the power of God, he is the one who gives us consolation and strength to move forward. But: to move forward! And this bothers us. It's so much nicer to be comfortable." (Pope Francis)

“Are we open enough to allow the Holy Spirit to bother us and make us move forward? “I wish not merely to be called Christian, but also to be Christian.” (St. Ignatius of Antioch)

As we start this new week, let us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to a deeper understanding of what it means to be Christians living in the midst of this world.

Question for reflection:

1) Is the Holy Spirit involved in my daily life?

Tuesday, 21 May

Acts 14:19-28, John 14:27-31

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me say: I am going away, and shall return. If you loved me you would have been glad to know that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe. I shall not talk with you any longer, because the prince of this world is on his way. He has no power over me, but the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that I am doing exactly what the Father told me. Come now, let us go.’

I give you peace

Peace is neither the absence of trouble nor the avoidance of confrontation. It neither depends on external events nor on feeling good. Rather, peace is the inner calmness we possess even in the midst of life’s challenges. Only Jesus can give us this inner peace that we yearn for.

In this time of prayer, listen attentively to the loving words of Jesus to our hearts, *“Peace I bequeath you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”*

Let these words of Jesus guide us as we live through this day.

“Don’t worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking Him with a thankful heart. And God’s peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 6-7)

Stay close to Jesus because He, and only He, can give us real peace.

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

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 22 May, St. Rita of Cascia
Acts 15:1-6, John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. You are pruned already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you. Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away - he withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask what you will and you shall get it. It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.’

Being fruitful, not successful

The world speaks to us about being successful. Jesus, however, invites us to be fruitful. What does Jesus mean when He tells us that we should bear much fruit? How can we bear much fruit?

The world adores successful people who have money, power and status. We want to be successful too so that we can be admired and praised by people. We work hard in order to get to the top of the social

ladder. We also push others to do the same by expecting them to perform and achieve. Yet, we eventually discover that success does not give us the peace and joy we yearn for.

This is because we have not been created to become successful people according to the standards of this world, but fruitful according to God. Today, Jesus invites us to remain in Him so that we will strive to be fruitful.

Jesus lived his whole life loving, serving and doing good deeds. He was a simple itinerant preacher without any stable income or comfortable life. In His mission, He sometimes experienced acceptance from people but He had many who opposed Him. In the end, Jesus died a humiliating death.

Is Jesus successful in the eyes of the world?

“We belong to a generation that wants to see the results of our work. We want to be productive and see with our own eyes what we have made. But that is not the way of God’s Kingdom. Often our witness for God does not lead to tangible results. Jesus himself died as a failure on a cross. There was no success there to be proud of. Still, the fruitfulness of Jesus’ life is beyond any human measure. As faithful witnesses of Jesus we have to trust that our lives too will be fruitful, even though we cannot see their fruit. The fruit of our lives may be visible only to those who live after us. What is important is how well we love. God will make our love fruitful, whether we see that fruitfulness or not.” (Henri Nouwen)

Questions for reflection:

1) What am I working for in my life: success or fruitfulness? What prevents me from striving to be fruitful?

Thursday, 23 May
Acts 15:7-21, John 15: 9-11

Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete."

JOY!

"Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God." (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

Many people strive for happiness. Happiness is a feeling that depends on external events - things outside of ourselves. For example, a good meal, a word of praise from someone, a promotion, a new car, etc. All these produce in us the feeling of happiness. Depending on our external situation, we can swing from being happy one moment to being sad the next.

Thus, we become a prisoner of circumstance and we swing, like the pendulum, from one feeling to another. Living based on things and people to make us happy, we tend to become insecure and anxious. Sometimes, we are fretful in our fleeting moment of bliss because we wonder when this happy moment would fade away. We have been created for joy, not happiness.

What is joy then?

While happiness is a feeling that depends on external circumstances, joy is a certainty because we know that God is with us and His love will never fail us no matter what happens. Therefore, joy has its source in the presence of God.

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalm 16, 11)

Questions for reflection:

1) What is the joy that Jesus is offering me today? How can I share this joy with others around me?

Friday, 24 May

Acts 15:22-31, John 15:12-17

Jesus said to his disciples, "This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants anymore, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; and then the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name. What I command you is to love one another."

Love one another

Jesus calls us to love one another as He loves us. This is not an option or something that we do when we feel like it. Rather, it is a commandment, an imperative that demands us to make the choice to love another person. It implies that we deliberately choose to love, regardless of our feelings towards that person.

This might sound challenging for us. We might wonder, "*How can I possibly love someone whom I do not like? How can I be good to someone when I cannot get along with that person?*"

The good news for us is that Jesus will never make us do something that is impossible for us to do. When we remain in Jesus, love flows from us. Because He is love and we cannot help but have the abundance of His love in us. "*A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.*"

To lay down our life for others means more than just literally dying for them. Christian love is when we choose to forget ourselves and go towards others in order to serve, help, guide and promote them. Even if we are not attracted to certain people, we still choose to lay down our life for them.

“The person who does not decide to love forever will find it very difficult to really love for even one day.” (St. Pope John Paul II).

Today, let us make the decision to love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I love those whom I do not like?

Saturday, 25 May

Acts 16:1-10, John 15:18-21

Jesus said to his disciples: “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world, because my choice withdrew you from the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too; if they kept my word, they will keep yours as well. But it will be on my account that they will do all this, because they do not know the one who sent me.”

I belong not to the world, but to Jesus

The true mark of a disciple is love. The world will hate us if we take our following of Jesus seriously. This is because we will refuse to identify ourselves with the values and concerns of the secular world. Instead, we will reject competitiveness, self-absorption, anger, revenge, and desire for status and power which are ingrained in the lives of so many people.

“My choice withdrew you from the world...”

Jesus chose us to live and love differently from the world’s ways. Perhaps, the most horrifying thing that can ever happen to us, as Christians, is that we are loved and honoured by this world. This means that we have failed to witness God’s love to the people around us. This means that we have chosen to live a self-centred life.

“There is one and only one possible road to joy: selfless love.” (Peter Kreeft)

It is a challenge to walk this one possible road to joy. Yet, as people who are loved and chosen by Jesus, we are invited to choose His life of love.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from loving selflessly like Jesus'?

Sunday, 26 May, Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 15:1-2,22-29, Revelation 21:10-14,22-23, John 14:23-29

Jesus replied: ‘If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him. Those who do not love me do not keep my words. And my word is not my own: it is the word of the one who sent me. I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you. Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid. You heard me say: I am going away, and shall return. If you loved me you would have been glad to know that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen you may believe.’

If you love me....

‘If anyone loves me he will keep my word...’

For Jesus, to keep His word is to keep His commandment of loving one another by being servants to one another. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples with full awareness that one would betray Him, another would deny Him and the rest would abandon Him. He, the Master and Teacher, chose to humble Himself to be a servant at their feet. Such humble love is not easy for us to carry out in our own relationships with others. Yet, if we love Jesus, then we have to put this love into action.

However, Jesus knows that we resist and struggle to love by being servants to all. He knows that we need to have the constant presence of God, who is the source of love, to dwell within us. Thus, He promises us that His Father and He will come to make their home with us in order that we will not be alone in this journey of loving. Moreover, Jesus also promises us His Spirit who will come and guide us. Lastly, Jesus offers us His own peace which comforts us when we feel tired of loving, and strengthens us to have no fear of becoming vulnerable in loving others.

Jesus will never let us down but stays faithful to all that He promises us. Today, let us trust in Him who loves us so much, as we live this day with Him in us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I love Him enough to live out His commandment to love by serving others?
- 2) How can I get joy and strength to love from Jesus' promises to me?

Monday, 27 May, St. Augustine of Canterbury
Acts 16:11-15, John 15:26-16:4

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When the Advocate comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness. And you too will be witnesses, because you have been with me from the outset I have told you all this that your faith may not be shaken. They will expel you from the synagogues, and indeed the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God. They will do these things because they have never known either the Father or myself. But I have told you all this, so that when the time for it comes you may remember that I told you.'

Reflect the Son!

"You too will be witnesses"

What does Jesus mean by this statement?

As Christians, 'witnessing' is part of our very being. In fact, we are 'walking advertisements' where we make the invisible God visible. Isn't it beautiful if people can remember us for our passionate faith?

We must never forget that our faith is not about legalistically following rules and regulations, but rather, our faith is about friendship with Jesus. This is what we, as witnesses, are called to show the world by our words and actions.

"Bring the excitement of Jesus' friendship to the world, wherever you find yourselves: at work, at school, on WhatsApp, Facebook or Twitter. When you go out dancing, or for a drink, when you meet in the town square or play a little match on the neighbourhood field. That is where Jesus' friends can be found. Not by conning others, but by standing beside them and being patient with them. With the patience which comes from knowing that we are happy, because we have a Father who is in heaven." (Pope Francis)

There are many people who live their lives not knowing and experiencing this Friend whom we have come to know and love. Today, we can give witness to them that He is worthy of our love and life.

"The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot." (St. Augustine)

Let us be joyful as we bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I give witness to Jesus' presence today?

Tuesday, 28 May

Acts 16:22-34, John 16:5-11

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Now I am going to the one who sent me. Not one of you has asked, "Where are you going?" Yet you are sad at heart because I have told you this. Still, I must tell you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going because unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I do go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will show the world how wrong it was, about sin, and

about who was in the right, and about judgement: about sin: proved by their refusal to believe in me; about who was in the right: proved by my going to the Father and your seeing me no more; about judgement: proved by the prince of this world being already condemned.'

The gift of the Holy Spirit

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples were sad because they heard that their Master would be leaving them soon. In addition to their sadness, they were distressed because they were not certain about what was to come.

"... you are sad at heart because I have told you this."

What about us? Each one of us has experienced sadness and grief. What is the sadness that you carry in your heart?

Jesus knew the hearts of His disciples and so He promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to be with them in their journey of life. He would be there to turn their gaze to Jesus in moments when they would face challenges and hardship.

Today, Jesus knows that we sometimes carry sadness in our hearts when people reject us for what we believe in, or when we keep falling into the same temptations, or when we face crisis at home or work. He wants us to know that we are not alone. He sends us His same Spirit who is our Advocate, our Counsellor, to speak to us through the Word of God, through the Sacraments, through our conscience. He will turn our gaze back to Jesus and find peace in Him once again.

We are never alone. This is our comforting security. The Holy Spirit is with us and in us, now and forever.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit in me today?

Wednesday, 29 May

Acts 17:15,22-18:1, John 16:12-15

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself but will say only what he has learnt; and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he tells you will be taken from what is mine. Everything the Father has is mine; that is why I said: All he tells you will be taken from what is mine.'

Giving time and space

In today's Gospel, Jesus had many things to tell His disciples but He knew that it was not the right time and space because of their sadness, fear and confusion. Jesus simply let go and trusted that the time would one day come when they would be ready to listen, to understand and to live out what He had to say. This is because the Holy Spirit would be with them and guide them to walk in the path of truth.

Jesus was right! Filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, His disciples began to understand the message of Jesus' life. With passion and determination, they went out and continued His mission, even to the point of giving up their lives for Him.

This is a good lesson that we can learn from Jesus. Sometimes, we face a situation where we want to tell and advice people for their own good. Many times, we struggle with our impatience because we want to see results and improvements in the way these people live their life, their situations, their etc.

Our impatience might lead us to want to lash out at the person to start taking certain action. We might wish to start giving people solutions on how to deal with their problems. Perhaps, it is good to understand that people need time and space for change too.

We are called not to give up on them but to continue to put our hope in them, to pray for them and never cease to love them in the same way Jesus did with his disciples.

We have the Spirit of Truth within us. We can count on Him to lead others to live in the light of truth and love. However, let us remember that love is neither pushy nor self-righteous. Rather, in order to help others, we need to humbly listen to the Holy Spirit and discern how best to love.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from trusting and hoping in others and their process of growth?

Thursday, 30 May

Acts 18:1-8, John 16:16-20

"In a little while you will not see me anymore, and then a little while later you will see me." Some of his disciples asked among themselves, "What does this mean? He tells us that in a little while we will not see him, and then a little while later we will see him; and he also says, 'It is because I am going to the Father.' What does this 'a little while' mean? We don't know what he is talking about!" Jesus knew that they wanted to question him, so he said to them, "I said, 'In a little while you will not see me, and then a little while later you will see me.' Is this what you are asking about among yourselves? I am telling you the truth: you will cry and weep, but the world will be glad; you will be sad, but your sadness will turn into gladness.

In a little while

The phrase "*in a little while*" is repeated many times in today's gospel. We know that Jesus was referring to the events of his Passion and Resurrection and that Jesus would be physically absent from them for a short moment before returning and being present with the disciples. Jesus would be absent for a short time before returning back to appear to the disciples.

Like the disciples, there are times when we find that our hearts have this same question "*What does this mean?*". We have experienced moments when it is difficult to see the light of Jesus in the darkness. What does this phrase "*in a little while*" mean when there is no change in the situations that we live in?

How long is this "*in a little while*" when there is no visible change in the broken relationships in our families, when the people that we are praying for continue to hurt, when we ourselves continue struggle with the familiar sins or when there is still pain in our lives?

We can listen to the voice of Jesus today. We can make the choice to focus our attention to listen to the voice of Jesus and not the voice of our fears, the voice of our questions. We can trust that Jesus hears the deepest questions that are in our hearts just as he heard the quiet

murmurings of the disciples. He hears and he has a personal answer for each of us in the many situations that we face.

This is the truth of our Christian journey and the promise of Jesus that we will see Him again. Yes, there will be sorrow and tears; but Jesus promises us that we will see Him again and our “*sadness will turn into gladness*”. Each day is a new day to choose to turn to listen to Jesus, a new day to ask and give thanks for this gift of faith.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus personal message for me today?

**Friday, 31 May, Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Zephaniah 3:14-18 or Romans 12:9-16, Luke 1:39-56**

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.' And Mary said: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy - according to the promise he made to our ancestors-of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.' Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

Selfless love

After receiving Angel Gabriel's announcement that she would be the Mother of God, Mary did not focus on herself and her emotions, worries and thoughts. Instead, she immediately went to visit Elizabeth after hearing that her cousin was also pregnant. What do we see here? Love in action! Mary selflessly gave herself for the good of others.

What can we learn from Mary today?

Selflessness is a virtue which makes us grow out of our pride and meanness in order to give ourselves without any personal motives or expectation of anything in return. Selflessness makes us live freely for others and God, not for ourselves only.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Visitation, let us ask Mother Mary to help us to also have the courage to de-centre from ourselves so that we can selflessly give ourselves more to others.

"There is one and only one possible road to joy: selfless love" (Peter Kreeft)

Questions for reflection:

1) How can I imitate Mary's selfless love today?

Saturday, 1 June, St. Justin

Acts 18:23-28, John 16:23-28

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I tell you most solemnly, anything you ask for from the Father he will grant in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete. I have been telling you all this in metaphors, the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in metaphors; but tell you about the Father in plain words. When that day comes you will ask in my name; and I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you, because the Father himself loves you for loving me and believing that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I leave the world to go to the Father.'

Ask and you will receive

"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." This does not mean that we can make any request that comes into our head and expect all our prayers to be answered. When we ask for what we genuinely need and not just for what we want, then our prayers will be answered and our joy will be complete. What do we genuinely need?

What we need most of all is to grow closer in union with God and to desire what He desires. The will of God is always for us to live a life of love and build His Kingdom of justice and peace in the midst of where we are. Let us desire for more of God in our lives. In Him, we live lovingly. In Him, we find our peace.

"...and I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you..."

Why did Jesus say that He would not be praying for His disciples, for us? Jesus wanted His disciples to put their trust in God the Father. God loved each of them despite their limitations. God cared for them and knew what they truly needed.

"...the Father himself loves you for loving me and believing that I came from God."

Today, let us find our delight in Jesus' words. God the Father loves us for loving Jesus and believing that He came from God. God is love. This is who He is. He loves each one of us with tenderness and faithfulness. He will never let us down but will give us what we really need to do - His will and live our life with true joy that the world with all its riches and pleasures can never give us.

Question for reflection:

1) What do I genuinely need in order to desire what God desires today?

Sunday, 2 June, Ascension of the Lord

Acts 1:1-11, Hebrews 9:24-28, 10:19-23, Luke 24:46-53

Jesus said to his disciples, 'You see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this. 'And now I am sending down to you what the Father has promised. Stay in the city then, until you are clothed with the power from on high.' Then he took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. Now as he blessed them, he withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven. They worshipped him and then went back to Jerusalem full of joy; and they were continually in the Temple praising God.

Jesus carried up to heaven

"Today our Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven; let our hearts ascend with him. Listen to the words of the Apostle: If you have risen with Christ, set your hearts on the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God; seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth. For just as he remained with us even after his ascension, so we too are already in heaven with him, even though what is promised us has not yet been fulfilled in our bodies."

(St. Augustine)

What does this feast of the Ascension of the Lord mean to us? Has this feast lost its deep meaning in our lives today?

This feast reminds us that our earthly life is not permanent. This place is not our home. Jesus went up to heaven so as to show us our permanent and eternal home. Where or what is heaven? Or who is heaven?

Heaven "is neither an abstraction nor a physical place in the clouds, but a living, personal relationship with the Holy Trinity. It is our meeting with the Father which takes place in the risen Christ through the communion of the Holy Spirit." (St. Pope John Paul II)

Heaven is the fullness of communion with God. However, heaven starts right here and right now. Today, we can make Heaven a reality when we live in constant awareness of God and be in an intimate relationship with Him.

In this life, we do not journey to Heaven alone because Jesus has given us the gift of His Holy Spirit who will guide us and lead us back home. With the Holy Spirit, we will never lose our way. We pray, walk, love and do good works, not aimlessly, but always with Heaven as our final destination. One day, we will see God face-to-face.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What does this Feast of the Ascension of the Lord mean to me?
- 2) How can I make heaven as my reality today?

**Monday, 3 June, St. Charles Lwanga and Companions
Acts 19:1-8, John 16:29-33**

His disciples said to Jesus, 'Now you are speaking plainly and not using metaphors! Now we see that you know everything, and do not have to wait for questions to be put into words; because of this we believe that you came from God.' Jesus answered them: 'Do you believe at last? Listen; the time will come - in fact it has come already - when you will be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world.'

Be brave!

"When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."
(Corrie Ten Boom)

There are many people around us who feel scared and hopeless because of the many burdens they carry in life. Sometimes, we too carry the heaviness of desolation due to a family crisis, a personal problem or a difficulty at work.

"I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me."

Today, let us stop and allow these words to fill our hearts with peace. Jesus reminds us that we, like Him, are also never alone because God the Father is with us. This reality is the source of our peace.

"I plead with you--never, ever give up on hope, never doubt, never tire, and never become discouraged. Be not afraid." (St. Pope John Paul II)

Today, let us never ever let fear cripple us to stop hoping, and stop walking on. We walk through this journey of life with Jesus who is always close to us. He is our Peace. He is our Courage. He is our Love.

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus inviting me to live through moments when I sense myself walking through the dark tunnel of fear and uncertainty?

Tuesday, 4 June

Acts 20:17-27, John 17:1-11

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: 'Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you; and, through the power over all mankind that you have given him, let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him. And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have glorified you on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do. 'Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me with that glory I had with you before ever the world was. I have made your name known to the men you took from the world to give me. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now at last they know that all you have given me comes indeed from you; for I have given them the teaching you gave to me, and they have truly accepted this, that I came from you, and have believed that it was you who sent me. I pray for them; I am not praying for the world but for those you have given me, because they belong to you: all I have is yours and all you

have is mine, and in them I am glorified. I am not in the world any longer, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.

Glory to the Father...

"...so that your Son may glorify you."

This was Jesus' constant desire. He wanted to glorify God His Father by His words and acts of love. He went around bringing healing to people. He ate with sinners and welcomed outcasts. He spoke and taught about love, forgiveness, reconciliation and compassion.

What does Jesus' words and actions speak to us about God?

As Christians, our words and actions must glorify God. Instead, many times, we seem to forget this and tend to seek glory for ourselves. We yearn for praises and affirmations from others. We want people to recognise us for the good works we do. We get upset when we are not shown appreciation.

"Whoever wants to boast must boast of what the Lord has done." (1 Corinthians 13:1)

Today, can we examine our habits, our words, our options in life, our thoughts, our conduct towards others, etc.... Are we glorifying God? In this time of prayer, let us ask the Holy Spirit to remind us throughout this day that we are here to bring honour and praise to God. Through our words and actions, people can recognise God and give glory to Him.

Question for reflection:

1) What do my words and actions tell others about God?

Wednesday, 5 June, St. Boniface
Acts 20:28-38, John 17:11-19

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: 'Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us. While I was with them, I kept those you had given me true to your name. I have watched over them and not one is lost except the one who chose to be lost, and this was to fulfil the scriptures. But now I am coming to you and while still in the world I say these things to share my joy with them to the full. I passed your word on to them, and the world hated them, because they belong to the world no more than I belong to the world. I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.'

Belonging to God

Today, let us continue with Jesus' prayer for His disciples and for us. Jesus prayed, "*Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one like us...*"

The word 'keep' reminds us of the image of a Shepherd keeping watch over his sheep so that they will be safe and protected. When a sheep starts to wander away from the Shepherd then it gets lost and troubled.

Today, Jesus prays that God the Father would keep us close to His heart and away from all enticements of the world, from all our pride that makes us to live independent from God, etc. We have the choice to stay in His love or go away from Him.

It is comforting for us to live in this security that we are kept by God in His love. Like the sheep with the Shepherd, we are safe with God by our side.

We belong to God, not to the world of lies, power, status, lust, etc. Thus, we live in this world with the awareness that we belong to God and we also have the mission to bring His presence to others.

Today, let us simply find comfort in this reality that we belong to God. Nothing and nobody can take away God's love from us. Like sheep in the arms of the Shepherd, we too are safely kept by God who watches over us, day and night. We are never alone. We are one with God and in God.

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I live in this awareness that I belong to God? Why?

Thursday, 6 June, Saint Norbert
Acts 22:30,23:6-11, John 17:20-26

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said: 'Holy Father, I pray not only for these, but for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you love me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Father, Righteous One, the world has not known you, but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me. I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them.'

Love leads to unity

"We are made for loving. If we don't love, we will be like plants without water." (Desmond Tutu)

Jesus' desire is that we may all be one. Without love, unity is impossible. What kind of love builds unity?

Active, self-giving love is what builds unity. Such love is not a sentiment or a thought but it involves the will. It implies that we need to choose to do the right action, the good action, the loving action.

We love for the good of the other. We give ourselves for the growth of the other.

In this time of prayer, let us reflect on our relationships with our family members, colleagues, friends, fellow parishioners and ask ourselves: Does my love build unity? When I speak, do I sow the seeds of love? When I carry out a task, do I seek to do so with the desire to express my love to others?

“In a Christian community division is one of the most serious sins, because it does not allow God to act...What God wants is that we be welcoming, that we forgive and love each other so as to become more and more like Him, who is communion and love.” (Pope Francis)

May we put effort in building oneness with others. Our oneness with others will only come when we are one with God. It is He who opens our hearts to desire for love and communion.

Today, let us take steps to work for oneness!

Questions for reflection:

1) Is there someone whom I am divided from? How can I work for unity?

Friday, 7 June

Acts 25:13-21, John 21:15-19

Jesus showed himself to his disciples, and after they had eaten he said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?’ He answered, ‘Yes Lord, you know I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs’. A second time he said to him, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ He replied, ‘Yes, Lord, you know I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Look after my sheep’. Then he said to him a third time, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was upset that he asked him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and said, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know I love you’. Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my

sheep. 'I tell you most solemnly, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt round you and take you where you would rather not go.' In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me.'

Do you love me? Feed my sheep!

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus approached Simon Peter and asked him, "Do you love me?" three times. This reminds us of Peter's denial of Jesus when he said, "I do not know him". Out of fear, Peter turned his back on His Friend and Master.

By asking Peter the question thrice, Jesus was forgiving Peter for his moment of weakness. Moreover, Jesus continued to entrust the mission of being a Shepherd to His flock to Peter. He did not stop trusting Peter despite all that had happened.

Today, Jesus knows that our human frailties are obstacles to truly love Him and give ourselves to Him. He never tires of asking us daily, "Do you love me?" It is not that Jesus has His suspicions about our love for Him. Rather, He wants us to express our love, no longer by mere words or empty promises, but by allowing ourselves, again and again, to be used for His grand mission. Jesus calls us to enter into a more mature love, a deeper following.

"Feed my lambs... Look after my sheep.... Feed my sheep."

There are many people who are like sheep without a Shepherd. Thus, we have the responsibility to bring people to Him so that they too can experience the gift of His love.

In this time of prayer, let us listen to Jesus as He asks once more, "Do you love me?" What will your response be?

Question for reflection:

1) If I love Jesus deeply, what am I doing for Him?



**Life is a journey. When we
stop, things don't go right.**

Pope Francis

Saturday, 8 June

Acts 28:16-20, 30-31 John 21:20-25

Peter turned and saw the disciple Jesus loved following them - the one who had leaned on his breast at the supper and had said to him, 'Lord, who is it that will betray you?' Seeing him, Peter said to Jesus, 'What about him, Lord?' Jesus answered, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come, what does it matter to you? You are to follow me.' The rumour then went out among the brothers that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus had not said to Peter, 'He will not die', but, 'If I want him to stay behind till I come'. This disciple is the one who vouches for these things and has written them down, and we know that his testimony is true. There were many other things that Jesus did; if all were written down, the world itself, I suppose, would not hold all the books that would have to be written.

You are to follow me!

Peter had a long way to go in his journey of following Jesus. Even after Peter was given the responsibility to be the Shepherd of His flock, he was still the same old impulsive Peter. He was distracted as his thoughts wandered to the Beloved disciple. If Peter had received the mandate to feed Jesus' sheep, he was curious to know about the path of the Beloved disciple.

"What about him, Lord?"

Why was Peter curious about the Beloved disciple? Was he comparing himself to this disciple who had leaned closely to Jesus at the last Supper? Was Peter feeling jealous?

We will never know the reason why Peter asked Jesus that question. However, we do know that we ourselves have asked the same question that Peter asked. We ask because we tend to compare ourselves with others.

"Follow me"

The answer of Jesus to Peter shows His patient love that never stops to call him back to what is essential. Likewise, Jesus patiently calls us, *"Follow me"*.

When we follow Him, He will lead us to live a purposeful life of love. Then, we will realise that we have our own missions as well as to recognise that each brother and sister has also been called to follow Jesus, and He is the One who will lead them to do the specific mission that they have been entrusted with. Today, let us fix our eyes on Jesus and follow Him wherever He goes.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I follow Jesus with greater faithfulness today?

Sunday, 9 June, Pentecost

Acts 2:1-11, Romans 8:8-17, John 14:15-16,23-26

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. If anyone loves me he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our home with him. Those who do not love me do not keep my words. And my word is not my own: it is the word of the one who sent me. I have said these things to you while still with you; but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.'

Come, Holy Spirit

"The Holy Spirit, then, as Jesus promises, guides us "into all truth" (Jn 16:13) he leads us not only to an encounter with Jesus, the fullness of Truth, but guides us "into" the Truth, that is, he helps us enter into a deeper communion with Jesus himself, gifting us knowledge of the things of God. We cannot achieve this on our own strengths. If God does not enlighten us interiorly, our being Christians will be superficial." (Pope Francis)

Today, as we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, we rejoice because the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is with us always. The Holy Spirit guides us to enter into a deeper communion with Jesus and helps us to grow more and more to be like Jesus Himself - to love with mercy and to live with freedom. Only the Holy Spirit can transform and mould us to become who we are meant to be - God's beloved children.

"You can follow a thousand catechism courses, a thousand spirituality courses, a thousand yoga or zen courses and all these things. But none of this will be able to give you the freedom as a child (of God). Only the Holy Spirit can prompt your heart to say 'Father.' Only the Holy Spirit is capable of banishing, of breaking that hardness of heart and making it ... soft? No, I don't like that word, ... 'docile'. Docile towards the Lord. Docile when it comes to the freedom to love." (Pope Francis)

Let the Holy Spirit be a friend and not a stranger to us, and so we open our hearts to receive Him today!

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who is the Holy Spirit?
- 2) How open am I to be guided by the Holy Spirit in me?

Monday, 10 June

2 Corinthians 1:1-7, 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.

Happy are you...

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a gentle Father and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in our sorrows, so that we can offer others, in their sorrows, the consolation that we have received from God ourselves. Indeed, as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so, through Christ, does our consolation overflow." (2 Corinthians 1:4)

The above passage is taken from the first reading of today. These beautifully rich words from St. Paul to the Corinthians show that God is the source of all comfort and consolation in every hardship we

experience in life. God comforts us in our sorrows so that we can offer to others the consolation we receive from God.

Many people see sufferings in a negative light, and so they try to avoid such experiences. As Christians, we need to live sufferings in the light of faith. We need to recognise that we can help others from our sufferings.

This links with the Gospel of today where Jesus speaks of the Beatitudes. This teaching of Jesus is not about how to achieve a good, comfortable and easy life. It speaks about being poor in spirit, gentle, mournful, hungry for justice, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and persecuted for the sake of Christ. All these go against the world's values and desires. When we really start living the Beatitudes in our daily life, we centre our lives on God, and live a radically new way of being. We will suffer for living our faith with passion and commitment. However, let us never forget that we will also experience the greatest joy and peace that this world can never give to us.

Question for reflection:

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

**Tuesday, 11 June, St. Barnabas
2 Corinthians 1:18-22, Matthew 5:13-16**

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

Salt and light

"You are the salt of the earth.... You are the light of the world."

Jesus does not give us the option but He calls us to be salt of the earth and light of the world.

Salt might not seem to be essential in our modern world. However, in the ancient world, soldiers used to receive salt as their wages. Salt then was the main way to preserve meat and fish as a way to prevent rotting of the food. It was, as it is now, an important ingredient to add flavour to food. Therefore, Jesus is calling all His disciples to be salt by adding flavour to the world by living our faith as well as to preserve the truth and love that He proclaimed.

However, Jesus warns us to be careful not to lose our saltiness. This is because when salt is contaminated, it becomes useless and cannot be used for anything, except to be thrown away. We cannot allow sins of indifference, pride, jealousy, lust, etc. to harden our hearts and make us become contaminated salt. We are meant to be purposeful Christians living our faith with joy and enthusiasm.

We are also called to be the light of the world in the same way Jesus is the Light of the world.

We radiate Christ's presence in this world by living a life of love. The more we put love into action, the more our light will shine for Christ. By our good deeds done out of love, we make Jesus present in our world.

It is time to become salt and light in our homes, workplaces, neighbourhood and society.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I influence my surroundings with God's values and ways?

Wednesday, 12 June

2 Corinthians 3:4-11, Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'

The Law of love

"I have come not to abolish but to complete them."

Jesus did not come to do away with the Law of the Old Testament but to bring it to a higher level, i.e. to the Law of Love. As Jesus' disciples, we are called to keep, live and teach this Law of love - the very same Law which Jesus lived and taught.

Today, let us take time to review our life and reflect whether we have been loving God, others and ourselves. Have we been faithful to God and the ways of the Gospel? Have we been compassionate and sought to forgive and be forgiven? Have we accepted and loved ourselves for who we are? Have we followed the Law of love closely?

Following the Law of love is not simply following a set of rules and regulations. It springs from a heart that desires to love. St. Therese is one example of someone who understood the Law of love and lived it with great enthusiasm. In her prayer, she discovered and wrote the following:

"Without being discouraged I continued my reading, and this phrase comforted me: 'Earnestly desire the more perfect gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way' (1 Cor 12:31). And the Apostle explains how all gifts, even the most perfect, are nothing without Love... that charity is the excellent way that leads surely to God. At last I had found rest.... Considering the mystical Body of the Church, I had not recognized

myself in any of the members described by St. Paul, or rather, I wanted to recognize myself in all... Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church has a body composed of different members, the noblest and most necessary of all the members would not be lacking to her. I understood that the Church has a heart, and that this heart burns with Love. I understood that Love alone makes its members act, that if this Love were to be extinguished, the Apostles would no longer preach the Gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood... I understood that Love embraces all vocations, that Love is all things, that it embraces all times and all places... in a word, that it is eternal!" (St. Therese of Child Jesus)

Let us follow the examples of many Christian men and women who abide by the Law of love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I obey the Law of Love?

**Thursday, 13 June, Saint Anthony of Padua
2 Corinthians 3:15-4:1,3-6, Matthew 5:20-26**

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

Go and be reconciled

We all know very well that we must love our brothers and sisters. However, knowing does not mean that we necessarily put love into practice.

In today's Gospel, Jesus referred to the scribes and Pharisees, who were the 'experts' of the Law, they had no qualms about telling people that they had to love but they themselves failed to do what they said.

We must not be like the scribes and Pharisees. Rather, we must always put into practice what we know. We must love and not hate. This is because hatred can 'kill' others by our words and attitudes. When we insult or belittle someone, our words are rooted in anger and even hatred. Often, we do not realise the impact of our words and actions.

"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."

Today, Jesus invites us to look at each person as our brother, our sister, and to seek to be at peace with each brother and sister. If we are against others, we cannot go to God our Father with sincerity. Let us ask Jesus to give us the courage to work always for reconciliation. Let us open our eyes to see each other as a brother and sister.

Questions for reflection:

1) Is there someone with whom I have to work for reconciliation? How can I put into practice the words of Jesus?

Friday, 14 June

2 Corinthians 4:7-15, 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.'

Carriers of Christ

"We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us. We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; we have been persecuted, but never deserted; knocked down, but never killed; always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body."

(2 Corinthians 4:7-10)

In the first reading of today, St. Paul reminds us that we are earthenware jars that contain the greatest treasure, i.e. Christ Himself. Carrying Christ in us, we have the inner strength to keep moving forward, even if we keep falling many times along the way. The reality that we carry this immense treasure in us marks the way we live our life.

How?

We become people of integrity who recognise the inner dignity of others and treat them with respect. In today's Gospel, though Jesus speaks about adultery, the message behind His words is not simply about sexual acts. Rather, it reminds us that each person deserves to

be treated with respect. This is because each person is sacred. He/she is like an earthenware jar that contains Christ. Each person belongs to God and is deeply loved by Him. We must never use another person for our own personal pleasure or benefits.

Jesus speaks also about tearing and cutting away eyes and limbs. We must not take His words literally but go to the meaning behind them. If our eyes prevent us from looking at someone with a clean heart, then we have to move away and not look at that person. If our feet cause us to walk towards a place which might lead us to sin, then we have to walk away and not go there.

We must never forget that we are earthenware jars that contain Christ within us. Let us express deep and genuine respect and love for others.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus inviting me to do?

Saturday, 15 June

2 Corinthians 5:14-21, Matthew 5:33-37

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you: do not swear at all, either by heaven, since that is God's throne; or by the earth, since that is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great king. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one.'

Honest words

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus once again invites each one of us to be people of integrity where we are honest and truthful in our communication with one another as well as transparent with our words.

Often, we tend to say something but we do not really mean what we say. We sometimes lie so that we avoid disappointing someone, we

want to be 'nice' to others, etc. Other times, we make false promises so as to escape getting into conflict. There are moments when we speak with great conviction on topics which we have little understanding about because we want to impress others. There are times when we gossip about others.

We seldom stop to reflect and see how our words reveal our personal integrity. Today, it is a good time to examine ourselves during this time of prayer. We are invited to speak with integrity and to use words that are directed always towards truth and love. In order to speak words directed towards truth and love, we need to discern carefully if what we say, out of love, will benefit others. Sometimes, we speak the truth even though we might hurt someone but we know that it is a necessary and most loving thing to do. Other times, we hold back on speaking the truth to someone because he/she is not ready for it, or because we might not be the right ones to do so. We need to discern our motives, the timing, the circumstances, etc. so that our words will be aimed always for truth and love.

Let us be people of integrity and speak words of truth and love to those we meet each day.

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I mean what I say and say what I mean? How can my words be in the direction of truth and love?

Sunday, 16 June, Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:22-31, Romans 5:1-5, John 16:12-15

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I still have many things to say to you but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself but will say only what he has learnt; and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he tells you will be taken from what is mine. Everything the Father has is mine; that is why I said: All he tells you will be taken from what is mine.'

Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

"One day, St. Augustine was walking on the beach contemplating the mystery of the Trinity. Then he saw a boy in front of him who had dug

a hole in the sand and was going out to the sea again and again and bringing some water to pour into the hole. St Augustine watched the boy for some time and he asked him, "What are you doing?" "I am going to pour the entire ocean into this hole." St Augustine laughed and said, "That is impossible! My dear boy, the whole ocean will never fit in the hole you have made." The boy replied, "And you cannot fit the Trinity in your tiny little brain." The boy vanished. St Augustine realised that he had been talking to an angel." (Unknown)

Today, we celebrate Trinity Sunday - a Feast which we might not get excited about or even fully understand the meaning of. However, the Holy Trinity is the fundamental reality of our faith which requires us, not to understand intellectually, but to enter into this mystery of love with faith.

The Trinity lives in us and with us. We have a constant companion with us always. Imagine that we are constantly in the hands of our Creator, the hands of our Redeemer and the hands of our Sanctifier. In His hands, we are loved and cared for.

The Trinity is three persons but one in communion. Truly, our God is a model to what a perfect relationship is all about. So many times, division in relationships happen when we fail to be one. Friends walk away. A community breaks up. The family is destroyed because we do not understand fully what it means to be different yet united.

Today, let us not try to figure out the Trinity because our tiny little brain cannot fully understand it. However, let us allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to live in this complete truth of the Trinitarian presence in us. Let us take comfort that we are always in the hands of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, and there, we are secure. With the Triune God in us, we have the grace to work for unity with those around us.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I aware of the presence of the Trinity in me every day?
- 2) How can I be more aware that the Trinity lives deep within me?"

Monday, 17 June

2 Corinthians 6:1-10, 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.'

Compassion

The justice of the Old Testament is: "*An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*" However, Jesus went beyond this law and focused instead on compassionate love. When one is compassionate, he/she looks at the suffering of the other and has an active will to alleviate the pain of the other. Many have the wrong understanding of compassion as being just a sentiment. In today's gospel, Jesus shows that compassion is demanding, and it means offering the other cheek, giving up what we possess, going the extra mile, not turning anyone away.

We are sons and daughters of God our Father. He never fails to love us with His compassionate love, even though we go away from Him time and time again. He never ignores or turns us away when we are in need. Like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, God always runs towards us and embraces us with arms of mercy and love. Following the compassionate heart of our Father, we too need to go beyond our instincts and feelings, and treat others as God treats us.

Does our compassion for those around us reach that point? We may find it difficult to go the extra mile for someone when we are not appreciated. Yet, how many times have God given Himself to us and we don't even realize it? How many times are we forgiven again and again by our Merciful Father or given much more than what we need by Him? To live a life of compassion is a sign of maturity in love, a sign that we are truly sons and daughters of God our Father.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I walk this road of compassion today?

Tuesday, 18 June

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 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.'

Mature love like Christ's love

It is in our human nature to limit our love to our family and friends. Once again, Jesus challenges us to stretch beyond the limits we put in loving others, and include those we do not like or who are against us. He calls us to love those people whom we naturally oppose and keep our distance. In short, Christian love is revolutionary; it requires a radical transformation.

Can we take on Jesus' call to love all, even our enemies?

It might seem like an impossible feat to stretch our love to include our enemies. We might wonder if we can ever do such a thing. Everything is possible, not by our own strength, but by the grace of God. He gives us the capacity to love unconditionally.

"But Father" [one might say], 'I don't feel like behaving that way'. 'Well', [one might reply], 'if you don't feel like it, that's your problem, but that's the Christian way.' This is that way that Jesus teaches us. 'And what can I hope?' [one might ask]. Go on Jesus' way, which is the way of mercy. Be merciful as your father is merciful. Only with a merciful heart can we do all that, which the Lord counsels us to do – all the way. The Christian life is not a navel-gazing one. It is a life in which one gets out

of oneself in order to give oneself to others. It is a gift, it is love – and love does not turn in on itself, it is not selfish, but self-giving.”
(Pope Francis)

Today, let us ask God for the grace to love as He loves.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I put love into practice today?

Wednesday, 19 June

2 Corinthians 9:6-11, 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.’

Focus on the heart

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people.” (Colossians 3:23)

It is important to be clear of our motives in whatever we do: almsgiving, fasting and prayer. As Christians, we need to seek Christ in all that we do and say, so that we can strive to work for Him, and not for our own

selfish desires and motives. God rewards us, not with material things, but with His gifts of peace and joy. It does not matter if people see and appreciate our actions or not. When we do it for God, we will experience a deep sense of peace and joy that nobody and nothing can take away from us.

Today, Jesus wants us to look at our hearts and see the reason why we do good deeds, fast and pray. If we find ourselves doing things for our own selfish reasons, then we have to stop and re-examine our motives. Good deeds, fasting and prayer are means to open ourselves to grow closer to God and to others. Let us always seek to honestly love God and to sincerely do good for others today.

Questions for reflection:

1) Why do I do good deeds, fast and pray? Is it for selfish reasons or for selfless reasons?

Thursday, 20 June

2 Corinthians 11:1-11, Matthew 6:7-15

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

Our Father

We are very familiar with the recitation of the prayer, 'Our Father'. However, more than simply memorizing and babbling the prayer, Jesus calls us to live this prayer from our heart.

It is important to understand that the number of words in our prayers do not mean that they are effective. Rather, the manner in which we

approach God is essential. God wants us to relate with Him with affection and love.

In fact, Jesus teaches us to call God, "Our Father". This is who God is for us - Our Father. This is who we are for Him - His beloved children.

Interestingly, Jesus uses, 'Our Father' and not 'my Father' because God is the Father of all humanity. We belong to the human family where each person is our brother and sister. Thus, to pray this beautiful prayer of the "Our Father" implies that we dare to open our hearts to love our brothers and sisters, especially those who are in need of their daily bread. There are many people who are hungry for their daily bread of love and friendship, and live lonely lives without any care and concern from their family and friends.

"If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

We might not be able to help relieve the needs of the whole world, but we can start by helping one person today. When we give that person his/her daily bread, we are truly living this prayer from our heart.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, is there someone, among my family and friends, who is in need of my time, friendship, kindness, etc.?

Friday, 21 June, St. Aloysius Gonzaga
2 Corinthians 11:18,21-30, 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.

Questions for reflection:

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

Saturday, 22 June, Ss. John Fisher and Thomas More 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, 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)

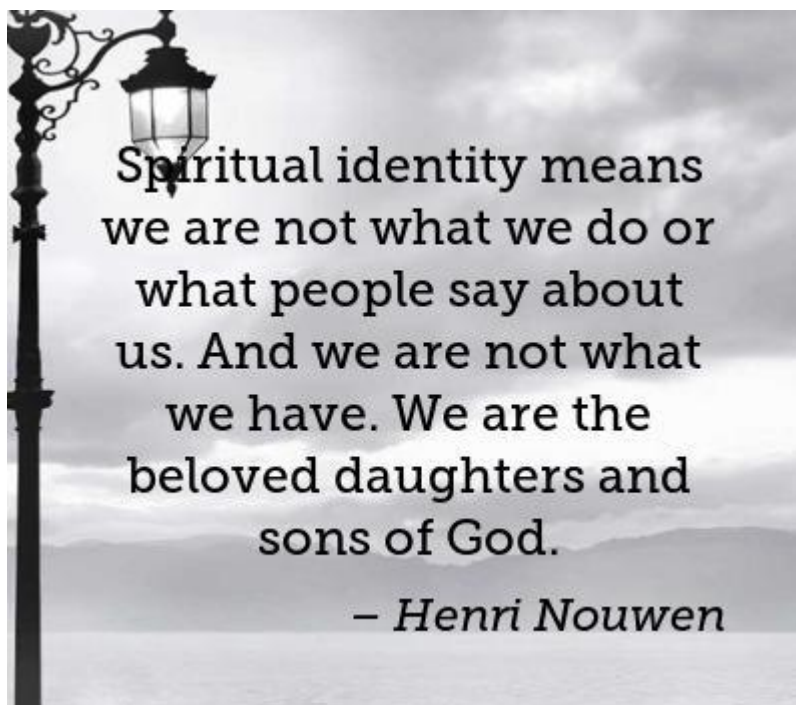
If God is our only Master, our only Love, He should be the one directing our 24 hours of each day, and not just when we are in church grounds. In our 86,400 seconds of each and every day, God our Father is there caring for us. He is present even when we are not aware of it and live each day rushing for 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, 23 June, Corpus Christi Sunday

Genesis 14:18-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Luke 9:11-17

Jesus made the crowds welcome and talked to them about the kingdom of God; and he cured those who were in need of healing. It was late afternoon when the Twelve came to him and said, 'Send the people away, and they can go to the villages and farms round about to find lodging and food; for we are in a lonely place here'. He replied, 'Give them something to eat yourselves'. But they said, 'We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we are to go ourselves and buy food for all these people' For there were about five thousand men. But he said to his disciples, 'Get them to sit down in parties of about fifty'. They did so and made them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven, and said the blessing over them; then he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute among the crowd. They all ate as much as they wanted, and when the scraps remaining were collected they filled twelve baskets.

No greater love than this...

The crowds came looking for Jesus and He made them feel welcomed. Isn't this comforting for us today as we too come and approach Jesus in prayer? Like a Shepherd, Jesus never sends any person away without seeing to his/her needs and desires. In today's gospel passage, Jesus welcomed the people and talked to them about God, about His Kingdom.

Do we make people feel welcomed when they enter into our home, our parish? Do we share with them God's love?

The people were so enthralled by Jesus and His words that they forgot about the time and their hunger. The disciples' attitude towards the people was so different from Jesus' attitude. They went up to tell Jesus, "*Send the people away...*" He had no intention of sending the crowds away. Instead, Jesus told His disciples, "*Give them something to eat yourselves.*"

We can imagine the disciples looking with misery at their meagre five loaves and two fish, and the huge crowd in front of them. They forgot to focus on Jesus and trust in His power and love to provide.

Do we trust in Jesus' power and love to provide for our daily needs? Or do we focus on the little that we have and see the impossibility of everything?

Jesus performed a miracle and fed the crowd with just five loaves and two fish. The people ate and they had enough. Today, as we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, let us rejoice that Jesus gives Himself to us selflessly in order to feed and nourish us every time we receive Him during each Eucharist celebration. He will never let us go hungry but fills us with His faithful presence of love.

"Out of the darkness of my life, so much frustration, I put before you one great thing to love on earth: The Blessed Sacrament... There you will find romance, glory, honour, fidelity and the true way of all your loves upon earth." (J.R.R. Tolkien)

Monday, 24 June, Nativity of 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.

With others and for others

"...when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy."

Elizabeth and Zechariah did not celebrate the joyful birth of their son by themselves. Their neighbours and relations gathered around them and rejoiced with them. This reminds us of a very important aspect of our Christian life - community. We are not meant to be isolated beings. We are not called to live our faith alone by ourselves. No! Each of us is meant to be with others, not isolated. With others, we share our joy. With others, we grow in our faith. With others, we share our sorrows. With others, we pray. With others, we suffer.

St. John the Baptist was born in a family as well as a community of faith. In the company of his family and friends, he grew up and his spirit matured. Later in his mission, St John the Baptist lived his faith with others and for others. He appeared openly to Israel and became a light for the nation as well as the voice preparing the way for the Messiah.

We are meant to be with others and for others. Our Christian faith must not be just 'God and I' but 'God, others and I'. Let us find God's presence in our fellow Christians and form one community of faith where we can all grow matured in our inner lives with God.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I see the importance of belonging to a community of faith? Why?
- 2) How can I live my faith more with others and for others?

Tuesday, 25 June

Genesis 13:2,5-18, Matthew 7:6.12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces. So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets. Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to

perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.'

Rule of thumb

"There was once a Chinese girl named Li-li who got married and lived with her mother-in-law. Since the mother-in-law was obnoxious, Li-li decided to kill her. Li-li went to her doctor to get slow-acting poison. The doctor said, "Just so that people don't suspect you, treat your mother-in-law very nice, as you'd like to be treated." So Li-li was nice to her mother-in-law as she slipped a little poison into her food each day. Now a funny thing happened: the two started getting along much better and became best friends. So Li-li went back to the doctor and said, "I now love my mother-in-law and don't want to kill her; please give me something to counteract the poison." The doctor replied, "I gave you ordinary vitamins; the only poison was in your attitude." (Anonymous)

Jesus gives us the golden rule: *"So always treat others as you would like them to treat you."*

Jesus invites us to actively do for others what we would want others to do for us. If we want to be loved, we must first give love to others. If we want to be treated with respect, we must treat others with greater respect. If we want to be understood, we must first try to open ourselves to understand others' mindset and viewpoint.

Let this rule be the basis for all our actions today!

Question for reflection:

1) "So always treat others as you would like them to treat you." How can I apply this concretely to my life today?

Wednesday, 26 June

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18, 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.'

Meant to bear good fruits

A fruit tree might be huge, shady and beautiful to look at. However, if it bears bad fruits, then it is not a good tree. We judge whether a tree is sound or unsound by what it produces and not by its external appearances. Likewise, we know whether a prophet is good or bad, by the fruits that he/she bears. Whether a Christian is genuine or not, we can know by the fruits that he/she bears.

As Christians, we are called to be good trees that bear good fruits. Jesus is concerned with quality rather than quantity. This is because good fruits manifest the content of our heart. A heart that is full of love will produce fruits of forgiveness, compassion, kindness, patience and joy.

Let us ask ourselves: What do I have inside my heart? Is my heart full of love?

"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me. Those who do not remain in me are thrown out like a branch and dry up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples." (John 15: 5-8)

It is a relationship of deep union with Jesus that we can grow to become good trees. In this time of prayer, let us allow ourselves to be drawn by Christ. He calls us to remain in Him. When we are in Him, we become good trees that bear fruits of love.

Question for reflection:

1) What fruit am I producing?

Thursday, 27 June, Saint Cyril of Alexandria
Genesis 16:1-12,15-16, 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.

Questions for reflection:

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

Friday, 28 June, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
Ezekiel 34:11-16, Romans 5:5-11, Luke 15:3-7

Jesus spoke this parable to the scribes and Pharisees: 'What man among you with a hundred sheep, losing one, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the missing one till he found it? And when he found it, would he not joyfully take it on his shoulders and then, when he got home, call together his friends and neighbours? "Rejoice with me," he would say "I have found my sheep that was lost." In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine virtuous men who have no need of repentance.'

God is not a good loser

"He replies to this murmuring with a joyful parable. The words 'joy' and 'happiness' appear in this short text four times: three times joy, and once happiness. "And you" – it's as if he were saying – "you are scandalised by this, but my Father rejoices". That is the most profound message of this story: the joy of God, a God who doesn't like to lose. God is not a good loser, and this is why, in order not to lose, He goes out on his own, and He goes, He searches. He is a God who searches: He searches for all those who are far away from Him, like the shepherd who goes to search for the lost sheep." (Pope Francis)

The Shepherd goes to look for that one insignificant sheep. In the Shepherd's heart, each sheep, each person is special and precious. He would do anything to bring that one lost sheep back to His arms. When He finds it, there are no words of condemnation but joy.

Today, let us experience the joy of God in our lives. We are also called to be shepherds after the heart of the Good Shepherd. We learn from Jesus how not to condemn or point an accusing finger at others but to show God's forgiveness, mercy and compassion. We rejoice when a lost wandering sheep returns home.

Questions for reflection:

1) Have I ever experienced being distant from the Shepherd? What made me return to the arms of the Shepherd and experience His joy?

2) How can I be a shepherd constantly guiding those around me to the Good Shepherd?

Saturday, 29 June, Ss. Peter and Paul

Acts 12:1-11, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18, Matthew 16:13-19

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'. 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God'. Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'

A saint? Me?

"Do you aspire to be a saint?" If someone asks you this question, what would your reply be?

We all aspire to be a good mother, a doting father, a successful businessperson, a good leader, etc. However, we seldom or never aspire to be a saint because we look at ourselves and get discouraged with our inconsistencies and failures. How can we ever become saints?

The good news is that we do not become saints on our own efforts. God is the 'saint-maker'. It is He who made these two ordinary men into Saints Peter and Paul.

Peter was a man of strength as well as cowardice. When Jesus asked the disciples, *"Who do you say I am?"* Peter had the honest courage to answer Jesus, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Jesus then entrusted Him with the mission to be the rock on which He would build His church.

Most likely, Peter had no idea what His Master was talking about. This was because Peter, in the High Priest's courtyard, denied Jesus three times.

Paul or Saul was a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the early Christians because they were following Jesus. Yet, on the way to Damascus, he experienced a deep conversion when Jesus revealed Himself to him. Who would imagine a zealous persecutor could become a passionate apostle to the gentiles? Paul spread the Gospel and brought the Christian faith to many people, and even faced persecution himself.

Peter and Paul were poles apart in their faith stories. Yet, both allowed God to work in their lives with total trust. Today, we celebrate their Feast day with the certain hope that we too can indeed aspire to be saints!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I aspire to be a saint? Why?
- 2) How can I allow God to work more in me and through me?

**Sunday, 30 June, Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
1 Kings 19:16,19-21, Galatians 5:1,13-18, Luke 9:51-62**

As the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely took the road for Jerusalem and sent messengers ahead of him. These set out, and they went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him, but the people would not receive him because he was making for Jerusalem. Seeing this, the disciples James and John said, 'Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?' But he turned and rebuked them, and they went off to another village. As they 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'.

Following Jesus always

As Jesus and His disciples set off for Jerusalem, they went into a Samaritan village. The Samaritans in that village did not welcome Him because He was going to Jerusalem. During Jesus' time, the Jews and the Samaritans were enemies, and both sides were hostile to each other. James and John reacted in anger, "*Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?*" Jesus, however, reprimanded them and simply went off in another direction.

"Whenever you are confronted with an opponent. Conquer him with love." (Gandhi)

Jesus' mission is not of violence and revenge, but of peace and love. This is something that we, as His disciples, must continue to follow. Instead of retaliation, we bring reconciliation. Instead of reacting, we respond with a smile that brings peace.

As they went on their way, three young men approached Jesus with the desire to follow Him. Jesus' replies to these three men show that discipleship has a cost and demand total commitment. Today, we need to examine our own following of Jesus and ask Him for the grace to follow Him radically. Let us never be afraid of committing ourselves to Jesus, but open our hearts to Him, and have more trust in Him.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How do I respond in the face of oppositions and rejections?
- 2) Do I find myself compromising in my following of Jesus? Why?

Monday, 1 July, Bl. Junipero Serra
Genesis 18:16-33, Matthew 8:18-22

When Jesus saw the great crowds all about him he gave orders to leave for the other side. One of the scribes then came up and said to him, 'Master, I will follow you wherever you go'. Jesus replied, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'. Another man, one of his disciples, said to him, 'Sir, let me go and bury my father first'. But Jesus replied, 'Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead'.

A radical call for all Christians

Are we ready to follow Jesus unconditionally? Jesus does not make sales talk and sugar coat His words to attract people to follow Him. Instead, He lays his cards on the table and states clearly what it means to be His disciples. His call is radical. His call is decisive.

In today's gospel, one of the scribes went to Jesus and declared, *"Master, I will follow you wherever you go."* Jesus warned him that following Him implied giving up worldly securities and living a simple life as He did. Jesus had less security than even the foxes and birds because He had no house to call His own. By becoming His disciple, the scribes must dare to live as He lived, and simply be at the service of those in need. The next man came up to Jesus and asked to bury his father first, which was a common expression which means to look after his father until his death. Jesus, however, challenged this man to have the courage to leave his family which might be an obstacle for his following. Thus, Jesus simply said, *"Follow me."*

Is Jesus asking for too much?

This is something that each of us has to answer from our heart. As baptised Christians, all of us are called to follow Jesus radically. We too are called to live a life of simplicity as Jesus did. We are to put our securities not in honour or worldly possessions, but in God alone. We are called to leave our families too because they do not come first, but God. When God is in the centre of our lives, then we can truly love and serve our family better with freedom and truth.

"The disciple simply burns his boats and goes ahead. He is called out... The old life is left behind, and completely surrendered. The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity... out of the realm of the finite...into the realm of infinite possibilities."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Lord, your call is too difficult and radical. Yet, I desire to follow you with total love and faithfulness today.

Tuesday, 2 July

Genesis 19:15-29, Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus got into the boat followed by his disciples. Without warning a storm broke over the lake, so violent that the waves were breaking right over the boat. But he was asleep. So they went to him and woke him saying, 'Save us, Lord, we are going down!' And he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened, you men of little faith?' And with that he stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and all was calm again. The men were astounded and said, 'Whatever kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him.'

Perfect trust

In today's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples got into a boat and went on a journey on the lake. Along the way, they encountered a fierce storm. The disciples were terrified to the point that they thought that their boat would capsize.

Reflecting on this passage brings consolation to us. This is because we realize that it does not mean that when Jesus is in our boat, in our life, we will never experience storms of difficulties. It does not mean that our life would be free from all pains, brokenness and disappointments. Jesus was in the boat with His disciples but they still had to face the storm.

Storms will come along our way as we journey through life. Yet, our greatest comfort is that Jesus is in our boat, in our life. He is with us no matter how great the storm is.

Sometimes, we might not sense His presence and think that He is 'asleep' and does not bother or care. Jesus knows. He calls us to trust in Him. Jesus slept on despite the storm because He had deep trust in God His Father. His trust was so great that He was able to find rest in His Father's love. In the same way that Jesus remained sleeping in the midst of the fierce storm, we are also called to rest in His presence when we find ourselves faced with broken relationships, crisis at work, family problem, health issues, etc. We can trust that Jesus will never let us down. He will give us His peace and give us the strength to carry on.

"O Christ Jesus, when all is darkness and we feel our weakness and helplessness, give us the sense of Your presence, Your love and Your strength. Help us to have perfect trust in Your protecting love and strengthening power, so that nothing may frighten or worry us, for, living close to You, we shall see Your hand, Your purpose, Your will through all things." (Prayer for Trust in Jesus, St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I have a tendency to allow my personal storms in life to overwhelm me that I become fearful? What prevents me from trusting more in Jesus?

**Wednesday, 3 July, St. Thomas, Apostle
Ephesians 2:19-22, John 20:24-29**

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord', he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe'. Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: 'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

Doubt no longer!

“Dearly beloved, what do you see in these events? Do you really believe that it was by chance that this chosen disciple was absent, then came and heard, heard and doubted, doubted and touched, touched and believed? It was not by chance but in God’s providence. In a marvellous way God’s mercy arranged that the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his master’s body, should heal our wounds of disbelief. The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples. As he touches Christ and is won over to belief, every doubt is cast aside and our faith is strengthened. So the disciple who doubted, then felt Christ’s wounds, becomes a witness to the reality of the resurrection.” (St. Gregory the Great)

Today, we can identify ourselves with Thomas. Though it is the greatest challenge to live by faith, it is also the very foundation of our Christian life.

Thomas insisted on touching the wounds of Jesus in order to believe. When the Risen Jesus gave him the opportunity to personally encounter Him and touch His wounds, Thomas cried out those beautiful words, “My Lord and My God”.

His encounter with His Master and Friend led him to become a living witness of his faith. Thomas became a true missionary who brought faith outside of the Roman Empire, going as far as India. He continued to touch the wounds of Jesus present in the people whom he met in his mission and gave them the healing love of Jesus.

Today, let us encounter Jesus and allow Him to heal the wounds of all our doubts so that we can be led into a deeper faith. Like St. Thomas, we cannot hold back the treasure of our faith but be impelled to touch the wounds of disbelief and doubts in our brothers and sisters and be living witnesses of our Lord and God.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus’ personal invitation to me in this time of prayerful silence?



**We all have the duty to
do good.**

Pope Francis

Thursday, 4 July

Genesis 22:1-19, Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his own town. Then some people appeared, bringing him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Courage, my child, your sins are forgiven'. And at this some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming'. Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, 'Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' - he said to the paralytic - 'get up, and pick up your bed and go off home'. And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for giving such power to men.

Your sins are forgiven

A paralytic man was brought to Jesus for healing. Jesus, looking at the faith of the friends, told the paralytic, "Courage, my child, your sins are forgiven." The paralytic man expected healing instead Jesus forgave his sins. Why did Jesus forgive the sins of this man and not just heal him from his physical infirmity?

Jesus saw the heart of this man. He knew that the man needed to be forgiven for his sins that prevented him from living life with deep peace and true freedom. Jesus' love reached out to the paralytic man and He did the most unthinkable thing by healing him spiritually. The Pharisees, however, accused Jesus of blaspheming. For them, only God could rightfully forgive sins. Jesus, by forgiving sins, had taken the place of God. In order to show that Jesus had authority to forgive sins, He healed the man from his physical infirmity. Interestingly, Jesus knew the wicked thoughts in the Pharisees' hearts but continued to hope that they, after witnessing the many miracles and listening to His teaching, would be open to receive Him. However, their hearts were hardened and they could not praise God for what they saw. The people, with their simple faith, saw the miracle and praised God.

Today, let us, like the paralytic man's friends, bring our family and friends to Jesus so that His healing love can touch them and make them live their lives fully.

Let us also never get tired of going to Jesus and knowing that He has the power to heal us from everything that makes us suffer from paralysis within us. We need to trust that His love desires the best for us.

Lastly, may our hearts hold thoughts of goodness and love that make us rejoice at the actions of God in our life and the life of others.

Question for reflection:

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

Friday, 5 July, St. Elizabeth of Portugal

Genesis 23:1-4, 19, 24:1-8, 62-67, Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, 'Follow me'. And he got up and followed him. While he was at dinner in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'

Mercy is what I want

Jesus saw Matthew and called him, a tax collector, to follow Him. Matthew, who was so used to being ridiculed and ostracised by the Jews for being a public sinner due to his occupation, was taken aback by Jesus invitation that he immediately got up and went with Him.

"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'."

(Pope Francis)

When the Pharisees saw Jesus mingling with tax collectors and sinners, they judged Him for this action. Jesus quoted the words of the Prophet Hosea: "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice" in order to remind them the true meaning of faith in God.

We usually associate 'mercy' with pardoning someone. However, the word, in the Bible, holds a deeper meaning than simply offering pardon to someone. It refers to a tender, compassionate love, a love that has special concerns for the sufferings of others. Mercy is an extension of Love. It is Love stooping down to the needs and miseries of others, for example, spending time to listen to a friend's problem, offering hope to a disheartened colleague, a helping hand to someone in need and other such acts. This is what God wants from each one of us. He wants us to exercise this practical love. We can love with mercy because we ourselves have experienced His unfailing forgiving mercy in our own lives.

Today, as we go about our work, school, relationships with others, let us be aware that we need to exercise this practical love of God. This is how we will please God today!

Question for reflection

1) How can I put mercy into action today?

Saturday, 6 July, St. Maria Goretti Genesis 27:1-5,15-29, Matthew 9:14-17

John's disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants would never think of mourning as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on to an old cloak, because the patch pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; if they do, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine into fresh skins and both are preserved.'

New Wine, New Wineskin

The disciples of John the Baptist were upset that Jesus' disciples did not fast as they did. For Jesus, His presence brought joy to the lives of His disciples in the same way the presence of the bridegroom would cause people to celebrate. There would come a time when Jesus would be taken away from them to face the sufferings of the cross, and then His disciples would grief. However, for now, His disciples had no need to fast.

Jesus' way of doing things was different from the old norms and traditions. He wanted those who follow Him to accept openness to learn and accept new things. He did not want His disciples to have a closed mind that holds them back from seeing the goodness of God.

Jesus used a familiar image of wineskins in order to emphasize His point. When new wine is poured into old wineskins, the inflexibility of the skins could not withstand the pressure from the gases released from the wine. Thus, the brittle skins would easily burst.

Jesus invited His listeners to be like new wineskins that are elastic and flexible. In this way, they would open themselves to learn, grow and become true people of God.

Today, Jesus is our Bridegroom whose presence brings joy to our life. He desires that we open ourselves to Him and to be surprised by the newness that He brings to our life.

Questions for reflection:

1) Am I open to the actions of God in my life? What resistance do I have in being open to God?

Sunday, 7 July, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 66:10-14, Galatians 6:14-18, Luke 10:1-12,17-20

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.' 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.'

Rejoice in God

Jesus sent His seventy-two disciples ahead of Him on mission. They were to go and proclaim the Good News that God is near and that He is love. This should be the disciples' main focus. Thus, they had to leave all the unnecessary baggage, and to travel light with God as their sole security.

The disciples went and came back full of joy at the success of their mission. Jesus offered them another reminder, *"Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven."*

Jesus did not want His disciples to indulge in their pride, but to give thanks to God for their success. They were simply mere instruments of God.

Today, we are all sent into this world to tell our family members and friends about the Good News that God loves and cares for them. We do so with our words as well as our deeds. Our joy comes when we know that someone has come to know and love God through our witnessing. Our joy comes when we allow Him to use our lives as His instruments.

Today, let us be sent into mission with nothing except with trust in God and love for Him alone.

“Christianity spreads through the joy of disciples who know that they are loved and saved.” (Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Where is my mission field today?
- 2) Am I afraid to share my faith with others? How can I be a joyful witness to God’s faithful love?

Monday, 8 July

Genesis 28:10-22, Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus was speaking to them, up came one of the officials, who bowed low in front of him and said, ‘My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved’. Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him. Then from behind him came a woman, who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years, and she touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, ‘If I can only touch his cloak I shall be well again’. Jesus turned round and saw her; and he said to her, ‘Courage, my daughter, your faith has restored you to health’. And from that moment the woman was well again. When Jesus reached the official’s house and saw the flute-players, with the crowd making a commotion he said, ‘Get out of here; the little girl is not dead, she is asleep’. And they laughed at him. But when the people had been turned out he went inside and took the little girl by

the hand; and she stood up. And the news spread all round the countryside.

Unshakeable Faith!

Both stories, though different, have similarities too. Firstly, the two characters who were suffering are females. One of them was just twelve years old, and the other one was an older woman but she had been suffering from her illness for twelve years. Both were seriously sick. Both stories ended happily because of deep faith. The strong faith of the father as well as the woman opened the way for healing to take place.

The father pleaded with Jesus to come to his house and lay His hand on his dying daughter. He was an official from the synagogue, and thus, a very respectable Jew. Most likely, he heard the wonderful things Jesus had done, and knew that this great Prophet could work miracles for his daughter. *“Come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved!”*- such a strong statement of faith!

The woman who suffered for twelve long years from haemorrhage also heard about Jesus. She believed that Jesus could help her in the way that no other physicians could. She did not dare to approach Jesus publicly, and so, she resorted to touch His garment. She said to herself, “If I can only touch his cloak I shall be well again”.

Today, let us look at these two beautiful stories woven into one and learn from it a great lesson on faith. We must always look to Jesus in good times as well as bad times. We go through life with an unshakeable faith in Jesus, and know that He will never abandon us.

Question for reflection:

1) How strong is my faith in Jesus?

**Tuesday, 9 July, St. Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions
Genesis 32:23-33, Matthew 9:32-38**

A man was brought to Jesus, a dumb demoniac. And when the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke and the people were amazed.

'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel' they said. But the Pharisees said, 'It is through the prince of devils that he casts out devils'. Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest'.

Sheep without a Shepherd

Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages. He taught, healed and stayed with the people who were most in need. Jesus went on untiringly to be at the service of others. This was because His heart was moved when he saw that the people were harassed and dejected.

What about us? Do we place others' needs before our own?

Many times, we are self-absorbed that we fail to see the needs of others. Jesus calls us to follow His footsteps to love and serve. To love like Jesus does not depend on our moods or schedules. Whenever there is someone in need, God is there calling you to be with that person to love and serve.

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

Today, we are the labourers sent by God to our friends, family members, colleagues, parishioners, community members, etc. We are also labourers to the strangers we meet as well as to the people we do not like. We are labourers to work for God and to bring His presence of love to all through our words and actions.

Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders for His good works. They claimed that the power of the prince of devils was working through Jesus. Likewise, when we dedicate our life to love and serve, we will surely face rejections from people who feel threatened by our goodness. We must never be afraid but continue following Jesus.

Today, we are God's labourers, ready to partner with Him in this mission of love and service. We go on from person to person, untiringly, in order to give God's love to each one.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I struggle to place the needs of others before my own?

Wednesday, 10 July

Genesis 41:55-57, 42:5-7, 17-24, Matthew 10:1-7

Jesus summoned his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, the one who was to betray him. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not turn your steps to pagan territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.'

When God calls...

"Jesus summoned his twelve disciples... These are the names of the twelve apostles" What is a disciple? What is an apostle?

A disciple is a follower who learns from His Master. An apostle is someone who is sent on a mission in order to pass on what he/she has learnt from the Master.

Which one are we called to be - a disciple or an apostle?

We cannot be apostles if we are not disciples first. Often, we regard ourselves as 'disciples' who are called to learn Jesus' teachings and ways. We forget that our discipleship must lead us to be apostles, as people actively involved in the mission of sharing the Good News.

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly

experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are "disciples" and "missionaries", but rather that we are always "missionary disciples"." (Pope Francis)

In today's Gospel, Jesus called His twelve disciples to follow Him and learn from Him. At the same time, they were also called to be His apostles to spread the Good News of God's love everywhere they went. Today, it is our time to be Jesus' disciples and apostles. What are we waiting for?

Question for reflection:

1) What is my greatest challenge to live as Jesus' disciple-apostle?

Thursday, 11 July, St. Benedict

Genesis 44:18-21,23-29,45:1-5, Matthew 10:7-15

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out devils. You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with a few coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the workman deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you go into, ask for someone trustworthy and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, let your peace descend upon it; if it does not, let your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. I tell you solemnly, on the day of Judgement it will not go as hard with the land of Sodom and Gomorrah as with that town.'

Travelling light

In today's Gospel, as Jesus sent His disciples on mission, He told them to travel light and make the spreading of God's Kingdom as their only ambition and motivation. He told them to take no gold or silver, no haversack, no spare tunic or footwear or staff. He did not want His

disciples to be distracted by any worldly possessions but to live simply and to trust God to supply their needs.

What about us? Can we travel through life with no gold or silver or haversack, spare tunic, footwear or staff?

Jesus invites us to live simply and not to allow our possessions to become our greatest treasure. Many times, we tend to attach ourselves to our 'gold', 'silver' and all the other material things we have that we go through life carrying heavy burdens. When things we have or long for, have great importance and value for us, we allow them to be our Masters and depend on them for our happiness.

Jesus today invites us to travel light. Material possessions, from our money to cars to food to electronic gadgets, etc., are good as long as we use them wisely and well. Our main focus in life is to serve God, not things. We serve God by announcing that the Kingdom is close at hand. Whenever we put love into practice, the Kingdom of God is present. The Kingdom of God is made present through concrete acts, gestures and words of love which are performed without expecting any rewards or appreciation. We reached out to the weak, the sick, the vulnerable, the needy, etc.

When we play our part in this grand mission, we receive true happiness and contentment more than our material possessions can give to us. Today, let us ask for the grace to trust God more so that we can travel light and make the mission of God the focus of our life.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I play my part in proclaiming that God's Kingdom is close at hand?

Friday, 12 July

Genesis 46:1-7, 28-30, Matthew 10:16-23

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Remember, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as serpents and yet as harmless as doves. Beware of men: they will hand you over to Sanhedrin and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the pagans. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise against their parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name; but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved. If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another. I tell you solemnly, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.'

Sheep among wolves

"Faith is God's precious gift, which opens our mind to know and love him. He wants to enter into relationship with us and allow us to participate in his own life in order to make our life more meaningful, better and more beautiful. God loves us! Faith, however, needs to be accepted, it needs our personal response, the courage to entrust ourselves to God, to live his love and be grateful for his infinite mercy. It is a gift, not reserved for a few but offered with generosity. Everyone should be able to experience the joy of being loved by God, the joy of salvation! It is a gift that one cannot keep to oneself, but it is to be shared. If we want to keep it only to ourselves, we will become isolated, sterile and sick Christians. The proclamation of the Gospel is part of being disciples of Christ and it is a constant commitment that animates the whole life of the Church."

(Pope Francis, World Mission Sunday 2013)

We are God's missionaries because we have been entrusted with the gift of sharing the joy of our faith. We need to be courageous and go out of our comfort zones to offer the gift of faith freely. Though the

mission is not easy, we must never give up! Instead, we need to count more on Jesus, less on our own strengths and capabilities.

There are 'wolves' out there that will retaliate when we speak to them about Jesus. There will be people, even family members, who might not understand or welcome our faith. Yet, Jesus continues to send us out like sheep among wolves. Like the sheep, we are constantly being guided and loved by the Good Shepherd. Like the serpent, we need to be shrewder in discerning well how to deal with people and situations. Like the dove, we too must learn to be peaceful at all times as we go about our work as God's missionaries.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from sharing this beautiful gift of faith with others?

Saturday, 13 July

Genesis 49:29-32, 50:15-26, Matthew 10:24-33

Jesus said to his apostles: 'The disciple is not superior to his teacher, nor the slave to his master. It is enough for the disciple that he should grow to be like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they not say of his household? Do not be afraid of them therefore. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows. So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.

Do not be afraid!

"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, what will they not say of his household?"

Jesus warns us that if we truly want to spread and live the Good News, we must expect rejection and persecutions too. Jesus Himself was called 'Beelzebul' and rejected for His teachings and way of life. In the face of suffering for the Gospel's sake, we must imitate Jesus who did not exchange insults for insults or return violence for violence. Even when we try to do good to others, but in return, get hostility and unfriendliness, we must still not stop or give up. Rather, we must always go on and face the consequences that come with living His mission of love.

We have the courage to freely talk about Jesus with others, as others talk freely about their favourite food or their pets. We must have no fear to do acts of love especially to those who are most in need of our help.

'Do not be afraid...'

This is Jesus' message to each of us today. We must not be afraid because God is the one taking care of us. He will never fail us because He is our Father.

Question for reflection:

1) Have I experienced being misunderstood or rejected for my Christian faith and my values?

Sunday, 14 July, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Deuteronomy 30:10-14, Colossians 1: 15-20, 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'.

Blessed are those who care

The parable of the Good Samaritan is one about making choices. Every day, we are faced with choices as to whether to walk away or get involved. In today's parable, both the priest and Levite chose to look away and pass by on the other side. The Samaritan was the one who chose to stop, look and get involved by helping the wounded man. What made the Samaritan to get involved? He had every reason to look away because the Jews were the enemies of the Samaritans. In fact, the Samaritans were abused and rejected by the Jews. Yet, this Samaritan saw the wounded person on the road, not by his race or nationality, but as a fellow human person, a brother in need of help.

Thus, he was moved with compassion and took on the suffering of the wounded man as his own.

Today, we are faced with choices to walk away or get involved. May we continue the good work of the Good Samaritan each day.

“Blessed are those who care and who are not afraid to show it – they will let people know they are loved. Blessed are those who are gentle and patient they will help people to grow as the sun helps the buds to open and blossom. Blessed are those who have the ability to listen – they will lighten many a burden. Blessed are those who know how and when to let go – they will have the joy of seeing people find themselves. Blessed are those who, when nothing can be done or said, do not walk away, but remain to provide a comforting and supportive presence – they will help the sufferer to bear the unbearable. Blessed are those who recognize their own need to receive, and who receive with graciousness –they will be able to give all the better. Blessed are those who give without hope of return – they will give people an experience of God.” (Unknown)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I open my eyes and perceive the needs of those around me?
- 2) How can I continue the good work of the Good Samaritan today?

Monday, 15 July, St. Bonaventure
Exodus 1:8-14,22, Matthew 10:34-11:1

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household. Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a holy man will have a holy man's reward. 'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.' When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

Loving Jesus above all

Jesus is the Prince of Peace who comes to bring divisions among people. Why?

When we strive to love Jesus above all by living His values and ways, it is possible that our family members and friends might not understand or even support us. What are we going to do then? Will we forsake Jesus and please our family members by doing what they want us to do?

"For a son dishonours his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies are the members of his own household." (Micah 7:6)

The love for Jesus leads us to choose Him to be the first in our lives. This does not mean that we hate our family members and friends when they oppose our way of life. Jesus does not teach us to hate, but to love. In fact, when we love Jesus above all, we will love our

family members and friends with a mature and pure love that is free from expectations and fears.

Do we allow Jesus to disturb our life?

We can no longer sit on the fence anymore. Rather, we need to choose to follow Jesus radically or to remain in our comfort zones. When we choose Jesus as our number 1, we are called to have His same goal, which is to love by being kind and generous to the needs of those who are most in need. Today, let us love Jesus with our whole heart, mind and strength.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I love Jesus enough to take on the consequences of following Him closely?

**Tuesday, 16 July, Our Lady of Mount Carmel
Exodus 2:1-15, Matthew 11:20-24**

Jesus began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent. 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. And still, I tell you that it will not go as hard on Judgement Day with Tyre and Sidon as with you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be exalted as high as heaven? You shall be thrown down to hell. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have been standing yet. And still, I tell you that it will not go as hard with the land of Sodom on Judgement Day as with you.'

Repent!

The people in the towns saw, experienced and witnessed the many miracles that Jesus performed. Yet, they did not turn away from their sins. Why? They were indifferent to what they had witnessed.

Tyre, Sidon and Sodom were cities from the Old Testament whose people were wicked and immoral. On the other hand, the peoples of the towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida were not wicked to the extent of those from Tyre, Sidon and Sodom but they were indifferent to Jesus'

teachings and the miracles He performed. These people, even after hearing and seeing Jesus, continued living their lives as before.

What about us? Are we the Chorazin and Bethsaida of today? Are we the Tyre, Sidon and Sodom of today? Do we pray daily with the Scriptures, do spiritual readings, etc. but continue to be indifferent and are not bothered to change our bad habits and ways of life that prevent us from really following Christ? Do we have ears to listen?

A Japanese proverb states, *'The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists'*.

Let us be like the bamboo plant that is flexible and bends in accordance to all that Jesus speaks to us in our life each day. Jesus is with us today! Let His presence make a difference in our life!

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from changing and living a life according to the ways of Jesus?

Wednesday, 17 July

Exodus 3:1-6,9-12, Matthew 11:25-27

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

Walking in the Light of Humility

Jesus is not against those who are intellectually learned and clever. Rather, He is referring to those who are full of pride because of their intelligence.

In today's Gospel, Jesus was referring to the Pharisees and religious leaders who rejected Him because of their pride. They regarded Jesus as a lowly carpenter from Nazareth as well as a wandering preacher, and thus they hardened themselves against Him. They, on the other

hand, held themselves at high esteem and thought that they were experts with regard to God and religion.

Jesus praised those who humbled themselves to follow Him. They were without pretense and trusted in Jesus and His message. Jesus rejoiced over these simplehearted people.

Today, Jesus calls us to have child-like simplicity and humility to allow Him to lead us into a deeper intimate relationship with God.

It is through Jesus that we can come to know God as our loving Father. In Jesus, we see the heart of God who is deeply and completely in love with each one of us. Let us never get tired of drawing close to Jesus and allowing Him to speak to us constantly revealing to us about God and bringing us into a personal relationship with Him.

“There is no room for God in him who is full of himself.” (Martin Buber)

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from having Humility as my friend and companion this day?

**Thursday, 18 July, St. Camillus de Lellis
Exodus 3:13-20, Matthew 11:28-30**

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

Find rest in Me

Are you stressed with the busyness of life?

We are always busy with many things every day. We tend to have this urgency to go, go, go and seem to have more things added to our plates. Along the way, we sense a yearning in us to connect again, to find deeper meaning again.

Today, let us listen to the gentle voice of Jesus to each one of us,
“Come to me... I will give you rest.”

Listening to these words, we find in Jesus the source of our real rest and peace.

"May there be peace within

May we trust God that we are exactly where we are meant to be.

May we not forget the infinite possibilities born of faith.

May we use the gifts we have received to share God's love with others.

May we be confident knowing we are children of God Let this presence settle in our bones, and allow our soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen."

(St. Therese of Child Jesus)

Let this prayer of St. Therese be ours today as we find time to pause and to be with Jesus in prayer.

Jesus, our Friend and Companion, desires to carry our heavy burdens of life with us. We need to trust that we are never alone as we walk through each happy and sad moment of life.

Let us enter into a quiet time of prayer and allow Jesus' words to comfort us and give us the inner rest and peace we truly need.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my response to Jesus' gentle invitation?

Friday, 19 July

Exodus 11:10-12,14, Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus took a walk one Sabbath day through the cornfields. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath'. But he said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry - how he went into the house of God and how they ate the loaves of offering which neither he nor his followers were allowed to eat, but which were for the priests alone? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the Temple priests break the

Sabbath without being blamed for it? Now here, I tell you, is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of Man is master of the Sabbath.'

Mercy, not sacrifice

In today's Gospel, the Pharisees saw that Jesus' disciples were picking ears of corn and eating them. Immediately, they turned to Jesus and blamed Him for not stopping His disciples from working on a Sabbath.

Jesus was not affected by their criticism. Instead, He reminded them that King David and his followers ate the loaves meant only for priests because they were hungry. For Jesus, true obedience of the Law should be motivated by the spirit of mercy, not simply following Sabbath regulations.

"And if you had understood the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless"

Today, Jesus invites us to truly know what God wants from us. He wants us to show mercy to others in their needs.

"Mercy is the heart of God. It must also be the heart of the members of the one great family of his children: a heart which beats all the more strongly wherever human dignity – as a reflection of the face of God in his creatures – is in play. Jesus tells us that love for others – foreigners, the sick, prisoners, the homeless, even our enemies – is the yardstick by which God will judge our actions. Our eternal destiny depends on this. It is not surprising that the Apostle Paul tells the Christians of Rome to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (cf. Rom 12:15), or that he encourages the Corinthians to take up collections as a sign of solidarity with the suffering members of the Church (cf. 1 Cor 16:2-3). And Saint John writes: "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother or sister

in need yet refuses help, how does God's love abide in him?" (1 Jn 3:17; cf. Jas 2:15-16)." (Pope Francis)

Let us be aware that we need to exercise mercy towards our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. This is how we will please God today!

Question for reflection:

- 1) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Saturday, 20 July, St. Apollinarius
Exodus 12:37-42, Matthew 12:14-21

The Pharisees went out and began to plot against him, discussing how to destroy him. Jesus knew this and withdrew from the district. Many followed him and he cured them all, but warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah: Here is my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, the favourite of my soul. I will endow him with my spirit, and he will proclaim the true faith to the nations. He will not brawl or shout, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. He will not break the crushed reed, nor put out the smouldering wick till he has led the truth to victory: in his name the nations will put their hope.

Courage and simplicity

The Pharisees started to plot on how to destroy Jesus because they had already deep-seated hatred for Him. Nothing He did or said would change their hardened hearts against Him. In the gospel passage, Jesus knew this and chose to withdraw from the district. He could have tried to justify His actions or directly confront the Pharisees. He chose instead to carry on loving and putting Himself at the humble service of those who needed Him. Jesus decision to withdraw does not mean resignation, but courage and determination. This is an attitude we too must learn to have in our own life. Regardless of the opposition and prejudices we receive from others, we must never stop doing good.

Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. He is the chosen servant, the Beloved. He brings God's tender love to people. He does not reject the weak or treat them with contempt. He gives hope to those who are hopeless. He is always ready to bring people to have a true relationship with God. Ironically, the Pharisees were too blind to perceive Jesus as God's servant, God's Beloved. The simple people perceived Jesus as a Man of God, and they followed Him and went to Him with their needs.

Today, let us have the simplicity to perceive Jesus, God's servant, God's Beloved, alive and active in our own lives. He brings faith, hope and love to us. With Jesus, we choose to courageously love and do good, even in the face of opposition and misunderstandings.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How do I deal with confrontations and rejections? Do I continue standing up for God's truth and love, and choose to carry on doing good?
- 2) Do I desire for a simple heart that perceives Jesus in my life today?

Sunday, 21 July, Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Genesis 18:1-10, Colossians 1:24-28, Luke 10:38-42

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

Include Jesus

There are many moments when we identify ourselves as busy and active Marthas. We work and rush through the day with many worries and troubles in our minds. What is Jesus' message for us today?

Jesus does not want us to stop working or doing things. Rather, it is for us to learn how to include Him in all our work and activities.

In today's gospel passage, Martha was caught up with all her worries and troubles. Jesus was in Martha's house, but she missed being with Him and listening to Him. Instead, she was harassed with the voices of her worries and troubles that she became frustrated with Jesus and her sister. Mary, on the other hand, chose to be with Jesus and listen to Him attentively. Her action showed that she had chosen Jesus to be the centre of her life.

We are Christ-centred Christians when we allow Jesus to affect our life - our decisions, our thoughts, our feelings, etc. Jesus is the only Master that directs our life, not the voices of our worries, our negativism, our fears, etc.

Jesus is not an accessory that we put on and off depending on our moods. He is not just a guest that comes and goes, but he wants to stay and live with us. Therefore, Jesus is our companion with whom we are called to enter into a daily relationship.

Today, let us learn to be like Mary of Bethany to sit at Jesus' feet and make Him the centre of our lives.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How can I open myself to include Jesus more in my comings and goings; in my worries and concerns; in my pains; in my joys?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Monday, 22 July, St. Mary Magdalene
Exodus 14:5-18, John 20:1-2, 11-18

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.' Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away' she replied 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him'. Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' - which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene, the Apostle of the Apostles

Mary Magdalene, as St. Thomas Aquinas so lovingly called her the "Apostle of the Apostles", was the faithful disciple of Jesus who followed Him even to the cross. On that Easter morning, she encountered her Risen Lord and was the first to announce the joyful message of Easter to the rest of the disciples.

"It is the Lord who gives us the grace, to all, to be able to say with our lives, 'I have seen the Lord,' not because he has appeared, but because 'I have seen him in my heart.' And this should be the testimony of our lives: 'I live this way because I have seen the Lord.'"
(Pope Francis)

As we celebrate the Feast of Mary Magdalene, the 'Apostle of the Apostles', let her joy of announcing the Good News be an example for us to go out and say, "I have seen the Lord in my heart, and so I say this, I do this. I have experienced His presence in my life, and so I live this way, I love this way."

Through our words and actions, we can bring the Good News of God's love to each person we meet each day. May we never think that mission is not for us!

"All of us are invited to "go out" as missionary disciples, each generously offering their talents, creativity, wisdom and experience in order to bring the message of God's tenderness and compassion to the entire human family. By virtue of the missionary mandate, the Church cares for those who do not know the Gospel, because she wants everyone to be saved and to experience the Lord's love. She "is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel" (Misericordiae Vultus, 12) and to proclaim mercy in every corner of the world, reaching every person, young or old."
(Pope Francis)

Let St. Magdalene inspire us to imitate her joy of proclaiming Christ to all!

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I proclaim the Good News to every person, young and old?

Tuesday, 23 July, St. Bridget of Sweden
Exodus 14:21-15:1, Matthew 12:46-50

Jesus was speaking to the crowds when his mother and his brothers appeared; they were standing outside and were anxious to have a word with him. But to the man who told him this Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother.'

Belonging to God's family

Jesus stretched out His hand towards His disciples and said, *"Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."*

Jesus was not rejecting His family but He wanted to make a point to those listening to Him that He sees them all as His family based on their desire to do God's will. Though not united by ties of blood, God's new family is intrinsically bonded by His love and their love for one another and for humanity.

God's will is to love as He loves. God's love never compromises, never disheartens, never ignores, never puts conditions and limits. His love is merciful, compassionate, patient, unwavering, faithful and honest. It is in His very nature to love. St. John the evangelist aptly states that God is love (1 John 4: 16). God is nothing else but pure love. God creates us in His love and gives us the capacity to love as He loves.

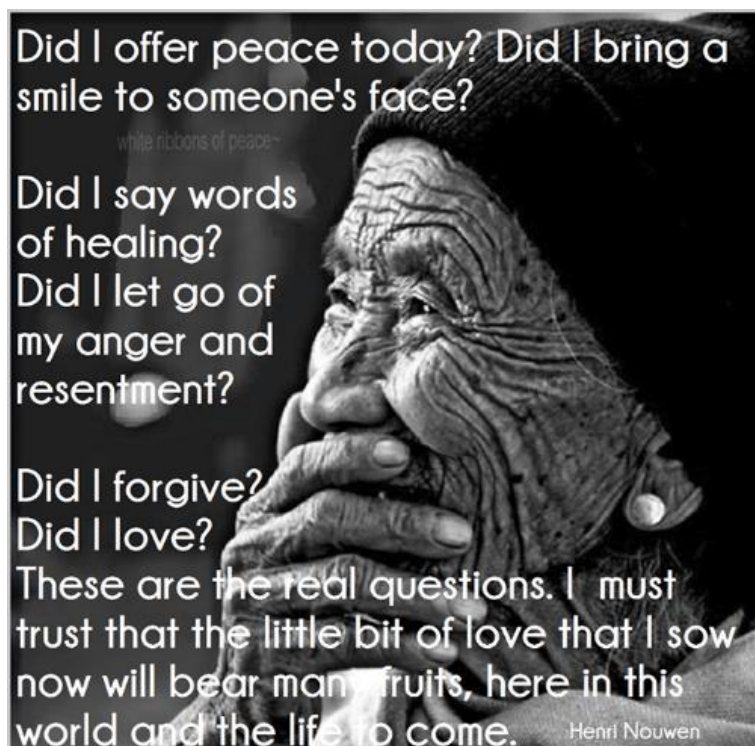
As Christians, we belong to God's family where we root ourselves firmly and deeply in God's love. From His love, we love others. We build relationships of trust, honesty, faithfulness, compassion, kindness, truthfulness, peace with others around us. We, *out of love for God, choose to become servants to one another.*

"Pure love.... knows that only one thing is needed to please God: to do even the smallest things out of great love - love, and always love."
(St. Faustina)

May we always love without counting the cost but with only one desire to please God alone.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In my daily life, do I seek always to do God's will and please Him alone?
- 2) How can I put love into action today?



Wednesday, 24 July
Exodus 16:1-5,9-15, Matthew 13:1-9

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the beach, and he told them many things in parables. He said, 'Imagine a sower going out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up straight away, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Listen, anyone who has ears!'

Listen

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us about the parable of the 4 soils - the hardened path, the rocky ground, the thorny soil and the rich soil. Reflecting on this parable, we might be troubled and wonder, *"Who can qualify as 'rich soil'?"* and *"Is there any hope for the other three soils that do not produce crop?"*

Let us listen to the last line in today's Gospel, *"Listen, anyone who has ears!"*

"What are the duties of a Christian? Perhaps, you will tell me: to go to Mass on Sundays; to fast and abstain during Holy Week – do these things but the first duty of a Christian is to listen to the Word of God, to listen to Jesus, because He speaks to us and He saves us with His Word – and with His word, He also makes our faith stronger, more robust: Listen to Jesus!" (Pope Francis)

In order to be rich soils, we must do our duty as Christians, i.e. to listen to Jesus the Word of God. The more we listen deeply, the more we root ourselves in the strong foundation of the Word of God. When we are rooted in Jesus, we will bear good and abundant fruit.

Let us remember that Christianity is not about following external regulations blindly but it is to listen to Jesus. He is the One who can make us live our Christian faith with renewed enthusiasm and passion. He is the One who can make us bear abundant fruit. If we have ears, let us listen!

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from listening attentively to Jesus, the Living Word of God?

**Thursday, 25 July, St. James
2 Corinthians 4:7-15, Matthew 20:20-28**

The mother of sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom'. 'You do not know what you are asking' Jesus answered. 'Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can'. 'Very well,' he said 'you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.' When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

St. James, the Apostle

"We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7)

In the first reading, St. Paul reminds all of us that we are earthenware jars - simple and ordinary. What makes our life extraordinary is the treasure that we contain.

As we celebrate the feast of St. James, we also rejoice at him who allowed himself to be this earthenware jar for Christ. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, James served the early church with passion and dedication. In the end, he was the first among the apostles to suffer martyrdom (Acts 12:1-2).

It is a consolation for us to see that James was so ordinary in the sense that he was like any one of us. He desired to be great and powerful. Yet, he was humbled to allow Jesus His Master to correct him and teach him through life's experiences what true greatness meant.

Today, the world continues to consider people to be great and mighty because of their success, fame and wealth. Yet, Jesus does not consider these as things to be considered for greatness. What counts for greatness is when we love others by placing ourselves to be at their service.

Today, let us learn from this great Saint and take the step to desire and choose to be great in God's sight.

Questions for reflection:

1) How can I serve God and others with more love and humility today? What strikes me in this time of prayer?

**Friday, 26 July, Ss. Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Virgin Mary
Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 13:18-23**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are to hear the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart; this is the man who received the seed on the edge of the path. The one who received it on patches on rock is the man who hears the words and welcomes it at one with joy. But he has no root in him, he does not last; let some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, and he falls away at once. The one who received the seed in thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this world and the lure of riches choke the word and so he produces nothing. And the one who received the seed in rich soil is the man who hears the word and

understands it; he is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

Rich soil, rich harvest

Today, let us focus on the 4 soils presented by Jesus in today's parable. Path: A path is hardened ground where no seed can sink below in order to take roots. That is why the seeds that fall on the path became easy food for the birds.

Rocky ground: The rocks prevent any seed from taking root. Whatever little soil there is in the rock can help the seed to grow. However, the lack of deep roots causes the plants to wither under the hot sun.

Thorny ground: The thorns do not help the seed to grow. Rather, thorns take over the growing plants by taking in their nutrients until there is nothing left for the plants.

Rich soil: This is the best soil where the seeds can take root and grow into fruit-bearing plants.

These soils - the path, the rocky ground, the thorny soil and the rich soil - are the conditions of our hearts as we listen to the Word of God. We are called to allow the seed of God's Word to fall on rich soil.

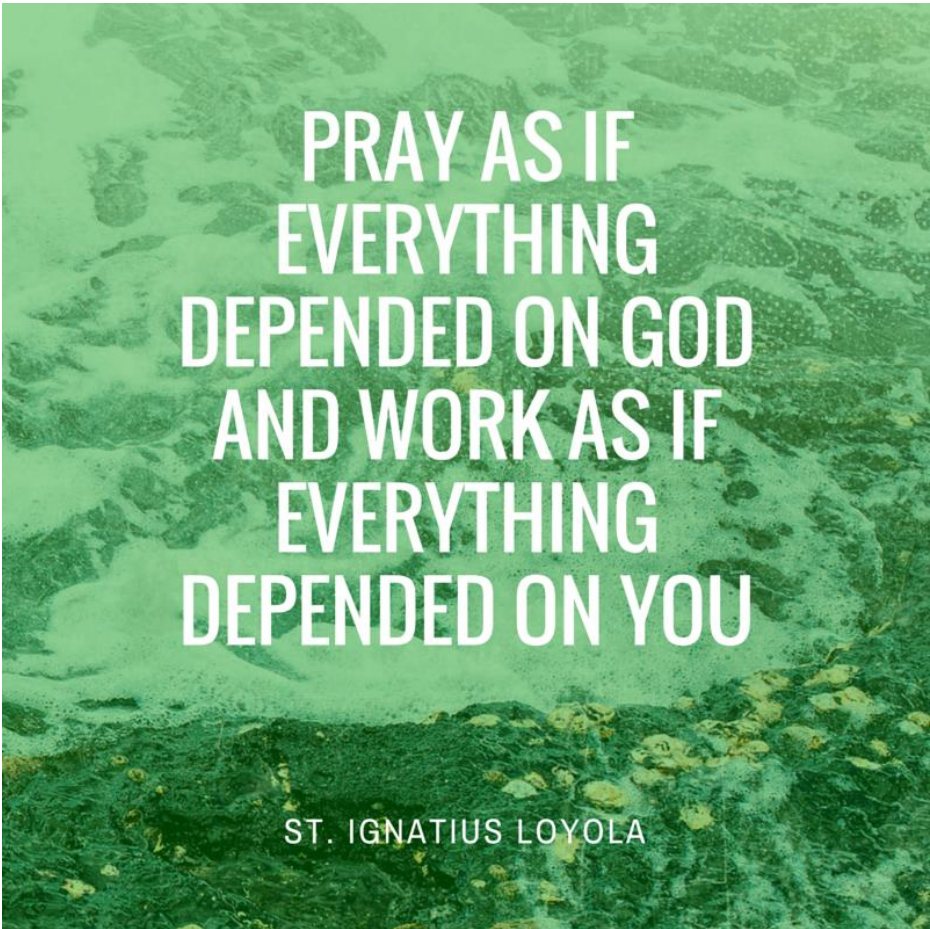
We must also remember that our responsibility is not to make the seeds sprout and grow into fruit-bearing plants. God is the one who will make the seed grow and bear fruit. We, however, are responsible for maintaining our soil in good condition.

"I am the Vine. You are the branches. If anyone remains joined to me, and I to him, he will bear a lot of fruit. You can't do anything without Me." (John 15:5)

Today, let us remain in Jesus our Vine. He will free our soil from being hardened as well as from being rocky and thorny. Without Him, we cannot do anything!

Questions for reflection:

1) Which soil do I identify myself with? What is Jesus' message to me in this time of prayer?



PRAY AS IF
EVERYTHING
DEPENDS ON GOD
AND WORK AS IF
EVERYTHING
DEPENDS ON YOU

ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA

Saturday, 27 July

Exodus 24:3-8, Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus put a parable before the crowds, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, the darnel appeared as well. The owner's servants went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" "Some enemy has done this" he answered. And the servants said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn.'"

The darnel and wheat

For those of us who love gardening and planting, we know that darnel is very dangerous because they are similar to wheat at the beginning stage of growth. This weed is also dangerous because it takes in essential nutrients from the growing wheat.

And the servants said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest..."

The man did not want to remove the darnel because the wheat might be removed in the process too. Thus, he allowed the darnel and the wheat to grow together.

Likewise, we look at people around us - in our workplace, in our family, in our parishes, in our communities - we judge some as 'darnel' and we impatiently consider that they deserve to be removed as soon as possible.

Today, Jesus calls us to be patient and not to be too quick to exclude the 'darnels' we see. Look at Jesus' life, He never excluded the 'darnels', the Pharisees and the rest of the religious leaders. Instead, He continued to preach to them the message of God's love, hoping

that they would one day open their hearts and believe. Jesus too never gives up on any of us despite our own flaws and idiosyncrasies. Thus, we too must be patient and not exclude anyone just because we see their limitations and faults. By the grace of God, we keep hoping that the 'darnels' can somehow be transformed into life-giving 'wheat'. On our part, we must choose to be good wheat. Through our examples, may we bring people to Christ and Christ to people.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I look at those whom I tend to judge negatively with Jesus' heart?

Sunday, 28 July, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Genesis 18:20-32, Colossians 2:12-14, Luke 11:1-13

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."' He also said to them, '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!'

God is our Father

Jesus' disciples wanted to learn from Him how to pray. Jesus started on a series of teachings regarding prayer - The Lord's prayer, the parable about a persistent friend and the need of asking.

The basis of Jesus' prayer is relationship of trust and intimacy with God who is Father. God is our Father who yearns for a personal relationship with each one of us. We sometimes assume that God distances Himself from us because of our waywardness. However, God is never far from us but keeps coming to love us and care for us. Praying the Lord's Prayer, we must first experience God as our Father with whom we can trust and abandon ourselves totally in His

presence. If not, we will simply recite this prayer without knowing the Person whom we are addressing it to.

When we relate with God as someone close to us, we will freely ask God our loving Father for the desires of our hearts. We ask with persistence but also with the heart that trust that He will give us the best that we need in His time and His ways. The very best gift that God will give to those who ask Him is the gift of His very same Spirit. The Holy Spirit which enters deep within our very selves, cleanses our hearts from all sins and gives us His peace, joy and faithfulness - gives to us the very life and love of God Himself.

Therefore, Jesus said, "How much more..." We cannot fully understand the measure that God wants to give us. We, however, are invited to be beggars before God in prayer, and persistently ask Him to pour the richness of His love into our hearts. Let us ask because we shall receive; seek because we shall find; knock because the door will be opened to us.

Today, let us come before God with a lot of trust and love because we know that He is our Father.

"Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you."

(St Tomas Aquinas)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How does my prayer life at this point of my life reflect my relationship with God?
- 2) Is God as my Father a mere idea, a concept that I have? Or do I truly experience Him as my loving Father whom I trust? How can I grow more in the way I relate with God?

Monday, 29 July, St. Martha
Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34, John 11:19-27

Many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them over their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that, even now, whatever you ask of God, he will grant you'. 'Your brother' said Jesus to her 'will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day'. Jesus said: 'I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she said 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.'

I believe!

Martha - busy active Martha - heard that Jesus was on His way to her house, she left the gathering and ran immediately to Him. In her grief, she needed to have Jesus close to her. She met Him face-to-face, and gently reproached Him for not coming sooner in order to save her beloved brother from his death.

Behind her reproach, Martha revealed her faith in Jesus. She deeply believed that Jesus had the power even over sickness and death.

Jesus looked at His friend, Martha and felt the weight of her sadness. He said to her, *"Your brother will rise again."*

Martha believed that her brother would rise at the resurrection on the last day. Her faith in the resurrection remained strong and secure even in the face of Lazarus' death. Jesus was not talking about the future, but He was stating a reality that would soon happen. Lazarus would rise again because Jesus would soon restore him back to new life.

"I am the resurrection. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

As we celebrate the Feast of St. Martha, let her words be our words;

her faith be our faith; her hope be our hope. Let us, together with her, express to Jesus, *"Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world."*

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In moments of my loss and sadness, do I run to Jesus and seek in Him the consolation I need?
- 2) How does my faith in Jesus, who is the resurrection, make me live my present reality with more hope?

**Tuesday, 30 July, St. Peter Chrysologus
Exodus 33:7-11, 34:5-9,28, Matthew 13:36-43**

Leaving the crowds, Jesus went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain the parable about the darnel in the field to us'. He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the evil one; the enemy who sowed them, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all things that provoke offences and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the virtuous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Listen, anyone who has ears!'

Darnel from the wheat

What message does this gospel passage have for us today?

We have this tendency to play judge and deep down we want to separate people into two camps: the saints from the sinners, the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the darnel.

Even though Jesus is the sower of the good seed, He does not stop the darnel from existing in the same way that He allows the wheat to flourish. Thus, the wheat and the darnel, the sheep and the goats, the saints and the sinners live together, side by side.

This is a beautiful reminder of the depth of God's merciful and patient love. He never gives up on any of us - the good or the bad. God, like the Good Shepherd, looks passionately for the lost sheep, and waits for each one of them to journey back to Him. His joy comes when one sinner decides to return home.

At times, we ourselves can have both wheat and darnel growing side by side in the soil of our heart. We struggle with the badness in us and we also rejoice at the goodness that leads us to be life-giving. The greatest comfort is to know that God's mercy will never abandon us in our moments of weakness. He is not frightened by our sins. He will continue to walk through life with us.

Today, we are called to entrust ourselves to the mercy of God that is beyond our comprehension.

"God's mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). ... Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish." (Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

1) Is there someone whom Jesus is inviting me not to give up on but to continue to journey with? How can I be more patient with myself and entrust myself to God's merciful love?

Wednesday, 31 July, St. Ignatius of Loyola Exodus 34:29-35, Matthew 13:44-46

Jesus said to the crowds, 'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off happy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.'

For a greater treasure

There was a Polish priest, named Maximilian Kolbe, who was captured by the German Gestapo and became prisoner 16770. He was placed in Auschwitz concentration camp. One day, a prisoner escaped from the camp. In order to punish the camp for the escaped prisoner, 10 prisoners had to be killed by starvation. One of the 10 men, Franciszek Gajowniczek, who was selected to die, began to cry, "My wife! My children! I will never see them again!" Maximilian heard his plea and immediately stepped forward, removed his cap, and said, "I am a Catholic priest. Let me take his place. I am old. He has a wife and children." The officer-in-charge allowed the exchange. In the end, Maximilian Kolbe was the last to die. In fact, he kept on encouraging the other prisoners in the starvation camp with prayers. Although he was not given food or water, he always wore a smile on his face, even to the prison guards. Because the cell was needed for more prisoners, Maximilian Kolbe was injected with carbolic acid. One of the SS guards stated, "This priest is really a great man. We have never seen anyone like him." Maximilian Kolbe was canonised a Saint on 10 October 1982.

What made St. Maximilian Kolbe a great man?

St. Maximilian Kolbe is like the two men in today's parable. Both men, in the parable, joyfully sold all what they had in order to obtain their treasures. Likewise, St. Maximilian Kolbe was willing to give up His life in order to attain a greater treasure. He desired to possess God's Kingdom above all things, even his own life.

Today, we are not expected to sell our houses, cars, gadgets, etc. However, it is a call to desire the Kingdom of God as our most precious treasure. Nothing is more valuable than to possess a loving relationship with God here and now. When we have God's Kingdom, we will live with His love, peace, freedom and joy.

Let us be like the two men in the parable who grasp the value of the treasure and desire to gain more of it.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I believe that the Kingdom of God is worth far more than anything else?

**Thursday, 1 August, St. Alphonsus Liguori
Exodus 40:16-21,34-38, Matthew 13:47-53**

Jesus said to the crowds: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea that brings in a haul of all kinds. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in a basket and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the just to throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. 'Have you understood all this?' They said, 'Yes'. And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old'

Catching fish

When a net is cast into the sea, it catches every fish of all kinds. The kingdom of God is like a net cast into the sea of humanity. God welcomes everyone: the good as well as the bad, the sinner as well as the saints. Everyone is welcomed to experience God and His love. No one is excluded by God. No one is condemned by God. This is because His desire is that all may have life in all its fullness.

"What is the foundation of our faith? An act of mercy whereby Jesus bound us to himself. And the Christian life is the response to this love; it is like the story of two lovers. God and man meet, they seek one another, they find one another, they celebrate one another, and they love one another: just like the lover and beloved in the Song of Songs. Everything else comes as a result of this relationship. The Church is the family of Jesus in which he pours out his love. It is this love which the Church guards and wants to give to everyone." (Pope Francis)

It is up to us if we want to respond to God's love or to walk away from Him. There will be people who do not want to know anything about

Him or those who separate themselves from God. These exclude themselves from enjoying the kingdom of God.

This Gospel passage challenges us, who desire to follow Jesus, to become fishers of people. Through our words and actions, we can share with others the Good News of God's love.

Today, let us spend this time of prayer to enjoy our love story with God. In this time and space, God and we meet. We seek each other, we find one another, we celebrate one another, we love one another. Let us be instruments of His love to all whom we will encounter today.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I welcome everyone to experience God's love, without discrimination?

Friday, 2 August

Leviticus 23:1, 4-11, 15-16,27,34-37, Matthew 13:54-58

Coming to his home town, Jesus taught the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were astonished and said, 'Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? His sisters, too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?' And they would not accept him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country and in his own house', and he did not work many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Just a carpenter's son

In today's Gospel, Jesus went to His hometown, no longer just as a carpenter's son, but as a reputable rabbi with crowds following Him. Jesus went, as usual, to the synagogue and He started to teach. The people from his hometown heard Him and they were surprised at His wisdom as well as the miracles they heard that He did in other towns. However, they rejected Jesus because He was, in their eyes, 'the carpenter's son', a poor working peasant. They despised Jesus because they knew His background, His family, His childhood. How

familiarity can breed foolish contempt! Because of their lack of faith, Jesus could not work any miracles.

What about us? Are we critical towards family members and friends when they try to share the Good News with us? Have we experienced being rejected by our family and friends when we try to speak to them about God and His Good News?

God continues to use ordinary people, like us, to be His prophets, His messengers of His Good News. We might not feel equipped to be part of His mission. We see our flaws and imperfections. Let us never forget that Jesus does not call the equipped, but He equips those whom He has chosen and called.

Today, let us allow Jesus to use our life as His instrument. Even when we face rejection and ridicule from others, we continue on because we know that Jesus is our strength.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I struggle to share my faith with those closest to me?

Saturday, 3 August

Leviticus 25:1,8-17, Matthew 14:1-12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the reputation of Jesus, and said to his court, 'This is John the Baptist himself; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him'. Now it was Herod who had arrested John, chained him up and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John had told him, 'It is against the Law for you to have her'. He had wanted to kill him but was afraid of the people, who regarded John as a prophet. Then, during the celebrations for Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company, and so delighted Herod that he promised on oath to give her anything she asked. Prompted by her mother she said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head, here, on a dish'. The king was distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he ordered it to be given her, and sent and had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought in on a dish and given

to the girl who took it to her mother. John's disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went off to tell Jesus.

A voice shouting in the desert

John the Baptist saw himself as the 'voice of someone shouting in the desert' (John 1:23). His voice shouted with passion the message of repentance because he wanted the people of Israel to be converted and go back to God. His prophetic powerful preaching led him to his martyrdom.

Like John the Baptist, there are many people, from the past to the present, who have sacrificed their lives because they have chosen to rock the boats of many. They shout in the desert of our society and move the conscience of many. In their fight for justice and truth, a majority of these people end up, silenced, like St. John the Baptist.

One such person is Archbishop Oscar Romero. He was the voice that spoke up courageously for the rights of the poor and the oppressed in El Salvador. On 24th March 1980, Romero was shot while celebrating Mass in a small chapel near his cathedral.

As Christians, we must continue the mission of St. John the Baptist and of many others who were the voices that shouted for truth and justice. Let us never compromise our Catholic faith by opting to take the conventional ways in order to blend with those who advocate for lies, injustice and hatred.

"We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work"

(Blessed Oscar Romero)

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from standing up for what I truly believe in?

Sunday, 4 August, Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Ecclesiasticus 1:2,2:21-23, Colossians 3:1-5,9-11, 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.'

The story of a rich fool

A man in the crowd went to Jesus with a grievance he had of being cut off unfairly from his family inheritance. Yet, Jesus did not seem so interested to solve his legal issues. Instead, Jesus told the man a parable so as to teach him a deeper meaning to life than just inheritance and money.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man, who having good harvest from his land, started to plan for the future. He planned to store his riches in bigger barns and then to retire and enjoy the fruit of his labour for many years. Little did he know that God regarded him as a fool, and this poor rich fool would die that very night. Thus, what would happen to the riches that he had accumulated?

This rich fool failed to recognise the shortness of his life and that his worldly achievements and richness could never satisfy him. He was too proud with all his 'I's' and 'mine's' to see beyond himself. In his life, he had neither concern for the needs of others nor gratefulness to thank God for all that he had.

Today, Jesus does not want us to be like the rich fool, but to be like Him. Jesus lived His life setting His heart not on the accumulation of riches and power, but on God alone. He lived His life giving generously of Himself to all those who needed Him. He had no material wealth or success to boast about but He was rich in the sight of God.

Lord, help me to have you as my treasure. With you, I am contented and at peace.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What do I treasure most in my life?
- 2) How can I imitate Jesus to be simple, giving, trusting and loving?

Monday, 5 August, The Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major
Numbers 11:4-15, Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death, he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick. When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food'. Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves'. But they answered 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish'. 'Bring them here to me' he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining; twelve baskets full. Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

Bring them to Me

Jesus saw a large crowd and saw their needs. Thus, He spent time to be with the people - healing their sickness, listening to their problems, touching their loneliness, giving hope to their distress. Jesus was never indifferent to anyone who went to Him. He was never too busy to give Himself to the people.

What about us? We tend to rush around and have no time to simply be present for those who need us. Let us stay with Jesus and learn from Him how to give ourselves to others without allowing time to be an obstacle to loving.

The disciples realised that the people would need to leave soon because it was getting dark and there was no food. Jesus, however, said to His disciples, "*Give them something to eat yourselves.*" Jesus' disciples must have been shocked at His proposal. They looked at the little that they had and must have felt hopeless.

Isn't this situation familiar to us? We look at the little that we have and conclude with frustration and discouragement that we do not have enough, we are not worthy to try, we cannot attempt to do so, etc. Can our five loaves and two fish do any good?

Listen to Jesus - *"Bring them here to me."* The disciples brought their five loaves and two fish, and Jesus fed the huge crowd. Let us trust that Jesus can and will work miracles through the little that we give to Him.

Question for reflection:

- 1) How can I be more generous with my time today?
- 2) Do I trust that Jesus can use my life with all that I am and use me to feed the crowd of today? Am I willing to let Him use me as His instrument?

**Tuesday, 6 August, Transfiguration of the Lord
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, 2 Peter 1:16-19, Luke 9:28-36**

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning. Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'. - He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.' And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

In the silence, listen to Him

The Father's voice coming from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him."

Peter, John and James heard those words. Did they listen to Jesus? Did they listen with trust in Jesus' words about His passion, death and resurrection? Did their listening to Jesus give them the perception that they had to stay faithful with Him even in the scandal of the cross?

In our daily life, do we listen to Jesus? Do we listen to Him as He speak to us about renouncing ourselves, carrying our cross and following Him? Do our listening to Jesus make us to live with Him and for Him?

"I need to be silent for a while, worlds are forming in my heart." (Mister Eckhart)

In today's gospel, Jesus brought Peter, James and John up the mountain, a place away from everything and everyone else in order to be with God. Jesus went up to the silence of the mountain to pray and listen to what God wants to tell Him.

In our world, we are constantly filled with noises from the traffic, the radio, the television, the words of people that we do not appreciate the beauty of silence. In the silence, God speaks and we listen. If we really want to grow deeper into our following of Jesus, we need to follow Him constantly up the mountain and enter into the stillness where we can listen and discern the voice of God the Father.

"Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our lives are in danger. Somewhere we know that without silence words lose their meaning, that without listening speaking no longer heals, that without distance closeness cannot cure. Somewhere we know that without a lonely place our actions quickly become empty gestures. The careful balance between silence and words, withdrawal and involvement, distance and closeness, solitude and community forms the basis of the Christian life and should therefore be the subject of our most personal attention" (Henri Nouwen)

Wednesday, 7 August

Numbers 13,1-2, 25, 14:1,26-29,34-35, Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. Then out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Sir, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he answered her not a word. And his disciples went and pleaded with him. 'Give her what she wants,' they said 'because she is shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel'. But the woman had come up and was kneeling at his feet. 'Lord,' she said 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the house-dogs'. She retorted, 'Ah yes, sir; but even house-dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their master's table'. Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

Great is your Faith!

The Canaanite woman went to Jesus and started shouting at the top of her voice. She was not afraid to shout out despite belonging to a race that was regarded as hopeless by the Jews. A mother's love made her hold nothing back but to keep on pleading with Jesus to help her daughter. She trusted that Jesus could heal her daughter and make her well again.

Finally when Jesus did say something to her, and it turned out to be not what she expected, she continued to look at Him with hope and trust. Jesus, seeing her unwavering faith, praised her and answered her request.

Let us be inspired to do the same! Let us have the unwavering faith that we have a great God in our life and we can turn to Him always with trust that He will never let us down. Jesus will never turn His back on true faith. Therefore, we call to Him with a believing heart.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I identify myself with this Canaanite woman's faith in Jesus?

Thursday, 8 August, St. Dominic
Numbers 20:1-13, Matthew 16:13-23

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'. 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God'. Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord;' he said 'this must not happen to you'. But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

A Suffering Christ

When Jesus asked His disciples the crucial question, "*Who do you say I am?*" Peter spontaneously answered, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Peter, like many of the disciples, recognised that Jesus was not a mere rabbi or prophet, but He was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus praised Peter for speaking the truth, and was given the task to be the Rock on which the Church would be built. What a glorious moment for Peter! Yet, the very next instance, Peter fell from his pedestal when Jesus reproached him for being a stumbling block, an obstacle in his path. This was because Peter had taken Jesus aside and remonstrated with Him regarding His talk on suffering and death.

Peter could not personally accept a suffering Messiah, a rejected Messiah. He wanted a glorious Saviour without the cross. Jesus, however, knew that He had to walk the path of passion and death first before His resurrection.

Are we too afraid of suffering?
Can we love Jesus, the suffering Christ?

**Friday, 9 August, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross
Deuteronomy 4:32-40, Matthew 16:24-28**

Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour. I tell you solemnly, there are some of these standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming with his kingdom.

Yes to a Life of Love

It is the human tendency to look through life with the lens of 'I, me, mine.' We tend to think that the whole world revolves around us.

Jesus, in today's Gospel, shatters all our self-centred ways and calls us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. This is a call to set aside our lens of 'I, me, mine' and to enter into the dynamism of forgetting ourselves and looking at the needs of others instead. This is the paradox of discipleship. If we want to gain, we must learn to lose.

What prevents me from giving myself more? Am I afraid to lose my comforts, other people's opinions of me, my popularity, my need to be right all the time?

Today, let us open ourselves to deny our self-centred pride and selfish desires in order to unselfconsciously love and care for those around us, especially those in need.

"We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become. If we love things, we become a thing. If we love nothing, we become nothing. Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ, rather it means becoming the image of the beloved, an image disclosed through transformation. This means we are to become vessels of God's compassionate love for others." (St. Clare of Assisi)

Today, Jesus invites us to join Him in this path of love. Are we willing to follow Him?

Questions for reflection:

1) Is it difficult for me to renounce myself, take up my cross and follow Jesus? Why?

Saturday, 10 August, St. Lawrence
2 Corinthians 9:6-10, John 12:24-26

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I tell you, most solemnly unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life will lose it; anyone who hate his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him.'

A grain of wheat

We celebrate the feast of a very little-known saint, St. Lawrence. Let us look at his life and see how we can follow the example of this great saint.

St. Lawrence, from Spain, was appointed 'archdeacon of Rome' by Pope Sixtus. In the time of persecution in Rome, St. Lawrence was asked by the prefect of Rome to hand over the treasures of the Church, he obediently did just that. He brought to the Roman prefect the treasures of the church by lining the poor, the lame, the lepers, the widows, the orphans. He said bravely to the prefect, "The Church is truly rich, far richer than your emperor." The Roman prefect was so angry that he had St Lawrence put to death by roasting him over fire. Without losing his sense of humour even in a time of intense suffering, St Lawrence said to his torturers, 'It is well done. Turn me over!'

St. Lawrence was great, not because of his achievements, but because he lived and died for Christ. He placed Jesus first above everything else. Thus, this humble saint became a grain of wheat who died in order to yield a rich harvest. His only desire was to follow Jesus faithfully to the end, and to be with Him where He was.

This is what it means for us to be Christians who desire to follow Jesus authentically. We need to make a vital decision to die to our old selves and embrace our new life with Christ. The path of the grain of wheat is the daily way we must walk. It is not easy because we do not spontaneously die to ourselves, to carry our cross and follow Jesus. Yet, let us never forget that this way is glorious because we will bear

fruit that will last forever. We will be with Jesus where He is. We will be honoured by God the Father.

“I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

Question for reflection:

1) What is in me that must die?

Sunday, 11 August, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Wisdom 18:6-9, Hebrews 11:1-2,8-19, Luke 12:32-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 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. 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.'

Master is on the other side

What is our daily preoccupation? Is it about our children, our work, money, health? Is it to become successful in the eyes of the world, to gain recognition and to become wealthy?

Today, Jesus reminds us that among our preoccupations, we must also constantly not forget to ready ourselves for our Master's coming. There is no way we know when or how the Master will one day call us to Himself. Like a thief, He comes without us being aware of it.

We, somehow, are afraid of facing our death. Death is something we cannot control. We know that our final destination is to God but we are still uncertain how or when we will see Him face-to-face.

"A sick man turned to his doctor as he was preparing to leave the examination room, and said "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side..." Very quietly, the doctor said, "I don't know." "You don't know? You are a Christian and you don't know what's on the other side?" The doctor was holding the handle of the door. On the other side came a sound of scratching and whining. And as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room And leaped on him with an eager show of gladness. Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He has never been in this room before. He didn't know what was inside... He knew nothing except that his master was here, And when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, But I do know one thing... I know my Master is there and that is enough." (Unknown)

We prepare ourselves daily to meet God our Master by living a life of love and service. We build God's Kingdom here and now, and not simply spend our time working for our basic survival. We pass on our faith to others as the real treasure so that they too can encounter God and live for Him alone.

When we do finally meet Him when He comes to us, we know that we are ready because we have lived for Him and for others.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is our faith deep enough to trust that our Master is on the other side of the door, waiting to meet us face-to-face?
- 2) How can I prepare myself to meet God?

Monday, 12 August, St. Jane Frances de Chantal
Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Matthew 17:22-27

One day when they were together in Galilee, Jesus said to his disciples, 'The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the power of men; they will put him to death, and on the third day he will be raised to life again'. And a great sadness came over them. When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half shekel came to Peter and said, 'Does your master not pay the half-shekel?' 'Oh yes' he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, 'Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do the kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?' And when he replied, 'From foreigners', Jesus said, 'Well then, the sons are exempt. However, so as not to offend these people, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that bites, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for you.'

A story on being handed over and temple tax

There are two parts to today's Gospel passage. The first part is about Jesus' warning He would be handed over to the power of men and would suffer, die and rise on the third day.

"This word, "to be handed over," plays a central role in the life of Jesus. Indeed, this drama of being handed over divides the life of Jesus radically in two. The first part of Jesus' life is filled with activity. Jesus takes all sorts of initiatives. He speaks; he preaches; he heals; he travels. But immediately after Jesus is handed over, he becomes the one to whom things are being done. He's being arrested; he's being led to the high priest; he's being taken before Pilate; he's being crowned with thorns; he's being nailed on a cross. Things are being done to him over which he has no control. That is the meaning of passion - being the recipient of other people's initiatives."

(Henri Nouwen)

Jesus was handed over and allowed Himself to be placed into the hands of people over whom he had absolutely no control. His disciples heard what Jesus said and they were sad. They did not expect their Master to be passively handed over. This was not the way that they also wanted for themselves. They wanted to be disciples of a powerful

Master, a great Leader. They definitely did not want to be 'handed over' to sufferings, pains and death.

What about us?

We want to be strong, in control and take charge of our lives. We do not want to be 'handed over' to people's initiatives and have things done to us against our will and plans. In life, we are sometimes being 'handed over' to illnesses, circumstances, crises that are beyond our control. As disciples, we should follow Jesus' footsteps and not be afraid because He will be with us in moments when we are experiencing our passion.

In the second part of the Gospel, Peter was questioned by tax collectors on the issue of paying the temple tax. As for Jesus, He and His disciples, as sons of God, should be exempted from paying the Temple tax. This was because the Temple was the House of God. No child is required to pay taxes for being in their Father's house. To avoid a scandalous situation, Jesus told Peter to pay the Temple tax.

This is a lesson for all of us. We must always be good examples for others and not stumbling blocks for them by fulfilling our responsibilities and obligations. As we enter into prayer today, let us listen to Jesus as He speaks to us through His Word.

Question for reflection:

1) What struck me as I prayed with today's Gospel passage?

Tuesday, 13 August, Ss. Pontian and Hippolytus
Deuteronomy 31:1-8, Matthew 18:1-5,10,12-14

At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' So he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. Then he said, 'I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven. 'Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? I tell you solemnly, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all. Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.'

To live in the present

The issue of being the greatest was the disciples' concern. Is this our concern as well? Jesus made it clear to His disciples as well as to us that it is not a matter of becoming great, but about changing and becoming like little children.

Little children live simply in the present moment with a sense of joy and wonderment. They do not live in the past or worry about the future. They laugh, play, love, dance, sing without wondering about the opinions of others. They are who they are, without pretence.

Jesus invites us to become like little children and live in the present moment. It is in the present moment where God reveals Himself. In the present moment, we come to be aware that God is with us and that He cares for us. We need to plan and work for a better future, but without missing the present moment. We take delight in life itself with all its goodness and wonderment. Living in the present, we learn how to love the people around us rather than focus on past resentments or the many expectations we have of them. Becoming like little children leads us to let God be God, let others be others and let ourselves be

ourselves.

Jesus invites us to enter into the process of *metanoia* (Greek), which means literally to change our mind. Our mind controls all and has the power to pull us to live in our memories of the past or the anxieties of the future. Our mind judges and labels others, and prevents us from appreciating others as they are. On our own, we cannot change our minds. The Holy Spirit who lives in us is constantly at work in us, and helps us to encounter God's presence in the present moment. It is a constant journey of opening ourselves to let go of our past and future, and live at peace with God, others and ourselves each moment of today. This is where life begins!

Wednesday, 14 August, St. Maximilian Kolbe
Deuteronomy 34:1-12, Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples: 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, is between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven. I tell you solemnly once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.'

Reconciliation

A story goes like this: 'The rabbi asked his students: "How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?" One of the rabbi's students suggested: "When from a distance you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep?" "No." was the answer of the rabbi. "Is it when one can distinguish between a fig tree and a grapevine?" "No," the rabbi said. "Please tell us the answer then," said the students. "It is, then," said the wise teacher, "when you can look into the face of another human being and you have enough light in

you to recognise your brother or your sister. Until then it is night, and darkness is still with us.” (Henri Nouwen)

God gives us the gift of community - our family, our community of faith, of parish groups - so that we can build relationships based on mutual love. However, there are times when someone in the community does us wrong. What should we do? Can we have the light in us to recognise that person as our brother/sister?

Today, Jesus invites us to work always for reconciliation. This is because He has given us love as the absolute imperative that governs our relationships with our brothers and sisters. However, to love does not mean that we turn a blind eye to the wrongdoing of the other. Out of love, we should approach the person and enter into a dialogue of understanding and forgiveness. If he/she resists our initiative of peace, then we should bring another person or two with us. Whatever we do, we must always approach the person in the spirit of reconciliation.

May we have enough light in us to recognise every person as our brother and sister, even those who have done us wrong. May we have enough love to work for reconciliation.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I work for reconciliation so that there is unity in my relationships with others?

**Thursday, 15 August, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Revelations 11:19,12:1-6,10, 1 Corinthians 15:20-27, Luke 1:39-56**

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be

fulfilled.’ And Mary said: ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my saviour; because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him. He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy - according to the promise he made to our ancestors-of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants forever.’ Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months and then went back home.

Rushing to do God’s stuff

“Luke’s Gospel which we have just heard (cf. Lk 1:39-56) shows us this living Ark — which is Mary — on the move: after leaving her home in Nazareth, Mary set out for the hill country, making haste to reach a city of Judah and go to the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. It seems to me important to emphasize the expression “with haste”: God’s things deserve haste, indeed, the only things in the world that deserve haste are precisely those of God, which are truly urgent for our life.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

When Mary heard the good news about her cousin, Elizabeth, she did not wait or procrastinate. She took action by leaving the comfort of her home in order to travel a great distance to visit her cousin, Elizabeth. The action of Mary shows that she placed Elizabeth’s needs above her own. Mary did not focus on herself and her problems. Instead, she wanted to be with her cousin - to rejoice with her as well as to help her in her pregnancy.

“Love seeks one thing only: the good of the one loved. It leaves all the other secondary effects to take care of themselves. Love, therefore, is its own reward.” (Thomas Merton)

We are called to imitate such love that selflessly cares for others. Such love conquers pride and does not indulge in jealousy or unkindness. Such love gives oneself without seeking for rewards or praises.

As we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, let us ask for her help to guide our feet to always hasten to reach out to others, our heart to selflessly care for others, our mind to think for the good of others, our hands to carry the wounds of others.

Question for reflection:

- 1) Do I hurry to do God's things?

Friday, 16 August, St. Stephen of Hungary
Joshua 24:1-13, Matthew 19:3-12

Some Pharisees approached him, and to test him they said, 'Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?' He answered, 'Have you not read that the creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man must leave father and mother, and cling to his wife, and the two become one body? They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide'. They said to him, 'Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?' 'It was because you were so unteachable' he said 'that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: the man who divorces his wife -I am not speaking of fornication - and marries another, is guilty of adultery.' The disciples said to him, 'If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is not advisable to marry'. But he replied, 'It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born that way from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves that way for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.

Commitment is the key

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.' Here, in four words, is a spiritual and pastoral program of life. The love of Christ, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, enables us to live like this, to be like this: as persons always ready to forgive; always ready to trust, because we are full of faith in God; always ready to inspire hope, because we ourselves are full of hope in God; persons ready to bear patiently every situation and each of our brothers and sisters, in union with Christ, who bore with love the burden of our sins." (Pope Francis)

The message for us in today's Gospel is: Commitment.

Let us go beyond commitment in marriages to reflect on the different commitments that we have in our life.

In marriage, two people make a lifelong commitment of faithful love. It is not just in marriage, but also in family life, parents commit themselves to accept and care for their children in order that they are free to be who they are meant to be. Children also commit themselves to love and respect their parents, and not to despise them in their old age. Good friends commit to be there for each other in the ups and downs of life.

In Jesus' life, He is the first who makes the lifelong commitment to each of us. His love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. This love has been poured into our hearts and capacitates us to love each other in the same way. Thus, with His love in us, we become people ready to forgive and trust.

Authentic commitment requires us to have true love that stays with a friend, a spouse, a child, a parent during their 'good times' and especially in their 'bad times'.

"Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?"

According to Jesus, Moses allowed divorce because of the people's hardness of hearts. However, it was not the original plan of God. He always desires for unity - unity in marriage as well as unity in family life and friendships.

The passage though speaks specifically about marriage but let us open our eyes of faith to see commitments at every level of our relationships. May we work hard to bring forgiveness and trust in every relationship that God has gifted us with.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my greatest challenge to commit myself to love with God's love in my marriage, family life, and friendship?

Saturday, 17 August
Joshua 24:14-29, Matthew 19:13-15

People brought little children to him, for him to lay his hands on them and say a prayer. The disciples turned them away, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs'. Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

The only thing that matters

"Being at the start of life, the child is open to any adventure. So it should be with you. Don't put any obstacles in the way of your progressive union with Christ, a progress which should continue throughout your whole life." (Chiara Lubich)

In today's Gospel, people brought little children to Jesus so that He could lay His hands on them and say a prayer for them. However, His disciples told them to go away.

Jesus saw this, and He told the children to come to Him. Using this incident as a teaching lesson, Jesus told His disciples, *"...for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."*

Jesus continues to call us to be like little children in the sense of being child-like and not childish. To be child-like is to have a simple and trusting faith that leads us to open ourselves to respond to God's call for a deeper communion with Him. As we enter more into relationship with God, we start to realise that when everything is stripped away, the only thing that matters is Him.

Today, let us listen to the words of Jesus as He speaks to our hearts, *"Come to Me. Do not let anything or anyone stop you from drawing close to Me. Do not let your pride, laziness, stubbornness, anger, tiredness... to make you walk away from Me. Be like little children and trust that I am here to love you."*

Today, let us be open to go on an adventure with Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) What is the one obstacle that prevents me from being child-like in my faith so that I can enter into a loving communion with Jesus?

**Sunday, 18 August, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jeremiah 38:4-6,8-10, Hebrews 12:1-4, 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.'

I choose Jesus

How is it that Jesus is talking about division? Why is Jesus contradicting Himself? Isn't Jesus for unity and peace? Why does He say - *"Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."*?

When we choose to live our lives for Jesus and His Gospel values, we will face oppositions and rejections, even from people whom we love. It is very common to hear of stories about people who are baptised against the approval of their parents, spouses, children, friends, etc. These people face painful displeasure and anger from their family members and friends. Yet, they continue to be faithful to their conviction.

There are young people who want to dedicate their lives to God and for His mission. It is common too to have family members and friends who oppose their decisions. Yet, many have answered God's calling and remain firm in their integrity.

To those who want to follow Him closely, Jesus warns of possible hostility. Despite the oppositions we face, the most loving thing to do is to stand firm to the Truth and not to simply give in to the demands and expectations of our loved ones. It might seem ironic but we show

true love to our family members and friends when we choose to put Jesus above them. Our love for our parents, siblings, friends, etc. will never come to an end but it will only become pure when Jesus becomes our first choice.

Today, let us pray that we may never lose sight of Jesus so that we can live for Him and with Him. Let us also unite ourselves in prayer for people who are experiencing rejection and misunderstandings because of their decision to opt for Christ.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Will I remain firm in my love and convictions for Christ despite oppositions from others?
- 2) How can I make choices according to Christ and His Gospel values?

Monday, 19 August, St. John Eudes
Judges 2:11-19, Matthew 19:16-22

There was a man who came to Jesus and asked, 'Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said, 'Which?' 'These.' Jesus replied 'You must not kill. You must not commit adultery. You must not bring false witness. Honour your father and mother, and: you must love your neighbour as yourself' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?' Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me'. But when the young man heard these words he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

A joy beyond measure

This story of the rich young man often distresses us because it is too radical and extreme. We identify ourselves with this young rich man who walked away sad from Jesus because of his great wealth.

This rich young man had kept all the commandments. Yet, he desired for something more in his life. He knew that Jesus, the Master, would enlighten and show him the right way.

“Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

Jesus invited this young man and us to let go of all obstacles that prevent us from opening ourselves to truly follow Him. This rich young man was so possessive of his treasure that he could not let go and have God as his true possession and greatest treasure.

What is our treasure? Does our work prevent us from spending quality time with Jesus in prayer? Does our self-love stop us from opening ourselves to the call of Jesus? Does our laziness and love for comfort make us shut ourselves from Him?

It is not a pain but a joy to have Jesus as our priceless treasure. In order to gain Jesus, we need to have the courage to sell all the obstacles. We need to never forget that Jesus alone can fulfil our heart's deepest desires.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to let go of the obstacle I have that might be holding me back from finding true joy with Jesus?

Tuesday, 20 August, St. Bernard
Judges 6:11-24, Matthew 19:23-30

Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you solemnly, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.' When the disciples heard this they were astonished. 'Who can be saved, then?' they said. Jesus gazed at them. 'For men' he told them 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.' Then Peter spoke. 'What about us?' he said to him 'We have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?' Jesus said to him, 'I tell you solemnly, when all is made new and the Son of Man sits on his throne of glory, you will yourselves sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life. Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

Detach in order to attach

In this gospel passage, Jesus told His disciples that it would be very hard for a rich person to enter God's kingdom. What is the message for us today? Is Jesus condemning those who are materially rich?

No, Jesus is not condemning those with wealth. There is nothing wrong in having money and things. Jesus' point is about having God, not money or things, to be the one ruling our lives. Money is to serve us, not rule us. Material possessions are to be used, not to be in control of us.

Who are we following today, Jesus or money/material possessions?

Today, let us develop a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus. When Jesus becomes our intimate friend and the companion of our lives, we will fully trust and follow His voice of love. Detachment from our material wealth and securities is only possible when we know the greater attachment we are invited to have.

"We must have a real living determination to reach holiness. I will be a saint means I will despoil myself of all that is not God; I will strip my

heart of all created things; I will live in poverty and detachment; I will renounce my will, my inclinations, my whims and fancies, and make myself a willing slave to the will of God.” (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Peter and so many people throughout centuries till today have left everything to follow Jesus. They detached themselves from everything because they attached themselves to have Jesus the Lord who would not fail them.

Step by step, let us start to follow Jesus and trust that He will give us all we need.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus inviting me to do in this time of prayer?

Wednesday, 21 August, St. Pius X
Judges 9:6-15, Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard. Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage". So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because no one has hired us" they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too". In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first". So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner. "The men who came last" they said "have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?" Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.

The Generous Landowner

The landowner, in today's Gospel passage, paid one denarius to each of the workers regardless of whether he was working at the start or the end of the day. When the ones working for a long time saw that they had the same amount, they started to grumble because they had worked more hours under the hot sun and were toiling relentlessly in the vineyard.

We might also think that the landowner was unfair to the workers. Those who work more must be paid more. The ones who work less must be paid lesser. This is the law of justice of the world.

Jesus tells us this parable to show us that God has a different logic than the world's.

God is like this landowner whose generosity extends to every person. He gives one denarius of His love and mercy to those who are worthy as well as to those who are not.

Sometimes, we wonder how possible it is for God to love this person who is so undeserving or for God to bless this person and not us. His generosity extends to everybody.

The one denarius - the daily wage of His mercy is for those who are worthy as well as for those who are unworthy, for those who are good as well as those who are not.

“Why be envious because I am generous?”

Today, we are called to rejoice and give thanks to God for His love that is so generous and rich in mercy.

God does not prefer the hardworking Catholics who faithfully work hard in the parish to those Sunday Catholics. He does not give His love more to those who go for mass every day and lesser to those who go to mass only once a year.

God pursues all - the saints and the sinners among us - in order to bring each of us always to a deeper encounter from the stage where we are. We can grumble and say that it is not fair but let us remember that God's ways are not ours and His thoughts are not ours.

Questions for reflection:

1) Have I ever experienced God's generous love in my life? How can I be generous to others in the same way God is to me?

**Thursday, 22 August, Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Judges 11:29-39, Matthew 22:1-14**

Jesus began to speak in parables once again to the chief priests and elders of the people: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants. "Tell those who have been invited" he said "that I have my banquet all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the crossroads in the town and invite everyone you can find to the wedding". So these servants went out on to the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth". For many are called, but few are chosen.'

Enter into this Feast!

One thing that we like most is to be invited by our friends for feasts where we know that there will be good company, great fellowship and, of course, fantastic food. Today, Jesus invites us to the grandest feasts of all - i.e. to enter into a daily fellowship with God. In this intimate relationship with God, our hearts will never be empty of love and affection. Today, Jesus calls us to not wait but come and join in the feast of love. Like the king in the passage, God invites everyone, good and bad, to come and enjoy living a life with Him. It is time to stop our excuses, "I am not worthy enough for God to love me." "I am a mess and so I am not good enough." etc., but to have the desire to want a relationship with God. This is the Good News of our Christian faith - God always loves us no matter what we have done and not

done.

The gospel passage today has a twist. There was a man who had responded to the king's invitation and came for the feast. However, he did not bother to change his clothes which reflects the indifference of his inner heart - he is being indifferent about changing his attitudes, habits, and behaviour.

Yes, God invites all, the good and the bad, to the feast of having a relationship with Him. However, we have to get rid of our bad habits, our old way of thinking and judging, the resentments and anger we carry in our hearts, etc. We need to put on new clothes and discard our old ones.

St Paul in his letter to the Colossians explained clearly the clothes we need to put on every day in order to truly come to the feast of love.

"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection." (Colossians 3:12-14)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What 'wedding garment' do I want to put on today?
- 2) Am I eager to be with God and feast on His unconditional love He has for me?

Friday, 23 August, St. Rose of Lima
Ruth 1:1,3-6,14-16,22, Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to disconcert him, one of them put a question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself.'

On these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets also.

Love is the greatest commandment

If today is your last day, what would you do?

Many of us will most likely not be bothered about counting our coin collection or watching our television dramas or washing our precious cars if today were to be our final day on this earth. Instead, we would be spending time with the people we love to express our gratitude to them as well as to make peace with them.

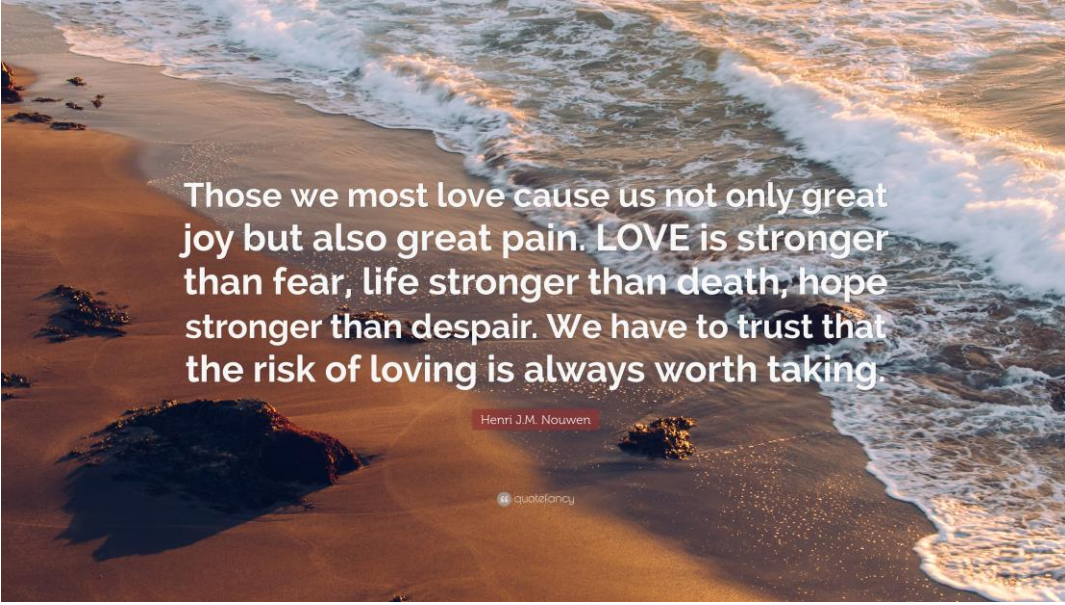
Well, we do not need to wait for today to be our last day in order to express our love for those around us. Today, Jesus calls us to start living a life of loving God and loving others.

Love is the heart of our Christian faith. Our love for God can never be separated from our love for our brothers and sisters. This is because we cannot love God without the desire to love Him who also dwells in our brothers and sisters. Thus, it is in our simple self-giving acts of love for others that we show the depth of our love for God.

“What is the law of the People of God? It is the law of love, love for God and love for neighbour according to the new commandment that the Lord left to us (cf. Jn 13:34). It is a love, however, that is not sterile sentimentality or something vague, but the acknowledgment of God as the one Lord of life and, at the same time, the acceptance of the other as my true brother, overcoming division, rivalry, misunderstanding, selfishness; these two things go together. Oh how much more of the journey do we have to make in order to actually live the new law — the law of the Holy Spirit who acts in us, the law of charity, of love! Looking in newspapers or on television we see so many wars between Christians: how does this happen? Within the People of God, there are so many wars! How many wars of envy, of jealousy, are waged in neighbourhoods, in the workplace! Even within the family itself, there are so many internal wars! We must ask the Lord to make us correctly understand this law of love. How beautiful it is to love one another as true brothers and sisters. How beautiful! Let's do something today.” (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live the law of love today?



Those we most love cause us not only great joy but also great pain. LOVE is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair. We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking.

Henri J.M. Nouwen

quote fancy

Saturday, 24 August, St. Bartholomew
Revelation 21:9-14, John 1:45-51

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, the one about whom the prophets wrote: he is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth'. 'From Nazareth?' said Nathanael 'Can anything good come from that place?' 'Come and see' replied Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There is an Israelite who deserves the name, incapable of deceit'. 'How do you know me?' said Nathanael 'Before Philip came to call you,' said Jesus 'I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel'. Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. so You will see greater things than that.' And then he added 'I tell you most solemnly, you will see heaven laid open and, above the Son of Man, the angels of God ascending and descending'.

Come and see

It is traditionally understood that St. Bartholomew refers to the Nathanael in today's Gospel passage. What message does this feast of St. Bartholomew have for us today?

Nathanael encountered Jesus through a mediator, Philip. Philip had a deep life-transforming encounter with Jesus that he wanted to share the Good News with his friend. He went searching for Nathanael and told him, "Come and see." Philip did not stay for long but disappeared after his friend had his own personal encounter with Christ. He was simply an instrument to bring his friend to Jesus and Jesus to his friend. Because of Philip's "Come and see", Nathanael became Jesus' apostle. Not only that, it was believed that Nathanael went to India and Armenia where he was persecuted for his faith and died as a martyr. From that one encounter with Christ, Nathanael's whole life direction changed and lived totally with Jesus and for Jesus.

Looking at our life, our personal following of Jesus started because of the faith of our parents, friends, relatives, mentors. Through a friend's testimony or a parent's good example, we start to be drawn closer to Jesus and start our own journey with Him.

In the same way that we have 'Philips' who inspire us towards Jesus, we too are called to be mediators to tell people, "Come and see. Come and experience. Come and know."

We will never know how our words and deeds can influence others to greater faith and love for Jesus.

Questions for reflection:

1) Who are the people in my life that have brought me closer to Jesus? How can I help others to draw closer to Jesus?

**Sunday, 25 August, Twenty First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 66:18-21, Hebrews 12:5-7,11-13, 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.'

Enter by the narrow door

Jesus invites us to try our best to enter by the narrow door. The narrow door is not something but someone. The narrow door is Jesus Himself. When we try our best to enter into Him, we will find ourselves with Him. Having Jesus as the centre of our lives, we will have fullness of life.

In our daily life, we struggle to enter by the narrow door because we are constantly surrounded by lies that tell us, "Make career your life."

"Your money is your only security." "The TV is your saviour that makes you happy."

Jesus invites us to listen to His voice as He gives us the strength to strive, to try our best always to enter by the narrow door.

We are constantly faced with the hard choice: to live listening to the voice of the world or to the voice of Jesus. There is a story that goes something like this:

'Once upon a time, there was a very wise and holy man who lived apart from others. He would spend hours and hours alone in prayer. He was respected by all because he knew how to bring peace. One day, two students came to him to learn from him. "We want to follow you, for you have brought everlasting peace to our people," they said. But the wise and holy man told them that peace will not come in this life if people are constantly fighting. The two students did not understand so the wise man continued. "There are two creatures that are inside of us that are fighting each other. One feeds on anger, resentment, bitterness, frustration, fear and doubts. The other feeds on mercy, forgiveness, compassion, understanding and love," The two students could not believe what they were hearing. They asked the wise old man, "Which creature is stronger?" The old man replied, "It depends. It depends on which one you feed the most." (Unknown)

Let us choose to listen to the voice that leads us to enter through the narrow door. There, we will find ourselves completely one with Jesus.

Monday, 26 August

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5,8-10, Matthew 23:13-22

Jesus said: "Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You who shut up the kingdom of heaven in men's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go in who want to. 'Alas for you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when you have him you make twice as fit as hell you are. 'Alas for you, blind guides! You who say, "If a man swears by the Temple, it has no force; but if a man swears by the gold of the Temple, he is bound." Fools and blind! For which is of greater worth, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred?"

Or else, "If a man swears by the altar it has no force; but if a man swears by the offering that is on the altar, he is bound." You blind men! For which is of greater worth, the offerings or the altar he is swearing by that and by everything on it. And when a man swears by the Temple he is swearing by that and by the One who dwells in it. And when a man swears by heaven he is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who is seated there.'

God wants love, not sacrifices

What is the message for us as we pray with this Gospel passage?

In the passage, Jesus was stern with the scribes and the Pharisees because He saw that their hearts had lost the zeal, passion and love for God with all their misguided rules and laws. Even though they were going through the minute observations of the 10 commandments and many other precepts, their hearts were far from loving God as well as from loving their neighbours.

The scribes and Pharisees were very concerned about appearing good externally but they were full of corruption and greed.

Jesus calls us to be sincere in our faith in God and the way we live our life. If we are so concerned with how people view us and their opinions of us, we spend our time and energy in keeping up with our appearances. Then, we have totally missed the point of our Christian faith. Rather, we must be more concerned with being loving than looking good.

"That is the purpose of our mission: to identify the material and immaterial needs of the people and try to meet them as we can. Do you know what agape is? It is love of others, as our Lord preached. It is not proselytizing, it is love. Love for one's neighbour, that leavening that serves the common good." (Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

1) Are my words and actions in harmony with my Christian faith? How can I be a true guide who points the way for others to see and encounter God?



Only by being a man or
woman for others does
one become fully human.

Pedro Arrupe

Tuesday, 27 August, St. Monica
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, Matthew 23:23-36

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law - justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practised, without neglecting the others. You blind guides! Straining out gnats and swallowing camels! Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that the outside may become clean as well.'

The weightier matters of faith

'The sign that we are far from the Lord is hypocrisy. The hypocrite does not need the Lord, he is saved by himself - so he thinks - and he disguises himself as a saint...What makes people hypocrites?... they disguise themselves, they disguise themselves as good people: they make themselves up like little holy cards, looking up at heaven as they pray, making sure they are seen - they believe they are more righteous than others... they despise others' (Pope Francis)

Today, Jesus calls us to throw away all the accumulated masks we have that make us appear to be externally good, righteous and virtuous. To be true Christians is not a matter of formality and actions that placate God. Rather, it is about putting into action the weightier matters of what our Christian faith should be about: Justice, mercy and good faith. These are the benchmark to ensure that we are living a true Christian life.

"Clean the inside of the cup and dish first so that the outside may become clean as well."

Jesus invites us to examine our intentions for doing what we are doing. Sometimes, we can be following external rituals and rules but our hearts are filled with judgements and condemnation of others.

Today, let us draw close to Jesus and allow Him to encounter us again

so that His light of love can shine all the hidden dark corners of our hearts and make us to love with freedom and honesty.

Jesus, you know what I carry in my heart. Purify my heart so that I can love you and others with sincerity.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How often do I tend to live for external appearances and forget the weightier matters of what my faith in Jesus is all about?
- 2) What is my resolution at the end of today's prayer?

**Wednesday, 28 August, St. Augustine
1 Thessalonians 2:9-13, Matthew 23:27-32**

Jesus said, 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of corruption. In the same way you appear to people from the outside like good honest men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You who build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of holy men, saying, "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our fathers' day". So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the sons of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your fathers began.'

Giving glory to God

"In the same way you appear to people from the outside like good honest men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

The scribes and the Pharisees put so much emphasis on external show and appearances that their hearts and minds were full of self-love and contempt for the people around them. They looked for human glory instead of seeking for God's glory.

If we are serious in following Jesus, we need to walk His path which is not one of possessing human glory and success, but which leads to seeking God's glory and desiring to please Him alone. God's glory is what gives us lasting joy and peace. When we live a life of love and

our lives are in harmony with our words and actions, then we truly give glory to God.

“One cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one’s life. Those who listen to us and observe us must be able to see in our actions what they hear from our lips, and so give glory to God!” (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) Whose glory do I seek - my glory or God's glory?

**Thursday, 29 August, The Passion of St. John the Baptist
1 Thessalonians 3:7-13, Mark 6:17-29**

Herod had sent to have John arrested, and had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife'. As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him; but she was not able to, because Herod was afraid of John, knowing him to be a good and holy man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you'. And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom'. She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist' The girl hurried straight back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, here and now, on a dish'. The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. So the king at once sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Which voice is directing me?

Today, we commemorate the feast of the Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist. What does this feast speak about our lives, our realities?

Herod married His brothers' wife, Herodias. Herod lusted after Herodias' daughter. Herodias was deeply resentful of John for speaking against her union with Herod and waited for the moment when she can take revenge. Herod, drunk with wine, made a foolish oath to Herodias' daughter after she did a dance for him and his guest. The young girl listened to the advice of her vindictive mother and requested for the head of the prophet. Herod, against his better judgement, gave in to her request and had the prophet beheaded.

It is easy to point fingers at the characters involved in the senseless death of St. John the Baptist. What about us? Do we allow lust, anger, resentment, etc. to control and lead us to 'behead' a friend, a family member, a colleague for speaking and witnessing the truth to us? Do we stop listening to the voice of our conscience?

Today, let us draw close to Jesus because we need every single day to fix our eyes on Him, and not on our anger, jealousy and lust.

Friday, 30 August

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this: Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones did take their lamps, but they brought no oil, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him." At this, all those bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out". But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves". They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other bridesmaids arrived later. "Lord,

Lord,” they said “open the door for us.” But he replied, “I tell you solemnly, I do not know you”. So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.

A Faith that is Alive!

What is the message for us today as we reflect on the parable of the ten bridesmaids?

Faith either grows or dies. We need to take care of our faith in Jesus and not take for granted that our faith will always be strong and constant. How can we allow our faith to grow and keep growing?

Prayer is the first essential oil that fuels the fire of our faith to keep it glowing. Do we set time and space daily to be with God? Do we allow His Word to be the lamp that lights our path?

The next essential oil is action. Prayer must lead us to the action of living a life of love and service. Do we make time to reach out to others in need? Do we use our talents and resources to help our brothers and sisters?

Let us not be lazy Christians as personified by the five foolish bridesmaids. We cannot afford to slacken in our faith. Every day is a new day for renewing our relationship with Jesus, our Bridegroom.

Today, we have the option to stay prepared and feed our faith with prayer and action, or we can put our faith aside and let our faith fall into a deep sleep.

Questions for reflection:

1) Have I taken my faith for granted and been complacent in my relationship with Jesus? How can I feed my faith more today?

Saturday, 31 August

1 Thessalonians 4:9-11, Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus told his disciples this parable: 'It is like a man on his way abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third is one; each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Now a long time after, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness". Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness". Last came forward the man who had the one talent. "Sir," said he "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back." But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have recovered my capital with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the five talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but from the man who has not, even what he has will be taken away. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

The talent of love

Today's Gospel passage speaks of the Master's trust in his three servants. He gave each of his servants a sum of money according to his ability. After he left, the servants with the five and two talents 'promptly' went to work hard and got back even more talents. However, the third servant went off, dug a hole and buried his one talent in the ground.

God gives each of us talents, not just natural capacities, but the greatest talent He has given to us is the capacity to love. This gift of love is not for us to set aside and keep buried in the ground by fear, procrastination, laziness, pride, etc. When God gives us the capacity to love, He wants us to promptly exercise and put this gift into action every day. There are many interpretations to this word, 'Love'. Many people limit love to simply an emotion, a sentiment.

As Christians, we must look at Jesus to grasp the profound and true meaning of love. Jesus on the cross reveals to us the fullness of faithful love, the richness of unconditional self-giving. On the cross, Jesus shows us that true love demands action.

Today, each of us has received many talents and gifts. The greatest of all is the capacity to love. Let us exercise this love promptly by placing ourselves to be at the service of others. Let us not neglect this capacity to love that God, our loving Master, has entrusted to us. The more love we give, the more love we will receive. Let us not be afraid to put love into practice.

"God who created man out of love also calls him to love - the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who Himself is love."

(St. John Paul II)

Today, let us live by love and give love unselfishly in such a way that it will give life.

"Faithfulness in little things is a big thing." (St John Chrysostom)

Question for reflection:

1) Today, how can I exercise the talents that God has given me?

**Sunday, 1 September, Twenty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sirach 3:17-18,20,28-29, Hebrews 12:18-19,22-24, Luke 14:1,7-14**

Now on a sabbath day he had gone for a meal to the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely. He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honour. He said this, 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man". And then, to your embarrassment, you would have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, "My friend, move up higher". In that way, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted.' Then he said to his host, 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again.'

Living in the spirit of humility

It is all about humility. This is a word so frequently used but it is difficult to live it out in our own lives. It seems to be out of fashion in today's society where we have somehow been ingrained to achieve, to be at the top, to be better than the rest.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus noticed how people picked places of honour by placing themselves at the top of the table. This was because nobody wanted to be at the least important places. Looking at ourselves, many of us are not at the top or the bottom of the table. We are at the middle and desire to move up in order to be recognised and rewarded.

This happens in our work, our studies, our family life, parish

communities. We work hard in order to prove ourselves. Sometimes, resentments and anger creep into us when we see others moving up to the top of the 'table', and we remain where we are.

Look at Jesus and learn from Him what true humility is all about. Jesus, being the Son of God, came down from heaven and became a human person. Throughout His life, He lived His life by being at the service of others. Going back to the image of the table, where was Jesus - at the top as an exalted person or at the bottom as a lowly servant?

Today, let us desire to have the same spirit of humility as Jesus.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I humble myself and be like Christ?

Monday, 2 September

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Luke 4:16-30

Jesus came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen'. And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself" and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside"'. And he went on, 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a

Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

Sent to do God's Mission

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, began His ministry with these words from Prophet Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me... He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour." This was Jesus' mission, from the start to the end, to promote God's reign as a project of justice and compassion for the outcast and rejected ones in society. The Good News of God's love is for all people.

Today, we too have the same mission to share the Good News with everyone, especially with the poor and outcasts in our society: The elderly struggling to make ends meet, those struggling with depression, the young children with poor grades become outcast, the poor crying to be heard, etc. They more than anyone else need to hear the Good News that God loves them and He watches over them.

"We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace." (Pope Francis)

Today, Jesus calls us to bring the Good News to the poor, lonely, depressed, sick and hungry. Let us, through our loving words and actions, bring God's love to them!

Questions for reflection:

1) Whom am I called to welcome into my life? What might I need to change in my heart first before I can respond to the call to bring the Good News to those who are most in need of God?

Tuesday, 3 September, St. Gregory the Great
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6,9-11, Luke 4:31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because he spoke with authority. In the synagogue there was a man who was possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil, and it shouted at the top of its voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the devil, throwing the man down in front of everyone, went out of him without hurting him at all. Astonishment seized them and they were all saying to one another, 'What teaching! He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out.' And reports of him went all through the surrounding countryside.

With renewed freshness

Jesus' teaching made a deep impression on those who listened to Him. What about us, today? Do Jesus and His Word leave a deep impression on us? Do we, over time, take Him for granted?

Today, may we be shaken out of our boredom and dullness so that we can listen to Jesus with eagerness and excitement. Even if we are burdened with problems, we must never lose that joy of being drawn and attracted to Jesus because His words are eternal life and love.

The man who was possessed recognised who Jesus was. He shouted out aloud, "*I know who you are: the Holy One of God.*" This man was afraid of what Jesus, the Holy One of God, might do to him and so he wanted to be left alone.

Like the man in today's Gospel, we too have our own demons that we struggle with every day. These demons of pride, jealousy, anger, lust, laziness as well as our deep wounds from past incidents are alive and actively influencing us in the way we live and love. Do we resist Jesus' help in our struggle with our demons?

Today, let us draw close to Jesus and accept joyfully His authority as He leads us to live life with true freedom. May we stay with Jesus today!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me as I listen attentively to His Word today?

Wednesday, 4 September
Colossians 1:1-8, Luke 4:38-44

Leaving the synagogue Jesus went to Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever and they asked him to do something for her. Leaning over her he rebuked the fever and it left her. And she immediately got up and began to wait on them. At sunset all those who had friends suffering from diseases of one kind or another brought them to him, and laying his hands on each he cured them. Devils too came out of many people, howling, 'You are the Son of God'. But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him leaving them, but he answered, 'I must proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do'. And he continued his preaching in the synagogues of Judaea.

Time to pray

*Do not look forward in fear to the changes in life;
rather, look to them with full hope that as they arise,
God, whose very own you are,
will lead you safely through all things;
and when you cannot stand it,
God will carry you in His arms.
Do not fear what may happen tomorrow;
the same understanding Father who cares for
you today will take care of you then and every day.
He will either shield you from suffering
or will give you unfailing strength to bear it.*

*Be at peace,
and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations.*
(St. Francis de Sales)

“When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place.”

Even though Jesus was constantly with the people and busied Himself with helping each person that came His way, He made time for prayer because He needed to be alone with God. In prayer, Jesus was with God, His Father where He encountered Himself to be deeply loved and truly guided by God. Submerged in His Father’s love, Jesus was at peace.

No matter how busy or tired we are, we need to make time and space to be with God. In moments when we feel like we do not want to pray, then all the more we should pray. In prayer, we let ourselves be loved. In prayer, we allow God to guide us in the decisions we need to make. In prayer, we receive strength to move on. Let us be faithful to the time and space we set for daily prayer.

“Everyone of us needs half an hour of prayer every day, except when we are busy— then we need an hour.” (St. Francis de Sales)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be more faithful in prayer?

Thursday, 5 September
Colossians 1:9-14, Luke 5:1-11

Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats close to the bank. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats—it was Simon's—and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch'. 'Master,' Simon replied 'we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled the two boats to sinking point. When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man'. For he and all his companions were completely overcome by the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is men you will catch'. Then, bringing their boats back to land, they left everything and followed him.

The deeper water

'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch'

Jesus asked Peter to put out into deep water and to drop his nets for a catch. Peter, an experienced fisherman, had worked hard all night but caught nothing. Yet, something about Jesus made him comply despite his own tiredness and hesitation. Following Jesus into deeper waters, Peter experienced a miracle beyond his imagination.

Today, Jesus invites us to leave the safety of our shore and enter into deeper waters with Him. This is not easy for many of us because we cherish safety and security. We would rather be in the safety of the shore where we can be in control of our life than out in deep waters. Yet, it is precisely by being in deep water that we experience Jesus as He truly is. There, we learn to trust Him. There, we learn to walk by faith, not by sight.

Let us choose deep waters today.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from leaving the safety of my shore and entering into deep waters with Jesus?

Friday, 6 September

Colossians 1:15-20, Luke 5:33-39

The Pharisees and scribes said to Jesus, 'John's disciples are always fasting and saying prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees too, but yours go on eating and drinking'. Jesus replied, 'Surely you cannot make the bridegroom's attendants fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come, the time for the bridegroom to be taken away from them; that will be the time when they will fast.' He also told them this parable, 'No one tears a piece from a new cloak to put it on an old cloak; if he does, not only will he have torn the new one, but the piece taken from the new will not match the old. 'And nobody puts new wine into old skins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and then run out, and the skins will be lost. No; new wine must be put into fresh skins. And nobody who has been drinking old wine wants new. "The old is good" he says.'

Opening to the old and new

A well-loved musical, 'Fiddler on the roof', is about Tevye, a simple and poor dairyman, who struggled to maintain tradition in times of change and turbulence in his small village of Anatevka. Tevye, in the opening number states, *"Without tradition, our lives would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof."*

In today's gospel passage, the Pharisees and scribes went to Jesus and asked him, *"Why do you do things in a different way? Why are you going against the status quo? Why don't you and your disciples fast like John's disciples and our disciples?"* They were holding onto the changelessness of their tradition as their top priority, as their highest value. They were afraid of the new ways of Jesus and how He seemed to be shaking their comfort zones.

Jesus then used the symbol of a wedding feast to answer their

question regarding fasting. He likened Himself to the bridegroom. As long as He the bridegroom was present, the wedding feast carried on, and the guests, i.e. His disciples, were meant to celebrate.

He then used two parables to further clarify His point. It would be senseless to tear from a piece of brand new cloak and put it onto an old torn cloak. Likewise, it would be meaningless to put new wine into old skins. Due to the fermentation process, the new wine would produce gas that would only cause the old wine skins to stretch to bursting point. Jesus' point to the Pharisees and scribes is that they had to open themselves to the newness that He was bringing to their lives. In order to do so, they could not hold onto their desire for changelessness. By doing so, they would experience the true joy of their faith.

What message does today's gospel passage have for us?

In our own faith journey, there is always place for the old and the new, for fasting and feasting. We must not be rigidly holding onto the changelessness of tradition, and close ourselves to the newness that Jesus wants to bring to our lives. Rather, Jesus invites us always to be adaptable. Thus, let us learn from the old and also welcome the new. Let us be ready to fast and also be eager to feast. Let us not miss the joy of our faith! Jesus is here. As our Bridegroom, He desires to bring new joy and love into our hearts each day.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Does my faith in Jesus bring joy and love to my life?
- 2) How can I be more flexible to the new things that Jesus is offering me?

Saturday, 7 September
Colossians 1:21-23, Luke 6:1-5

One Sabbath Jesus happened to be taking a walk through the cornfields, and his disciples were picking ears of corn, rubbing them in their hands and eating them. Some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath day?' Jesus answered them, 'So you have not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry how he went into the house of God, took the

loaves of offering and ate them and gave them to his followers, loaves which only the priests are allowed to eat?’ And he said to them, ‘The Son of Man is master of the Sabbath’

Friend of life

The Jews considered the Sabbath as a day of ‘rest’ in imitation of God, who had rested after six days of creating the world (Exodus 20:8-11) In fact, the term ‘Sabbath’ is derived from the Hebrew word, ‘Sabbath’ which means to stop and rest. God set the Sabbath for the people to rest and enjoy the freedom to love and to do good deeds.

Jesus wanted to restore the real meaning of the Sabbath. The Pharisees had ingrained a list of rigorous laws to celebrate the perfect observation of Sabbath day. In meticulously following the Sabbath law, the people missed the point of what the Sabbath really meant. Jesus, on the other hand, was never scrupulous in following the Sabbath law. He even cured the sick on the Sabbath day which aroused anger among the Pharisees.

Jesus, the master of the Sabbath, knew that the Sabbath was not meant to be a heavy burden to be laid on the people, but to bring goodness and rest to their lives. This is because God is the God of Life who always places the needs of the people first.

In today’s passage, Jesus and His disciples were walking through a cornfield, and they were hungry. Upon seeing the ripe grain, the disciples plucked the grain, removed the husks and ate it. The Pharisees were indignant that Jesus’ disciples were breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus reminded them of King David and his followers, who due to hunger, did not hesitate to eat the bread that was meant only for the priests. For Jesus, the people and their needs must come first: the hungry must be fed, the sick must be cured, the lonely must be heard, the poor must be helped.

The master of Sabbath is a friend of life. We who follow Him must also be a friend of life. We are called, not just to be self-absorbed in our own routines and practices, but to remember to put the needs of

others before ours. Today, let the God of life speak to us in this time of prayer.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I grow more in my freedom to love?

**8 September, Sunday, Twenty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Wisdom 9:13-18, Philemon 9-10,12-17, Luke 14:25-33**

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

Determined and Committed

Today, Jesus calls for authentic discipleship. Are you ready to be Jesus' disciple? Are you willing to follow Jesus?

Real disciples are ordinary people with extraordinary determination to choose and keep choosing Jesus in the midst of so many voices clamouring for our attention and commitment.

The key word that sums up today's gospel passage is commitment. A commitment of the whole person that involves a total detachment from people and material possessions. A commitment that implies that we 'hate' families and even ourselves.

What does it mean when Jesus uses the word, 'hate'?

'Hate' here does not mean being emotionally loathing or hostile. In the Semitic language, 'to hate' means turning away from someone or something. Thus, Jesus demands from those who desire to follow Him a commitment to choose Him alone as our only Love, as our only

Master.

In our following of Jesus, we need to know that there is a price to pay. In the two parables, Jesus spoke of a person building a tower and a king going to battle. Both of them wisely counted the costs before deciding what to do. If this was not done, they would start but would lack the perseverance to complete their tasks.

Today, are we ready to be Jesus' disciples? Are we willing to follow Him, out of love and to the very end?

Monday, 9 September, St. Peter Claver
Colossians 1:24-2:3, Luke 6:6-11

Now on another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and began to teach, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. The scribes and the Pharisees were watching him to see if he would cure a man on the Sabbath, hoping to find something to use against him. But he knew their thoughts; and he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Stand up! Come out into the middle.' And he came out and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, 'I put it to you: is it against the law on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to destroy it?' Then he looked round at them all and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand'. He did so, and his hand was better. But they were furious, and began to discuss the best way of dealing with Jesus.

Dare to Do the Right Thing

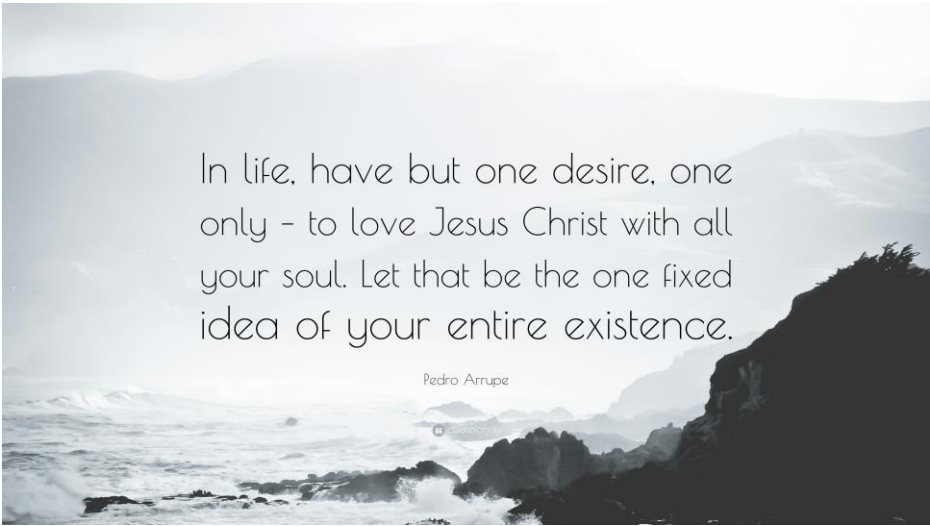
Jesus never takes a break from either loving or doing good deeds simply because it was the Sabbath, the day of rest. Instead, He saw a man with his right hand withered and immediately healed him. He knew that the religious leaders were closely watching what He would do. He also knew that they would condemn Him for His action. However, Jesus chose to put the man in need as His top priority.

Jesus never stops loving and doing good deeds. We must pattern the way we love after Him and give love without procrastination or fear of others' criticism. At times, our doing good actions can lead us to face misunderstandings and persecutions. We, however, must persevere, with Jesus as our strength and motivation.

"It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result." (Mahatma Gandhi)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I commit myself to love more and never stop doing good deeds?



In life, have but one desire, one
only - to love Jesus Christ with all
your soul. Let that be the one fixed
idea of your entire existence.

Pedro Arrupe

 facebook

Tuesday, 10 September
Colossians 2:6-15, Luke 6:12-19

Jesus went out into the hills to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor. He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all.

From prayer to mission

Jesus went to the hills to pray and He spent the whole night praying to God. In silence, Jesus stayed with God.

"God is hidden within me. I find Him by hiding in the silence in which He is concealed." (Thomas Merton)

Silence scares many of us because it is confusing and awkward. Many of us do not know what to do in moments of silent prayer. We start to busy ourselves by thinking of what we need to do next. We begin to fidget and become restless.

We need to set aside time to pray despite our busyness. In silence, we find God. In silence, we enter into an intimate and personal relationship with Him. The good news is that God is the first who desires to enter into a loving communion with us. Thus, He waits for us patiently.

After spending the night with God, Jesus called and chose twelve among His disciples to be His apostles. Interestingly, Jesus did not choose the great or the perfect to be His apostles. Rather, He chose ordinary people with their own particular weaknesses as well as gifts.

Each of them was called by Jesus to allow God to act through their lives.

In our silent prayer, let us be aware that Jesus is calling us by name to enter into a more intimate and personal relationship with Him. He needs us to be His presence today. He can use us, despite our imperfections, as His instruments for His mission.

Questions for reflection:

1) How can I make prayer time a top priority? From my prayer time with Jesus, how is He inviting me to live my mission today?

Wednesday, 11 September

Colossians 3:1-11, Luke 6:20-26

Fixing his eyes on his disciples Jesus said: 'How happy are you who are poor: yours is the kingdom of God. Happy you who are hungry now: you shall be satisfied. Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh. Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets. 'But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep. Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.'

A Life with God's Joy

Jesus offers us the Beatitudes as our way of life that brings us to possess fullness of joy that the world can never give us.

Every day, hundreds of people around us move in all directions, rushing to reach some unknown goal. Many people are so busy pursuing power, pleasures, productivity and fame. Many people have this constant fear of not making it in life. So self-absorbed they are with their personal concerns that they remain oblivious to the suffering and needs of so many people who are in need.

Let us today be still and quiet. Let Jesus speak to us about what it means to live a life with God's joy.

"How happy you who are poor... How happy you who are hungry now... How happy you who weep now... Happy are you when people hate you..."

Jesus' way to happiness is for us to choose to live a life of simplicity, a life hungering for justice, a life weeping in solidarity with those who are suffering. To live the Beatitudes implies that we first have to die to our desire for worldly riches, fame, popularity and power. We follow Jesus who lived His life among the marginalized, and who did not desire to use His power and influence to seek His own glory, but to relieve the suffering of those in need. Jesus chose to live for God and for others.

Money, power and success do not make us happy. We need to let Jesus show us another path to happiness that the world can never give us.

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to walk the path of the Beatitudes?

Thursday, 12 September, Holy Name of Mary
Colossians 3:12-17, Luke 6:27-38

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back. Do for others just what you want them to do for you. "If you love only the people who love you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners do that! And if you lend only to those from whom you hope to get it back, why should you receive a blessing? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount! No! Love your enemies and do good to them; lend and expect nothing back. You will then have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God. For he is good to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge others, and God will not judge you; do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you; forgive others, and God will forgive you. Give to others, and God will give to you. Indeed, you will receive a full measure, a generous helping, poured into your hands—all that you can hold. The measure you use for others is the one that God will use for you."

The Power of Love

"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

(Leo Buscaglia)

The people we encounter each day are there in our life for a reason. God puts them in our way so that we can love, not hate; show compassion, not judgement.

As God's beloved children, we can love our friends and enemies because He has given us the capacity to love with His compassionate love. The greatest tragedy in life is when we start building barriers

against others because of our prejudices, fears and insecurities.

Today, let us go back to the gentle voice within us that calls us again and again, *"You are my Beloved child. I love you, and my favour rests on you."*

This is the truth of who we are. It is this truth that will lead us to break down the walls we have built and learn to love others with God's love. Be compassionate as God our Father is compassionate. Be loving as God our Father is loving. Be forgiving as God our Father is forgiving. Be merciful as God our Father is merciful.

Today, let us not underestimate the power of love - a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, the smallest act of caring - to the people around us, especially to those whom we find it hard to love.

Let us pray and listen to the voice of God as He affirms us and strengthens us to choose love today!

Friday, 13 September, St. John Chrysostom

1 Timothy 1:1-2,12-14, Luke 6:39-42

Jesus told a parable to them, 'Can one blind man guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, "Brother, let me take out the splinter that is in your eye", when you cannot see the plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take out the splinter that is in your brother's eye.'

The splinter and plank

"Before you judge my life, my past or my character... walk in my shoes, walk the path I have travelled, live my sorrow, my doubts, my fear, my pain and laughter. Remember, everyone has a story. When you live my life, then you can judge me." (Unknown)

In today's gospel passage, Jesus invites us to go out and encounter

others, without judging them but by accepting them as our brothers and sisters. We cannot see what goes on inside each person. We do not know all the facts of each person's story. Therefore, let us stop focussing on other people's sins because this does not make us into saints. Instead, let us grow in love. Jesus calls us to stay close to Him and experience ourselves being deeply loved despite our own brokenness, scars and weaknesses. He is merciful to us even though we struggle with our imperfections. He knows every plank and splinter of sin we have within us which we perhaps might not even recognise in ourselves. Jesus, with His tender love, desires to remove them so that we can relate freely with others without judging them.

"If you judge people, you have no time to love them." (Mother Teresa)

In this time of prayer, let us go close to Jesus and open our hearts to His love. We pray that we may always give praise than to criticise, to build than to destroy, to love than to condemn.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I tend to judge and see others at their worst?
- 2) How can I grow in love?

**Saturday, 14 September, Exaltation of the Cross
Numbers 21:4-9, Philippians 2:6-11, John 3:13-17**

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'No one has gone up to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven; and the Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.'

The Cross of Jesus

"When we walk without the cross, when we build without the cross and when we proclaim Christ without the cross, we are not disciples of the Lord. We are worldly. We may be bishops, priests, cardinals, popes, all of this, but we are not disciples of the Lord." (Pope Francis)

We are disciples of Jesus who walk with the cross, who build with the cross and who proclaim Jesus with the cross. For us, Jesus on the cross expresses the faithful love that made even the suffering worth it. For us, Jesus on the cross reminds us that He gave His life so that we might live life to the full.

No one can be drawn to the cross without leaving something of herself or himself there. Thus, each one of us is challenged to follow Jesus as He leads us to the path of the cross where we have to also die to our pride, self-sufficiency, arrogance, prejudices, indifferences, etc. It is in dying that we give God's life to others.

Let us contemplate on the cross and allow ourselves to be loved by Jesus. Even if we harden our hearts towards Him, Jesus does not stop loving us. His love is our hope, our joy.

Question for reflection:

1) What does the cross mean for me?

**Sunday, 15 September, Twenty Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Exodus 32:7-11,13-14, 1 Timothy 1:12-17, Luke 15:1-32**

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

Be merciful as God is merciful

'In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon' (Pope Francis)

The merciful love revealed in today's parables is made visible and real in Jesus' life. He, like the shepherd, never fails to go out and look for the lost ones who had fallen away. He, like the woman, never stops rejoicing when one repentant sinner comes back to God. Jesus is nothing but love that is compassionate and patient.

Today, this is the path of love that we, as Christians, are called to

follow. In our busyness of everyday, may we never forget to live and show mercy.

“Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him. Show us your face and we will be saved. Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief. Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words you spoke to the Samaritan woman: “If you knew the gift of God!” You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests His power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified. You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error: Let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved and forgiven by God. Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind. We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy, You who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.” (Prayer by Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What does the parables from Luke 15 mean to me at this point in my life?
- 2) In the same way that I have experienced mercy from Jesus, how can I live and show His mercy to others?

Monday, 16 September, Ss. Cornelius and Cyprian
1 Timothy 2:1-8, Luke 7:1-10

When Jesus had come to the end of all he wanted the people to hear, he went into Capernaum. A centurion there had a servant, a favourite of his, who was sick and near death. Having heard about Jesus he sent some Jewish elders to him to ask him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus they pleaded earnestly with him. 'He deserves this of you' they said 'because he is friendly towards our people; in fact, he is the one who built the synagogue.' So Jesus went with them, and was not very far from the house when the centurion sent word to him by some friends: 'Sir,' he said 'do not put yourself to trouble; because I am not worthy to have you under my roof; and for this same reason I did not presume to come to you myself; but give the word and let my servant 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 these words he was astonished at him and, turning round, said to the crowd following him, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found faith like this'. And when the messengers got back to the house they found the servant in perfect health.

An astonishing faith

A Roman centurion, the oppressor of the Jewish people and most likely a Gentile, sent some Jewish elders to ask Jesus to heal his sick servant. Jesus responded by following them to the house, however, the Roman centurion sent his friends to tell Jesus that he was not worthy for Jesus to enter under his roof. He was confident, however, in the power of Jesus' words which could surely heal his servant from a distance.

Jesus was amazed at the great faith of this Roman centurion. Because of his faith, the servant was healed and was in perfect health.

What does this Gospel passage speak to us today?

Though the Roman centurion was a good man to the Jews, he was still an enemy and an oppressor. Yet, Jesus willingly went to his house

with the intention of healing the servant. He exemplified what He taught the crowd about loving their enemies.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” (Luke 6:27)

What about us? Will we stop and do good to our enemies?

Jesus was impressed with the faith of this Roman centurion. He simply trusted in the power of Jesus’ single word. This can be challenging for many of us because we find it hard to trust without reservation. We demand proofs and explanations before we dare to put our trust. Let us learn from this Roman centurion the joy of having simple faith and trust in Jesus.

“Only trust in God can transform doubts into certainty, evil into good, night into radiant dawn.” (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I exercise my faith in Jesus today?

Tuesday, 17 September, St. Robert Bellarmine
1 Timothy 3:1-13, Luke 7:11-17

Now soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. When he was near the gate of the town it happened that a dead man was being carried out for burial, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople were with her. When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her. 'Do not cry' he said. Then he went up and put his hand on the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, 'Young man, I tell you to get up'. And the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Everyone was filled with awe and praised God saying, 'A great prophet has appeared among us; God has visited his people'. And this opinion of him spread throughout Judaea and all over the countryside.

Do not cry

As He approached the gate of the town, Jesus saw a funeral procession. He noticed the weeping mother, a widow who had just lost her only son. Jesus felt sorry for her because she had lost the one whom she loved. This word, "Sorry" here, does not refer to a condescending attitude. Rather, Jesus' heart went out to her as He suffered her pain. He told her, "*Do not cry*".

Jesus comforted her with those words, "Do not cry" because He was telling her to trust Him. There was no need for her to weep because He was there for her. To the shock of everyone present, Jesus touched the bier and said in a loud voice, "*Young man, I tell you to get up.*"

To the great astonishment of those around, the dead man got up and started to talk. Now, the mother's tears of sorrow turned into joy.

All of us have experienced our personal tragedies or known people who have suffered tragedies. Jesus comes to us and tells us those same words, "Do not cry." He wants to give us joy in our sorrow as well as peace in our pain.

Our dead would remain dead. Our broken hearts would remain broken. Our sickness might continue or even worsen. The difference is that Jesus will be our comforter who will never let us be alone in our grief and sadness: He grieves with us, He hurts with us, He suffers with us. He is our hope and security.

Question for reflection:

1) Have I ever experienced Jesus' comforting presence in moments when I face my deepest griefs?

Wednesday, 18 September

1 Timothy 3:14-16, Luke 7:31-35

Jesus said to the people, 'What description, then, can I find for the men of this generation? What are they like? They are like children shouting to one another while they sit in the market place: "We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't cry". 'For John the Baptist comes, not eating bread, not drinking wine, and you say, "He is possessed". The Son of Man comes, eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners". Yet Wisdom has been proved right by all her children.'

Belonging to Wisdom

John the Baptist, living an austere life in the desert, was seen by the people as 'possessed'. Jesus, on the other hand, came eating and drinking, and was labelled 'glutton, drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'

For those who refused to accept the message of the Good News, nothing and nobody could move their hearts to believe and rejoice. They looked at Jesus and John the Baptist with contempt and disapproval.

"Yet, Wisdom has been proved right by all her children."

What does Jesus mean by this statement? Who are Wisdom's children? The children of Wisdom are not the intellectuals who pride themselves of knowing everything. Instead those whose hearts are filled with simplicity and humility belong to Wisdom. This is because Wisdom herself is humble and simple, and looks constantly towards God for His light of Truth and Love. "

"There is no room for God in him who is full of himself" (Martin Buber)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be a child of Wisdom today?

Thursday, 19 September, St. Januarius
1 Timothy 4:12-16, Luke 7:36-50

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal. When he arrived at the Pharisee's house and took his place at table, a woman came in, who had a bad name in the town. She had heard he was dining with the Pharisee and had brought with her an alabaster jar of ointment. She waited behind him at his feet, weeping, and her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them away with her hair; then she covered his feet with kisses and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is that is touching him and what a bad name she has'. Then Jesus took him up and said, 'Simon, I have something to say to you'. 'Speak, Master' was the reply. 'There was once a creditor who had two men in his debt; one owed him five hundred denarii, the other fifty. They were unable to pay, so he pardoned them both. Which of them will love him more?' 'The one who was pardoned more, I suppose' answered Simon. Jesus said, 'You are right'. Then he turned to the woman. 'Simon,' he said 'you see this woman? I came into your house, and you poured no water over my feet, but she has poured out her tears over my feet and wiped them away with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but she has been covering my feet with kisses ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. For this reason I tell you that her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love. It is the man who is forgiven little who shows little love.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven'. Those who were with him at table began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man, that he even forgives sins?' But he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'.

Seeking for mercy

When the woman entered the house where Jesus was, she was immediately seen as one with a bad reputation in town. She was seen as a sinner, an outcast, and thus she was despised by the self-righteous people in that house. How do we look at others: when we look at our friends, family members and fellow parishioners? How do people view us? When Jesus looks at us, how does He see us?

Simon the Pharisee looked and condemned, not just the woman but Jesus as well. For him, if Jesus was truly a prophet, he would have stopped the sinful woman from touching him. Simon played the judge and could neither see love in the woman's action nor compassion in Jesus' acceptance of her.

The woman had courage to do what only love could do. She took a jar of ointment and wept at Jesus' feet. She then wiped the tears away with her hair. This woman was oblivious to all the whisperings and finger-pointing happening around her. She only wanted to love the One who had shown her love and mercy.

Jesus knew what Simon the Pharisee and even the rest of the onlookers were thinking about. He then told a parable to teach them an important lesson - i.e. real love comes from a heart that is forgiven.

Today, Jesus invites us to acknowledge our need for God's merciful love and to experience ourselves being forgiven, again and again. It is when our hearts are touched by God's love that we have time to love others, and not judge them.

"God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy." (Pope Francis)

Let us be drawn by the power of mercy!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I find myself judging others often? Do I acknowledge my need for God and His mercy?
- 2) What is Jesus' message for me as to how to live my life today?

Friday, 20 September, Ss. Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang and Companions
1 Timothy 6:2-12, Luke 8:1-3

Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching, and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God. With him went the Twelve, as well as certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and ailments: Mary surnamed the Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and several others who provided for them out of their own resources.

Following Jesus to the end

"Jesus made his way through towns and villages preaching, and proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God."

Jesus was constantly on the move. His passion to bring the Good News to people led Him to tirelessly move from one place to another.

As Christians, we are challenged to be actively on the move in order to proclaim the Good News of God's love to those around us. Through our words and actions, we can share with them the gift of God's love. Thus, we need to be permeated by the faithful love of God and let ourselves be led by Him.

In today's Gospel, St. Luke introduced us to Jesus' travelling companions. They were not just made up of men but also women. These women were brave to leave the comforts of their home in order to follow Jesus on the road. This was because women did not have the rights and freedom that men had in Jesus' time. Yet, Jesus showed no loathing or unfairness towards women. He accepted and respected them for their rights and duty to proclaim the Good News.

St. Mary MacKillop, the first and only Australian saint, was canonised on 17th October 2010. She showed great love for Christ and courage to follow Him faithfully to the end. Throughout her life, she suffered greatly because she encountered opposition from several sectors outside and even within the Church. Indeed, she bravely faced the

false accusations and belittling of her work. She continued to serve the poor and needy with determination.

"Whatever troubles may be before you, accept them bravely, remembering Whom you are trying to follow. Do not be afraid. Love one another, bear with one another, and let charity guide you all your life. God will reward you as only He can." (St. Mary MacKillop)

Throughout centuries, there have been so many great Christian women who have shown faithfulness in following Jesus on the road. Let us today renew our commitment to follow Jesus with greater determination!

Question for reflection:

1) In what way can I model my following after these women who followed Jesus so faithfully to the end?

**Saturday, 21 September, St. Matthew
Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13, Matthew 9:9-13**

As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, 'Follow me'. And he got up and followed him. While he was at dinner in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'

Crumpled, dirtied and chosen

As we celebrate the feast of St. Matthew, we can see it so well that our God is a God of mercy. It was Jesus' gaze of mercy that moved Matthew to leave everything, get up and follow Him. That moment of encounter with Jesus changed Matthew from being a tax collector to an apostle; from being a sinner to a saint.

"A well-known speaker started off his conference by holding up a \$50

note. Looking at his listeners, he asked, "Who would like this \$50?" Majority of the people raised their hands. He said, "I am going to give this \$50 to one of you but first, let me do this." He started to crumple the note and asked, "Who still wants it?" Still the hands were up in the air. "Well, what happens if I do this?" The speaker went on to throw the note on the ground and grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked the now crumpled and dirty note up. "Now, who still wants it?" My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. The \$50 note remains \$50. It does not decrease in value despite being crumpled and dirty. Many times, we are dropped, crumpled and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what happens, we will never lose our value in God's eyes. To Him, whether we are dirty or clean, crumpled or creased, we are priceless to Him" (Unknown)

Today, let us allow ourselves to be loved by Him. No matter how 'crumbled or dirty' we are, we must never forget Jesus' profound mercy. When we truly experience ourselves being loved and forgiven by Jesus, we can also break down the walls of prejudices and judgements that make us exclude others.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is it a challenge for me to relate to others with mercy and not by being judgemental?
- 2) What do I understand from Jesus in prayer that I want to put His Word into practice?

**Sunday, 22 September, Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Amos 8:4-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-8, Luke 16:1-13**

Jesus said to his disciples, 'There was a rich man and he had a steward denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, "What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer." Then the steward said to himself, "Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes." Then he called his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, "How much do you owe my master?" "One hundred measures of oil" was the reply. The steward said, "Here, take your bond; sit down straight away and write fifty". To another he said, "And you, sir, how much do you owe?" "One hundred measures of wheat" was the reply. The steward said, "Here, take your bond and write eighty". 'The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light. And so I tell you this: use money, tainted as it is, to win you friends, and thus make sure that when it fails you, they will welcome you into the tents of eternity. The man who can be trusted in little things can be trusted in great; the man who is dishonest in little things will be dishonest in great. If then you cannot be trusted with money, that tainted thing, who will trust you with genuine riches? And if you cannot be trusted with what is not yours, who will give you what is your very own? No servant can be the slave of two masters: he will either hate the first and love the second, or treat the first with respect and the second with scorn. You cannot be the slave both of God and of money.'

For you, for them

In today's parable, the master entrusted his steward with his money. However, he mismanaged his master's money by spending it on himself. When his dubious deeds came to light, his master wanted him to give an account of all his expenditure. Now, this dishonest steward was faced with the sudden loss of all that he had accumulated. What did he do? He knew that he was too lazy to do hard labour. He was

too proud to beg for money. This astute steward decided to approach his master's creditors and lowered all their debts, with the hope, that someone would look upon his plight with kindness and offer him shelter. When his master found out, the steward was commended for his astuteness.

What can this dishonest steward teach us about our life and our faith? The dishonest steward belongs to the 'children of this world'. They use well their resources to serve their own interests. What about us as 'children of the light'? Do we stop and even reflect on how we want to use, not just our money, but also our talents, gifts and time to serve God and His people? At the end of our lives, what do we want to bring with us to heaven? We cannot bring with us all that we have accumulated here on earth when one day we leave this life. Thus, we need to use all that we have and accumulate for others, not just for selfish gains. We are called to become responsible and generous stewards.

When we share what we have with others, their lives will be touched and changed for the better. We will then 'win friends' for ourselves in such a way that others will appreciate our friendship, values, talents and faith.

At the end of our lives, when we stand at the gates of heaven, may we hear our Master telling us, *"Well done, my good and faithful servant! Enter into your master's happiness."*

Questions for reflection:

- 1) At the end of my life, what do I want to take with me to heaven?
- 2) How can I be a responsible and generous steward today?

Monday, 23 September, St. Pio of Pietrelcina
Ezra 1:1-6, Luke 8:16-18

Jesus said to the crowds, 'No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed. No, he puts it on a lamp-stand so that people may see the light when they come in. For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be known and brought to light. So take care how you hear; for anyone who has will be given more; from anyone who has not, even what he thinks he has will be taken away.

Faith: A light for our way

In the same way that we do not light a lamp and cover it or hide it, we too do not hide our faith in God but proclaim clearly through our words and deeds. Our Christian faith is not a private matter but one that we must be proud of.

At times, we are indeed afraid to make our faith public because we do not want to be ostracized and ridiculed by others. It is a challenge to listen to Jesus as He tells us explicitly that we must shine our faith brightly for all to see.

"There is an urgent need, then, to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence. A light this powerful cannot come from ourselves but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from God. Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. Transformed by this love, we gain fresh vision, new eyes to see; we realize that it contains a great promise of fulfilment, and that a vision of the future opens up before us. Faith, received from God as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way, guiding our journey through time." (Pope Francis)

In order that we have the courage to let our light of faith shine bright, we need to encounter God again and again. When we experience God loving us deeply and unconditionally, our fears dissipate as we allow Him to be our Light that guides us through our journey of life.

Today, it is time once more to encounter our living God who calls us and reveals His love, a love which precedes us and upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. From this encounter, we go out and shine!

Question for reflection:

1) When Jesus said that the lamp must be placed on a lampstand rather than hidden, what does it mean for me?

Tuesday, 24 September

Ezra 6:7-8,12,14-20, Luke 8:19-21

The mother and brothers of Jesus came looking for him, but they could not get to him because of the crowd. He was told, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to see you' But he said in answer, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice'.

Belonging to God's Family

In today's Gospel, Jesus seemed to be impolite to Mary, His mother and His brothers (in Jewish tradition, cousins and close relatives were often referred to as brothers). We need to understand the message behind the words of Jesus so as to be enriched with this beautiful passage.

Jesus was a loving son to Mary, His mother. He would never have the heart to insult or hurt the woman who loved Him so much. Rather, He wanted the crowd around Him to grasp the new reality of what it meant to be in the new family of God. In God's family, they were united as one, not by blood ties, but by their desire to do God's will. God would be their loving Father and they would be brothers and sisters to each other. No one was better than the other. No one would be honoured more than the other. As children of God, they would do the Father's will of loving and serving all without discrimination or segregation.

We too have a place in God's family. As brothers and sisters to Jesus, our top priority is to seek and do God's will. His will is for us to live a life of love and humble service. Today, we are His children and this is the source of our contentment and peace.

"It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world."
(St. Aloysius Gonzaga)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I not take for granted being part of God's family?

Wednesday, 25 September
Ezra 9:5-9, Luke 9:1-6

Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. He said to them, 'Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money; and let none of you take a spare tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there; and when you leave, let it be from there. As for those who do not welcome you, when you leave their town shake the dust from your feet as a sign to them.' So they set out and went from village to village proclaiming the Good News and healing everywhere.

Take Nothing... Trust

Jesus' whole life exuded His trust and surrender to God His Father. Everything He did was done out of genuine trust in God. In today's gospel, Jesus set the Twelve together and sent them out to preach about the Kingdom of God. Interestingly, He did not instruct them on what they should take with them in this mission, but He told them what not to take. *"Take nothing for the journey: neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money, and let none of you take a spare tunic."*

A staff was usually carried by travellers to defend themselves against thieves and wild animals. They were to carry no haversack which was used as begging for alms and provisions. No spare tunic to protect them from the cold if they had to sleep outdoors. No bread or money as additional security. Jesus sent His disciples without anything, except their complete trust in God.

Today, Jesus sends us on a mission too. We are sent by Jesus to bring God's love, peace and joy to those who come our way. We go with a heart full of trust in God that He will provide us with the strength, the joy and enough enthusiasm for the mission.

"God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us." (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium No. 12)

God is living at our side every day to love us. Today, we trust in God and go out with joy to help Him share the Good News of His love with people in our lives.

Question for reflection:

1) What is holding me back from living the joy of mission?

**Thursday, 26 September, Ss. Cosmas and Damian
Haggai 1:1-8, Luke 9:7-9**

Herod the tetrarch had heard about all that was going on; and he was puzzled, because some people were saying that John had risen from the dead, others that Elijah had reappeared, still others that one of the ancient prophets had come back to life. But Herod said, 'John? I beheaded him. So who is this I hear such reports about?' And he was anxious to see him.

Who are you?

"Who is this I hear such reports about?"

Herod's question continues to be the most significant question ever asked by humankind.

Though he had asked the right question, he did not search in the right direction for the answer. Rather, he recalled the evil deed that he had committed against John the Baptist; he was afraid that John had come back to life. This made him fearful. His conscience was pricked and so he was anxious to see this Jesus. He was not interested in knowing Jesus personally but was just eager to satisfy his curiosity and ease his conscience.

Today, let us ask Jesus, *"Who are you?"*

With eyes of faith, we gaze at Jesus with love and allow Him to reveal to us who He truly is. With ears of faith, we hear Jesus' voice as He calls us by our names and we trustingly follow Him. With hearts of faith, we yearn to die to our self-centred pride in order to enter into a lasting relationship with Him and be united with the One we love.

“Encountering Christ, letting themselves be caught up in and guided by his love, enlarges the horizons of existence, gives it a firm hope which will not disappoint. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God’s faithfulness which is stronger than our every weakness.” (Pope Francis)

Herod asked the right question but he was not brave to encounter Christ. Let us today encounter Jesus and follow Him to a deeper experiential knowledge of His faithful love.

Question for reflection:

1) Who is Jesus for me at this point of my life?

Friday, 27 September, St. Vincent de Paul

Haggai 2:1-9, Luke 9:18-22

One day when Jesus was praying alone in the presence of his disciples he put this question to them, ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’ And they answered, ‘John the Baptist; others Elijah; and others say one of the ancient prophets come back to life’. ‘But you,’ he said ‘who do you say I am?’ It was Peter who spoke up. ‘The Christ of God’ he said. But he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone anything about this. ‘The Son of Man’ he said ‘is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.’

A question and an answer

“Who do you say I am?” This is a question that Jesus asked His disciples, and one which every disciple of every age needs to face. Today, Jesus wants us to respond to this same question, *“Who do you say I am?”* He does not want a theoretical or intellectual answer but one that comes from our own personal experiences of Him in our lives.

Peter saw Jesus healing, forgiving, teaching, loving and he sensed that Jesus was more than just a prophet. Thus, he proclaimed, *“The Christ of God”*. He might not fully understand the meaning behind his words. For Peter and the rest of the disciples, to be the Christ or the Messiah meant victory, glory and honour. However, God’s ways and

thoughts are different from ours. Jesus immediately went on to explain that the Messiah had to suffer grievously, would be rejected and put to death before His victory. The path of the cross is the path that Jesus took, and one which we too have to take if we want to follow Him closely.

Jesus does not want His disciples to simply answer the question, *“Who do you say I am?”* with words, but to follow Him daily to walk the path of the cross - path of self-giving love.

Today, Jesus is here with us and asks us the only question that truly matters: *“Who do you say I am?”*

Questions for reflection:

- 1) *“Who do you say I am?”* - How can I reply, not just from what I heard and know about Jesus, but from how I have truly experienced Him in my life of faith?
- 2) What is the cross that I have to take up today?

Saturday, 28 September, Ss. Wenceslaus and Lawrence Ruiz and Companions

Zechariah 2:5-9, 14-15, Luke 9:43-45

At a time when everyone was full of admiration for all he did, Jesus said to his disciples, ‘For your part, you must have these words constantly in your mind: The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the power of men’. But they did not understand him when he said this; it was hidden from them so that they should not see the meaning of it, and they were afraid to ask him about what he had just said.

Set Your Heart on God

Jesus was at the high point of His life. He was greatly admired by huge crowds of people, and was successful in all that He did. Yet, He was not moved by external praises and accomplishments. Jesus knew the hearts of the people. The same people, who marvelled at what He did, would be the same ones handing Him over to death.

‘The Son of Man is going to be handed over into the power of men.’

As for Jesus, He continued to set His heart solely on God, His Father. His life was in the hands of God, and not in the hands of men.

We love to be praised and admired by people. We love to be the winner and achieve great results for all we do. In our glorious moments, we tend to forget God and set our hearts on the world. However, when we are criticized, ridiculed and considered useless by others, we fall into the trap of self-rejection and self-deprecation.

The great challenge for us is to fully set our hearts on God. God loves us unconditionally and stays close to us in our lives. We do not need to work hard to prove that we are worthy of His love and care. God's love for us goes beyond our achievements or failures. We are loved, no matter how the world sees and values us.

"You must have these words constantly in your mind..."

In each time of prayer, when we truly listen to Jesus, He speaks to us about God's love and about our value in His eyes. Let us listen carefully to the voice of Love so that we can live each moment of success and failure, of joy and sorrow by setting our hearts on God alone.

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I measure my worth by the success and achievements I have? How can I set my heart more on God and less on myself?

Sunday, 29 September, Twenty Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Amos 6:1,4-7, 1 Timothy 6:11-16, Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even came and licked his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. 'In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his bosom. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames". "My son," Abraham replied "remember that during your life good things came your way, just as bad things came the way of Lazarus. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to stop anyone, if he wanted to, crossing from our side to yours, and to stop any crossing from your side to ours." 'The rich man replied, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too". "They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham "let them listen to them.". "Ah no, father Abraham," said the rich man "but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead".'

The rich man and Lazarus

The rich man lived a self-centred life. He had all the worldly comforts and wealth, but he had absolutely no compassion for anyone else. He knew of the poor beggar who laid at his gate but he simply ignored him. His behaviour towards poor Lazarus reflected his relationship with God. He had no God in his heart.

Lazarus lived in poverty all his life. Yet, he held onto his greatest treasure, that was his faith in God. Even though, Lazarus suffered, he continued to trust in God alone. When he died, angels carried him to be with Abraham in paradise.

"Look at these two men. To the poor man with a name who trust in the Lord, and the rich man who has lost his name and who trusts in himself, we can say: it is true, we need to trust in the Lord! ... (yet) we all have this weakness, this frail tendency to place our hopes in ourselves or in our friends or in human possibilities alone, and we forget the Lord...And so today, we would do well to ask ourselves: Where do I place my trust? Have I placed it in the Lord or am I a pagan who trusts in things, in idols that I have fashioned? Do I still have a name, or have I begun to lose my name and to identify myself only as "I" with all its variations: "me, with me, for me, only me: always egoism, I!" (Pope Francis)

Today, let us not put our confidence in worldly securities and power. May we humble ourselves and recognise that the real treasure we can ever have is based on an intimate relationship with God as well as to be at the service of our brothers and sisters.

Lord, help me to trust in You alone!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Where do I place my trust?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation to me as I pray and reflect on this gospel passage?

Monday, 30 September, St. Jerome
Zechariah 8:1-8, Luke 9:46-50

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

The power of simplicity

Immediately after Jesus spoke to His disciples regarding His coming passion and death on the cross, they started to argue among themselves which one of them was the greatest.

They were wondering who would be in charge when Jesus was no longer with them. Each of them desired to be the leader over the others. They were full of their own worldly ambitions and desire for power.

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

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

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

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

In the next incident in today's gospel passage, John and James showed that they could not truly grasp Jesus' message of simplicity and humility. The two brothers saw an outsider casting out devils in Jesus' name, and they felt threatened. They felt that only they, as true disciples of Jesus, had the power to do such a thing. Jesus came and said, “You must not stop him.” This was because Jesus knew that God could use simple hearts to do great deeds.

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

Tuesday, 1 October, St. Therese of Lisieux
Zechariah 8:20-23, Luke 9:51-56

As the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely took the road for Jerusalem and sent messengers ahead of him. These set out, and they went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him, but the people would not receive him because he was making for Jerusalem. Seeing this, the disciples James and John said, ‘Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?’ But he turned and rebuked them, and they went off to another village.

Taking the same path of Jesus

Jesus ‘resolutely’ travelled, not the easy road of life, but the hard road. He chose to walk the road leading to Jerusalem the place where He would face rejection and sufferings.

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus entered into a Samaritan village. He could, like any normal Jew, take a long indirect route to Jerusalem in order to avoid any contact with Samaritans their long-time enemies. Jesus, however, chose to take not the easy way but the hard way. Perhaps He thought that He could be at the village and share the Good News with the people and spend time there to be with them. However, they rejected Him and refused to have Him with them.

What about us? Jesus resolutely set His face towards Jerusalem and all what it entailed. Are we willing to follow Him?

We want to have a good time and be well-liked by people. Thus, we would rather shy away from anything that makes us face conflicts or rejection. We want to take the easy, or even the easiest road where we will enjoy a smooth and easy life.

To follow Jesus is to have His same determination. To follow Jesus is to make His destiny to be ours, His journey to be ours.

"It is to the Cross that the Christian is challenged to follow his Master: no path of redemption can make a detour around it."

(Hans Urs von Balthasar)

Question for reflection:

1) Am I willing to follow Jesus to the path that He will lead me to?

**Wednesday, 2 October, The Guardian Angels
Nehemiah 2: 1-8, Matthew 18:1-5,10**

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

To be like a little child

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples wanted to know who the greatest in the kingdom of heaven was. Their question reflected what they had in their hearts. Each one of them wanted to be the greatest, to be somebody. However, Jesus' way of life involved them being little, not great; promoting others, not self; loving others gratuitously, not for selfish benefits.

In order to answer the question of His disciples, Jesus called a little child and set the child in front of them. He then told His disciples that unless they changed to be like little children, they would never enter the kingdom of heaven. He wanted His disciples to grasp His meaning of greatness. To be great does not begin with competing but converting their hearts to become child-like and humble.

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

Today, we are also invited to change and become like little children. This means that we are called to strive to be child-like, teachable, humble, simple, and open to learn and live. It is a challenge for many of us because we tend to want to compare and compete with others around us. We tend to want to outdo, outrun, outpace and outsmart others. Like the disciples, we want people to regard us as somebody and give us the respect we deserve.

Let us enter into this daily conversion of being child-like so that humility and love can be a permanent part of who we are. We thus strive to make ourselves a gift for others so that we can love them for their own good.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I learn to be child-like today?

Thursday, 3 October

Nehemiah 8:1-4a,5-6,7b-12, Luke 10:1-12

The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him, in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself was to visit. He said to them, ‘The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest. Start off now, but remember, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Carry no purse, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road. Whatever house you go into, let your first words be, “Peace to this house!” And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you. Stay in the same house, taking what food and drink they have to offer, for the labourer deserves his wages; do not move from house to house. Whenever you go into a town where they

make you welcome, eat what is set before you. Cure those in it who are sick, and say, "The kingdom of God is very near to you". But whenever you enter a town and they do not make you welcome, go out into its streets and say, "We wipe off the very dust of your town that clings to our feet, and leave it with you. Yet be sure of this: the kingdom of God is very near." I tell you, on that day it will not go as hard with Sodom as with that town.'

Go and proclaim

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

We are the labourers that Jesus is sending out. We tend to associate these words of Jesus as a vocation slogan to call young people to join priesthood and religious life. Jesus calls each and every one of us to be part of this mission. Jesus never excludes anyone from His mission, and so we must not exclude ourselves too. Whether we are young or elderly, studying or working, etc., we are sent to be labourers to God's harvest.

In this mission of being God's labourers, we must be ready to be like lambs among wolves. We will encounter rejection, ridicules and even persecutions. But as lambs, we must never forget that we are safe in our Shepherd's arms. He is always with us and will renew our strength with His love.

The message of the Good News that we are called to proclaim, through our words and actions, is, "The Kingdom of God is very near to you. God is here. God is near." We are called to be messengers bringing hope and peace to the hearts of the people.

The mission is urgent. There is no time to delay or wait but there is only the need to go out and proclaim.

Question for reflection:

1) How committed am I to allow Jesus to use my life as His instrument for the mission?

Friday, 4 October, St. Francis of Assisi
Bar 1:15-22, 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.'

Jesus makes a difference!

Jesus spoke these harsh words to His listeners because He urgently wanted them to wake up and start making a change in their lives.

The cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were the three cities where Jesus frequently visited and performed miracles. In these cities, He also spoke to them about God and his Kingdom. Despite witnessing the many wonderful miracles of Jesus and hearing all His teachings, the people hardened their hearts and were not moved to change their lives.

What would we do? Imagine Jesus coming to our city, our family and our workplace. What would we do? Would we continue our life as before? Do we feel any need to make a stand and make a change?

Everyday, Jesus comes into our home, office and city! He comes to us because he is 'God with us'. His presence has to provoke a change of heart, a change in attitude, a change in our life.

What do we want to change in our lives today? Perhaps we need to change the way we look at someone we do not really like or to change our impatient attitude towards our parents and friends or to forget our pride that makes it so difficult to apologise and reconcile with someone.

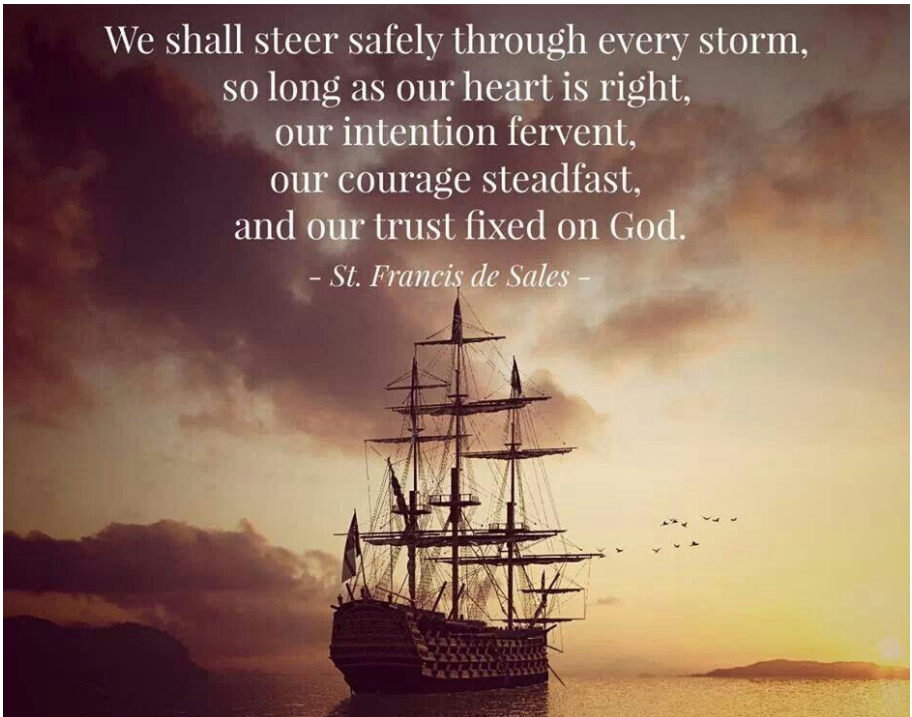
Jesus comes into our life today. Let Him make a difference in our life!

Question for reflection:

1) What is one thing that I need to let go in order to have more of God in my life?

We shall steer safely through every storm,
so long as our heart is right,
our intention fervent,
our courage steadfast,
and our trust fixed on God.

- St. Francis de Sales -



Saturday, 5 October

Bar 4:5-12,27-29, Luke 10:17-24

The seventy-two came back rejoicing. 'Lord,' they said 'even the devils submit to us when we use your name.' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Yes, I have given you power to tread underfoot serpents and scorpions and the whole strength of the enemy; nothing shall ever hurt you. Yet do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you; rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven.' It was then that, filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, he said, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' Then turning to his disciples, he spoke to them in private, 'Happy the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it'

With joy in the heart

The disciples came back with great joy after their mission experience. Jesus rejoiced with them but warned them not to forget their true source of joy. Their joy must not be based on their success and accomplishments. Instead, their true joy had to come from the reality that their names were written in heaven.

Likewise, we live in joy, not because of all the great things we have achieved or the many things we possess, but because of God's faithful love. Even if we face problems in our life, we know that we belong to God and so we have the hope to carry on.

"A Christian is a man or a woman of joy: a man and a woman with joy in their heart. There is no Christian without joy! You may be told that there are many such Christians but they are not Christians! They say they are, but they are not! They are missing something. The Christian identity card is joy, the Gospel's joy, the joy of having been chosen by Jesus, saved by Jesus, regenerated by Jesus; the joy of that hope that Jesus is waiting for us, the joy that - even with the crosses and

sufferings we bear in this life - is expressed in another way, which is peace in the certainty that Jesus accompanies us, is with us... The Christian grows in joy through trusting in God. God always remembers his covenant...the Christian knows that God remembers him, that God loves him, that God accompanies him, that God is waiting for him. And this is joy.” (Pope Francis)

Jesus invites us to be simple and humble. This is because the ones who are simple and humble seek only one thing, i.e. God Himself. They do not allow pride to harden their hearts. Therefore, let us ask for the grace today to be simple and humble Christians who have God, who have joy!

Questions for reflection:

1) Is my Christian identity card joy? Why?

Sunday, 6 October, Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4, 2 Timothy 1:6-8,13-14, Luke 17:5-10

The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith'. The Lord replied, 'Were your faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you. 'Which of you, with a servant ploughing or minding sheep, would say to him when he returned from the fields, "Come and have your meal immediately"? Would he not be more likely to say, "Get my supper laid; make yourself tidy and wait on me while I eat and drink. You can eat and drink yourself afterwards"? Must he be grateful to the servant for doing what he was told? So with you: when you have done all you have been told to do, say, "We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty".'

Faith and service

We sometimes wonder, "If only I have more faith, I would not have this illness, this problem. If only I have more faith, I would be a much better person and do things differently."

In today's gospel passage. the disciples asked Jesus to 'increase' their faith. They wanted to upsize their faith. Jesus, however, told them that they need not upsize their faith but the size of a little mustard seed would do. The request for an increase in faith must not entice them to presuppose that with this increase comes more power to lord over others. Rather, the more faith one has, the more one lowers oneself to be a servant. In fact, as Christians, we can never say, *"I have enough with serving. Now, it is your turn to serve me!"*

More faith does not lead us to gain status or praises from others. Rather, it moves us to put into practice Jesus' ways of loving in the ordinary moments of the day. At the end of the day, how happy if we can go to Jesus, our Master, and tell Him with humility and joy, *"We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty."*

Therefore, it is not necessary for us to upsize our faith. As long as we have faith as small as the mustard seed, we can already start following Jesus to be at the service of love. It is not a matter of how big our faith is but how our faith makes us to be servants for others.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I concretely live my faith today?

Monday, 7 October, Our Lady of the Rosary

Jonah 1:1-2,11, Luke 10:25-37

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

Go and do the same yourself

Christian love is not just a concept or an idea that we think about. It is not even a feeling or sentiment that we have in our hearts. Christian love involves thinking, feeling and putting it into action.

"What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like." (St. Augustine)

In today's Gospel, Jesus told a parable where a priest and a Levite saw the wounded man but walked on. This was because they did not regard the man as their neighbour but a stranger. Both failed to put love into practice even though they knew the concept of love. A Samaritan, the despised enemy of the Jews, saw the same person on the road. His heart was moved by compassion. He drew near the wounded man and took responsibility of him. This Samaritan man is a model for what it means to love.

Jesus reminds us never to be so busy with work, deadline and even with parish ministries that we forget to look at others as our neighbours and love them with compassion and mercy.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be sensitive to the needs of others today?

Tuesday, 8 October

Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 10:38-42

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

Christian life is listening and doing

Martha welcomed Jesus and His disciples to her home. She promptly busied herself with serving the guests. Mary, however, chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listened attentively to His teaching.

"Martha who was distracted with all the serving..."

Martha's distraction led her to be pulled in different directions. She was pulled in the direction of complaints, anger, resentment, becoming judgemental and anxious. She was so distracted that she

forgot to serve graciously and joyfully. She was so scattered that she was prevented from being fully present with Jesus. Instead, Martha got angry with her sister and even accused Jesus of not caring. Thus, her distractions divided her from Mary as well as from Jesus.

Jesus did not chide Martha for her good work in serving. Rather, He reminded Martha that her distraction had led her to miss out on the 'only one' thing that was needed. Mary had chosen that 'only one' thing and that was to sit at His feet and pay attention to Him. It was from listening to His words that Martha would find peace in her service.

Many of us would find ourselves drawn to Martha rather than Mary. We too tend to be busy with serving the needs of our family, friends and even God that we become so distracted with the many activities. Thus, we have little time to be with Jesus and listen attentively to Him. Instead of finding peace in Jesus, we become worried and anxious. Lacking peace within us, serving becomes a heavy burden rather than a joy.

Today, let us listen to Jesus first so that we can be nourished by His word of love. From there, we can truly serve with joy and peace in our hearts.

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from sitting at the feet of Jesus and finding rest in Him again?

Wednesday, 9 October, St. Denis
Jonah 4:1-11, Luke 11:1-4

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

God, our all-loving Father

In today's Gospel, Jesus' disciples must have been impressed by the way He was praying which was different from the rest of the Jewish religious leaders. He was neither blabbing out words nor simply praying out of routine. Most likely, they saw Jesus praying to God the Father as though He was speaking with someone He truly loved. There was something special in the way Jesus prayed that one of them asked Him, *"Lord, teach us to pray..."*

Jesus invited His disciples as well as each one of us today to enter into a deeper relationship with God who is our Father. God is not someone distant from our lives whom we cannot relate with. God is not indifferent and uncaring. God is Father.

"The Our Father begins with a great consolation: we are allowed to say "Father". This one word contains the whole history of redemption. We are allowed to say "Father" because the Son was our brother and has revealed the Father to us; because, thanks to what Christ has done, we have become once more the children of God. The problem for very many people today is that their experience of fatherhood is in many cases either completely absent or obscured by inadequate examples of fatherhood. We must therefore allow Jesus to teach us what father really means. For Jesus, father is the source of all good, the measure of perfection of all people. "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" The love that the father has for us and endures to the end. Christ fulfilled that love on the Cross by praying for his enemies. We call God "Father" because he is the source of all love, and in the Lord's Prayer Jesus invites us to become children of this all-loving Father." (Pope Benedict XVI)

Today, as His children, let us relate with God our all-loving Father. We trust Him and know that we belong to Him and that God will give us all that is good and life-giving.

Question for reflection:

1) Looking back at my journey of faith, what are my experiences of trust and love that I have with God my Father?

Thursday, 10 October

Malachi 3:13-20, Luke 11:5-13

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him"; and the man answers from inside the house, "Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it you". I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it him for friendship's sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants. 'So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

How much more...

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus continued to tell His disciples that God whom they were to call Father is the one they can trust. He told a parable of a persistent friend whose friend unexpectedly arrived at his house. He ran out of bread so he asked another friend for some. The friend answered from within, "*Do not bother me...*"

We might look at this parable and pity that poor man who was woken up just because his friend needed three loaves of bread. However, in Jesus' culture, it is expected for someone to give whatever the friend is asking regardless of the time.

The man who refused to open his door to help his friend in need would somehow respond positively due to the persistent knocking and asking of the other. How much more would God give us of what we need to live life with His love and peace!

Likewise, if a father, with his human limitations, would give to his child what is good, how much more of the gift of His Holy Spirit would God give to those who ask Him. Many times, we pray by asking Jesus for material needs and wants. However, we must not forget that the true prayer of a child of God is a daily asking with open hands for what he/she really needs, i.e. the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Today, let us be aware that we are God's beloved sons and daughters as we enter once more into a relationship of love and trust with Him.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I place my trust in God the Father each day?

Friday, 11 October, St. John XXIII

Joel 1:13-15, 2:1-2, Luke 11:15-26

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

He who is with me...

There were people who attributed Beelzebul, the prince of devils, to Jesus and His works. Instead of rejoicing at the many good works that He did to help those in need, these people slandered Jesus. Yet, there were many other people who were able to recognise God working through Jesus.

Jesus' presence provoked a response from the people around Him. People either were attracted to Him or repelled from Him.

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

Today, there can be no impartiality when we come before Jesus. We have to make our choice. We can be with Him or against Him; to gather with Him or scatter. When we make our choice to be with Jesus, He pushes us always towards our brothers and sisters, and to be with them too. With Jesus, we look at others through His eyes of compassionate love. With Jesus, we can rejoice at the goodness of others and not judge them with our own criteria. With Jesus, we gather people together and not divide.

Let us make the choice to live with Jesus today.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I stand with Jesus today?

Saturday, 12 October

Joel 4:12-21, Luke 11:27-28

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

Listening and keeping the Word

A woman, upon hearing the wise words Jesus had spoken, blessed His mother who had given him life and nurtured him. "Happy the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked!" she exclaimed.

Jesus, however, followed up on her words and brought out the importance of listening to the word of God and obeying it. This, for Jesus, is real happiness.

Prayer is an intimate moment when we listen attentively to Jesus through the word of God and allow His love to be revealed to us personally. It is important to realize that prayer is not something we do for God, but it is what God is doing in us. He is the one leading and directing our time of prayer. Prayer does not stop with listening, but the real 'work' of prayer is in keeping the word of God throughout the day and allowing God to influence our words and deeds. Real happiness comes when we hear and obey the voice of Love.

Without prayer, we become deaf to the voice of God and become confused with many other anxious and distracting noises that pull us away from living life fully.

Let us be disciplined in keeping our time of prayer and not evade setting time and space for God. Let us look at Mother Mary whose real happiness did not come from the pride of having a capable child-like Jesus. Rather, her happiness came from listening and doing what she understood from God. Nothing and nobody could take away her joy in God. We are called too to live this real happiness that Jesus offers to us today. Let us choose to be happy today!

Question for reflection:

1) Do I accept Jesus' offer to hear God's word and obey it - and to find true happiness?

**Sunday, 13 October, Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Kings 5:14-17, 2 Timothy 2:8-13, Luke 17:11-19**

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered one of the villages, ten lepers came to meet him. They stood some way off and called to him, 'Jesus! Master! Take pity on us.' When he saw them he said, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests'. Now as they were going away they were cleansed. Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. This made Jesus say, 'Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner.' And he said to the man, 'Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.'

The story of the ten lepers

Leprosy was a horrible disease during Jesus' time. Those with leprosy would be condemned to live apart from their families and friends. If they were to walk into a place, people would take flight for fear of getting the infection.

In today's gospel passage, ten lepers came to meet Jesus. Jesus did not flee from them. Instead, He stopped, listened to their request and changed their lives.

Jesus said to them, '*Go and show yourselves to the priests.*' Only the priests could declare that a leper was no longer suffering from the disease and give him/her permission to go back once more to his/her family and community.

Interestingly, Jesus did not tell these ten men that they had been healed from leprosy. He simply said, 'Go...'

None of these men put conditions on Jesus. They simply went as Jesus said.

We, on the other hand, have the tendency to put conditions before we take steps to do as God tells us. "Lord, I will follow you if you solve my

family problem.”, “I will forgive this person as soon as you give me a sign.” etc. These men believed in Jesus and their lives were never the same again.

“So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead.”
(James 2:17)

What about us? Do we have such faith to listen and obey?

All ten were healed. Only one returned to give thanks to Jesus. This man was not only humble to rejoice at the gift of being healed, but also recognised the Giver of his gift. He knew from the depth of his heart that all good gifts come from God. What about us? Do we, with grateful hearts, give thanks to the Giver for all the gifts that we have received?

“God gave you gift of 86, 400 seconds today. Have you used one to say ‘Thank you’?” (William A Ward)

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus inviting me to live today?

Monday, 14 October, St. Callistus
Romans 1:1-7, Luke 11:29-32

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

There is someone greater...

“To you all then, who are God’s beloved in Rome, called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.” (Romans 1:7)

These are St. Paul's words from today's first reading which we are invited to reflect upon in our own lives. We too are God's beloved in the places where we are. We too are called to be saints and live our lives with Christ and for Christ.

"Me, saint? Impossible!" we might conclude as we look at our long list of flaws and imperfections.

The call to sainthood excludes no one. The saints whom we admire and love were not super humans during their lifetime. They were ordinary people who despite their weaknesses recognised God's presence in their lives. They were friends of God and brought His love to those around them. Therefore, we are called to open our eyes of faith and see God's presence in us and around us. Our hearts are content to have Him as the source of our love and peace.

In today's Gospel, the crowds were surrounding Jesus but many who were present were not His friends. Jesus knew that there were some people who were looking for an outstanding and incredible sign such that there would be no question that it was God working in and through Jesus. Despite all the many miracles that Jesus had already performed, they could not believe. Their hearts were hardened and so they could not recognise God's presence in Jesus.

Today, let us believe that there is something greater than Jonah. There is someone greater than our fear, flaw, anxiety, etc. Jesus is here with us. This is our security, our guarantee. With Jesus, we walk on towards the call to being saints, to being friends of God.

Questions for reflection:

1) What struck me in this time of prayer? How can I live my life in the light of faith today?

Tuesday, 15 October, St. Teresa of Avila
Romans 1:16-25, Luke 11:37-41

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

From a heart that gives

A Pharisee invited Jesus to have a meal at his house but was astonished when Jesus did not wash his hands. His reaction to Jesus not washing his hands was not due to hygienic purposes but to ritual washing. This ritual washing was part of the Law but it was imposed by the Pharisees. Thus, this Pharisee was shocked that Jesus did not do this external rite.

Jesus knew what the man was thinking and so He used a graphic image to make His point to him. The Pharisees were so concerned with making sure that the outside of the cup and plate were clean but they forgot to look at their hearts which were full of extortion and wickedness. Thus, they missed the point of their faith in God.

What about us? Have we too missed the whole point of our faith in God?

Today, let us be more concerned with what we have in our hearts than simply going through external rituals and routines. Jesus calls us to 'give alms' from what we have, i.e. to give ourselves to those in need. Giving of ourselves to others brings us to mature in our love. We are here to give of ourselves to each other.

"If nature has made you a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart. And though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that."
(Frances Hodgson Burnett)

Jesus' heart was always full of love, patience, mercy and kindness, even though His hands were empty of material wealth and possessions. From His heart, He gave love. Though, He kept giving and giving, His heart was never empty but always full of the Father's love.

Likewise, when we give love from our heart, we will never be empty within us. Instead, the more we give, the more we will receive. This is because God renews and replenishes us with His love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I practice giving love to those around me today?

**Wednesday, 16 October, St. Margaret Mary Alacoque
Romans 2:1-11, 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, 17 October, St. Ignatius of Antioch
Romans 3:21-30, Luke 11:47-54**

Jesus said, 'Alas for you who build the tombs of the prophets, the men your ancestors killed! In this way you both witness what your ancestors did and approve it; they did the killing, you do the building. And that is why the Wisdom of God said, "I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will slaughter and persecute, so that this generation will have to answer for every prophet's blood that has been shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was murdered between the altar and the sanctuary". Yes, I tell you, this generation will have to answer for it all. Alas for you lawyers who have taken away the key of knowledge! You have not gone in yourselves, and have prevented others going in who wanted to.' When he left the house, the scribes and the Pharisees began a furious attack on him and tried to force answers from him on

innumerable questions, setting traps to catch him out in something he might say.

Stop closing doors!

In today's Gospel, Jesus accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy. They built monuments to honour the prophets whom their ancestors killed. The huge and great monuments that they built were external manifestations which meant nothing to them. This was because their hearts were still stubborn and they refused to change and live according to what the prophets preached.

He also told the scribes once more about closing the doors of heaven to people because of their way of thinking and acting.

Jesus calls each one of us to return to God's love and return to the simplicity of our Christian faith. He wants us to be authentic Christians whose lives truly attract others to God.

When Jesus left the house, the Pharisees and scribes started to attack Him. This should be a reminder for us that when we start living our faith authentically, we must be ready to face oppositions and rejections from those who do not understand the ways of God. Like Jesus, we too must never give up but persevere to keep on living our faith with joyful enthusiasm.

Question for reflection:

1) What is my greatest challenge to live in such a way that my life attracts others to Christ?

Friday, 18 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"

Start off now...

"If God is present in our life, the joy of bringing the Gospel will be our strength and our happiness" (Pope Francis)

In the Gospel, Jesus appointed seventy-two to proclaim the Good News. Today, He also sends each one of us to proclaim God's message, through our words and actions, to those around us. The content of what we share depends on our relationship with Jesus and our following of Him. Thus, we must never stop getting to know Jesus and falling in love with Him. Our daily intimate relationship with Him is what will push us to go forth every day to our homes, offices, schools, parishes, etc. in order to bring Him to the people we meet. This mission of sharing the Gospel is not simply an obligation we do from time to time. Rather, we should go out and do mission all the time. The joy of bringing the Gospel is our daily strength and happiness.

"Start off now..."

Jesus invites us today to go forth and not procrastinate any longer. The mission is urgent as there are many people who have not encountered His love.

Today, we celebrate the feast day of St. Luke the evangelist who faithfully wrote the Gospel of Luke as well as the Acts of the Apostles in order to bring faith to Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4). May we also imitate St. Luke by not keeping our faith to ourselves but to go forth from our comfort zone to others who need to hear the Good News that God loves them and is near them.

Question for reflection:

1) Today, with whom can I share the Gospel?

**Saturday, 19 October, Ss. Isaac Jogues and John de Brebeuf
Romans 4:13,16-18, Luke 12:8-12**

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

Open to the Spirit of love

'He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.' Why did Jesus say this? Why is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit not to be forgiven?

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

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, comes again and again to offer us forgiveness and new life. However, when we reject the Holy Spirit and

His gifts, we are telling God that we do not need His forgiveness because we do not trust Him, or have already given up on Him or we do not believe that He can still love us.

God, who is the God of mercy and love, will never give up on any of us. He runs to us like the father in the prodigal son. He searches for us like the shepherd who lost his sheep. He rejoices over the return of one sinner. This God calls us to be humble and to acknowledge our limitations and weaknesses. Let us get rid of our pride - the pride that pulls us away from experiencing the forgiving love of God.

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

Question for reflection:

1) How I can humble myself and experience the forgiving love of God?

**Sunday, 20 October, Twenty Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Exodus 17:8-13, 2 Timothy 3:14-4:2, Luke 18:1-8**

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

Indifferent no more!

What is the message of today's parable? We need to plead and wear God down with all our constant begging that He finally gives in to our demands. Is it what this parable really means? The message of

today's parable is about justice, not about pestering God for our selfish requests.

The request from the widow to the unjust judge was, 'I want justice from you against my enemy!' In Jesus' time, widows were vulnerable to people taking advantage of them. They were often oppressed and unheard.

Today, this widow symbolises countless faceless people on the margins of society. They are crying out for justice, mercy and compassion. The homeless, the poor, the abused, the ones suffering from mental illnesses, etc. are all seeking to be heard, helped, loved and accepted. God cares for them. God identifies Himself with each of His little ones.

"God helps the outcasts/Hungry from birth/ Show them the mercy/ They don't find on earth/ God help my people/ We look to you still/ God help the outcasts/ Or nobody will." (Heidi Mollenhauer, from Hunchback of Notre Dame)

We are called to pray continuously and never lose heart. Pray for who? Pray for what? We can pray for ourselves and our needs. However, it is time to step out of our small world and start to pray for the least, the forgotten and the vulnerable in society. We must never lose heart for justice and mercy to prevail. May our faith lead us to start taking action and to make a difference.

"The world makes us to look towards ourselves, our possessions, our desires. The Gospel invites us to be open to others, to share with the poor." (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) What can I do to help alleviate the sufferings of those around me?

Monday, 21 October

Romans 4:20-25, Luke 12:13-21

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

Givers, not hoarders

A man from the crowd told Jesus to settle a family dispute over inheritance. However, Jesus was not interested in discussing such an issue but He used this situation as a teaching opportunity to the crowd about the danger of wealth.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man who instead of being grateful to God for his good fortune and sharing with those who may not be as privileged as he was, he spent his time and energy planning on building bigger barns to store his excess crops. He thought that he could then enjoy life because of the plentiful good things that he had accumulated.

What about us? What is the message that we can learn from this parable?

Jesus calls us to strive to be rich in the eyes of God and not the world's. The world's mentality is to hoard and amass riches for ourselves. To follow Jesus' way demands that we generously share

all that we have with those in need. We are not meant to be hoarders but givers.

"If nature has made you for a giver, your hands are born open, and so is your heart; and though there may be times when your hands are empty, your heart is always full, and you can give things out of that--warm things, kind things, sweet things--help and comfort and laughter--and sometimes gay, kind laughter is the best help of all."

(Frances Hodgson Burnett)

Let us start today by giving with open hearts!

Question for reflection:

1) What prevents me from giving of myself to others?

Tuesday, 22 October, St. John Paul II

Romans 5:12,15,17-21, Luke 12:35-38

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

Faithfulness matters

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

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

Faithfulness in our modern society is a virtue that is not much appreciated. Many people are willing to give up on their commitments and on relationships when things get tough and difficult. They prefer to pursue their own interests than to persevere diligently in making things work well.

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

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

Questions for reflection:

1) Have I ever thanked God for His faithfulness to me? How can I be faithful to God today?

Wednesday, 23 October, St. John of Capistrano
Romans 6:12-18, Luke 12:39-48

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

receive fewer strokes. When a man has had a great deal given him, a great deal will be demanded of him; when a man has had a great deal given him on trust, even more will be expected of him.'

Responsible stewards who give and give...

"Givers can be divided into three types: the flint, the sponge and the honeycomb. Some givers are like a piece of flint – to get anything out of it you must hammer it, and even then you only get chips and sparks. Other are like a sponge – to get anything out of a sponge you must squeeze it and squeeze it hard, because the more you squeeze a sponge, the more you get. But others are like a honeycomb – which just overflows with its own sweetness. That is how God gives to us, and it is how we should give in turn." (Anonymous)

God has called us to be stewards responsible for looking after His household, His people. Who are these people? They are our children, spouse, parents, friends, strangers we meet each day, etc. As responsible stewards, we are called to give of ourselves in order to be at the service of others. We give our time, our talents, our strength, our creativity, our faith, etc. in order that they might grow and be strong in their faith in God. In fact, our faithfulness to God is seen from how much we put ourselves at the loving service of others.

Let us not be like the unfaithful steward who did what he pleased by wasting his time focusing on himself and his needs. Today, we strive to be good stewards on whom God has put His trust.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live my life so that I can be a true steward to God?

Thursday, 24 October, St. Anthony Mary Claret Romans 6:19-23, Luke 12:49-53

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

son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

Living for God

Jesus' love purifies and cleanses all the impure thoughts, the hateful judgements, the hidden intentions behind our actions, etc. The choices we make each day lead us to live our lives for God or against God. We judge ourselves by our own choices and actions. God is Love and His Love is covered with mercy, not chastisement.

Each day, we are here on this earth to make God our choice. We are here to make good choices that will lead us to love God above all else. Sometimes, in the process of living our life for God alone, our family members and friends might not understand the reasons for the choices we make. They might disapprove or criticise the things we do. The choices we make to live for God might even cause divisions in our relationships with others. Yet, we are called to stand firm in living God's values and ways, regardless of the oppositions we face from others.

True love for God does not come from lip-service, but from making right decisions to put God above all else, and to live our lives for Him alone. When our hearts are at peace, we will bring His true peace to those around us.

Question for reflection:

1) Do I stand firm for what I believe, even if those around me have different opinions and views?

Friday, 25 October

Romans 7:18-25, Luke 12:54-59

Jesus said again to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud looming up in the west you say at once that rain is coming, and so it does. And when the wind is from the south you say it will be hot, and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky. How is it you do not know how to interpret these times? Why not judge for yourselves what is right? For example: when you go to court with your

opponent, try to settle with him on the way, or he may drag you before the judge and the judge hand you over to the bailiff and the bailiff have you thrown into prison. I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the very last penny'

Change my heart, Lord!

In the Gospel passage today, Jesus was frustrated with the people who claimed that they could read and understand the signs of nature. Yet, these people were so blinded by the greatest sign taking place before them! Jesus opened the eyes of the blind to see, made the dumb speak, the lame to walk and even the dead to rise from the dead. He taught with authority that amazed His listeners. He calmed the storms and fed the crowd from the five loaves and two fish. Despite all that He did and said, they did not seem to recognise the presence of God working in and through Jesus.

Jesus then challenged the crowd to urgently judge for themselves what was right in the sight of God and to be open to allow Him to change their hardened hearts into believing hearts.

Today, what would Jesus say about us? Do we recognize Him amidst the circumstances we live? Do we see the presence of Jesus in the words of a friend, in the needs of those around us, in the inner thirst we have for quiet time of prayer? Do we open ourselves to Him and welcome Him in the people we meet, events we live, challenges we encounter?

Each of us stands before God who sees and knows our hearts inside-out. His light of loving mercy reveals all that is in our hearts and His forgiving love frees us from the bondage of sins that prevent us from seeing Him, believing Him and loving Him. Today, let us ready ourselves to allow God to gently change our hearts.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I use my eyes of faith to see and rejoice in God's presence in my life today?

Saturday, 26 October
Romans 8:1-11, 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, 27 October, Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sirach 35:12-14,16-18, 2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18, Luke 18:9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get." The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner". This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'

I am a sinner

Both the Pharisee and tax collector went to the Temple to pray. However, the focus of the Pharisee's prayer was to make a list on how bad others were and how good he was. His pride was on all what he had done and deserved.

The tax collector, however, recognised his need for God's mercy. In his humility, he came to God as he was. He stood some distance away, did not even dare to raise his eyes to heaven; but beat his breast. His simple prayer was: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Those listening to Jesus would definitely regard the Pharisee as the one who had established a good relationship with God. However, Jesus said that the tax collector was the one who went home at rights with God, and the other did not. His statement would cause a ripple of protest among His listeners.

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted."

Humility opens our eyes of faith to see ourselves as we are, that is, we are small, weak and vulnerable. It frees us to forget about ourselves and look at God instead. Humility opens our hearts to cry

out, *"Have mercy on me, a sinner"* when we make mistakes. It also makes us accept and love others in their weakest moments. Today, we are invited to be in touch with reality and walk the path of humility with God.

"Humility saves man, pride makes him lose his way." (Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How does today's gospel change my perspective of God?
- 2) Is there anything in my life that is holding me back from trusting in God's merciful love?

**Monday, 28 October, Ss. Simon and Jude, Apostles
Ephesians 2:19-22, Luke 6:12-16**

Jesus went out into the hills to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

Ordinary people, extraordinary mission

Jesus chose twelve ordinary people with their own strengths and limitations to be His apostles. Looking at the list of the apostles, none of them would be qualified as great or important in the eyes of the world. They were, in fact, very ordinary men but sent on an extraordinary mission by Jesus. Because they trusted in Jesus, they followed Him.

This is wonderful news for us! Jesus calls each one of us, imperfect as we are, to be His friends. We, like the apostles, have the choice to be generous in our response to Jesus. We can give excuses such as, *"I have no time. I am not qualified. I am too old. I am too young"* or we can be bold and pray with open hands, *"Take me, Lord, and use me for your glory"*

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Simon and St. Jude. After Pentecost, St Simon went to Egypt while St. Jude went to Mesopotamia where they proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. Later, they both went to Persia to continue their mission. Unfortunately, they were martyred. What made these two men give their lives for Jesus to the point of death? St. Simon and St. Jude were able to lay their lives for Jesus because He was somebody important for them.

We are also called to be with Jesus and to go forth to share the Good News that God is love, He cares, and He is here. We might face oppositions along the way, but we must never give up doing good acts. Instead, we must continue to give ourselves to allow Him to use our ordinary lives for His extraordinary mission.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I open to collaborate with God in the mission to share His love with those around me?
- 2) What prevents me from responding generously to God's call?

Tuesday, 29 October

Romans 8:18-25, Luke 13:18-21

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

Mission to expand

As we take this passage of the mustard seed and yeast, let us wonder and be curious. Let us not be content simply to remain in this beautiful passage at the superficial level but go deeper and be open to allow Him to gently lead us to grasp the deeper meaning for our own lives.

In the Gospel passage today, we see a man throwing a small mustard seed into his garden. It grew and became a tree. We then read about a woman who took the yeast, mixed it with flour and expanded it in the process of baking bread. Jesus explained that the dynamics of the

Kingdom of God is like the small mustard seed growing and the simple yeast expanding.

What do these two parables tell us?

God uses, not big and grand, but small and ordinary things to spread His Kingdom of love. Today, God wants to use our ordinary and simple lives for the good of His Kingdom. He sends us to our workplace, schools, relationships, family life to be His instruments. Our presence in society, family, parish should influence and provoke in others a change of lifestyle, habits, outlook on life, etc. Our Christian values of love, forgiveness, reconciliation, faithfulness should disturb, challenge and provoke questions for people who are surrounded by materialistic and hedonistic values.

“Laypeople are a kind of nuclear energy in the Church on a spiritual level. A layperson caught up with the gospel and living next to other people can “contaminate” two others, and these two, four others, etc. Since lay Christians number not only tens of thousands like the clergy but hundreds of millions, they can truly play a decisive role in spreading the beneficial light of the gospel in the world.”

(Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa)

Question for reflection:

1) Do I recognise that I am God’s mustard seed, His yeast that He has placed to make a difference in the places where I am?

Wednesday, 30 October

Romans 8:26-30, 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 the narrow door of love?

Thursday, 31 October

Romans 8:31-39, Luke 13:31-35

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus. 'Go away' they said. 'Leave this place, because Herod means to kill you.' He replied, 'You may go and give that fox this message: Learn that today and tomorrow I cast out devils and on the third day attain my end. But for today and tomorrow and the next day I must go on, since it would not be right for a prophet to die outside Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! So be it! Your house will be left to you. Yes, I promise you, you shall not see me till the time comes when you say: Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord!'

In the loving arms of love

The loving kindness of God is most profoundly seen in the image of a hen gathering her brood under her wings. It represents tenderness as well as gentle affection. Why did Jesus use the image of a hen to represent the tender love of God?

Baby chicks are cute and fuzzy. Mother hens, however, are not to be messed with because they are protective and maternal. They are always on the lookout for danger. They would quickly gather their chicks under their wings to defend and protect them from any menace, even at the expense of sacrificing their own lives. Mother hens would also gather their chicks under their wings for sufficient warmth before they head out to look for food.

Like a mother hen, God is constantly on the lookout for us. He stays close to us and shelters us under the wings of love. God loves and never stops loving us. The only thing that prevents us from fully enjoying His love is our unwillingness to be loved.

Going back to the image of the hen. The hen can stretch her wings out to protect and care for her chicks. The chicks, on the other hand, can turn away from her or run to her for protection.

God loves us perfectly even though we are imperfect. His faithful love

encompasses us completely. He loves each one of us, even in our brokenness and weaknesses. The question is: How do we respond to God's outstretched arms of love?

"We are all called upon to bear witness to and to proclaim the message that 'God is love,' that God is not distant from us or insensible to our human affairs. He is close to us, He is always by our side, He walks with us to share our joys and our pains, our hope and our strife. He loves us so much, to the point of making Himself man; He came into the world not to guide us but so that the world might be saved through Jesus. And this is God's love in Jesus, this love that is so difficult to understand but which we feel when we draw close to Jesus. And He always forgives us, He always awaits us, He loves us very much. And the love of Jesus that we feel is God's love" (Pope Francis)

Friday, 1 November, All Saints' Day

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

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

Saints: Friends of Jesus

The Good News for us today is that sainthood and holiness are not just reserved for a selected few. All of us are called to aspire to be saintly. The goal is within our reach. What does it mean for us to be saints?

Saints are ordinary people who allowed themselves to be loved by God and they love Him deeply in return. Saints are ordinary people

whose life attracts people to God's presence. Look at our own personal beloved Saints who are models of faith - St. Teresa of Child Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis Xavier, St. John XIII, St. Gianna Beretta Molla, Bl Oscar Romero, etc. They were ordinary people who lived extraordinary lives because of their steadfast love for Christ.

Today, there are still people who live each moment serving and loving God and others. These are ordinary people - teachers, lawyers, religious men and women, doctors, parents, etc - who follow Jesus from their hearts.

We are called to be saints. This is our vocation! To be holy is not about being perfect, self-righteous, solemn and faultless. The Beatitudes reveals to us what holiness means – poor in spirit, meek, mourning, hungering for what is right, merciful and pure in heart. In our ordinariness, we can follow Jesus and live a testimony of life that attracts others to God.

"We need saints without cassocks, without veils - we need saints with jeans and tennis shoes. We need saints that go to the movies that listen to music, that hang out with their friends... We need saints that drink Coca-Cola, that eat hot dogs, that surf the internet and that listen to their iPods. We need saints that love the Eucharist, that are not afraid or embarrassed to eat a pizza or drink a beer with their friends. We need saints who love the movies, dance, sports, theatre. We need saints that are open, sociable, normal, happy companions. We need saints who are in this world and who know how to enjoy the best in this world without being callous or mundane. We need saints".

(Pope Francis)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who are my favourite saints/ people whose lives inspire me to follow Jesus closely?
- 2) How can I strive to live a life of sanctity today?

Saturday, 2 November, All Souls' Day

Wisdom 3:1-9, Romans 5:5-11 or Romans 6:3-9, John 6:37-40

Jesus said to the crowd: 'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away; because I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me. Now the will of him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that he has given to me, and that I should raise it up on the last day. Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.'

The other side of death

As we celebrate All Souls' Day, we remember our loved ones who have gone ahead of us. We are also reminded of our own mortality. We will one day die. Death is inevitable. Yet, our Christian hope tells us that life does not end with death. Death is a door through which we enter to be with God forever.

There is a story that goes like this: A sick man turned to his doctor as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side." Very quietly, the doctor said, "I do not know..." "You do not know? You are a Christian, and you do not know what is on the other side?" The doctor was holding the handle of the door, and on the other side came a sound of scratching and whining. As he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaned on him with an eager show of gladness. Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He has never been in this room before. He did not know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here. When the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing...I know my Master is there and that is enough." (Unknown)

At the end of our life, we will be with God's loving embrace if we follow Jesus faithfully. Jesus, who by His resurrection has defeated death, speaks these comforting words to us: *"I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, and that I should raise it up on the last day."*

Therefore, we hold on to this hope that He will never lose any of us, but will gather us with Him and bring us to the other side where we will meet our Master!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I afraid of death? Why?
- 2) How can I live each day as though it is my last day?

Sunday, 3 November, Thirty First Sunday in Ordinary Time
Wisdom 11:22-12:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2, Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the town when a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him: 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.' And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost'.

Climbing my sycamore tree

Jesus is passing by our lives today. The invitation today is to climb a 'sycamore tree' – to search for a place that makes us see and encounter Jesus again.

In today's gospel passage, there was a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus who was regarded as a public sinner because of his occupation. He heard about Jesus and climbed a sycamore tree. He knew that his short stature would prevent him from seeing Jesus because of the huge crowd. Not caring what the people would say, he climbed a tree in order to position himself. His life was forever changed when Jesus saw and called him.

Today, Jesus seeks us again. We must respond, not just once, but all the time, every moment of each day. We are called to enter into a loving relationship with Jesus. The invitation is to never get tired of climbing our sycamore tree, to go to a place that will help us to see Jesus and experience His personal love.

May we never stop looking for Jesus!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I really desire to see Jesus? Or am I comfortable in keeping Jesus at a safe distance?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation to me in this time of prayer?

Monday, 4 November, St. Charles Borromeo
Romans 11:29-36, Luke 14:12-14

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

Seeking no reward

What is Jesus' message for us as we pray with today's Gospel passage?

Jesus invites us to be generous and to do good without seeking any reward in return. At times, we do a good deed with the intention that that the recipient can do something good for us in return. We donate for a cause with the intention that our deed will be acknowledged in public. We invite someone to a party and we expect that person invite us back for his/her function. We work hard for the family and we want our spouse and children to appreciate what we do.

On his 77th birthday, Pope Francis invited three homeless people to have breakfast with him. He could have invited famous and important people to celebrate his birthday, but he invited the poor who could not give him anything in return.

What about us? Do we look for opportunities when we can do good deeds to those who cannot repay us?

“Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will.” (St. Ignatius of Loyola)

Today, let us give without counting the cost; fight without heeding the wounds; toil without seeking for rest and labour without asking for reward. Instead, we fix our eyes on Jesus and set our hearts to please Him alone.

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Tuesday, 5 November

Romans 12:5-16, Luke 14:15-24

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

Excuses, excuses!

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

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

just gotten married during the period of the banquet and would like to spend time with his wife, why would he, in the first place, accept the invitation?

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

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

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 6 November

Romans 13:8-10, Luke 14:25-33

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

Cost of following

Jesus calls us, not just selected few, to follow Him,. He does not hide the cost involved in our following Him. Rather, Jesus lays all His cards out and honestly tells us what following Him demands.

For Jesus, to be His disciple is to hold Him as the first priority. That is why we are called to hate our father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters' and even our own lives too. The point of Jesus is that no other relationship should be placed first before Him. Thus, Jesus uses the word 'hate' figuratively in order to emphasize the need to put Him as the topmost priority above others.

There are many Christians who follow Jesus according to their own convenience and circumstances. Jesus does not want part-time disciples but people who are willing to follow Him full-time. He wants disciples who live His values full-time, to love unselfishly full-time, to humbly serve others full-time, to be sincere in words and actions full-time, etc.

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

If we want to be Jesus' disciples, let us be real and authentic ones!

Questions for reflection:

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

Thursday, 7 November
Romans 14:7-12, Luke 15:1-10

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

Lover of the lost

The shepherd left the 99 in the wilderness in order to search for the one lost sheep. Didn't the shepherd ever consider the risk of the 99 roaming off, being eaten by a wolf or being stolen by a thief? In the real world of profit and loss, nobody would look for the one lost sheep.

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

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

disciples, we too are called to be friends of the lost, the forgotten, the insignificant, the poor and the outcasts.

Questions for reflection:

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

Friday, 8 November

Romans 15:14-21, Luke 16:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, 'There was a rich man and he had a steward denounced to him for being wasteful with his property. He called for the man and said, "What is this I hear about you? Draw me up an account of your stewardship because you are not to be my steward any longer." Then the steward said to himself, "Now that my master is taking the stewardship from me, what am I to do? Dig? I am not strong enough. Go begging? I should be too ashamed. Ah, I know what I will do to make sure that when I am dismissed from office there will be some to welcome me into their homes." Then he called his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, "How much do you owe my master?" "One hundred measures of oil" was the reply. The steward said, "Here, take your bond; sit down straight away and write fifty". To another he said, "And you, sir, how much do you owe?" "One hundred measures of wheat" was the reply. The steward said, "Here, take your bond and write eighty". The master praised the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.'

What or who am I pursuing?

The steward was put in charge of his master's business but he was dishonest. Upon finding out of the steward's misappropriate use of his funds, the master wanted to fire him. The debtors were also dishonest because they did not care when the steward lowered their debts to far less than what they owed. The master himself was a man of dishonesty too. When he heard what his steward had done, he was full of praise for him.

All these characters in today's parable are all typical people of the world. They worked hard, even to the extent of choosing scheming

ways just to enjoy an easy and comfortable life. They vigorously chased the wealth of this world without dithering and procrastinating. *“For the children of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.”*

We, as God’s beloveds, are children of light. However, we do not sometimes live as one. We lack firmness, fortitude and passion to live our lives here for God. If only we have the same kind of commitment to work hard to build our life so as to possess the eternal treasure of heaven which no moth can destroy, no rust can destroy and no thieves can steal (Matthew 6:19) If only we have the determination to put God as the centre of our life, we will live life truly be fulfilled and happy.

Today, let us fix our eyes on Jesus and let Him teach us how to live as children of light.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live my life with determination to pursue God and store up eternal treasure in heaven?

Saturday, 9 November, Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome

Ezekiel 47:1-2,8-9,12, 1 Corinthians 3:9-11,16-17, John 2:13-22

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

Zeal for You, O Lord

The cattle, sheep and pigeons have every right to be present at the Temple because they were being sold as sacrifices as stated by the Torah. The moneychangers too had the right to be there because pilgrims needed to change their money into the special coinage of the Temple. This was because it was not allowed for money that held the image of Caesar or any other person to be used in the Temple. Yet, when Jesus walked into the Temple, He made a whip and drove them all out. He said, *"Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market."*

Why was He angry? Why did He do what He did?

Jesus saw the hearts of the people going in to worship at the Temple that day. Many of them were fixed to their rituals and personal agendas. He saw the hearts of the sellers as they rejoiced at their profits they were making. Their hearts were not with God.

Zeal for His Father's house was the reason why He did what He did.

Jesus wanted the people to reassess the uncomfortable truth: They needed to get back the passion for their faith in God once more, rather than to be concerned with how unblemished the animals were or how much the exchange rate was.

Today, Jesus calls us back to love God with all our heart, mind and strength. Love for God is not simply going for Eucharistic celebration on Sundays, but it implies that we love Him in those we meet from Mondays to Saturdays. When we care for the poor in our society, or strive to be patient with a person who is unlovable, or take time to be with our families instead of at work, these are moments when our hearts are with God.

Today, let us put our priority right.

**Sunday, 10 November, Thirty Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
2 Maccabees 7:1-2,9-14, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-3:5, Luke 20:27-38**

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

We journey towards eternity

“The goal of our life is not people it is God. Only in him shall we find the rest we seek. It is therefore to solitude that we must return, not

alone, but with all those we embrace through our ministry. This return continues until the time when the same Lord who sent us into the world calls us back to be with Him in never-ending communion.”

(Henri Nouwen)

In today's gospel passage, Jesus reminds us that the goal of our life is God. We have been created by Him to love Him and serve Him in this life. One day, He will call us back to be with Him in a never-ending communion of love.

In heaven, only one status matters - not our status that comes from marriage, or religious profession, or career, or family ties, etc. We stand fully before God as His children – as His beloved sons and daughters.

Our communion of love with God begins today when we are aware of who we are and live our identity as God's children deeply secure in His presence.

God is God, not of the dead, but of the living. For Him, we are all alive! And so, let us start living!

“Somebody should tell us, right at the start of our lives, that we are dying. Then we might live life to the limit, every minute of every day. Do it! I say. Do it now! There are only so many tomorrows.”

(Pope Paul VI)

Questions for reflection:

- 1) What is the goal of my life?
- 2) How can I start living every minute of life as a child of God?

Monday, 11 November, St. Martin of Tours
Wisdom 1:1-7, Luke 17:1-6

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

The power of faith

"Obstacles are sure to come..."

Yes, temptations are sure to come by our way. We will surely face obstacles that lure us away from the path of love, truth and justice. Looking at our lives, we cannot say that we do not have any obstacles because we do struggle with our pride, our desire for power and control, our selfishness, etc. Jesus reminds us, "Watch yourselves!" This is because there are many people who depend on the way we live our faith. Our unloving and selfish ways can scandalise others. Thus, we need to be cautious not to become stumbling blocks by our bad examples to our family members, friends, colleagues and even strangers we meet.

It is our choice to be good examples or bad examples, to become signs pointing others to Jesus or away from Jesus. Yet, when we fall into temptation and walk back to God, He will never cease to forgive us. God loves us endlessly and will never stop forgiving us. Each time we receive His forgiveness, He renews His call to follow Him and live His life of love.

When we experience being forgiven by God again and again, we will be open to forgive our brothers and sisters again and again for their mistakes and wrongs done to us.

In the Gospel passage, when the disciples heard the huge responsibilities expected of them, they cried out to Jesus, "Increase our faith"

Today, let us also ask Jesus to increase our little faith to help us overcome obstacles that come our way, to keep trusting in God's forgiveness and to always seek His will.

God is love. In His love, He will never give up on any of us. This is our joy as we journey through life.

Question for reflection:

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

**Tuesday, 12 November, St. Josaphat
Wisdom 2:23-3:9, Luke 17:7-10**

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

Servants of unlimited love

It is common in many of us to want to be appreciated and have some form of recognition for all the hard work we have done, for example a word of praise, or a monetary reward.

As Christians, can we, instead of seeking reward from others, say "We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty." Can we regard service to God and those around us as sacred acts of love?

Service that is done out of love is what God wants from us. God, who is love, fills our hearts with His unlimited love that seeks to give what

is good for the sake of others. Our true joy comes when we know that we have done our best for others' sake, and that we are pleasing God in this way.

"Love seeks one thing only: the good of the one loved. It leaves all the other secondary effects to take care of themselves. Love, therefore, is its own reward." (Thomas Merton)

Today, let us set our hearts on God. Thus, we do not mind if the acts of love we do might not be noticed by others, but we are happy because we seek one thing only: the good of the ones we love.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I give my best for the good of others?

**Wednesday, 13 November, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini
Wisdom 6:1-11, Luke 17:11-19**

Now on the way to Jerusalem Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered one of the villages, ten lepers came to meet him. They stood some way off and called to him, 'Jesus! Master! Take pity on us.' When he saw them he said, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests'. Now as they were going away they were cleansed. Finding himself cured, one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was a Samaritan. This made Jesus say, 'Were not all ten made clean? The other nine, where are they? It seems that no one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner.' And he said to the man, 'Stand up and go on your way. Your faith has saved you.'

Gratitude

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus healed ten lepers but only one came back to Him to give thanks.

"...one of them turned back praising God at the top of his voice and threw himself at the feet of Jesus and thanked him."

Gratitude begins with humility. Humility is a heart that recognises the workings of God in our lives. In this time of prayer, let us ask God for the gift of a grateful and humble heart, like Mary's.

Mary, the humble one, sang her song of praise to God. Even though she neither understood nor knew where He would lead her, Mary gave thanks because she trusted God. She knew that His love would never let her down. Thus, she proclaimed, "My heart praises the Lord; my soul is glad because of God my Saviour, for he has remembered me, his lowly servant! From now on all people will call me happy, because of the great things the Mighty God has done for me."

Today, let us stop and remember all the wonderful things that God has done for us. Let us give thanks with gratitude in our hearts for His love and goodness in our lives. We give thanks!

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever." (Psalm 107)

Question for reflection:

1) Am I thankful to God and others for all the gifts of love I have received in my life?

Thursday, 14 November
Wisdom 7:22-8:1, Luke 17:20-25

Asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was to come, Jesus gave them this answer, 'The coming of the kingdom of God does not admit of observation and there will be no one to say, "Look here! Look there!" For, you must know, the kingdom of God is among you.' He said to the disciples, 'A time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man and will not see it. They will say to you, "Look there!" or, "Look here!" Make no move; do not set off in pursuit; for as the lightning flashing from one part of heaven lights up the other, so will be the Son of Man when his day comes. But first he must suffer grievously and be rejected by this generation.'

Kingdom of love

The Pharisees asked Jesus 'when' the Kingdom of God would come. This was because the constant burning hope for the Israelites was that God would soon liberate Israel from the oppression of the Roman powers, and would then establish peace and justice among them.

"The kingdom of God is among you."

Jesus told the Pharisees that the kingdom was among them because it was already present in front of them. The kingdom of God is in the person of Jesus Himself. Jesus came, not to annihilate or destroy, but to heal the sick, forgive the sinners, comfort the suffering and love the outcasts. Jesus came to reveal that the reign of God is already here for those who believe and to ask us to enter into a relationship with Him.

Today, the Kingdom of God is already present here among us. We do not need to look here or there for God's kingdom. Instead, look at our own lives and see the presence of Jesus in us. With Jesus in us, we are not helpless anymore and we trust that He will one day liberate us from all burdens of sin and suffering.

Jesus is here! He is with us. He is in us.

Questions for reflection:

1) How can I live today with Jesus and enjoy his presence in my life? If his presence is within me, how can I share this great treasure I have with those around me?

**Friday, 15 November, St. Albert the Great
Wisdom 13:1-9, Luke 17:26-37**

Jesus said to the disciples: 'As it was in Noah's day, so will it also be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. It will be the same as it was in Lot's day: people were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but the day Lot left Sodom, God rained fire and brimstone from heaven and it destroyed them all. It will be the same when the day comes for the Son of Man to be revealed. 'When that day comes, anyone on the housetop, with his possessions in the

house, must not come down to collect them, nor must anyone in the fields turn back either. Remember Lot's wife. Anyone who tries to preserve his life will lose it; and anyone who loses it will keep it safe. I tell you, on that night two will be in one bed: one will be taken, the other left; two women will be grinding corn together: one will be taken, the other left.' The disciples interrupted. 'Where, Lord?' they asked. He said, 'Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather'.

The shortness of life

In the days of Noah as well as Lot, people were eating, drinking and going about their normal activities but they were gone the next moment when disaster struck them suddenly.

All of us will face the moment when it will be the end of our life here on earth. We do not know when it will be. How ready are we to see God face to face?

"...on that night two will be in one bed: one will be taken, the other left; two women will be grinding corn together: one will be taken, the other left."

In fact, if we are not prepared today, we will never be ready then. In each new day, we are called to live in an intimate relationship with God and be aware of His presence in our lives. When we are with God in every moment of each day, we will not be afraid but look forward to the final day when we will truly meet Him face to face.

Let us never be complacent and think that we will live on forever. We never know when we will be 'taken' and so we must make our relationship with God as our top priority.

Today, let us take steps to grow closer to God.

"Only in love can I find you, my God. In love the gates of my soul spring open, allowing me to breathe a new air of freedom and forget my own petty self. In love my whole being streams forth out of the rigid confines of narrowness and anxious self-assertion, which make me a prisoner of my own poverty emptiness. In love all the powers of my soul flow

out toward you, wanting never more to return, but to lose themselves completely in you, since by your love you are the inmost centre of my heart, closer to me than I am to myself."

(Karl Rahner)

Question for reflection:

1) How is my relationship with God?

Saturday, 16 November, Ss. Margaret of Scotland and Gertrude the Great

Wisdom 18:14-16, 19:6-9, Luke 18:1-8

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

Pray continually with a lot of trust

Though the widow in today's parable, was poor and powerless, she had the power of persistence and determination that kept her going to the corrupted judge until He listened and did as she requested.

The widow represents us. There are times when we face circumstances in life that seem to be against us. There might be the temptation to say, *"What is the point of praying since my prayers are not answered?"*

This widow teaches us a lesson - Let us pray consistently and never lose heart. Keep praying despite all the obstacles we face. God answers our prayers in His time and ways. He will provide for all of our needs. Let us trust that we will receive all from Him who loves us so much and is always watching over us!

"As you try to see all things as coming from the hand of God, adore His designs. I would like to see you have more trust in Divine Providence. Otherwise, you will be suffering many disappointments and your projects will meet with failure. Trust, my child, only in God. Everything human is changeable and the one who is for you today will

be against you tomorrow. You see how good our God is! We should have more confidence in Him every day and have recourse to prayer, not permitting anything to discourage us or make us sad. He has given me so much confidence in His Divine Will that I leave everything in His hands and I am at peace. My beloved child, let us praise God in everything because all that happens is for our own good. Try to fulfil your duties the best you can and for God alone and always remain happy and serene in all the tribulations of life. As for me, I have placed all in the hands of God and I have been successful. We have to learn to detach ourselves a little, trust in God alone, and do God's holy will with joy. How beautiful it is to be in the Hands of God, searching His Divine Gaze in readiness to do whatever He wishes."

(Mother Luisita)

Questions for reflection:

1) Do I give up easily on God especially when I find that He is not answering my prayer? How can I grow more in my trust for God?

Sunday, 17 November, Thirty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Malachi 3:19-20, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12, Luke 21:5-19

When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, 'All these things you are staring at now-the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed'. And they put to him this question: 'Master,' they said 'when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that this is about to take place?' 'Take care not to be deceived,' he said 'because many will come using my name and saying, "I am he" and, "The time is near at hand". Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen but the end is not so soon.' Then he said to them, 'Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. 'But before all this happens, men will seize you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring you before kings and governors because of my name - and that will be your opportunity to bear witness. Keep this carefully in mind: you are not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you eloquence and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your endurance will win you your lives.'

Love endures

The disciples were impressed with the beauty of the Temple, the magnificence of the stone, as well as the attractive offerings people have placed there. Jesus' reply to them was that all would be destroyed, and there would be suffering from natural disasters. They would also be betrayed and hated on the account of their faith in Him. However, He said, *"Your endurance will win you your lives."*

Today, let us pause for a moment and reflect on these words of Jesus: *"Your endurance will win you your lives."*

Jesus told His disciples that their faith should not be based on the beauty or sturdiness of the Temple. Their faith should not waver because of natural disasters and persecutions. Rather, their faith should be deeply rooted in God alone who would stay with them and care for them.

Endurance is not just a mere valiant determination or stoic grit. It is itself a gift of the presence of the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit in us, we can stand firm and continue holding onto our faith in Him. No matter how tough life is, we keep ploughing ahead. We are not alone because the enduring presence of Jesus is with us.

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Lord, go with me and sustain me with your loving presence.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) In the face of tribulations, do I live by trusting on the strength of the Holy Spirit in me?
- 2) How can I grow more in my faith?

Monday, 18 November

1 Maccabees 1:10-15,41-43,54-57,62-63, Luke 18:35-43

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

Let me see again!

The blind man, in today's Gospel passage, was not going to let the opportunity pass by. When he heard that it was Jesus who was passing, he started to shout with all his might, "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me." He would not keep quiet because even though he was blind, he had eyes of faith to see that Jesus would give him what he needed.

Jesus stopped and asked the blind man what he wanted. It seems like a senseless question on the part of Jesus. However, He wanted the blind man to be determined and state clearly what his heart longed for.

Today, let us allow Jesus to personally ask us this same question, "What do you want me to do for you?"

Do we know what our deepest desire is? Can we say out with determination to Jesus and know that He will give us what we need?

We are bombarded by many wants - from a new car, to the latest handphone, to a better job, to a bigger promotion, etc. The advertisements as well as expectations from people around us do not help us to lessen our many wants.

Thus, we think that once we get the handphone, the computer, the job, the car, etc., we will then be very happy.

Today, Jesus wants to know what our deepest need is, not our greatest wants. The blind man did not ask Jesus for a load of cash so that he could be rich. He did not ask Jesus to give him a cloak to keep warm. He told Jesus, "Let me see again."

Jesus is asking us, "What do you want me to do for you?" What will our answer be? What do we desire most in our life now?

Question for reflection:

1) What is my deepest need? (e.g. need for peace, patience, strength to do God's will)

Tuesday, 19 November

2 Maccabees 6:18-31, Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the town when a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him: 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.' And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost'

Showing mercy

"Come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today."

Zacchaeus was despised and regarded by the rest of the Jewish society as a public sinner. This was because tax-collectors in those times used to make their living by charging extra amount of tax so that they could become well-to-do. They were also seen as traitors as they worked for the Romans.

Jesus looked at Zacchaeus with mercy and not condemnation. Thus, He took the initiative to be in the house of the sinner. Zacchaeus, with great joy, welcomed Jesus into His house.

From that encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus made the decision to change His dishonest ways. From that day onwards, his life was no longer the same.

What can be learnt from Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus?

The mercy of Jesus always gives a second chance for the other to change, to have a new life, to believe in himself/herself again. His mercy reaches out to forgive. His mercy always gives hope.

"Be missionaries of God's love and tenderness! Be missionaries of God's mercy, which always forgives us, always awaits us and loves us dearly" (Pope Francis)

Today, we are also invited to show mercy to the 'Zacchaeus' around us. When we show mercy, we are united to Jesus' heart. Therefore, we ask Jesus for the grace to truly live as missionaries of God's mercy.

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 20 November

2 Maccabees 7:1,20-31, Luke 19:11-28

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

Faithfulness to very small things

In today's parable, we read about a king who called ten of his trusted servants and gave them each one pound to do business with, and then he left. When the king returned home, the servants gave an account of what they did with their one pound. The king's response to

the two servants who invested their one pound wisely was, *“Well done, my good servant! Since you have proved yourself faithful in a very small thing...”*

Let us pause and ask ourselves with all honesty: Have I been faithful in the very small things entrusted to me? Have I done my best in completing insignificant tasks that would not earn me any praise and attention from others?

“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”
(St. Teresa of Calcutta)

Today’s parable challenges each one of us to examine our attitudes towards ‘small things’ in our lives. Let us not be like the servant who did nothing with his one pound. Instead, we want to do little things with a lot of love so that we can deepen our daily faithfulness to Jesus, our king.

Question for reflection:

1) How faithful am I to the small things that have been entrusted to me?

**Thursday, 21 November, The Presentation of Virgin Mary
1 Maccabees 2:15-29, Luke 19:41-44**

As Jesus drew near and came in sight of the city he shed tears over it and said, ‘If you in your turn had only understood on this day the message of peace! But, alas, it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you-and all because you did not recognize your opportunity when God offered it!’

Jesus, the Prince of Peace

Jerusalem derives its name from ‘salem’ which means ‘peace’. Today, Jesus approached Jerusalem and he cried and lamented for her. His heart was heavy with sorrow because of the defiant attitude of the religious leaders who killed the prophets God had sent. Soon, they

would kill God's only begotten Son. The city had not known real peace because they had rejected Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

What about us today? Do we know real peace? Do we welcome Jesus the Prince of Peace into all areas of our life?

We experience peace, not at death when we will finally 'rest in peace', but from Jesus. It is our closeness to Jesus that will make us experience deep inner peace. When we face the valley of darkness, we walk with serene hearts because Jesus is with us. With Him, we will have no fear.

Let us not be stubborn and listen to the still small voice telling us, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* (John 14:27).

Today, let us recognise Jesus' presence. He walks beside us and guides us along our path of life. With Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we lack nothing.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*
(Psalm 23)

Question for reflection:

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

Friday, 22 November, St. Cecilia
1 Maccabees 4:36-37,52-59, Luke 19:45-48

Jesus went into the Temple and began driving out those who were selling. 'According to scripture,' he said 'my house will be a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a robbers' den'. He taught in the Temple every day. The chief priests and the scribes, with the support of the leading citizens, tried to do away with him, but they did not see how they could carry this out because the people as a whole hung on his words.

House of prayer, not den of robbers

In today's Gospel passage, Jesus went to the Temple and saw the mess of all the money making activities going on there. He started to drive the sellers out.

He said, *"According to scripture 'my house will be a house of prayer. But you have turned it into a robbers' den."*

At times, our hearts are like robber's dens full of selfishness, pride, anger, laziness, envy and lust that steal us of our joy and enthusiasm of living our faith. Instead these 'robbers' make our hearts harden towards God and indifferent towards others.

Today, Jesus invites us to let Him remove everything that robs us from living our faith fully. He wants to make our hardened hearts docile to love again, to be merciful again, to forgive again. We are not meant to become robbers' den but a house of prayer where God dwells.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I let God be the owner of my life, and not the idols that rob me of living my faith with joy and enthusiasm?

Saturday, 23 November
1 Maccabees 6:1-13, Luke 20:27-40

Some Sadducees-those who say that there is no resurrection-approached Jesus and they put this question to him, 'Master, we have it from Moses in writing, that if a man's married brother dies childless,

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

God of the living, not of the dead

"Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all men are in fact alive." What does Jesus mean by saying this?

God is the God of life. Our death is not the end of life, but the beginning of a life fully with God. Thus, death brings us to live our real identity as children of God. In the gospel passage, Jesus' example of the woman with the seven husbands is to emphasize that the main concern after death is not to which husband she would belong to. Rather, she belonged to none of the brothers, except to God alone. Thus, there will be no more exclusive ties between families and friends, but all humanity will live in complete love, and all will be loved by God. In Him, all will find eternal peace and rest.

How much longer will we live? None of us can know for certain. What we know for sure is that we will one day meet God face-to-face. For now, we live each day as a new day, and to make each moment as good as any moment in eternity. Today, we can start living with the sense of belonging to God who is God of the living, not of the dead.

Question for reflection:

1) Knowing that I belong to God for all eternity, how do I want to live each moment of today?

Sunday, 24 November, Solemnity of Christ the King
2 Samuel 5:1-3, Colossians 1:12-20, Luke 23:35-43

The people stayed there before the cross watching Jesus. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. 'He saved others,' they said 'let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers mocked him too, and when they approached to offer vinegar they said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself'. Above him there was an inscription: 'This is the King of the Jews'. One of the criminals hanging there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said. 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus,' he said 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.' 'Indeed, I promise you,' he replied 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

Jesus our King

Today, we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. What kind of King do we have? The word, 'King', is usually associated with power, majesty and grandeur. In the gospel passage, we see our King dying on a cross - abused, humiliated, mocked, beaten. We come face to face with our King on the cross who did not display any kind of power, majesty or grandeur! The only power that Jesus showed was that of love.

How did Jesus our King respond in His darkest hour? Did He react with despondency and anger? What did Jesus our King do?

Jesus reached out to love a criminal. Despite being on the cross, He unleashed love.

As we proclaim today that Jesus is our King, our lives too should imitate His. Jesus shows us that we can break through our labyrinth of pain and suffering when we choose to love and love again. Facing our darkest hour should never make us close ourselves in our self-pity or shrink away in embarrassment or personal disgrace. It should never prevent us from reaching out to forgive, help, uplift,

reconcile, give hope, etc. to others in need. Uniting ourselves with Jesus on the Cross, we too can love selflessly and deeply.

A person who loved despite suffering much is St. John Paul II. His mother and elder brother died when he was young. By twenty years old, he was an orphan after his father died too. He suffered the Nazi occupation. He was shot by an assassin and nearly died. He suffered from Parkinson's disease that caused him to be immobile and took away his ability to speak. He continued his mission of serving the Church with courage. St. John Paul II had many dark moments in his life but he was a man overflowing with deep love for Jesus and His people.

"In the messianic programme of Christ, which is at the same time the programme of the Kingdom of God, suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a "civilization of love"." (St. John Paul II)

Christ, our King, beckons us to transform our pain and suffering into something good by releasing love so that we can help Him to transform our society into a 'civilization of love'.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) When I face my darkest hour, how can I imitate Jesus my King?
- 2) Is there someone whom I can reach out to love selflessly and deeply today?

Monday, 25 November, St. Catherine of Alexandria
Daniel 1:1-6, 8-20, Luke 21:1-4

As Jesus looked up he saw rich people putting their offerings into the treasury; then he happened to notice a poverty-stricken widow putting in two small coins, and he said, 'I tell you truly, this poor widow has put in more than any of them; for these have all contributed money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in all she had to live on.

Two small coins

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

Many times, we look at what we have to offer and see that it is not worth much. For Jesus, it is not how much we give, but what is the motivation of our giving. Real giving comes from a heart that loves God and others. Real giving gives without expecting anything in return. When we give from the heart, the little that we give is valuable in Jesus' sight.

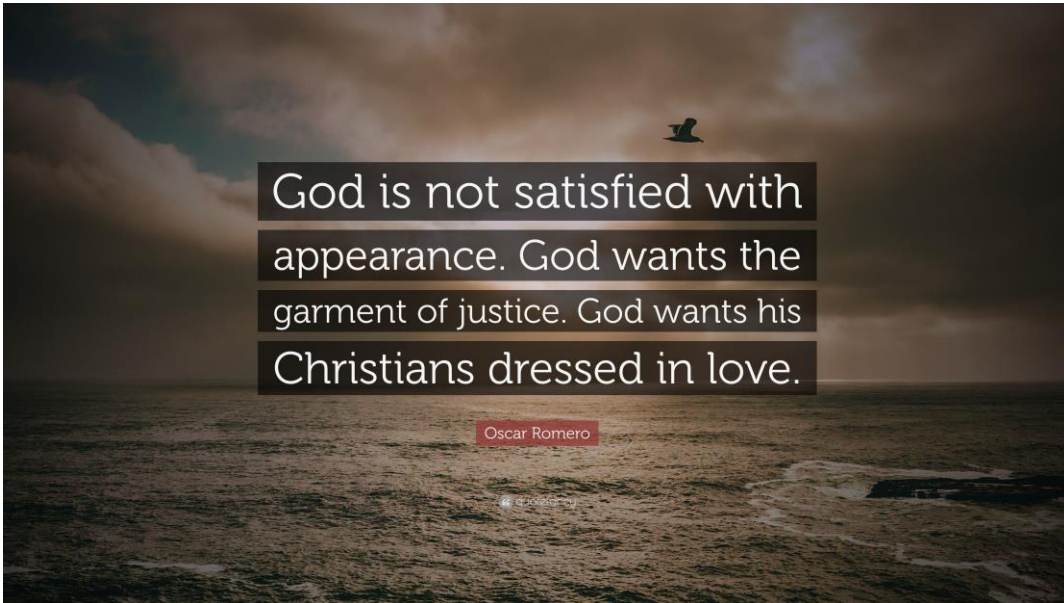
Everyday, we have opportunities to put our two small coins of love, concern, peacemaking, patience, etc. Even when no one sees and appreciates our two small coins, Jesus sees and rejoices.

"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do." (Edward Everett Hale)

Today, we take the courageous step to do something by not holding back our two small coins!

Question for reflection:

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

A dramatic seascape with a dark, stormy sky and a bird in flight. The ocean is turbulent with white-capped waves. A single bird is silhouetted against the cloudy sky in the upper center. The overall mood is somber and powerful.

God is not satisfied with
appearance. God wants the
garment of justice. God wants his
Christians dressed in love.

Oscar Romero

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Oscar Romero

[illegible]

Tuesday, 26 November

Daniel 2:31-45, Luke 21:5-11

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

Love remains

Jesus overheard some people admiring with pride the beautiful Temple. For the Jews, the Temple in Jerusalem was the most sacred place where God dwelled. Thus, they were pleased with the fine stonework and votive offerings, and felt a sense of security that nothing and nobody could destroy God's holy Temple.

Jesus simply warned these people: "All these things you are staring at now -the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed' In A.D. 70, the great temple, which seemed indestructible, was indeed destroyed.

What is Jesus' message to us today?

Too many times, we, like the people in today's gospel passage, admire the earthly gadgets, buildings, inventions, etc. We forget that all these are temporal. The time will come when all that is temporal will end and all that is eternal will remain.

"Love is eternal" (1 Corinthians 13:8)

The greatest security we must invest in is not our work or wealth or gadgets but in love. The love we give continues to bear fruit even after our mortal life ends.

"Love is not written on paper, for paper can be erased. Nor is it etched on stone, for stone can be broken. But it is inscribed on a heart and there it shall remain forever." (Anonymous)

Let us love, and there is no need to fear even when we experience external chaos around us. God who is love (1 John 4:4) is with us and He remains forever.

"At the end of life we will not be judged by how many diplomas we have received, how much money we have made, how many great things we have done. We will be judged by "I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless, and you took me in." (St. Teresa of Calcutta)

At the end of our life, we will be judged according to how much love we give to those around us. Let us start today!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I bear eternal fruit of love in my life?

Wednesday, 27 November

Daniel 5:1-6,13-14,16-17,23-38, Luke 21:12-19

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

True witness for Christ

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

Do we bear witness to Jesus through our words and actions? In this time of prayer, let us ask Jesus to give us the joy to be true witnesses to Him even when we face rejections and persecutions for our faith. "First: Jesus... If we forge ahead with our own arrangements, with other things, with beautiful things but without Jesus we make no headway, it does not work. Jesus is more important... The second word is: prayer. Looking at the face of God, but above all... realizing that he is also looking at us... Finally, witness: faith can only be communicated through witness, and that means love. Not with our own ideas but with the Gospel, lived out in our own lives and brought to life within us by the Holy Spirit... It's not so much about speaking, but rather speaking with our whole lives: living consistently, the very consistency of our lives! This consistency means living Christianity as an encounter with Jesus that brings me to others, not just as a social label. In terms of society, this is how we are, we are Christians closed in on ourselves. No, not this! Witness is what counts!" (Pope Francis)

We are Christians who are sent to go forth to share and live the Good News with others. It might be easy to become true witnesses for Christ but we need to endure the challenges.

In this mission, we are never alone. Jesus goes with us. Therefore, let us not be afraid to bring Jesus to others. Witness is what counts!

Question for reflection:

1) How can I be aware of the different opportunities today to be a witness of God's love in me?

Thursday, 28 November
Daniel 6:12-28, Luke 21:20-28

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

Take courage

"I am your friend and my love for you goes deep. There is nothing I can give you which you have not got, but there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take. No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in today. Take heaven! No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. Take peace! The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness could we but see - and to see we have only to look. I beseech you to look! Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by the covering, cast them away as ugly, or heavy or hard. Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendour, woven of love, by wisdom, with power. Welcome it, grasp it, touch the angel's hand that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty, believe me, that angel's hand is there, the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing presence. Our joys, too, be not content with them as joys. They, too, conceal diviner gifts. Life is so full of meaning and purpose, so full of beauty - beneath its covering - that you will find earth but cloaks your

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

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

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

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

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

Questions for reflection:

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

Friday, 29 November
Daniel 7:2-14, Luke 21:29-33

Jesus told them a parable, 'Think of the fig tree and indeed every tree. As soon as you see them bud, you know that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that the kingdom of God is near. I tell you solemnly, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. '

To the heart that loves, all is well

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."

What is Jesus' core message for us today?

Many of us find it a challenge to radically trust God because we think that He is not powerful enough or not caring enough. Today, Jesus invites us to open our hearts and encounter again God who loves us. Heaven and earth will pass away, but our God will always be there to guide and protect us, and His words will always remain true and faithful. God's love never fails us.

Therefore, we must always live in God's assurance of hope, peace and joy. Most of all, we must bring His faithful presence and His words of comfort to all our brothers and sisters who are suffering.

Let us not be afraid to trust God who is with us and wants only one thing: to give us love that will uphold us, no matter what life may bring to us.

"Everything is a grace, everything is the direct effect of our Father's love - difficulties, contradictions, humiliations, all the soul's miseries, her burdens, her needs - everything, because through them, she learns humility, realizes her weakness. Everything is a grace because everything is God's gift. Whatever be the character of life or its unexpected events - to the heart that loves, all is well."

(St. Therese of Lisieux)

Question for reflection:

1) How can I live trusting radically in God?

Saturday, 30 November, St. Andrew

Romans 10:9-18, Matthew 4:18-22

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

Leaving our boats and nets for Jesus' sake

As we celebrate the Feast of St. Andrew, let us ask this great saint to help us to follow Jesus with decisiveness and to be faithful to the end.

In today's Gospel, Jesus walked past Simon, Andrew, James and John. All of them were busy with their nets and boats as they were professional fishermen. In the middle of what they were doing the best, Jesus went to them and said, "*Follow me.*"

Likewise, Jesus calls us not when it is the most suitable timing for us or when we are free with nothing much to do. Instead, He always calls us to follow Him when we are busy living our lives. The challenge for us is to let go of all 'nets and boats' and follow Him to the path where He wants us to go. Do we dare to let Jesus be above all our personal agendas, comforts, ambitions and plans? Do we have the courage to follow Him with joyful trust?

Andrew and the rest left everything and chose to follow Jesus. For these fishermen, Jesus was worthy for them.

What about us? What is our response?

Question for reflection:

1) Jesus says, "Follow me". What is my response to Him?



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