



PRAYER FOR LIVING

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

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Prayer for Living Daily Reflections for Liturgical Year B

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Thursday, 1st July, 13th Week Ordinary Time.

Genesis 22:1-19, Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his home town. And suddenly some people brought him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Take comfort, my child, your sins are forgiven.' And now some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is being blasphemous.' Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, 'Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' -- then he said to the paralytic-'get up, pick up your bed and go off home.' And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for having given such authority to human beings.

Carrying others to Jesus

"Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic...". In today's gospel, when some people carried the paralytic man to Jesus, The care of these people demonstrated towards their friend touched Him. He saw the faith that these friends had in Him. Because of this, Jesus was moved to heal the man, both physically as well as spiritually.

We might not be paralyzed like the man in the gospel. However, many of us have experienced moments when our lack of faith paralyzes us as we struggled with the storms in life. In such moments, we find ourselves carried by the faith of others to Jesus. In other moments, we have also helped others as we brought them and led them to Jesus. Though our faith is indeed personal, it is never private. In this journey of faith and life, we depend on each other and are called to carry each other always to greater faith in Jesus.

Question for reflection:

How can I bring others to Jesus?

Friday, 2nd July, 13th Week Ordinary Time.

Genesis 23:1-4, 19; 24:1-8, 62-67, Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up

and followed him. Now while he was at table in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed I came to call not the upright, but sinners.'

Jesus includes all and loves all

Matthew, a tax collector, was known by those around him as a public sinner. On the other hand, Jesus looked at him, saw the good in him, and invited him to experience the embrace of God's mercy and love. Later, He even shared a meal at Matthew's house with other tax collectors and public outcasts. Jesus did what He did because His mission was to bring God's love to all people, especially to the "sick" and the "sinner".

Today, Jesus takes the initiative and comes to us because He sees the good in us that we sometimes might not recognise in ourselves. He invites us to enter into the embrace of God's mercy which has the power to transform us, heal us and empower us so that we, in turn, can follow Jesus as His disciples, as His instruments to bring His love to all people, without exception. May we respond to Jesus and open our hearts to love like Him.

Questions for reflection:

Am I prejudiced against someone? How can I respond to Jesus as He calls me again to follow Him?

Saturday, 3rd July, St. Thomas Apostle.

Ephesians 2:19-22, John 20:24-29

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, 'We have seen the Lord,' but he answered, 'Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors

were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

The patient love of Jesus

Thomas was full of doubt and declared that he would not believe that Jesus had risen until he saw Him with his own eyes and touched his wounds in his hands and side. Today, as we read the gospel passage, let us find comfort in Jesus' patient and tender love. Jesus, appearing again to His disciples, addressed these words to Thomas, "*Put your fingers here; look, here are my hands... Do not be unbelieving anymore but believe.*" Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for his doubts, but He encountered him and assented to his request. We do not know if Thomas placed his hands in Jesus' wounds, but we do know that this encounter was so strong that he exclaimed his confession of faith, "*My Lord and my God!*"

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of St. Thomas, let us find comfort that Jesus always comes to us as we are, even in those moments when we doubt God and His love for us. May we allow Jesus to lead us to deeper faith today.

Questions for reflection:

Which phrase or word strikes me as I read the passage? Why?

Sunday, 4th July, 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Ezekiel 2:2-5, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Mark 6:1-6

Jesus went to his hometown, 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.

To see God in everything

The people of Nazareth refused to accept Jesus as a prophet who spoke words of wisdom and miracles that touched and changed many lives.

For them, Jesus was too familiar, ordinary, known.

We too tend to look for God in extraordinary phenomena and fail to see His beauty and wonder in everything, especially in the familiar and the ordinary. The invitation is to have the eyes of faith to see God's presence all around us and that He can use people who are familiar to us as His instruments.

We can also encounter God under challenging experiences, like St. Paul in the 2nd reading. St. Paul wanted to get rid of the "*thorn in the flesh*", which could refer to an illness, a crisis, a difficult person in his life. He heard God telling him: "*My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness*". He realised that his weakness is a chance to experience God's presence. Today, let us ask for the grace to see God in everything and everyone.

Question for reflection:

What prevents me from seeing God's presence in the ordinary and the familiar?

Monday, 5th July, 14th Week Ordinary Time.

Genesis 28:10-22, Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus was speaking to them, suddenly one of the officials came up, who bowed low in front of him and said, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved.' Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him. Then suddenly from behind him came a woman, who had been suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years, and she touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was thinking, 'If only I can touch his cloak I shall be saved.' Jesus turned round and saw her; and he said to her, 'Courage, my daughter, your faith has saved

you.' And from that moment the woman was saved. When Jesus reached the official's house and saw the flute-players, with the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Get out of here; the little girl is not dead; she is asleep.' And they ridiculed him. But when the people had been turned out he went inside and took her by the hand; and she stood up. And the news of this spread all round the countryside.

To pray with faith

In today's gospel, we see two people approaching Jesus. One was an official who went to beg Jesus to heal his daughter and another was a woman who went to seek healing for herself. The thing that both had in common was their faith in Him. Because of their faith that led them to open their hearts to trust Him, they experienced His life-giving presence. For when God finds an open and trusting heart, then He can work wonders there.

Like the official, we, through our prayers, carry people who are sick and those in need to Jesus. Like the woman who suffered from haemorrhage, we reach out to Jesus with our personal needs. Do we have the same faith as the official and the woman when we approach Jesus in prayer? What is this faith that we are talking about here? Faith is born from love and that is expressed in perfect trust. Jesus wants to enter into our lives and give us His life-giving presence, but He needs us to have the faith that opens our hearts to trust and love Him. Today, let us go to Jesus with great faith in Him.

Question for reflection:

Do I have the same faith as the official and the woman when approaching Jesus in prayer?

Tuesday, 6th July, St. Maria Goretti.

Genesis 32:23-33, Matthew 9: 32-38

A man was brought to Jesus, a dumb demoniac. And when the devil was driven out, the dumb man spoke and the people were amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils.' Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease

and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest.'

To labour alongside Jesus

Jesus never stopped working for the good and the well-being of others. He constantly placed Himself at the service of the people who needed Him. In today's passage, Jesus healed a dumb person and went around the towns and villages to teach and proclaim the Good news and heal more people with all kinds of illness. He worked with His heart that was constantly filled with compassion for the people. Today, Jesus wants us, His disciples, to work with Him by placing our talents and gifts in the service of the people. Are we generous in giving our "Yes" to God?

In the same passage, we also see two kinds of responses to Jesus' good works. The Pharisees dismissed Jesus and His work while the people saw God's presence and work in Jesus. Today, we are also invited to be quick to see the presence of God around us, especially in the good and loving work that others do.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus inviting me to put into practice today?

Wednesday, 7th July, 14th Week Ordinary Time.

Genesis 41:55-57; 42: 5-7, Matthew 10:1-7

Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who was also his betrayer. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.'

Chosen to be His disciples

“These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; ...” As we read the list of names, we might wonder if Jesus could have called and chosen the wrong people to be His disciples. These people whom Jesus entrusted with His mission would fail Him time and time again with their bickering about who was the best, their lack of understanding, etc. In Jesus' most utmost moment of need, Peter would deny Him, Judas would betray Him and the rest would run away from Him. Jesus chose and called each of His disciples deliberately and willingly. The disciples, on their part, needed to exercise their freedom to keep choosing Him.

Today, let us remember that Jesus chooses and calls each of us to be His disciples, and He entrusts us with the mission of sharing God's love with those around us. However, His choice of us does not mean that we would remain faithful to our call. Therefore, each day, we need to keep on choosing Him and commit ourselves to walk the path of discipleship faithfully.

Question for reflection:

How can I live this day choosing Jesus who has first chosen me?

Thursday, 8th July, 14th Week Ordinary Time.

Genesis 44:18-21, 23-29; 45:1-5, Matthew 10:7-15

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: ‘As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the labourer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you go into, seek out someone worthy and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, may your peace come upon it; if it does not, may your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. In truth I tell you, on

the Day of Judgement it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.'

Staying faithful to the mission even in the face of rejection

Through His words and actions, Jesus came to reveal the true face of God, i.e. A God who loves all, welcomes all. Yet, He was met with criticism, scepticism, and rejection from those who refused to listen or accept Him. In today's gospel, Jesus warned His disciples that they too would encounter people who would not welcome or listen to them. He reminded them to keep on working for the mission even though they might face negative responses.

The message for us today is that we must never stop loving and doing good regardless of how others respond to us. Our motivation for the mission is to pass on the message of God's love and bring as many people to encounter Him.

Question for reflection:

Am I ready to continue Jesus' mission of love even though I might experience negative responses from others?

Friday, 9th July, SS. Augustine Zhao Rong and companions.

Genesis 46:1-7; 28-30, Matthew 10:16-23

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Look, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as snakes and yet innocent as doves. Be prepared for people to hand you over to sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as evidence to them and to the gentiles. But when you are handed over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will come forward against their parents and have them put to death. You will be universally hated on account of my name; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved. If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another. In truth I tell you, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes.

Courageous sheep among wolves

To be Jesus' disciple and live out the gospel values in a pluralistic society is not an easy task. It is often easier to keep our head down and blend into our surroundings to not stick out like a sore thumb. However, as Christians, we are meant to go against the current to offer the Good News of Jesus to others. We are called to work for social justice, have a say in racial discrimination, be in solidarity with the poor and the weak, etc. Today, the gospel passage calls us to be courageous in the living of our faith in Jesus and His values of love, compassion, honesty, and justice.

Listen to Jesus as He invites us to be sheep among wolves. It is not for us to be lost sheep but sheep who follow Him, the Good Shepherd. Jesus, our Shepherd, walks with us and guides us as we walk on in this path to be His living presence in this world. Let us keep our eyes on Him!

Question for reflection:

Am I willing to face opposition and hostility in following you?

Saturday, 10th July, 14th Week Ordinary Time.

Genesis 49:29-32; 50:15-26, Matthew 10:24-33

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Disciple is not superior to teacher, nor slave to master. It is enough for disciple to grow to be like teacher, and slave like master. If they have called the master of the house "Beelzebul", how much more the members of his household? So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

There is no need to be afraid because I am loved by God

“Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows”. As we read and reflect on these words of Jesus, let us find comfort in knowing that God our Father is taking care of us. A sparrow is one of the smallest birds, and yet not one falls to the ground without God knowing about it. If God cares for a sparrow, how much more us, who have been created in His same image and likeness. God cares for each one of us and is not indifferent to us. On the contrary, he loves us with a personal love.

“So there is no need to be afraid”: The reason why we are unafraid is that God loves and cares for us. Rooted in the security of being loved, we can face life's challenges with peace and hope. Embraced by God's love, we dare to go and bear witness to Jesus to those around us.

Question for reflection:

How can I entrust myself more to God?

Sunday, 11th July, 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Amos 7:12-15, Ephesians 1:3-14, 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.

To travel light

The call to discipleship implies the call to mission. In today's gospel, Jesus sent His disciples out so that they could be the continuation of the mission that He had started. Today, Jesus too entrusts us to be His presence in the environments we are in. We can be Jesus' hands, feet,

heart, voice just by loving and doing acts of kindness to those we meet each day.

“And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff ...”. Many of us find comfort in being in control and preparing ourselves by accumulating extra things for unexpected contingencies. Jesus calls us to learn to travel light through this journey of life. He tells us, in the same way, that he instructed His disciples, to take only one thing with them, i.e. a staff. What is a staff? A staff is a long stick that one carries for support in walking. Perhaps we can ask ourselves in this time of prayer: who or what is my staff that helps and supports me as I live my mission as Jesus’ disciple today? May we learn to walk each day with unwavering trust in God.

Question for reflection:

How willingly am I to travel light so that I can trust more in God?

Monday, 12th July, 15th Week Ordinary Time.

Exodus 1:8-14, 22, Matthew 10:34-11:1

Jesus instructs the Twelve as follows: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household. No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.' When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

The tough road of discipleship

The gospel speaks of sayings by Jesus regarding discipleship. Some of us might be uncomfortable with the opening lines of Jesus in the gospel passage today: *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword.”* Jesus knows that His presence causes divisions, even among family members. Often, we might find ourselves misunderstood or even rejected by our loved ones and friends when we try to live out the gospel values and take a stand for what is right. This is because some people in our lives might not fully embrace Jesus and what He stands for.

Divisions happen when we are forced to choose to be for Him or to be against Him. We are called to love Jesus above everyone else. This is the primary condition for discipleship. May we always dare to take up the cross and follow Jesus faithfully to the end and have Him as our first love.

Question for reflection:

Is Jesus my first love?

Tuesday, 13th July, St. Henry.

Exodus 2:1-15, Matthew 11:20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent. 'Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on Judgement Day than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised as high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have been standing yet. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on Judgement Day than for you.'

Moved by love, we speak

“Jesus began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent”: Jesus went to the towns to reveal the loving and merciful heart of God to the people. Despite the good works that they saw, the people refused to repent and be open to

God's presence in Him. Jesus was frustrated with them for not responding to what He had to offer. Reading and reflecting on this passage, we might be uncomfortable with this scene of Jesus getting angry and scolding the people because we would prefer Him to utter words of love and compassion. Jesus spoke those hard words to the people because He was loving them.

True love sometimes implies the need to speak the truth that must be said for the good of others. Jesus, moved by love for the people, spoke those difficult words to them. Today, Jesus shows us that love sometimes implies telling the truth with prudence and care when we see others making choices and living lives that do not reflect Christ and His values.

Question for reflection:

Do I let love guide me to speak to others for their growth and their good?

Wednesday, 14th July, St. Camillus de Lellis.

Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12, Matthew 11:25-27

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

Humility is the soil where faith in God takes root

The greatest obstacle to grow in a deeper relationship with God is pride. Pride closes one's heart to love and trust God and instead rely on one's strength. While pride is an obstacle, humility is the soil where faith in God grows and blossoms. In today's gospel, Jesus recognised that the pride and self-assurance of the religious leaders prevented them from encountering God more deeply. But, on the other hand, He recognised that it was the simple people who were the ones discovering God's love because they were humble enough to recognise their own needs and poverty.

Often we think that we need to be 'experts' in matters of faith. Today, let this gospel remind us to have the fundamental attitude of humility if we genuinely want to allow Jesus to draw us into a more intimate relationship with God our Father. We need to acknowledge that we are on this life-long journey to know God with our mind and heart. In this prayer time, let us be aware of our own need and our own poverty before God, and be open to welcome what He has to communicate to us.

Question for reflection:

Am I humble enough to recognise that I know little and am still on this journey to know and encounter God more?

Thursday, 15th July, St. Bonaventure.

Exodus 3:13-20, Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Come to me and rest

Let these words of Jesus echo within us: "*Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest*". Jesus is the one personally calling us to come to Him and promises us to give us the rest we desire. In this Covid-ridden world, we can be tired in body, mind and spirit, and thus, Jesus wants to walk with us and gives us the strength to face each challenge and hardship with peace and hope.

"Shoulder my yoke...": A yoke is a wooden beam fitted on the necks of two oxens and attached to a plough. It allows the two animals to share the heavy load and pull it together. Jesus does not promise us that our lives will be free from carrying heavy burdens. Instead, He offers us His yoke that is easy and light for us to have because He is the one carrying it with us. Let us come before Jesus today and give Him our tiredness and ask Him to renew our strength once again.

Question for reflection:

Do I hear Jesus' gentle invitation to come to Him and find rest in Him?

Friday, 16th July, Our Lady of Carmel.
Exodus 11:10-12: 14, Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus went through the cornfields one Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath.' But he said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God and they ate the loaves of the offering although neither he nor his followers were permitted to eat them, but only the priests? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the Temple priests break the Sabbath without committing any fault? Now here, I tell you, is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of man is master of the Sabbath.'

Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice

The Pharisees criticised Jesus' disciples because they considered their action of picking the ears of corn as breaking the Sabbath law. They were concerned with the observances of rules and empty sacrificial offerings that they missed the essential value of being merciful as God desired of them. Jesus responded to their condemnation by bringing them back to the core truth of the religion by quoting Prophet Hosea: "*Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice*".

To be merciful entails placing the needs of the human person above following religious rules and norms. It is to feed the hungry, welcome the rejected ones, care for the needy, forgive the shortcomings of others, etc. Today, let us be aware of the self-righteousness within us that tend to be quick to criticise and condemn others. May we put mercy as our top priority above all else.

Question for reflection:

Do I allow mercy to shape my heart and guide my thoughts?

Saturday, 17th July, 15th Week Ordinary Time.

Exodus 12: 37-42, Matthew 12: 14-21

The Pharisees went out and began to plot against him, discussing how to destroy him. Jesus knew this and withdrew from the district. Many followed him and he cured them all but warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: Look! My servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul delights, I will send my Spirit upon him, and he will present judgement to the nations; he will not brawl or cry out, his voice is not heard in the streets, he will not break the crushed reed, or snuff the faltering wick, until he has made judgement victorious; in him the nations will put their hope.

Walking in Jesus' footsteps

The gospel today starts with a rather unsettling statement: “*The Pharisees went out and began to plot against him, discussing how to destroy him*”. They seek to destroy Jesus because they found Jesus a threat to their power. Jesus, on the other hand, dedicated Himself to bring life to others. He came to heal and cure, not to destroy and kill. Matthew, the evangelist, recognises Jesus as the fulfilment of the words of Prophet Isaiah. Jesus, God's servant, His beloved, lived His life working for the good of others quietly and persistently. He was always on the side of the weak and the vulnerable.

God has chosen us as His beloved children and given us the mission of following in the footsteps of Jesus. By our words and actions, we are to bring God's love to those around us, especially marginalised people.

Question for reflection:

How can I walk in Jesus' footsteps today?

Sunday, 18th July, 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Jeremiah 23:1-6, Ephesians 2:13-18, 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.

The Lord is my shepherd

The first reading, Psalm, as well as the gospel speak of the image of the shepherd. In the 1st reading, God said that He would raise shepherds who would look after His sheep and that the sheep would not be afraid anymore. In Ps 23, we have read the beautiful words of *"The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want"*. In the gospel, we see Jesus looking at the crowd with compassion because He recognised that they were like sheep without a shepherd. Setting aside His plans to rest, He became their shepherd and placed Himself at their service by teaching them at some length. Today, Jesus looks at us with the heart of the Good Shepherd. With Him, we have everything we need. He feeds us with His Word, the Scripture. He nourishes us with His self-giving love in the Eucharist. He stays with us and keeps us safe in His presence, and thus, we are not afraid.

Today, Jesus our Shepherd invites us to seek Him because He wants to nourish us with His presence. Staying with Jesus, He will lead us to become loving and caring shepherds to others in our lives.

Question for reflection:

Looking at the people around me, how can I be a good shepherd to them?

Monday, 19th July, 16th Week Ordinary Time.

Exodus 14:5-18, Matthew 12:38-42

Some of the scribes and Pharisees spoke up. 'Master,' they said, 'we should like to see a sign from you.' He replied, 'It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. On Judgement Day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and they will be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented; and

look, there is something greater than Jonah here. On Judgement Day the Queen of the South will appear against this generation and be its 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.

“...look, there is something greater...”

The religious leaders approached Jesus and asked for a sign to show that He was from God because they were skeptical about His teachings and His works. Jesus used King Solomon and Jonah the prophet, two revered Old Testament figures, as examples to show the hardness of hearts of His contemporaries. The people of Nineveh recognised the greatness of Jonah and they repented when He told them to do so. The queen of the south went to King Solomon because she recognised His greatness and wanted to hear His wisdom. “*..and look, there is something greater than Jonah/ Solomon here*”: Jesus pointed out to the religious leaders that they failed to see and value who they had in front of them because He was much greater than all the kings and the prophets of Israel.

In this time of prayer, Jesus invites us to look with eyes of faith and see that He is greater than Jonah, than Solomon, than any person we admire. He is “greater” because He is Jesus, the human form of God, who is present to us in each moment of today.

Question for reflection:

How deep is my faith in Jesus?

Tuesday, 20th July, St. Aponillinaris.

Exodus 14:21-15:1, Matthew 12:46-50

Jesus was speaking to the crowds when suddenly his mother and his brothers were standing outside and were anxious to have a word with him. Someone said to him: Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to speak to you. But to the man who told him this Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'

Here is my brother, my sister

In today's gospel, Jesus' family was anxious to have a word with Him. They stood outside the crowd, waiting to get His attention. However, instead of attending to His family, Jesus turned to His listeners and declared that His disciples as His family. Today, He looks at us who are His disciples and calls us His brothers and His sisters.

Let us pause and ponder on this reality that we are members of His new family. We are united with Jesus and with each other, not by blood ties, but by the desire to do God's will. What is God's will? His will is that we might live a life of love by building communion with others and working for justice, peace and truth, especially for the most vulnerable among us. We might sometimes fail to do God's will, but Jesus continues to regard us as His disciples, His new family.

Question for reflection:

As Jesus' brother/sister, how can I concretely bring God's love to others?

Wednesday, 21st July, St. Lawrence of Brindisi.

Exodus 16:1-5, 9-15, Matthew 13:1-9

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, and he told them many things in parables. He said, 'Listen, a sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

God's love never discriminates

"Listen, a sower went out to sow...". Who is this sower? Why does he sow the seed indiscriminately onto the edge of the path, the rocky soil, the thorny ground and the rich soil? Why doesn't he simply focus on sowing his seed just onto the rich soil? God is like this sower who scatters the seed of His Word everywhere because the Good News of

His love is meant for the good soil as well as the bad soil. This is how generous our God is with His love that never discriminates.

This parable also gives us hope. We too have experienced the moments when our words and acts of kindness, encouragement and love seem to have fallen into hard, stony and thorny grounds of the hearts of others. It is tempting to fall into despair. Yet, today's gospel passage reminds us to keep hoping and keep loving. Following the Sower, we too keep speaking words of love and sowing acts of kindness to reveal the true heart of our loving God.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus telling me through this gospel passage today?

Thursday, 22nd July, St. Mary Magdalene.

Song of Songs 3:1-4, John 20:1-2, 11-18

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,' she said, 'and we don't know where they have put him.' But Mary was standing outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, as she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she replied, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.' Jesus said, 'Mary!' She turned round then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' -- which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala told the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that he had said these things to her.

Jesus calls us by name and sends us out

Today, we celebrate the feast day of St. Mary Magdalene, the Apostle of the Apostles. Her faithfulness to Jesus led her to the tomb, and later, she wept with sorrow as she realised that His body was not there. Imagine her joy when Jesus, her Master and Friend, came to her and called her by her name, “*Mary*”. Now that she found Him, she wanted to hold onto Him. Jesus, however, sent her out as His announcer of the Good News of His resurrection. Without delay, she went back to the rest of the disciples and told them the joyful news, “*I have seen the Lord*”.

In our faith journey, we, like Mary Magdalene, experience low points of sadness, uncertainty and grief, and high points of receiving lights in prayer, encountering Jesus and experiencing His peace. In this journey, Jesus always calls each one of us by name and asks us to go forward to live with hope and to share the Good News of our faith. We can do so because we know that He is with us- always and forever. May St. Mary Magdalene be our inspiration as we grow in our love for Jesus and take Him to others.

Questions for reflection:

Which phrase or word strikes me as I read the gospel passage? Why?

Friday, 23rd July, St. Bridget of Sweden.

Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘So pay attention to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the Evil One comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path. The seed sown on patches of rock is someone who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But such a person has no root deep down and does not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once he falls away. The seed sown in thorns is someone who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and so it produces nothing. And the seed sown in rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.’

Allowing God's Word to make a home in our hearts

The Word of God is effective and life-transforming, but we have to open ourselves to it for it to bear fruit. In today's gospel, Jesus stated four various hindrances that can deter us from receiving the Word of God in a way that bears fruit. The first obstacle is hearing the Word but without understanding due to hurried listening of the Word. The second obstacle is superficial taking in of the Word and we do not ponder and allow it to take root in our lives. Finally, the third obstacle refers to being immersed in the anxieties, comforts and pleasures in life that we allow these thorns to choke God's presence.

Allowing the Word of God to bear fruit in our lives is not spontaneous for us. We need to make an effort not to let the obstacles block the seed of God's Word to take root, grow and flourish. The good news is that God never gives up on any of us. On the contrary, he commits Himself to keep on scattering the seed of His Word in our hearts and patiently waits for us to allow it to bear fruit by listening to it and putting it into practice.

Question for reflection:

What distractions and worldly pleasures I might have that tend to threaten the growth of God's Word in my life?

Saturday, 24th July, 16th Week Ordinary Time.

Exodus 24: 3-8, Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus put another parable before the crowds, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the darnel appeared as well. The owner's labourers went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" He said to them, "Some enemy has done this." And the labourers said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?" But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn." '

To be patient with others in the same way God is patient with us

The gospel today uses the images of darnel and wheat. Darnel is a bad weed that looks like wheat in its growing stage. The servants wanted to remove the darnel because they were useless. The owner, however, had a different response to the situation. He was more tolerant of the darnel and allowed it to exist with the wheat. So what is the meaning of this parable for us?

The Church and our faith communities that represent the Kingdom of God here in our world are made up of good people (wheat) and not-so-good people (darnel). We tend to reject the darnel in our midst. God, however, shines His love on both the darnel and the wheat, the good and the bad, and He said to us, “*Let them both grow*”. Our task is to be patient and loving to those whom we consider as “darnel” and play our part in helping them to change and grow to become better persons. God is merciful, and so we too must be merciful.

Question for reflection:

How can I be more patient with the “darnel” in my life?

Sunday, 25th July, 17th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

2 Kings 4:42-44, Ephesians 4:1-6, John 6:1-15

Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee -- or of Tiberias- and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he had done in curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. The time of the Jewish Passover was near. Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' He said this only to put Philip to the test; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would not buy enough to give them a little piece each.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'Here is a small boy with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that among so many?' Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; he then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing is wasted.' So they picked them up

and filled twelve large baskets with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. Seeing the sign that he had done, the people said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, as he realised they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, fled back to the hills alone.

Giving our five loaves and two fish to Jesus for others

Seeing the hungry crowd, Jesus asked Philip where food could be bought to feed the people. Philip was overwhelmed by the seemingly impossible situation. Andrew saw the boy with five barley loaves and two fish, but he did not see any hope in this small fare. He said, "*What is that among so many?*". On the other hand, Jesus took the five barley loaves and two fish from the boy who willingly gave them to Him. He gave thanks to God and somehow fed the hungry people.

We tend to feel that we have little or even nothing to offer to Jesus when He calls us to help Him feed the people around us. However, the meagre resources we have can impact people when we willingly offer them to Jesus and trust that He is the one who makes much of what we give. So today, let us step out of our comfort zone and simply give, share, care because we never know where or how our efforts of loving others may truly bear fruit.

Question for reflection:

Do I dare to go beyond myself and offer the little that I have?

Monday, 26th July, SS. Joachim and Anne.

Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34, Matthew 13:31-35

Jesus put another parable before the crowds, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.' He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.' In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: I will speak to you in parables, unfold what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

To do small acts of love with Jesus

In today's gospel, Jesus put two parables before His listeners. One speaks of the little mustard seed that grows into a large shrub. Another parable is about the yeast that has the power to leaven the dough. What seems small and insignificant at the start leads to significant results at the end.

We often look at the little that we do and wonder if we are creating any difference or bearing any fruit. Today, through the gospel passage, Jesus wants to assure us that the little love we put, the little patience we exercise, the little effort to reach out to someone, the little acts of mercy we do, etc. can have a considerable impact on the lives of the people around us. Thus, the invitation is to keep loving, and God will work wonders through us.

Question for reflection:

Today, do I have the faith that my small mustard seed will grow into a big shrub?

Tuesday, 27th July, 17th Week Ordinary Time.

Exodus 33:7-11; 34: 5-9, 28, Matthew 13:36-43

Leaving the crowds, Jesus went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable about the darnel in the field.'

He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the Evil One; the enemy who sowed it, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of falling and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

The name of God is mercy

It is not our role to judge who the good wheat is and who is the darnel. We believe that God, who loves the saints and the sinners, is the Final

Judge, not us. Often, we tend to regard the loveable ones in our life as wheat and disregard those we struggle to get along with as darnel. St. Paul wrote in the letters to the Romans, "*Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister*" (Romans 14:13). Thus, the call for us is to put mercy, not judgment, into practice because God judges with compassion and love. "*I will say this: mercy is real; it is the first attribute of God.*" (Pope Francis)

We live in this field where wheat and darnel exist. Let us ask for the grace to know that though we are sinners, God loves us and sends us out to this field to be His instrument of mercy to others.

Question for reflection:

"In the evening of our life, we will be judged on love alone" (St. John of the Cross): In the context of today's prayer, how can I strive to love by showing compassion and mercy to others?

Wednesday, 28th July, 17th Week Ordinary Time.

Exodus 34:29-35, Matthew 13:44-46

Jesus said to the crowds: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.'

Having God as our treasure

Jesus spoke to the crowds about a worker and a merchant who both searched and found treasures. Both these two persons experienced the deep joy of discovering the treasures that provoked them to take the necessary steps to obtain them.

The Kingdom of God, which is the presence of God of love in our lives, is this priceless treasure and this valuable pearl. As Christians, our primary search in life is not to search for ways to have more money or comfortable life, but more of God. When we have God in our lives, we have the inner joy and peace to do His will by walking the path of mercy

and love. Today, let us seek God with our whole hearts, minds and strength.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' invitation for me as I pray with this gospel passage today?

Thursday, 29th July, St Martha.

1 John 4:7-16, Luke 10:38-42 (Alternative gospel)

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

To choose the better part: From prayer to service

In today's gospel passage, Martha busied herself to cook a meal for Jesus, her dear friend. In her preparation, she looked and saw her sister, Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening attentively to what He had to say. She was so free to turn to Jesus and said, "Lord, do you not care...?". Jesus told Martha, "...It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her". By saying these words, Jesus was not downplaying the importance of service. In fact, Jesus was the first one who was constantly placing Himself at the service of those who were most in need of Him. He too declared that He came to serve and not to be served (Matthew 20:28). The main point here is that Jesus wanted Martha not to lose focus on what was indeed essential.

Today, let the words of Jesus to Martha speak to us. We too live in a world where we are always worried and frantic over deadlines and things to do that we often forget that Jesus is waiting for us to be with Him and listen to His Word that nourishes and strengthens us. As we celebrate the feast of St. Martha, may we learn from her to welcome Jesus into our homes and our lives and not to lose the importance of being with Him in our work and service.

Question for reflection:

Have I been working hard for God that I have forgotten to be with Him in silence and prayer?

Friday, 30th July, St. Peter Chrysologus.

Levites 23:1, 4-11, 15-16, 27, 34-37, Matthew 13:54-58

Coming to his home town, Jesus taught the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were astonished and said, 'Where did the man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? His sisters, too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?' And they would not accept him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house,' and he did not work many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Open my eyes to see you, Lord

The people of Nazareth could not accept that God was working in Jesus and through Him. They saw Jesus growing up in the village and knew His family. However, they could not understand where He, the carpenter's son, got the wisdom and the power to perform miracles. As the saying goes, "*familiarity breeds contempt*". Jesus lamented that a prophet would only be respected everywhere except among his own people. As a result of their lack of faith, His hands were tied to work many miracles among them.

As we read this gospel passage, let us listen attentively to Jesus as He asks us to open our eyes of faith to perceive that God can use anyone, even our family members and friends, to be His instrument to reach out to us. May we be humble and not dismiss what is familiar but to see God in the ordinary.

Question for reflection:

Am I open to the wisdom of familiar people around me?

Saturday, 31st July, St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Levites 25:1, 8-17, Matthew 14:1-12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the reputation of Jesus and said to his court, 'This is John the Baptist himself; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Now it was Herod who had arrested John, chained him up and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John had told him, 'It is against the Law for you to have her.' He had wanted to kill him but was afraid of the people, who regarded John as a prophet. Then, during the celebrations for Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and so delighted Herod that he promised on oath to give her anything she asked. Prompted by her mother she said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head, here, on a dish.' The king was distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he ordered it to be given her, and sent and had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought in on a dish and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. John's disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went off to tell Jesus.

The price of integrity

Today, the gospel speaks of King, a weak man, who compromised the truth because he wanted to please others. It also tells us of the death of John the Baptist, who dared to speak the truth to the King and did not compromise in what he believed. In the process, he paid his life for standing up for God's values. Today, let us allow this gospel story to speak to us as it invites us to reflect on which character we identify ourselves with: Herod or John the Baptist.

Today, we are called to imitate John the Baptist and walk the truth and integrity path. We must courageously stand up for our faith and witness the Gospel values, even when doing so leads us to walk the path of humiliation, rejection and even persecution. May God give us the grace to have the courage to be people of integrity.

Question for reflection:

Am I a person of integrity?



"Feed Them" by Jorge Cocco