



PRAYER FOR LIVING

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

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verbum dei

Prayer for Living Daily Reflections for Liturgical Year B

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Monday, 1st March, 2nd Week of Lent.
Daniel 9:4-10, Luke 6:36-38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap; because the standard you use will be the standard used for you.'

The paradox of giving

In today's gospel, Jesus invites us to give because the more we give, the more we will receive. We might be wondering what we can give to others. More than giving physical resources, we can give ourselves to others. How? Jesus makes it clear to us: Do not judge but be compassionate, do not condemn, but forgive.

It is by showing compassion and forgiving others that we are giving generously of ourselves. This is not easy because we live in a society that is quick to judge and slow to pardon. In this time of Lent, Jesus calls us to be like God and to have His heart of merciful love that seeks always for communion. It is when we give love that we open ourselves to receive God's abundant love.

Question for reflection:

How can I be more giving in the way I love?

Tuesday, 2nd March, 2nd Week of Lent.
Isaiah 1:10,16-20, Matthew 23:1-12

Addressing the crowds and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practise what they preach. They tie up

heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'

Attitude of loving service

Jesus knows that the temptation to power and pride is one that many people, even church leaders, succumb to. When one is in any position of leadership, he/she tends to want recognition, praises and honour from others, like the religious leaders in Jesus' time who allowed their love for power and pride to harden their hearts against those under their charge.

In the Christian community, we must never forget that we are under the loving care of God our Father and the authority and guidance of Jesus our Teacher. We are all children of God and brothers and sisters to each other. The attitude that we need to have is the willingness to lovingly serve one another: "*The greatest among you must be your servant*". Today, may we follow the example of Jesus who came to serve and not to be served.

Question for reflection:

How can I live this day with this attitude of serving and loving, like Jesus?

**Wednesday, 3rd March, 2nd Week of Lent.
Jeremiah 18:18-20, Matthew 20:17-28**

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, and on the road he took the Twelve aside by themselves and said to them, 'Look, 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 gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised up 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.' Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can.' He said to them, 'Very well; 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 gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become 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.'

Can you drink this cup?

Jesus came to reveal the heart of God's merciful and loving heart. He did it through His actions and words. However, the majority of the religious leaders did not accept His teachings and saw His raising popularity with the people as a threat to their authority. Therefore, Jesus knew that He would soon face death as a consequence of His mission to love. The disciples, on the other

hand, could not understand when Jesus spoke about his imminent death. They were more concerned with having the top places.

To James and John, Jesus asked, "*Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?*" The cup that He was referring to is the cup of sacrifice, the cup of humiliation, the cup of being vulnerable, the cup of lowliness, not of power, honour and glory. Today, can we drink this same cup of Jesus? If the answer is yes, it implies that we need to walk the path of love, by going beyond ourselves for the sake of others.

Question for reflection:

Do I want to drink the cup that Jesus is offering?

**Thursday, 4th March, 2nd Week of Lent.
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 used to lie a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with what fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs came and licked his sores. Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace. 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 embrace. 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." Abraham said, "My son, remember that during your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus his fill of bad. 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 prevent those who want to cross from our side to yours or from your side to ours." So he said, "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." Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them." The rich man replied, "Ah no, father Abraham, 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."

To see the Lazarus of today

What is to be rich according to Jesus? The message of the parable tells us the answer: To have a heart that loves. Love starts with noticing the needs and plight of others and continues by giving and helping them. The rich man in today's gospel is the story of many of us. We, like the rich man, are self-absorbed with our concerns, ambitions, schedules and possessions that we do not notice the "Lazarus" around us who are in much greater need than we are.

This Lent, may we open our hearts to love by paying attention to the needs of others and to give of ourselves to show our care and kindness. The small acts of love can truly make a big difference to another person. Let us strive to be rich in the eyes of God today!

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' invitation to me as I pray with the challenging parable today?

Friday, 5th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

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 thinking, "They will respect my son." 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 at the proper time.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it? '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.

The rejected stone has become the cornerstone

Jesus told this parable to the chief priests and the elders whom He knew would eventually be the ones who would kill Him. Yet, Jesus knew that He, the rejected stone that the builders rejected would be the cornerstone which God His Father would raise. Rejection, hatred and death would not have the final word, but the power of God's love and life.

In our life, we too have experienced rejections by others that have made us feel vulnerable and hurt. It is in these moments of rejections and failures that we can experience the loving presence of God who wants to turn what is negative and painful for us into experiences of growth, maturity and new life. The God of Life is always with us, and so, let us have eyes of faith to see Him at work in situations that we deem as hopeless and discouraging. May we also live fully by responding to His loving call to be faithful tenants who bear good fruit of love in His vineyard.

Question for reflection:

Looking back in those moments when I have experienced the pain of rejection, failure and disappointment, have I experienced God's presence in me and with me?

Saturday, 6th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Micah 7:14-15,18-20, Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to Jesus, and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable: 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will 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 himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father..."

To re-encounter God's unconditional love

This parable is known as the story of the prodigal son. However, the main focus is actually on the father's love for his younger son who took his share of the inheritance and left home as well as for his elder son who was always at home but distanced himself from his father and brother. The father's love for his two lost sons in the parable speaks of God's unconditional and passionate love for us, His children.

In this season of Lent, we are invited to see God as He really is: God who is love. His love never rejects or condemns. Rather, His love rejoices over each person who makes his/her way back to Him and patiently waits for the self-righteous ones who have no mercy towards others. Let us re-encounter His love once again. The challenge is also for us to have this same love of God that always welcomes, embraces and forgives others in their weaknesses.

Question for reflection:

Have I experienced God's unconditional love in moments of my weaknesses?

Sunday, 7th March, 3rd Sunday of Lent.

Exodus 20:1-17, 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, John 2:13-25

When the time of the Jewish Passover was near Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and doves, and the money-changers sitting there. Making a whip out of cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, sheep and cattle as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the dove sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop using my Father's house as a market.' Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: I am eaten up with zeal for your house. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us that you should act like this?' Jesus answered, 'Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple: are you going to raise it up again in three days?' But he was speaking of the Temple 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 what he had said. During his stay in Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he did, but Jesus knew all people and did not

trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about anyone; he could tell what someone had within.

My life is where God is fully present

Jesus was angry at those who were responsible for turning the Temple, the house of prayer into a marketplace of buying and selling, of profits and losses. Out of His zealous passion for the House of God, He drove the merchants out so that it could once again be a true meeting place between God and people.

As we approach the third week of Lent, let us once again be reminded that our life today is a temple, a House of God, a sacred space where God dwells. People whom we meet in our journey of life need to see and meet God in us. Therefore, perhaps the temple of our life is in need of cleansing and purifying from unhealthy habits, attitudes and behaviours that do not reflect the presence of God's love in us. Let us allow Jesus to enter into our lives and renew our hearts and minds with His love.

Question for reflection:

What is in need of cleansing and renewing so that God can truly dwell in my life?

Monday, 8th March. 3rd Week of Lent.

2 Kings 5:1-15, Luke 4:24-30

Jesus came to Nazara and spoke to the people in the synagogue: 'In truth I tell you, 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 town in Sidonia. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured -- only Naaman the Syrian.' 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 off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away.

God has no favourites

“When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged”: They were in great fury to the point that they wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff because they regarded themselves as God’s special people, His chosen nation. They could not accept the message that Jesus came to present which was about God’s love and care for all people regardless of their religion, race, gender or nation. Therefore, their closed and fixed view of God prevented them to accept Jesus and His Good News.

God has no favourites. He loves all people with His universal love. Today, let us reflect: Is this my understanding of God? Do I then open my heart to welcome and love those beyond my race, religion, nation? Today, let us not be like the people of Nazara, who cannot let go of their fixed view of God. Instead, let us allow Jesus to open our hearts to see there is much more to God than we conceive.

Question for reflection:

How do I understand this phrase: “God has no favourites” in the context of today’s gospel?

Tuesday, 9th March, 3rd Week of Lent.
Daniel 3:25, 34-43, Matthew 18:21-35

Peter went up to him 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; 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, with the words, "Be patient with me 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, saying, "Pay what you owe me." His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me 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 the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, 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.'

God forgives, and so must I

The key message of Jesus' message is: Forgiveness has no limits. In the same way that God always forgives us of our sins and mistakes, we too must forgive each other. However, our human tendency is to put limits on the forgiveness and love we extend to others. In the parable, the servant, despite having a huge debt of ten thousand talents, was shown mercy by his master. However, this same servant could not forgive another servant who owed him a very small sum of money, and thus, his inability to forgive the debt of the other led him to misery. The challenge is to give to others what we have generously received from God. God readily forgives us, so too must we do the same.

To forgive is not easy, and so let us ask God for a merciful heart that has the ability to forgive and let go completely of past hurts and resentments, and the peace to see the one who has offended us with compassion.

Question for reflection:

Can I think of someone to whom I need to forgive from my heart?

**Wednesday, 10th March, 3rd Week of Lent.
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. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved. Therefore, anyone 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 person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of Heaven.'

The greatest commandment: Love!

The Pharisees and the religious leaders in the time of Jesus placed great importance on observing the Law. They followed scrupulously the rituals and observances, and often, these took precedence over love for people. Jesus, on the other hand, loved God and people, and everything sprang forth from His immense passionate love. Thus, in today's gospel, Jesus taught that He had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophet but He had come to complete them by His very life. In fact, his whole life was based on the two greatest commandments loving God and loving others, which He also in a later chapter said that "*all the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments.*" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Today, we are invited to go back to the basics of our faith, i.e. to fulfill the two greatest commandments of love. We often do good, because it is the right thing. We pray, fast and give alms because these are the right things that we should do. But do we do all these out of love for God and out of love for those around us?

Questions for reflection:

Do I place importance more on external practices of piety? Or do I allow love for God and others to move me to do good?

Thursday, 11th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Jeremiah 7:23-28, Luke 11:14-23

Jesus was driving out a devil and it was dumb, and it happened that 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 drives devils out.' Others asked him, as a test, for a sign from heaven; but, knowing what they were thinking, he said to them, 'Any kingdom which is divided against itself is heading for ruin, and house collapses against the house. So, too, with Satan: if he is divided against himself, how can his kingdom last? - since you claim that it is through Beelzebul that I drive devils out. Now if it is through Beelzebul that I drive devils out, through whom do your own sons drive them out? They shall be your judges, then. But if it is through the finger of God that I drive devils out, then the kingdom of God has indeed caught you unawares. So long as a strong man fully armed guards his own home, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than himself attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares out his spoil. Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather in with me throws away.'

The finger of God working among us

The people saw Jesus healing a dumb person, and attributed His good deed to the work of Beelzebul, the prince of devils. They failed to recognise “*the finger of God*” at work in and through Jesus because they most likely harboured negative judgment of Him. Therefore, all the good things that He did were seen in a rather negative light. However, the opinions of people did not stop Jesus from working for the good of others. We too have experienced other people misjudging our good actions and misinterpreted our good intentions. May we not allow disappointment to hold us back but continue, like Jesus, to always do good.

We too sometimes can be prone towards thinking ill of others, instead of seeing the good in them. As we journey through Lent, let us also ask for the openness to see and rejoice in the good that others are doing.

Question for reflection:

Do I see the presence of God at work in the situations and the people around me?

Friday, 12th March, 3rd Week of Lent. Hosea 14:2-10, Mark 12: 28-34

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a further 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, only 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 burnt offering 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 any more.

Love God, love others

The scribe went to Jesus and wanted to know which commandment was the first among the many regulations that they had to observe. Jesus gave him the two most important commandments: to love God and to love others.

These two commandments are the essence of our Christian faith. Loving God is the top priority. We are called to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Our love for God is a response to God's love for us. As St. John states, "*We love because God first loved us*" (1 John 4:9). We express our love for God when we open our hearts to love all people by working for their well-being, helping them with compassion, speaking the truth in love, etc. We work for the good of each person in the same way we work for our good, for our development. This implies that our love should not just be for those who are close to us, but also for those whom we do not get along well with as well as those who do not like us. In this Lent, let us ask Jesus for a heart that loves.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' invitation for me today?

Saturday, 13th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Hosea 5:5-6:6, Luke 18:9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright 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 everyone else, 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 justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'

What I want is love, not sacrifice

The Pharisee, in his prayer, thanked God that he had lived an upright and righteous religious life. Yet, in the parable, Jesus praised the tax collector who was regarded as a sinner, not only to the Pharisee but the Jewish society as a whole. Tax collectors were then known to be corrupted people who were wealthy at the expense of others. This particular tax collector went to the Temple and recognised himself as a sinner in need of God's mercy. In the eyes of God, this man's prayer was honest and thus he entered into communion with God. The Pharisee, though scrupulously followed external observances, failed to show mercy to others and instead placed himself as a judge over them. By doing so, he distanced himself from God and others.

As we journey through this season of Lent, let us remember that God values the practice of compassion and mercy more than blindly following external observances. God desires love that is shown in the love for others, as He said in the 1st reading: "*I want is love, not sacrifice*". May we also humbly recognise that we are all sinners who need God's mercy.

Question for reflection:

As I reflect on this parable, who do I identify myself with-the Pharisee or the tax collector?

Sunday, 14th March, 4th Sunday of Lent.

2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23, Ephesians 2:4-10, John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be judged; but whoever does not believe is judged already, because that person does not believe in the Name of God's only Son. And the judgement is this: though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, to prevent his actions from being shown up; but whoever does the truth comes out into the light, so that what he is doing may plainly appear as done in God.'

God so loved the world that He gave His son to us

"...though the light has come into the world people have preferred darkness to the light because their deeds were evil": Jesus, the light of God's love, has come into the world to shine the grace of mercy, forgiveness and peace. By standing close to this light, we see once again how precious and valuable we are for God, as St. Paul states in the 2nd reading, "We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he had meant us to live it".

Indeed, the light of God has come to shine love on all of us. However, we tend to walk away from this light and stay in the darkness of our failures and mistakes that tell us that we are worthless and of the sins that separate us from God and others. Today, let us listen to God telling us that we are His beloved children who are meant to live in the gentle and healing light of His

love. In this light, we are empowered to live a good life- a life of love.

Question for reflection:

What prevents me from entering and living in the light of God's love?

Monday, 15th March, 4th Week of Lent.

Isaiah 65:17-21, John 4:43-54

Jesus left Samaria for Galilee. He himself had declared that a prophet is not honoured in his own home town. 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. And there was a royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum; 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 to him, 'Unless you see signs and portents you will not believe!' '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 went on his way home, and while he was still on the way his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. They replied, 'The fever left him yesterday 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 new sign, the second, Jesus performed on his return from Judaea to Galilee.

A faith that trusts in Jesus' word

Jesus values a faith that simply trusts and believes in His word, without seeking signs of assurances and security. In today's gospel, the royal official has such faith that led his son to be healed. When Jesus told him to go back home because his son

would live, the man did not demand that He had to go back with Him. With trust in Jesus' words, "...your son will live", the officer made his journey home. We could imagine the joy of this man when he saw the fruit of His trust in the healing of his son.

This is the faith that Jesus invites us to have- one that trusts in His word, without needing signs and wonders. Let this royal officer be a model for all of us as we journey through life with Jesus' word of life and love guiding us.

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 16th March, 4th Week of Lent.

Ezekiel 47:1-9,12, John 5:1-16

There was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem next to the Sheep Pool there is a pool called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five porticos; and under these were crowds of sick people, blind, lame, paralysed. for at intervals the angel of the Lord came down into the pool, and the water was disturbed, and the first person to enter the water after this disturbance was cured of any ailment he suffered from. 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 that 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 down there before me.' Jesus said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around.' The man was cured at once, and he picked up his mat and started to walk around. 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 sleeping-mat and walk around." They asked, 'Who is the man who

said to you, "Pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around"? ' The man had no idea who it was, since Jesus had disappeared, as the place was crowded. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said, 'Now you are well again, do not 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 harass Jesus.

Blind to God's presence

Today, we read about a sick man who has been ill for 38 long years. After Jesus healed him, he picked up his sleeping-mat and was confronted by the Jewish authorities for carrying it on a Sabbath day. He did not hesitate and blame Jesus, and later, when he met Jesus again and came to know of his name, he immediately went back to the Jews and told them the identity of Jesus. The actions of this man led the Jewish authorities to persecute Jesus.

The man was healed but he seemed to be blind to God's life-giving action through Jesus and did not give thanks to Him for the good that He did. Even though this man did not show faith or gratitude, it did not stop Jesus from reaching out to him in love. Today, let us be thankful for the gifts that we have received from Jesus, and rejoice to see that He does not reserve His love and compassion only to those who believe in Him, but also to those who do not have faith in Him. The love of God does not discriminate or separate.

Question for reflection:

How do I respond to God's love that seek always for my good?

Wednesday, 17th March, 4th Week of Lent.
Isaiah 49:8-15, John 5:17-30

Jesus said to the Jews: 'My Father still goes on working, and I am at work, too.' But that only made the Jews even more intent on killing him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he spoke of God as his own Father and so made himself God's equal. To this Jesus replied: 'In all truth I tell you, by himself the Son can do nothing; 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 himself does, 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. In all truth I tell you, whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life; without being brought to judgement such a person has passed from death to life. In all truth I tell you, the hour is coming -- indeed it is already here -- when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and all who hear it will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and, because he is the Son of man, has granted him power to give judgement. 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 come forth to life; and those who did evil will come forth to judgement.'

Motivation of my living: God

Today's gospel is the continuation of yesterday's story of Jesus' healing the sick man. The Jewish authorities were furious that He healed the sick man on the Sabbath and thus, breaking the Law. Jesus, however, defended His action by stating that His motivation

that inspired His life was His love for God His Father. Jesus said: *'My Father still goes on working, and I am at work, too.'* Since God is always at work by bringing love, healing, hope, compassion to the world, Jesus continues to work by doing the same. The reason behind healing and helping others was never for His own personal glory and fame, but always for the good of others because He was imitating the heart of His Father. Thus, for God and for others, Jesus worked every single day, even on the Sabbath.

As we read this gospel, let us also reflect on the reason behind what we do and say. Is God our motivation? Today, may our love for God be our motivation for our work and words.

Question for reflection:

What is my motivation for doing what I do?

Thursday, 18th March, 4th Week of Lent.

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 true; but there is another witness who speaks on my behalf, and I know that his testimony is true. 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 mention it. John was a lamp lit 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 deeds my Father has given me to perform, these same deeds 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 whom he has sent. You pore over the scriptures, believing that in them you can find eternal life; it is these scriptures that testify to me, and yet you refuse to come to me to receive life! Human glory 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 should come in his own name you would accept him. How can you believe, since you look to each other for glory and are not concerned with the glory that comes from the one God? Do not imagine that I am going to accuse you before the Father: you have placed your hopes on Moses, and Moses will be the one who accuses you. If you really believed him you would believe me too, since it was about me that he was writing; but if you will not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?’

Human glory means nothing to me!

Today’s passage is a continuation of the previous days. Like the others, it might not be easy to understand. Let us, however, focus on the verse that speaks to you at this point in your life. One key sentence that we can ponder on is: *‘How can you believe since you look to each other for glory and are not concerned with the glory that comes from the one God?’*. Jesus knew that the Jewish leaders worked for human glory and approval instead of God’s. For Jesus, He told them: *‘Human glory means nothing to me’*. What about us? Whose glory and approval are we seeking?

Often, we want people to praise us or glorify us in order to affirm our sense of self-worth, and thus we do things to please them. As Christians, we are called to follow Jesus by rooting our self-worth in God and His love for us. We seek to please Him by doing what He requires from us, which is to love and serve those whom He places along our path. May we today ask God: *“Lord, how do you want me to live my life?”*

Question for reflection:

How can I live each day seeking God’s approval and not human glory?

Friday, 19th March, St. Joseph.

2 Samuel 7:4-5a,12-14a, 16, Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22, Matthew 1:16, 18-21

Jacob fathered 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 an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly 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.'

St. Joseph: a man of faith

Pope Francis declared this year 2021 to be the year of St. Joseph. In his Apostolic letter, the Pope wrote: *'Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture.'* (Patris Corde, 2020).

In today's gospel, St. Joseph's had a plan to divorce Mary informally in order to avoid causing her shame. However, when the Angel presented him with another plan that was different from his own, he listened and obeyed. Even though St. Joseph did not understand fully the whole picture, he trusted in God by letting go of what he wanted, and instead, allowed God to guide him. As we celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph, let us learn from this great saint how to have a faith that trusts in God at all times.

Question for reflection:

How can I allow God to lead me in my daily life as St. Joseph did?

Saturday, 20th March, 4th Week of Lent.

Jeremiah 11:18-20, John 7:40-52

Several people who had been listening to Jesus said, 'He is indeed the prophet,' and some said, 'He is the Christ,' but others said, 'Would the Christ come from Galilee? Does not scripture say that the Christ must be descended from David and come from Bethlehem, the village where David was?' So the people could not agree about him. Some wanted to arrest him, but no one actually laid a hand on him. The guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought him?' The guards replied, 'No one has ever spoken like this man.' 'So,' the Pharisees answered, 'you, too, have been led astray? Have any of the authorities come to believe 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 our Law does not allow us to pass judgement on anyone without first giving him a hearing and discovering what he is doing?' To this they answered, 'Are you a Galilean too? Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not arise in Galilee.'

The courage of Nicodemus

Jesus was a controversial figure among the Jewish people. Some respected Him as a prophet and the Christ. The majority of the Jewish authorities refused to regard as such and condemned Jesus as a man who led people astray and so He needed to be stopped. There is a character mentioned in the gospel passage, Nicodemus. He was a leading Pharisee, who went against his peers and stood up for Jesus. By asking the important question: *'But surely our Law does not allow us to pass judgement on*

anyone without first giving him a hearing and discovering what he is doing?', he was criticised by the others.

We too can be like the Pharisees in the gospel who make a judgment against someone, without knowing the full truth and without trying to understand him/her. Jesus invites us to have an open mind and heart to look at others with compassion. We are also invited to have the courage of Nicodemus and dare to have our own opinions about our faith and stand up for what is true, instead of simply following what others say and do. Let Jesus, who is THE voice of Truth, speak to us today!

Questions for reflection:

Do I tend to judge others? Do I have the courage to stand up for Jesus today?

Sunday, 21st March, 5th Sunday of Lent.

Jeremiah 31: 31-34, Hebrews 5:7-9, John 12: 20-33

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them: Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me, must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him. Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name! A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will again glorify it.' The crowd standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others

said, 'It was an angel speaking to him.' Jesus answered, 'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. 'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself. By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

To follow Jesus is to be the grain that falls and dies

Two Greeks went to Philip with the desire to see Jesus. In our own faith journey, this too should be our constant longing, “*Jesus, I want to see you*”, because there is always more to be seen, to be known, to be loved in our relationship with Jesus.

When Jesus heard that these two wanted to see Him, He gave a rather strange answer to their request. For Jesus, to see Him is not simply to admire Him, but to follow Him, and to follow Him is to follow the path of the grain of wheat. The wheat grain that falls to the ground enters into the process of dying by shedding off its husk in order to yield new life that it carries within itself. If we truly want to serve and follow Jesus, we need to shed the husk of pride, selfishness, personal ambition, etc., in order to give life to others for their growth and their good. We often want to avoid dying, be it physical, emotional or spiritual, because we are afraid of pain and loss. Yet, as we draw closer to Holy Week, Jesus invites us to walk with Him down this path of death that opens up to new life for ourselves and for others.

Question for reflection:

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

Monday, 22nd March, 5th Week of Lent.

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62, John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and

began to teach them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he straightened up and said, 'Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and continued writing on the ground. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. Jesus again straightened up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus. 'Go away, and from this moment sin no more.'

A merciful love

"Neither do I condemn you. Go away, and from this moment sin no more.": Jesus told these words to the woman who was caught committing adultery. His merciful love looked at her with the hope that she could change her life. In the eyes of Jesus, this woman was a person loved by God, and, as Pope Francis stated in a homily in 2016, *"she was not her sin"*.

Jesus' words to this woman are meant for us too: *"Neither do I condemn you. Go away, and from this moment sin no more."* Like this woman, we are unconditionally loved by God and His mercy always gives us a new opportunity to change, to live a new life. As we experienced God's merciful love, we are also called to look at others with mercy, and not to throw stones of judgment at them. In this quiet time of prayer, let us look first at our own hearts and recognise our need for forgiveness and mercy. Listen to Jesus

speaking personally to us, “*I do not condemn you...go and love the same*”.

Questions for reflection:

Who do I identify most in this story? Why?

Tuesday, 23rd March, 5th Week of Lent.

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. So the Jews said to one another, ‘Is he going to kill himself, that he says, “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 judge; but the one who sent me is true, and what I declare to the world I have learnt from him. They did not recognise 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 my own accord. What I say is what the Father has taught me; 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.

The cross: The revelation of God

The Pharisees asked a key question to Jesus: ‘*Who are you?*’, and this is the question that we too need to ask Him because there is always more to Jesus for us to discover. To the Jews, Jesus replied: “*When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am He...*” On the cross, in His moment of weakness, Jesus fully reveals who He is: God in human flesh. This is God. This is He who comes to show us the depth of His love for all

humankind. Jesus on the cross is the crucified God who underwent humiliation and suffering, and even death, in order to be one with us in our loss and pain. In the light of the resurrection, we know that the story of the cross does not end in darkness, but in the light of God's love.

As we draw closer to Holy Week, let us allow Jesus to reveal who God is and the depth of His unconditional love for all of us.

Question for reflection:

At the moment of my greatest darkness, do I experience the light of God's love shining through?

Wednesday, 24th March, 5th Week of Lent.

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 come to know the truth, and the truth will set 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 set free?" ' Jesus replied: 'In all truth I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now a slave has no permanent standing in the household, but a son belongs to it for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free. I know that you are descended from Abraham; but you want to kill me because my word finds no place in you. What I speak of is what I have seen at my Father's side, and you too put into action the lessons you have learnt from your father.' They repeated, 'Our father is Abraham.' Jesus said to them: If you are Abraham's children, do as Abraham did. As it is, you want to kill me, a man who has told you the truth as I have learnt it from God; that is not what Abraham did. You are doing your father's work. They replied, 'We were not born illegitimate, the only father we have is God.' Jesus answered: 'If God were your father, you would

love me, since I have my origin in God and have come from him; I did not come of my own accord, but he sent me.'

Jesus, the source of true freedom

In today's gospel, Jesus speaks of freedom: *'If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples; you will come to know the truth, and the truth will set you free'* and *'So if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free'*. What is this freedom that Jesus is speaking about? It is not a freedom that entails us to do what we want. Rather, it is the true freedom that comes from allowing our lives to be shaped by the Word of God and living the Gospel values of love, forgiveness, compassion, justice and truth.

Jesus the Son is always at work in our lives in order to set us free from all that enslaves us, for example, pride, anger, selfishness, etc., and empowers us to live as people who love without conditions and serve without counting the cost.

Question for reflection:

What prevents me from living and loving with true freedom?

Thursday, 25th 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, you who enjoy God's favor! 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. Look! You are to conceive in your womb 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 have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, 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. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

Mary's "Yes"

'...let it happen to me as you have said.', and with these words, Mary said, "Yes" to God and allowed His purpose in her life to be fulfilled. It did not come easy for Mary to say "Yes" to be the Mother of God. The gospel states that "*she was deeply disturbed*" by the words of the Angel. Yet, she chose to respond with faith and put her trust in God. Her "Yes" made it possible for God to be actively working in and through her life.

God too has a purpose for us in our life. Each day, God calls us in our own situations and in our own ways to bring Christ into our world, by being His presence of love to those around us, working for reconciliation, standing up for justice and truth, etc. Like Mary, it is often not easy for us to say "Yes" to Him. We struggle with our fears, our pride, our many "What ifs", etc. Today, let Mother Mary share with us her faith so that God can truly be the God of our lives!

Question for reflection:

How can I say "Yes" without reservation to God's purpose for my life?

Friday, 26th March, 5th Week of Lent.
Jeremiah 20: 10-13, John 10:31-42

The Jews fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many good works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?' The Jews answered him, 'We are stoning you, not for doing a good work, but for blasphemy; though you are only a man, you claim to be God.' Jesus answered: 'Is it not written in your Law: I said, you are gods? So it uses the word 'gods' of those people to whom the word of God was addressed -- and scripture cannot be set aside. Yet to someone whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world you say, 'You are blaspheming' because I said, 'I am 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 certain that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' They again wanted to arrest him then, but he eluded their clutches. He went back again to the far side of the Jordan to the district where John had been baptising at first and he stayed there. Many people who came to him said, 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true; and many of them believed in him.

To follow Jesus by doing good works

'I have shown you many good works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?'. All Jesus did was good works that revealed God the Father's love for all, especially the vulnerable and the weakest in society. Despite all the good He did, some people wanted to stone Him. Yet, Jesus did not stop doing what was good, what was right. Eventually, He would indeed be put to death by crucifixion.

Have we ever faced rejections and hostility from others, despite our good works? What do we do in such situations? Often, it is easy to do nothing in order to avoid confrontations with others.

Today, let us contemplate on Jesus' life and see that He preserved in loving and doing good because His source of strength and courage came from His loving union with God the Father. Contemplating on His life, may we be faithful to follow Jesus and strive always to do what is good and loving.

Question for reflection:

Do I tend to stop doing what is right, good and loving just to avoid troubles and conflicts?

Saturday, 27th March, 5th Week of Lent.

Ezekiel 37:21-28, John 11: 45-56

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees to tell them 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 suppress the Holy Place and our nation.' One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, 'You do not seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is to your advantage that one man should die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish.' He did not speak in his own person, but as high priest of that year he was prophesying that Jesus was to die for the nation- and not for the nation only, but also to gather together into one the scattered children of God. From that day onwards 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 was drawing near, and many of the country people who had gone up to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves were looking 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?'

For Jesus, each individual is important

In the gospel, Caiaphas, the high priest, decided that one man should die for the nation. For him, the life of an individual was nothing compared to the nation, and thus Jesus should be sacrificed for the collective good. For Jesus, however, each and every person matters. He is, like the shepherd, who left the 99 sheep to search for the single lost sheep. He is, like the woman who lost one coin and turned her house upside-down in order to find that coin. He is, like the father, who goes out to each son to show his love (Luke 15, 1-32). His whole life was to reach out to love each sinner (Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10), each outcast (Matthew, Matthew 9:9, Samaritan woman, John 4:1-25), each sick person (Mark 10:46-52, Matthew 8:1-4).

Today, Jesus invites us to look at each person as precious and to extend our love for the individual and his/her well-being. Each person, no matter how insignificant, is important and worthy of our attention and care.

Question for reflection:

Do I look at each person through the eyes of Jesus or Caiaphas?

**Sunday, 28th March, Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord.
Isaiah 50:4-7, Philipians 2:6-11, Mark 14:1-15:47**

It was two days before the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread, and the chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by some trick and have him put to death. For they said, 'It must not be during the festivities, or there will be a disturbance among the people.' He was at Bethany in the house of Simon, a man who had suffered from a virulent skin-disease; he was at table when a woman came in with an alabaster jar of very

costly ointment, pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the ointment on his head...

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of those who stood by heard this, they said, 'Listen, he is calling on Elijah.' Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it to him to drink saying, 'Wait! And see if Elijah will come to take him down.' But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, 'In truth this man was Son of God.' There were some women watching from a distance. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James the younger and Joset, and Salome. These used to follow him and look after him when he was in Galilee. And many other women were there who had come up to Jerusalem with him. It was now evening, and since it was Preparation Day -- that is, the day before the Sabbath- there came Joseph of Arimathaea, a prominent member of the Council, who himself lived in the hope of seeing the kingdom of God, and he boldly went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate, astonished that he should have died so soon, summoned the centurion and enquired if he had been dead for some time. Having been assured of this by the centurion, he granted the corpse to Joseph who bought a shroud, took Jesus down from the cross, wrapped him in the shroud and laid him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the entrance to the tomb. Mary of Magdala and Mary the mother of Joset took note of where he was laid.

Journey with Jesus to the cross

The gospel portrays the final journey of Jesus to the cross. In this journey, we encounter various people who stood by Jesus faithfully as well as encountered Him with eyes of faith. A woman anointed the head of Jesus with expensive perfume to express her

love for Him. The Roman centurion, a pagan, witnessed the death of Jesus and recognised that He was the son of God. The women disciples watching the death of their beloved Master and took note of where His body was laid. Joseph of Arimathaea courageously went to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus so that he could bury him with dignity. However, there were people: Judas, the high priest and the whole Sanhedrin, the crowd, Pilate, etc., who played a part in crucifying Jesus.

As we enter into Holy Week, we are invited to journey with Jesus as a friend and a disciple. Let us take our place among those who chose to be faithful to Him to the end.

Question for reflection:

How do the different responses of the people towards Jesus challenge me in my following as His disciple?

**Monday of Holy Week, 29th March.
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 filled with the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot -- one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him--said, 'Why was this ointment not 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 contents. So Jesus said, 'Leave her alone; let her keep it 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.

Hearts motivated by love for Jesus

We are invited to contemplate on His final days before His death. Knowing that His life was under threat, He chose to spend time with His friends. Likewise, each of His friends chose to express their love to Jesus: Martha served Him a good meal, Lazarus stayed close to Jesus at the table and Mary anointed His feet with expensive perfume. Each of them did what they did, not because of pragmatic reason or out of obligation, but simply out of love for Jesus. Judas looked at Mary's gesture of love as wasteful and started to criticise her. He did what He did, not out of love for Jesus or even the poor, but because, according to the gospel, he was a thief and used to help himself to the funds. His heart was filled with greed, not love.

As we enter into Holy Week, we are called to accompany Jesus and spend time with Him as His friends, like Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Let us also put Jesus as our motivation behind every prayer, fasting, word and action.

Question for reflection:

What is my motivation for doing what I do in this Holy Week?

Tuesday of Holy Week, 30th March.

Isaiah 49:1-6, John 13:21-33, 36-38

Jesus was deeply disturbed and declared, 'In all truth I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.' The disciples looked at each other, wondering whom 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 close to Jesus' chest he said, 'Who is it, Lord?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I give the

piece of bread that I dip in the dish.' And when he had dipped the piece of bread he 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 why 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. It was night. 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. Little children, I shall be with you only a little 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, 'Now you cannot follow me where I am going, but later you shall follow me.' Peter said to him, 'Why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' 'Lay down your life for me?' answered Jesus. 'In all truth I tell you, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'

Judas and Peter

This gospel took place after Jesus washed the disciples' feet, including the ones of Judas and Peter. Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. Because of this, His heart was troubled. We too might have the experience the pain and sadness of being betrayed by a friend. What did Jesus do with this human experience of being betrayed? He continued to love Judas. In the Jewish culture, the gesture of the host offering a piece of bread dipped in the dish to a person is an expression of showing respect and affection to him. Jesus did this gesture of love to Judas, but the latter had already made up his mind to betray Him. On the other hand, Jesus knew too that Peter would deny Him three times, even though he claimed that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus too continued to love Peter.

Today, we are invited to contemplate on Jesus and His faithful love for His betrayer and His denier. He loved us too despite our imperfections. Jesus looks at us and asks, “*What about you? Will you follow me to the end?*”

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus’ invitation for me as I pray with this passage?

Wednesday of Holy Week, 31st March.

Isaiah 50:4-9a, 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 then onwards he began to look 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?' He said, 'Go to a certain man in the city 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. And while they were eating he said, 'In truth I tell you, one of you is about to betray me.' They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, 'Not me, 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 me, Rabbi, surely?' Jesus answered, 'It is you who say it.'

To follow Jesus with greater faithfulness

As we journey into Holy Week, we are asked to examine our own discipleship and love for Jesus. In the gospel, we see Judas

Iscariot secretly going to the chief priests to betray Jesus, his master, for money. We too have the capacity, like Judas, to betray Jesus when we choose not to love Him in our brothers and sisters, especially those who are the weakest and the most vulnerable. Jesus knew Judas' decision to betray Him and He still welcomed him to be part of the Last Supper, to the meal of communion. His unconditional love never turned anyone away.

Let us ask Jesus for the strength to love Him and follow Him with greater faithfulness. May we be in communion with Jesus in the same way He is with us.

Question for reflection:

How can I love Jesus in those around me as an expression of my desire to be His true and faithful disciple?



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