

PRAYER FOR LIVING

**DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR
LITURGICAL YEAR B~
FEBRUARY**

**SR. SANDRA SEOW
VERBUM DEI MISSIONARIES**



verbum dei

Prayer for Living Daily Reflections for Liturgical Year B

Copyright © 2020 Sr. Sandra Seow
All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may
not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever
without the express written permission of the author.

Monday, 1st February.
Hebrews 11:32-40, Mark 5:1-20

Jesus and his disciples reached the territory of the Gerasenes on the other side of the lake, and when he disembarked, a man with an unclean spirit at once 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? In God's name do not torture me!' For Jesus had been saying to him, 'Come out of the man, unclean spirit.'...The men looking after them ran off and told their story in the city 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 -- the man who had had the legion in him -- properly dressed and in his full senses, 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 their 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 proclaim in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And everyone was amazed.

"What do you want with me, Jesus?"

In today's gospel, Jesus met with a very troubled and violent man who was outcast from the rest of the town. In fact, he was so uncontrollable that the people tried to chain him up but to no avail. Jesus looked at him with love and spoke to him as a person, not as a monster. After that encounter with Jesus, the violent recluse was freed from all his inner turmoil and anger and went off to proclaim all that Jesus had done for him.

Jesus comes so that we can have fullness of life (cf. John 10:10). There are times when we are entrapped by anger towards others, unforgiveness of the past, fear towards the future and hopelessness at all what we see. Let us, like the man in the gospel, approach Jesus

and ask Him, “*Lord, what do you want with me?*” Jesus is here with us to free us from the turmoil we have within us so that we can live with His peace. When we experience being touched, healed, freed by Jesus, He sends us out to proclaim His love and bring His peace to others.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus’ invitation to me in this time of prayer?

**Tuesday, 2nd February. The Presentation of the Lord.
Malachi 3:1-4, Hebrews 2:14-18, Luke 2:22-32**

When the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord- observing what is 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 prescribed 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 the restoration of Israel 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 are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations; a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel.

God in the fragile baby

Simeon was known to be a man of God who lived his life in tune with the Holy Spirit. When he saw the baby brought into the temple by his lowly parents, he immediately recognised him as the long-awaited Messiah. With eyes of faith, He saw God in the fragile baby: “*My eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations*”. Pope Francis, in one of his homilies, stated: “*He sees the Child and he sees salvation. He does not see the Messiah who works miracles, but a small child. He does not see something extraordinary, but Jesus with his parents...Simeon sees God’s simplicity and welcomes his presence*”. (Pope Francis, 2nd Feb 2019)

Today, we are invited to have a living encounter with God who continues to come to us in life, prayer, in others, even in the ones

whom we regard as weak and lowly. Let us be led by the Holy Spirit to see and welcome God's presence who comes to us in simplicity.

Question for reflection:

Is my heart open to welcome God who comes to me in unexpected ways today?

**Wednesday, 3rd February. St. Blaise.
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 despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, except that he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith. He made a tour round the villages, teaching.

God in the ordinary

Jesus was rejected by the people in his home town because He was too familiar and ordinary to them. They could not get past the fact that Jesus was the son of Joseph the carpenter and Mary, and could not see that there was more to him than they were conscious of. Because of this, they missed the opportunity to experience God in Jesus.

How do we look at others around us? Many times, we simply assume that we know someone without considering that there is more to that person than we are aware of. Like the people in Nazareth, we too fail to see the depths in each person, especially those who are so familiar to us, and we enter into the negative attitude of putting others down or belittling what they can give and contribute. May we never forget that God continues to reveal His presence of love through the lives of those people who we deem as familiar and ordinary.

Question for reflection:

What prevents me from looking at others with newness?

Thursday, 4th February.
Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24, Mark 6:7-13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over 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, 'Don't 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 under your feet as evidence to them.' So they set off to proclaim repentance, and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

Be my presence today!

"Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which He looks compassion on this world, Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world...Christ has no body now on earth but yours." (St. Teresa of Ávila)

Today, Jesus sends us, in the same way, that He sent His disciples to be His body, His eyes, His feet and His hands. We need to step out of ourselves for the love of God and others. In this time of pandemic that has caused many uncertainties and fears, we are called to give ourselves to others by speaking the message of peace and hope, by sharing our resources with the poor, by tearing down walls that divide, etc. Our sincere "Yes" to mission comes from our personal prayer life with Jesus. Let us listen to the voice of Jesus, "*Can I count on you to be my presence today?*"

Question for reflection:

What impedes me from going forth and be Jesus' presence?

Friday, 5th February. St. Agatha.
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.'...Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had 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 do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright 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 at once rushed back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, immediately, 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. At once the king sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in the 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.

To dare to be the voice of Truth

John the Baptist was beheaded because he courageously gave his life to be the voice of Truth. This passage is not for us to admire the courage of John the Baptist. Rather, it is for us to have his same courage to be the voice of Truth today, even if it implies creating tension and conflict. Often, we choose to keep quiet and “mind our own business”, or we choose to go against what we believe and lie in order to go with the flow, or to speak words that harm the reputation of others. As Christians, we are called to speak the truth in love so that our words would benefit and help those who hear us, even if doing this leads us to pay a price for doing so.

Courage is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and without it, we will remain silent. Let us ask for a courageous faith that helps us to live for Jesus and the gospel values.

Question for reflection:

How can I be the voice of Truth for Jesus today?

**Saturday, 6th February. SS. Paul Miki and Companions.
Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21, Mark 6:30-34**

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

Come away and rest for a while

Jesus said, "Come away...and rest for a while". Despite knowing that there were still many things that still needed to be done, Jesus told the disciples to rest. What does this mean for us? Like Jesus, we need to learn to take a step back and find time and space to simply rest, to slow down in order to be recharged. Perhaps we feel that to rest means that we are being lazy and unproductive, and thus, we push ourselves to be busy with doing things. Jesus invites us to go with Him for a prayerful rest and make time for solitude and renewal.

In the gospel, Jesus and His disciples did not get the rest they needed. Jesus, looking at the large crowd, felt compassion for them, and sat down to teach them. This speaks to us also of the need to let go of all our plans and always respond to the needs of others with compassionate and self-giving love, as Jesus did.

Question for reflection:

Do I value prayerful rest where I seek strength, peace and comfort in Jesus? What prevents me from responding to others with love, when they interrupt my plans and schedules?

**Sunday, 7th February. Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time.
Job 7:1-4,6-7, 1 Corinthians 9:16-19,22-23, Mark 1:29-39**

On leaving the synagogue, he went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed and feverish, and at once they told him about her. He went in to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. And the fever left her and she began to serve 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 sick with diseases of one kind or another; he also drove 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...

Don't stop praying!

Jesus had a very busy day. He healed Peter's mother-in-law as well as all those who were brought in by the people in the town. However, he still found time to go off to a lonely place and pray. Prayer was the space and time where Jesus remained with God His Father in solitude and silence. There, He found renewed strength to live the demands of the next day.

Today, let us never allow ourselves to be caught up in the whirlwind of activities that we forget to set time and space to be with Jesus. We pray because we need Jesus- His peace, love, strength, We go to Jesus because we know that without Him, we are nothing. Let us never get tired of praying and spending time with the One who loves us the most!

Questions for reflection:

Do I make time and space to be with Jesus? What are the obstacles that prevent me from praying and listening to Him?

Monday, 8th February. St. Josephine Bakhita.

Genesis 1:1-19, Mark 6:53-56

Having made the crossing, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and moored there. When they disembarked people at once recognised him, and started hurrying all through the countryside and brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were saved.

Jesus, I need you

Am I in need of Jesus? In today's gospel, we see that many people hurried to Jesus, brought the sick with them and "*begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak*". There was a sense of urgency among the people because they needed His help.

Am I like Jesus always ready to serve? From the point of view of Jesus, He saw crowds of people in need and stayed with them. He was not indifferent to their needs because He knew that He had come to serve, and not to be served (Mt 20:28). Today, in prayer, let us go to Jesus because we know that we need Him and at the same time, let us also ready to go with Him to serve those with compassion and love.

Question for reflection:

Do I recognise that I am, like the crowd, in need of Jesus? Do I recognise that Jesus has placed me among crowds so that I can also help those who are in need?

Tuesday, 9th February.

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

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round him, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, keep 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 to keep, concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So the 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, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. You put aside the commandment of God to observe 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: Honour 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 Korban (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 ineffective for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.'

The heart is what matters, not external practices

In the gospel of today, Jesus had strong words to the religious leaders who placed human tradition above the commandment of God, which is the law of love. He called these people hypocrites because He knew that their hearts were far from loving and serving God. Sometimes, we can be so caught with following external observances and even used them to judge and criticise others for being religious or not. Jesus invites us not to lose sight of what is most essential to our faith, which is to cultivate a heart of love, i.e. a life of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, respect, etc, more than simply focussing on external behaviours and formal religious practices.

As we reflect on this gospel, let us humbly ask for the grace not to forget that, for God, it is the heart that matters most. We are called to love God, love others as we love ourselves!

Questions for reflection:

Is my heart far from God? What is Jesus' message to me in this time of silent prayer?

Wednesday, 10th February, St. Scholastica.

Genesis 3: 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 someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Even you -- don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer? And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, 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 person unclean.'

A God-centred heart

"For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge..."

Once again, Jesus emphasizes on what truly matters in God's eyes is what is within the heart of each person because it is the guiding force

that determines the way the person acts and speaks. This is far more important to God than what a person eats or not eats on a certain day of the week or what the rituals he/she does. The focus then is: How is our heart?

The heart can be the fountain of goodness or evil, of life or death, of love or hatred. When our heart is God-centred, we will live according to His will, which is to love Him by loving others with compassion and serving them with love. Thus, if our heart is full of God, our lives will bear the visible fruit of goodness.

Question for reflection:

Do I want to live a life that is pleasing to God?

Thursday, 11th February, Our Lady of Lourdes.

Genesis 2:18-25, Mark 7:24-30

Jesus left that place and set out for the territory of Tyre. There he went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there; but he could not pass unrecognised. At once a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him and came and fell at his feet. Now this woman was a gentile, by birth a Syro-Phoenician, and she begged him to drive 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 little dogs.' But she spoke up, 'Ah yes, sir,' she replied, 'but little dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.' 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 home and found the child lying on the bed and the devil gone.

An amazing faith!

The faith of this pagan woman is an inspiring faith for us to imitate. This woman, whose love for her sick daughter made her ask Jesus for help with much persistence and urgency, did not give up when Jesus seemed to reject her request. She stood her ground when Jesus said that the children should be fed first by replying with humility that the little dogs under the table of the children could also enjoy the scraps of food that fell onto the ground. Seeing her faith, Jesus healed her daughter. What a contrast to the proud and self-righteous religious leaders who centered on external rites and religious norms, but their faith in God was weak and their hearts were far away from Him.

The depth of this pagan woman's humble and persistent faith is an example to each one of us. Let us not lose faith in Jesus even when we find that He does not seem to answer our prayer. Today, let us ask Jesus to teach us to have the simple faith of this pagan woman.

Question for reflection:

What is an obstacle that prevents me from having a deep faith in Jesus?

Friday, 12th February, Lunar New Year.

Numbers 6:22-27, James 4:13-15, Matthew 6:31-34

(Lunar New Year Mass Readings)

Jesus said, "So do not worry; do not say, "What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What are we to wear?" It is the gentiles 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 God's saving justice, 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.'

Do not worry about tomorrow

On this first day of the Lunar New Year, Jesus tells us, "*Do not worry about tomorrow*". The truth is that many of us tend to worry about finances, health, safety, career, etc. In this time of the pandemic, we are anxious about the virus, the vaccination, the lockdown. The call of "*do not worry*" is intrinsically linked with the need to trust in God. We dare to entrust ourselves to Him because we know that He is our Father who loves us and takes care of us. However, to put our trust in God does not mean that all our problems will be gone away and that our life will be free from pain and anxiety. Rather, God will give us the strength and peace to face the challenges we face.

Instead of worrying, we are called to set our hearts on His kingdom, which is His presence that is actively working in the world; and to always work for justice and live in love.

Question for reflection:

How can I live this New Year with more trust in God?

Saturday, 13th February.
Genesis 3:9-24, Mark 8:1-10

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 these people enough bread to eat in a deserted place?' He asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' 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 began handing them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them among the crowd. They had a few small fishes as well, and over these, he said a blessing and ordered them to be distributed too. They ate as much as they wanted, and they collected seven basketfuls of the scraps leftover. Now there had been about four thousand people. He sent them away and at once, getting into the boat with his disciples, went to the region of Dalmanutha.

Giving the little that I have for the good of others

Jesus and His disciples had different reactions as they faced the great hungry crowd. The disciples asked, "*Where could anyone get these people enough bread to eat in a deserted place?*", and in their mind, they were thinking of taking the easy way out of sending the people away. Jesus, on the other hand, asked, "*How many loaves have you?*" which shows His desire to do something to relieve their hunger. How do we respond when we are presented with the needs of others?

Jesus wants us always to look at the needs of others and see what we can do to help and serve. We, like the disciples, might look at the little that we have and think there is not much that we can do. It is easier to find excuses and walk away from doing anything. Today, let us have the courage to put our gifts and resources in the service of others because Jesus is the one who will work wonders through us.

Question for reflection:

How can I offer my "small loaves and fishes" for the good of others?

Sunday, 14th February, Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Leviticus 13:1-2, 44-46, 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, Mark 1:40-45

2nd reading: Whatever you eat, then, or drink, and whatever else you do, do it all for the glory of God. Never be a cause of offence, either to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to accommodate everybody in everything, not looking for my own advantage, but for the advantage of everybody else, so that they may be saved. Take me as your pattern, just as I take Christ for mine.

Imitators of Christ

St. Paul in the second reading commands us to take Christ as our pattern or in other words, to imitate Christ. How can we imitate Christ? St. Paul gives us the answers: 1) To do everything for the glory of God and 2) To seek the good of others. Jesus lived His whole life seeking God's glory. All that Jesus did and said was not to draw attention to Himself, rather He did everything so that people would give praise to God. He lived a life of love by being at the service of others, especially the poor and the vulnerable so that He could bring them to God. We could these two principles in today's gospel of Jesus healing the leper.

Today, we are invited to imitate Christ by glorifying God with our life, with what we do with our free time, with how we speak to others, with our actions of love, etc; as well as to love others, even those who are different from us, by always seeking what is best for them.

Question for reflection:

What is it in the life of Christ that I would like to imitate?

Monday, 15th February.
Genesis 4: 1-15, 25, Mark 8:11-13

The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with Jesus; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to put him to the test. And with a profound sigh, he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign? In truth, I tell you, no sign shall be given to this generation.' And, leaving them again, he re-embarked and went away to the other side.

An unconditional faith

The Pharisees demanded a sign from Jesus, even though He had given them the many signs by the proclamation of God's Kingdom through His words and actions. Despite asking for something greater, something spectacular, their hearts were closed to God's presence in

the person of Jesus Himself. Jesus gave a profound sigh to express His frustration at their lack of faith and said, “*Why does this generation demand a sign?*”

What about us? Do we ask for extraordinary signs in order to believe more, to trust more? Jesus asks for our faith in Him and His words that comes from growing in our friendship with Him. It is when we come to know and love Him that we put our faith and trust in Him.

Question for reflection:

Do I need signs in order to trust God?

Tuesday, 16th February.

Genesis 6: 5-8, 7:1-5, 10, Mark 8: 14-21

The disciples had forgotten to take any bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Then he gave them this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; look out for 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 still not understand, still not realise? Are your minds closed? Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear? Or do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for 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, 'Do you still not realise?'

I have Jesus with me

The disciples had one loaf of bread with them in their journey, and they worried about not having enough. They focussed on what they were lacking and they forgot to look at who they had in the boat with them, i.e. Jesus, the one who fed the multitudes of people with just a few loaves. Thus, Jesus asked them, “*Do you still not understand, still not realise, still not believe, still not trust?*”

As we pray, let us ask for a deeper faith that leads us to recognise that He is with us and that we can always depend on Him. Jesus, in the Eucharist, is the one loaf that abundantly nourishes us with His presence of love. Today, Jesus gently invites us to open our hearts to receive His presence and to listen to His Word. May we also say to Him, “*Lord, you are my Shepherd, my Friend. With you, I have everything I need*”.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' message for me today?

Wednesday, 17th February, Ash Wednesday.

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

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise 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 human admiration. In truth I tell you, 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. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so 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 are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scented 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".

Lent: Journeying with God

We start this journey of Lent with the words of Prophet Joel in the first reading: "*Come back to me with all your heart*". This is the call from God to us. The movement of going back to God implies the need to repent, i.e. a change of heart from turning away from Him to turning back to Him and experiencing His love that is all "*tenderness and compassion, slow to anger and rich in graciousness*".

Jesus, in the gospel, speaks of 3 ways in which we can practice to go back to God: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Almsgiving is more than donating our resources is to have the heart of love to look at our fellow brothers and sisters in need with compassion. Prayer is to cultivate a more intimate relationship with God. Fasting is not about not eating but it is to give up something we are attached to give God more room

in our hearts. As we start Lent, let us be determined to make our way back to God.

Question for reflection:

How do I want to live this Lent with purpose?

**Thursday, 18th February, Thursday after Ash Wednesday.
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, speaking 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. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it. What benefit is it to anyone to win the whole world and forfeit or lose his very self?'

Choose life, follow Jesus!

'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me.' To renounce means to deny oneself which is not appealing to many of us as we tend to navigate towards indulging ourselves. However, if we want to honestly follow Jesus, we need to give up on certain habits that are incompatible with the ways of Jesus or to renounce our self-centred tendencies that make us live a life of pride and selfishness, etc. We give up in order to gain and enjoy the fullness of life that Jesus wants to offer to us. In the first reading, the call to "Choose life" is God's invitation as we start this Lent.

Question for reflection:

What do I need to give up so that I can start to choose and gain life today?

**Friday, 19th February, Friday after Ash Wednesday.
Isaiah 58:1-9, Matthew 9: 14-15**

Then 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 cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

Fasting leads us always to love God and others

What is the point of fasting? Many of us do fasting because it is a way to lose weight after all the many feasting, or we do so because it is an obligation that we need to fulfill. Today, Jesus, the Risen Christ, refers to Himself as the bridegroom who continues to be with His people. Thus, now when we fast, we fast with joy, not sadness. We fast with joy from TV, food, shopping, or Facebook because we desire to make space for Christ to be more in our lives.

When Jesus the bridegroom is in our lives, He will always lead us towards loving and serving others. In the 1st reading, the Prophet Isaiah said, "to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke, to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless people..." This is the fasting that God wants. Our fasting must lead us always to more love: Love Christ and love others. This is the point of our fasting!

Question for reflection:

Does my fasting lead me to more love?

Saturday, 20th February, Saturday after Ash Wednesday. Isaiah 58:9-14, Luke 5:27-32

Jesus noticed a tax collector, Levi by name, sitting at the tax office, and said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything Levi 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 that are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance.'

A sinner loved by God

In the time of Jesus, the tax collectors were regarded as sinners by the rest of the Jewish people, especially by the religious leaders. Jesus, however, looked upon the tax collectors, not as sinners to look with disdain, but as God's children to be respected and loved. He noticed Levi, a tax collector, and called him, "Follow me".

How do we look at others? Do we focus on their failures, their weakness, and we disregard them and keep them at arms' length? Who are we to judge when we ourselves are sinners too? Today, let

us experience that we are all sinners loved by God, and thus, we too are called to look at others with hearts of mercy and love.

Question for reflection:

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

Sunday, 21st February, 1st Sunday of Lent.

Genesis 9:8-15, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus into the desert and he remained there for forty days, and was put to the test by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels looked after him. After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the gospel from God saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.'

In our desert moments, God takes care of us

The desert represents a place of danger as well as a place of encounter. It was in the desert that Israelites suffered after they left Egypt, as they travelled to the Promised Land. It was also in the desert that they experienced God's love and providence. Jesus too experienced the danger with wild animals but, at the same time, He experienced God's presence with Him: "*the angels looked after him*".

We too experience our own desert moments. We experience struggles and difficulties. Yet, in such moments, we too encounter God and His loving presence. We need to trust that God is with us and He takes care of us in these moments of facing the wild beasts in life. Oftentimes He sends His angels, who are our friends, family members, friends in our faith community, to journey with us, pray with us, encourage us, etc. On this First Sunday of Lent, let us find comfort that we are never alone in the desert journey because God is our Companion who walks with us.

Question for reflection:

Is there anything in my life that prevents me from opening myself fully to God's presence?

Monday, 22nd February, Chair of St. Peter, the Apostle.

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

1ST reading: *I urge the elders among you, as a fellow-elder myself and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and as one who is to have a share*

in the glory that is to be revealed: give a shepherd's care to the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, as God wants; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Do not lord it over the group which is in your charge, but be an example for the flock. When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the unfading crown of glory. In the same way, younger people, be subject to the elders. Humility towards one another must be the garment you all wear constantly, because God opposes the proud but accords his favour to the humble.

To be a shepherd who leads by example

Today, let us reflect on the 1st reading from St. Peter: “...give a shepherd's care to the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, as God wants; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Do not lord it over the group which is in your charge, but be an example for the flock”. All of us have the responsibility to be shepherds. But what kind of shepherd do we want to be? Are we shepherds who care like Jesus, the Good Shepherd?

Sadly, power corrupts. We have seen this in politics, in the workplaces as well as in the church. May we never allow power to harden our hearts. Let us lead by examples, not just by telling others what to do, but by showing with our actions and life. Today, the invitation is for us to be shepherds, leaders, employers, mentors, parents, aunts/uncles, who follow the example of Jesus by serving those around us with humility and love.

Question for reflection:

How can I lead others by my example of self-giving and humble service?

Tuesday, 23rd February, First Week of Lent.

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

Jesus said to his disciples: 'In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles 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, we need you

"The Our Father is a prayer of the children of God, it is not just one among many other Christian prayers." (Pope Francis, March 2018). In this prayer, we need to be aware that we are addressing God who is Father, and not just babbling words to a faraway God. As His children, we pray and ask God our Father to reveal His will to us, so that we can fulfil it in our lives. The will of our Father is nothing more than to love with His compassionate love and to work for justice and peace. When we live God's will, His Kingdom, i.e. His presence, is among us.

As His children, we also pray with trust as we place our needs before Him: our need for daily bread to sustain us, our need to be forgiven and to have the strength to forgive and our need for His guidance to walk the right path towards love and life. Today, let us once again come before God our Father with trust and confidence.

Questions for reflection:

Who is God for me? Who am I for God?

Wednesday, 24th February, First Week of Lent. Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11: 29-32

The crowds got even bigger and Jesus addressed them, 'This is an evil 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 people of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be a sign to this generation. On Judgement Day the Queen of the South will stand up against the people of this generation and be their condemnation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, look, there is something greater than Solomon here. On Judgement Day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented; and, look, there is something greater than Jonah here.'

Jesus, the greatest sign

Jonah preached and the people of Nineveh repented because they believed in his words. The Queen of the South met King Solomon and recognised that he was a man of God. Yet, Jesus' contemporaries demanded signs even though they already had the greatest sign with

them, that was Jesus Himself. He was greater than Jonah, Solomon and all the other great leaders and prophets of Israel.

Jesus continues to be among us as the greatest sign of God's presence. He, the Incarnated Word of God, continues to speak to us in the Scripture. He, the Bread of Life, continues to nourish us through the Eucharist. He, our Companion of life, is with us and lives in us. He, the Friend of the weak, is present in the poor and the vulnerable in society. Do we recognise this greatest sign? Is our faith rooted in Jesus?

Question for reflection:

Do I recognise Jesus' presence in me and around me today?

Thursday, 25th February, 1st Week of Lent.

Esther 4:17, 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. Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened. Is there anyone 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, evil as you are, 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 Law and the Prophets.'

Never stop asking, seeking, knocking

Jesus reminds us to never stop asking, searching and knocking because God will listen to our prayers. Yet, we have experienced that God seemed silent and that our prayers were not answered. In such moments of unanswered prayer, we might become dejected and frustrated, and we might even start doubting God. Today, Jesus invites us to trust that God our Father gives good things to those who ask Him. He does not mean that we will get whatever we ask for in prayer. Here we need to ask ourselves if we are asking for "good things", which refers to asking for more of God and seeking His will for us.

Today, let us go to God our Father and never get tired of asking for more of His love, seeking for what He wants from us and knocking at the door for help to live each day with peace.

Questions for reflection:

Do I come before God with trust? What do I want to ask for in this time of prayer?

Friday, 26th February, 1st Week of Lent.**Ezekiel 18:21-28, Matthew 5:20-26**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven. You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall 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 a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" 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. In truth I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.'

The importance of reconciliation

In today's gospel, Jesus goes beyond the commandment of "You shall not kill" to "anyone who is angry with a brother...who calls a brother 'fool'...". Anger is a human emotion that is part of being human. However, Jesus is pointing out the danger of cultivating our anger that will lead us to react, seek revenge, hurt others. It is the anger in us that also provokes us to speak words of fury and irritation. We know by our experiences that words have the power to hurt and destroy.

In this time of Lent, we are invited to work for reconciliation. It is not simply to think about it but to put it into action by going out to make peace with those who have hurt us or those whom we have hurt. Reconciliation takes precedence over worship. For Jesus, we cannot truly worship God when we are not at peace with those around us.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' invitation for me in this time of prayer?

**Saturday, 27th February, 1st Week of Lent.
Deuteronomy 26:16-19, Matthew 5:43-48**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said, You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Do not even the gentiles do as much? You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

To be perfect is to love like God

'You must, therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect'-We might think that Jesus is calling us to be a perfectionist who cannot accept flaws and carry high demanding expectations. God is perfect in the sense that He is love (1 John 4:16). We are called to be perfect, to be love, just as God our Father is perfect, is love.

Therefore, Jesus puts forth the challenging teaching of loving our enemies and praying for those who make our life difficult. We need to remember that love is not a feeling but an act of the will. Love implies that we will ourselves to choose to pray for the good and safety of those who hate us, to respond with kindness to those who treat us badly, to forgive those who hurt us, etc. On our own, it seems impossible to be perfect as God is, but with Him, all things are possible. In this time of prayer, let us remain in His love so that we can live this day with the power of His love in us.

Questions for reflection:

Do I yearn to be perfect as God is perfect? How can I put love into action?

**Sunday, 28th February, 2nd Sunday of Lent.
Genesis 22:1-2, 9, 10-13, Romans 8:31-34, Mark 9:2-10**

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain on their own by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became brilliantly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus,

'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three shelters, 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 from the cloud there came a voice, '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 were coming 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.

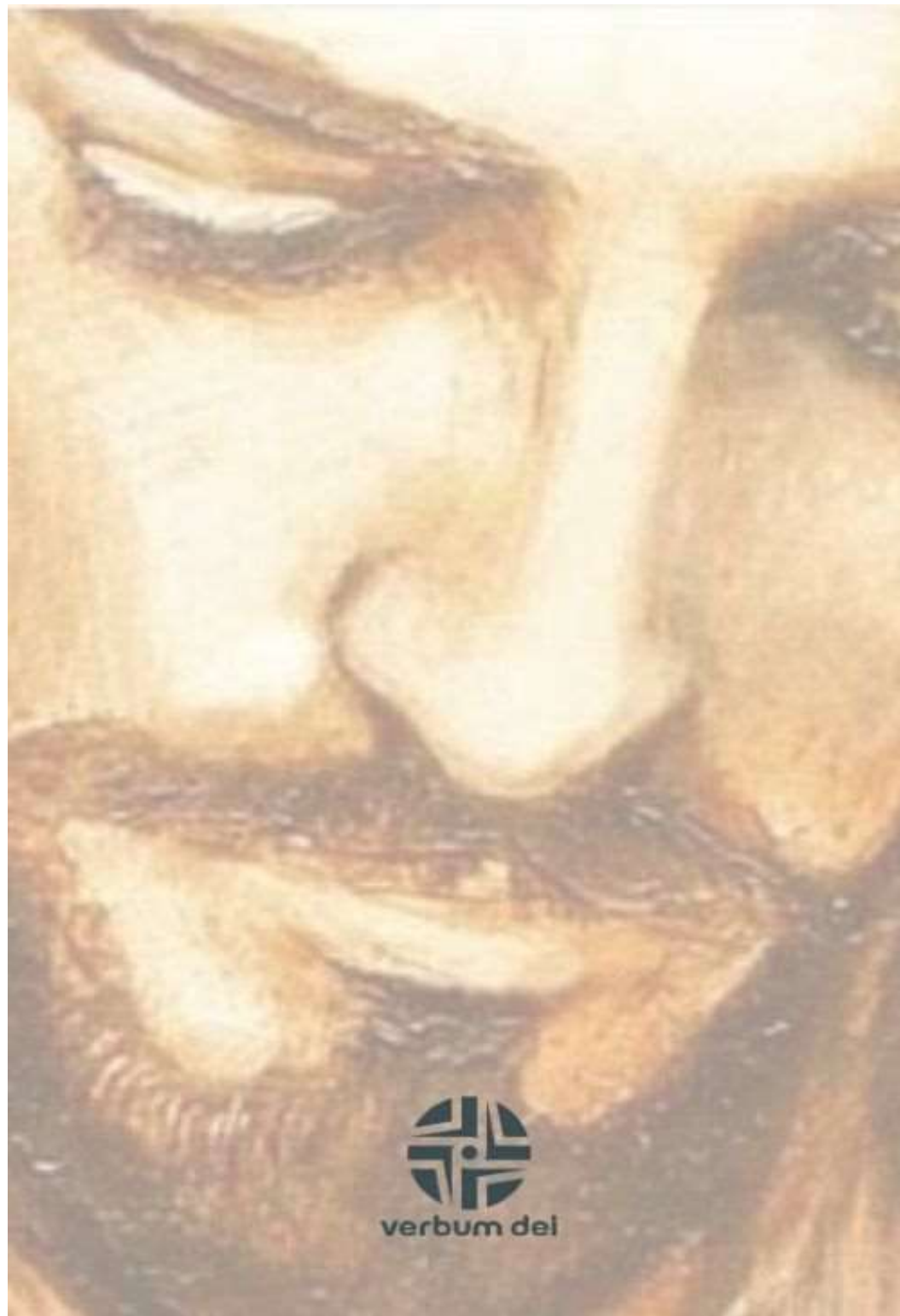
Going up to the mountain of prayer

Jesus, at this point of the gospel, knew that He would be persecuted and killed, because of the radical message of God's love and the actions He performed to reveal the compassionate heart of God. He could sense the hostility of the religious leaders around Him. At this low point of His life, He took His friends up to the high mountain to be by themselves and to pray. In prayer, Jesus experienced the Father's love and radiated with a bright inner light of joy and peace. With renewed strength, Jesus went down the mountain to continue walking the path that leads to the cross.

Today, let us seek and yearn for the experience of God's unconditional love, and so, let us go up the mountain of prayer. As we journey through life, we too experience low moments of fear and loneliness. It is precisely in these moments that we need to go up the mountain, i.e. to enter into prayer and encounter God our Father who is always with us. His unconditional love gives us the renewed strength to go down the mountain and walk on the journey of life with the inner light of joy and peace.

Question for reflection:

While facing difficulties, do I take time to go up the mountain of prayer?



verbum dei