



PRAYER FOR LIVING

DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR
LITURGICAL YEAR B~AUGUST

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Sunday, 1st August, 18th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15, Ephesians 4:17, 20-24, John 6:24-35

When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered: In all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal. Then they said to him, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the one he has sent.' So they said, 'What sign will you yourself do, the sight of which will make us believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Jesus answered them: In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 'Sir,' they said, 'give us that bread always.' Jesus answered them: I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever hunger; no one who believes in me will ever thirst.'

Keeping our sight on what endures

The people went looking for Jesus. They were the ones whom Jesus fed in the wilderness by multiplying five loaves and two fish. Jesus knew that they came seeking Him because they were concerned with fulfilling their physical hunger and not because they were yearning for Him, the Giver. Does this passage have meaning for us today?

Jesus does not want us to be indifferent to our physical wants and needs. He does not want us to be overly absorbed in satisfying our bodily needs to the extent that we forget to pay attention to our spiritual hunger. As we ponder on Jesus' words, we must face the reality that the true meaning of our life is not in the things that we have but in eternal life, which is to share in God's life in our here and now by being in an enduring relationship with Jesus. Let us listen to Him as He reveals Himself to us, "*I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever*

hunger; no one who believes in me will ever thirst.” Today, let us keep our sight on what endures!

Questions for reflection:

What is my intention for going to Jesus? To grow in my relationship with Him or for what I can get?

Monday, 2nd August, 18th Week of Ordinary Time.

Numbers 11:4-15, Matthew 14:13-21

When Jesus received this news he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the crowds heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick. When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' So he said, 'Bring them here to me.' He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples, who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. Now about five thousand men had eaten, to say nothing of women and children.

Open our hearts to others

After receiving the news of John the Baptist's death, Jesus wanted to be in a lonely place to find silence, prayer and rest. Yet, when He saw the crowds of people arriving there ahead of Him, Jesus responded to them with compassion. He set aside His plans and placed the needs of the people before His. As we reflect on this scene, let us ask Jesus to help us to be open in situations when our plans suddenly had to change due to people coming to us for help. Like Him, we respond with compassion and have eyes of faith to see that God is present in those who come to us with their needs.

As evening approached, Jesus' disciples wanted the people to leave. Jesus' answer was: *“There is no need for them to go: give them*

something to eat yourselves”. Let us pause again and reflect on the compassionate heart of our God, who never sends anyone away, but constantly takes care of all. Today, we rejoice that Jesus will never send us away when we go to Him in our poverty and that He counts on us to be His instruments to support and help those who are more in need.

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 3rd August, 18th Week of Ordinary Time.

Numbers 12:1-13, Matthew 14: 22-36

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he sent the crowds away. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, while the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a head-wind. In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea, and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.' It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!' Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.' Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the local people recognised him they spread the news through the whole neighbourhood and took all that were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were saved.

Keeping our eyes on Jesus, especially when we face the storms in life

Like the disciples in today’s passage, many of us find ourselves struggling with the storms of uncertainties and fears from the Covid-19 pandemic. We might also find ourselves battling with the strong winds of problems at home and work. In our storms, Jesus comes to meet us. He tells us, “*Courage! It is me! Don’t be afraid.*” Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with

us, is here and tell us not to be afraid. Stay with these words and allow Jesus to give us the peace that we so desire.

In the passage, Peter, feeling courageous, walked on water towards Jesus, but He started to sink because he noticed the wind and began to fear. Immediately, Jesus stretched out His hands and pulled him out of the water. When we feel vulnerable and weak, Jesus is always there holding out His hands to help us stand up and keep walking to firmer ground. We need to keep looking at Jesus and know that His love will always keep us from sinking.

Question for reflection:

What keeps me from listening to Jesus with trust as He tells me, “*Courage! It is me! Don’t be afraid.*”?

Wednesday, 4th August, 18th Week of Ordinary Time, St. John Vianney.

Numbers 13:1-2, 25-14:1, 26-29,34-35, Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he said not a word in answer to her. And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.

Jesus praises the faith of a Canaanite woman

Have we ever experienced praying to God for our need or the need of a loved one, and He seemed to be silent? So often, when we find that God is not answering our prayers, we choose to give up. Today, let us look at this Canaanite woman who did not give up asking and pleading just because Jesus did not say a word to her. Instead, she kept asking and

even went right up to Jesus, knelt at His feet and said, “*Lord, help me*”. She did not give up because she wanted her sick daughter to be healed.

Jesus’ reply to this woman was not promising as He said that it was not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to little dogs. However, the woman was not discouraged by what He said, but she replied with humility that she would be content with the crumbs that fell from the table. Jesus admired her “*great faith*” and healed her daughter. Today, let us yearn to have such great faith that keeps asking, keeps seeking, keeps persevering, keep believing.

Questions for reflection:

Jesus said to the Canaanite woman, “*Woman, you have great faith...*”. How was the faith of this woman? How is my faith?

Thursday, 5th August, 18th Week of Ordinary Time. Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major.

Numbers 20: 1-13, Matthew 16:13-23

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to say to anyone that he was the Christ. From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to rebuke him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said, 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.'

A rock or a stumbling block

Jesus asks us today, “*Who do you say I am?*”. The answer has to come from our own personal convictions rooted in our relationship with Him. In the passage, Peter answered, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*”. Because of His confession of faith, Jesus entrusted Peter to be the rock, the firm foundation on which the community of disciples and believers would depend on. Yet, the next moment, Peter, the rock, became a stumbling block for Jesus. Peter rebuked Jesus for declaring Himself to be a Christ who would suffer and die a violent death. Peter wanted a glorious Christ and not a suffering Messiah. Nevertheless, Jesus continued to trust in Peter to be the rock for His community despite his failure to understand.

Today, Jesus continues to love and keeps faith in us to be the rocks of faith on which others in our lives can rely, even though we keep failing Him. He patiently accompanies us in our journey of growing in our faith and leads us to a deeper relationship of love with Him.

Question for reflection:

“*Who do you say I am?*”: In a sentence, what is my personal conviction of faith?

Friday, 6th August, Transfiguration of the Lord.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14, Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain on their own by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became brilliantly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus, 'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus. As they were coming down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

The transfiguration moments in our journey

As we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration, let us focus on the three disciples, Peter, James and John. At this stage of their following of Jesus, they were full of fear and uncertainty of where the path would take them as they drew near to Jerusalem. If Jesus, their Master, would suffer and die as He had predicted, what would happen to them? We can perhaps identify with these disciples. These months of the pandemic have been causing many of us to be anxious and uncertain. Like these disciples, we seem to live in darkness and do not know what will happen next.

On that mountain, Peter, James and John received the light of consolation and hope that they badly needed when they witnessed God's presence shining through Jesus and heard His voice speaking those comforting words, "*This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him*".

As we reflect on this passage, Jesus wants to reassure us that we are never alone in the dark moments of fear, sadness, anxiety and failure. There will always be grace-filled moments in which we will experience the light of His love and comfort as well as listen to His voice that guides us.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' message to me today?

Saturday, 7th August, 18th Week of Ordinary Time.

Deuteronomy 6:4-13, Matthew 17:14-20

A man came up to Jesus and went down on his knees before him. 'Lord,' he said, 'take pity on my son: he is demented and in a wretched state; he is always falling into fire and into water. I took him to your disciples and they were unable to cure him.' In reply, Jesus said, 'Faithless and perverse generation! How much longer must I be with you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him here to me.' And when Jesus rebuked it the devil came out of the boy, who was cured from that moment. Then the disciples came privately to Jesus. 'Why were we unable to drive it out?' they asked. He answered, 'Because you have so little faith. In truth I tell you, if your faith is the size of a mustard seed you

will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you.'

I do have faith, Lord, but help me with my little faith

Jesus' disciples tried to heal a man's sick son but they were unable to. After Jesus healed the boy, the disciples went to Him and asked, "*Why were we unable to drive it out?*" This failure to heal the boy made them to face their own limitations and helplessness.

Let us reflect on this question that the disciples posed to Jesus, and identify those moments when we too have come face-to-face with situations that seem to test our inability to do the right things and make us recognise our limitations. We ask ourselves, "*Why can't I do this?...*". Jesus' reply to His disciples, "*Because you have so little faith*". Like the disciples, we have faith in Jesus, but "*little faith*" which weakens when we look at the overwhelming situations and forget to fix our gaze on Him and trust more in Him. Today, Jesus invites us to keep growing to know and love Him so that we can have trusting faith in Him.

Question for reflection:

Do I desire to have a strong, trusting faith in Jesus?

Sunday, 8th August, 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

1 Kings 19:4-8, Ephesians 4:30-5:2, John 6:41-51

The Jews were complaining to each other about Jesus, because he had said, 'I am the bread that has come down from heaven.' They were saying, 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven?"' Jesus said in reply to them, 'Stop complaining to each other. 'No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father, and learnt from him, comes to me. Not that anybody has seen the Father, except him who has his being from God: he has seen the Father. In all truth I tell you, everyone who believes has eternal life I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who

eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Stop complaining because Christ is our hope

At the start of today's gospel, the people started to grumble due to their presumed familiarity with Jesus and His parents, and thus, they murmured, "*How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven?"*". These words revealed their unbelief and their refusal to listen to what Jesus had to say.

Like Jesus' listeners, we often tend to complain. We complain about our jobs, our colleagues, our neighbours, our lives, etc. We grumble about the people in the parish. We whine that God's ways are hard to understand and live by. Our excessive grumblings can thrust others into pessimism and despair. Today, Jesus tells us, with the same words He said the Jews in today's gospel, "*Stop complaining to each other*". Instead, He calls us to go to Him, who is our Bread of Life, and allow Him to nourish us with His love that gives us the strength to walk on the journey of life with hope. As Christians, we need to have hope in Jesus, who is alive in the Eucharist and present in His Word.

Question for reflection:

How can I allow myself to be guided by Christian hope and not negativity?

Monday, 9th August, 19th Week of Ordinary Time, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Matthew 17:22-27

When they were together in Galilee, Jesus said to his disciples, 'The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death, and on the third day he will be raised up again.' And a great sadness came over them. *When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel came to Peter and said, 'Does your master not pay the half-shekel?' 'Yes,' he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, 'Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?' And when he replied, 'From foreigners,' Jesus said, 'Well then, the sons are exempt. However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that rises,*

open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.'

On suffering and temple tax

In today's gospel, Jesus told His disciples that He would soon face His suffering, death and resurrection. Naturally, the disciples were overwhelmed with great sadness. Without faith, suffering and death are difficult realities for us to grasp fully. Let us, as Christians, walk this path of suffering in the light of Christ's resurrection, trusting that pain, failure, loss and even death do not have the final word.

Later, tax collectors went to Peter and asked if Jesus paid the Temple tax. In Jesus' opinion, He and His disciples were free not to pay it because they were the sons and daughters of God the Father. However, He told Peter to go ahead and make the payment so as prevent causing scandal or offending others. As God's children, we are free in regards to some matters, but our freedom still needs to be governed by love, i.e. a love that seeks the well-being of others. Thus, at times, we need to put aside our rights and privileges in order to see how best we can exercise our love for others by serving and helping them.

Question for reflection:

What strikes me the most in this passage?

Tuesday, 10th August, St. Lawrence.

2 Corinthians 9:6-10, John 12:24-26

Jesus said to his disciples: '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.'

In dying, we find life

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Lawrence, who was martyred for his faith in Christ and his service to the poor in year 258. Today, as we ponder on Jesus' words in the gospel, we are reminded of what it means to be His disciple, which implies the willingness to pass through death so as to enter into fullness of life and open up that life to many people.

“Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”. The world speaks of the survival of the fittest. Many people work hard to preserve and improve their lives as much as possible, often at the expense of others, especially the poor and the weak in society. Are we ready to be the grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies? Are we willing to die to our self-seeking and prideful attitudes? Jesus calls us to die to ourselves so as to live for God and others. This is because by dying, we find fullness of life, not only for ourselves, but we become channels of life for others.

Question for reflection:

What must die in me, that I may live life to the fullness and give life to others?

**Wednesday, 11th August, 19th Week of Ordinary Time, St. Clare.
Deuteronomy 34:1-12, Matthew 18:15-20**

Jesus said to his disciples, 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: whatever the misdemeanour, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector. In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.'

Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing but delights in the truth

Are we concerned for the spiritual and moral health of our fellow brothers and sisters in our faith community, in our parish? It is not easy to correct someone when he/she errs or deal with internal conflicts in the community. Instead, we often choose to shrug these problems aside and continue minding our own business or even to enjoy gossiping about the erring member. The gospel today lists down how the early community deal with fraternal correction. Though we no longer follow the same procedure today, the underlying message is still valid for us, i.e. we are

all responsible for the faith and life of each other. Therefore, we need to care and look out for one another and correct the other if there is a need. We do all this because love has to be the motivating force that binds us together. If we correct someone without love in us, then we are making ourselves be nuisances.

“For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them”: Jesus is with us in our faith community, in the Church. His constant message is to love our fellow brothers and sisters in the same way that He loves us.

Question for reflection:

To what extent do I feel responsible for the spiritual and moral well-being of my fellow brothers and sisters?

Thursday, 12th August, 19th Week of Ordinary Time, St. Jane Frances de Chantal.

Joshua 3:7-11, 13-17, Matthew 18:21-19:1

Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. 'And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; 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.' Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and he left Galilee and came into the territory of Judaea on the far side of the Jordan.

The call to forgive without limits

Peter asked Jesus a question about forgiveness. He said, "Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?". Peter suggested seven times because it represents completion for the Jewish people. Thus, to forgive seven times would be enough. However, Jesus answered Peter, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times", which means unlimited forgiveness. Jesus then told a parable that speaks of the master who readily forgave the servant's huge debt because he exercised mercy towards him. Jesus wants us to grasp this reality that God, as the master, is merciful, and He forgives without limits. Are we aware that God is always ready to forgive us?

However, let us not forget that there is a second part to this parable. This same servant could not forgive his fellow servant when the latter failed to pay him back what he owed and had him thrown into prison. Let us not be like this servant who failed to allow mercy to guide his thoughts and actions. Instead, let us allow the merciful love of God to mould and shape our hearts so that we can, in turn, forgive those who sin against us.

Question for reflection:

Am I known to be merciful and forgiving?

Friday, 13th August, 19th Week of Ordinary Time, SS. Pontian and Hippolytus.

Joshua 24:1-13, Matthew 19:3-12

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and to put him to the test they said, 'Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?' He answered, 'Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one

flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.' They said to him, 'Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?' He said to them, 'It was because you were so hard-hearted, that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: anyone who divorces his wife -- I am not speaking of an illicit marriage -- and marries another, is guilty of adultery.' The disciples said to him, 'If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry.' But he replied, 'It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.'

To be a mirror of God's love

We, created in God's image and likeness, are called to be a reflection of God's love. In today's gospel, Jesus spoke about marriage as a relationship based on faithful and unconditional love. It is a love that builds communion where the two individuals become one. A married couple's communion of love mirrors God's faithful love for His people.

Though we know of broken marriages, we should neither judge nor ostracise anyone. Instead, as Church, we are called to offer welcome, help, and accompany couples who are facing troubles in their family life.

In the final part of today's gospel, Jesus also spoke about people who chose to remain single. Jesus Himself was not married and dedicated His life to be at the service of love and communion. Thus, it does not matter whether we are married or single because the key point is that we, as children of God, must seek to work for communion and that our all-embracing love must always reflect His faithful and unconditional love.

Question for reflection:

How can the way I love be a reflection of God's love?

Saturday, 14th August, 19th Week of Ordinary Time, St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Joshua 24:14-29, Matthew 19:13-15

People brought little children to him, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded them, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of Heaven belongs.' Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Seeing others through the eyes of Jesus

In Jesus' time, children were regarded as unimportant. Therefore, when some people brought their children to Jesus for Him to lay His hands on them and pray, the disciples regarded these children as "unworthy" for Jesus. However, Jesus told the disciples to let them come to Him because they were important and had special place in His heart.

What is the message for us as we pray and meditate on this passage? We tend to look at people from a worldly perspective. We admire and respect those who are wealthy and powerful. We tend to look down on people who seem to be weak and those without rights or status. Today, Jesus looks at the little ones, i.e. at those whom society disregard as unimportant, as great and valuable because they too have the dignity of being children of God and are deeply loved by Him. Who are the little ones around us whom we tend to ignore and disregard? Perhaps it is time for us to look at people through the eyes of Jesus.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' message for me today?

Sunday, 15th August, The Assumption of Mary.

Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6, 10, 1 Corinthians 15:2-26, Luke 1:39-56

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

blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.' And Mary said: 'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him. He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love -according to the promise he made to our ancestors -- of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever. Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home.

The Feast of the Assumption

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption. Mary, a human person like us, was taken up, body and soul, to God at the end of her earthly life, and there, she prays for us. Let us ponder on this reality that God raised Mary, not just her soul but also her body. Thus, it speaks to us of the sacred value and dignity of the human body in the eyes of God. We have been gifted with our bodies, where God dwells (1 Corinthians 6:19). Each body, though different, has a value, be it the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, etc. We are called to treat each person with love and to be a blessing, not pain, for others.

Our human bodies are instruments for doing acts of love. In the gospel today, Mary, moved by love, physically went to be with her elderly cousin, Elizabeth, who was in need. Today, with our bodies, may we extend care and help to those in need and thus, be a blessing for others.

Question for reflection:

In this awareness that my body is a gift, how can I share my life with others and communicate God's love?

Monday, 16th August, 20th Week of Ordinary Time, St. Stephen of Hungary.

Judges 2:11-19, Matthew 19:16-22

A man came to Jesus and asked, 'Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what

is good? There is one alone who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said, 'Which ones?' Jesus replied, 'These: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. Honour your father and your mother. You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?' Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But when the young man heard these words he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Taking the step to let go

'Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?' In the gospel passage, a man asked Jesus this question because He wanted to find the path to eternal life, i.e., communion with God. Yet, how many of us take the time to ask such questions? Do we long to seek to be in loving communion with God here, now and forever?

When Jesus told this man to let go of his wealth and give his money to the poor, he walked away because he could not have the strength to do as he was told. In a way, he could not let go because he felt that his wealth was the source of his happiness and life. What about us today? We, like this man, have things, people, habits and even attitudes in us that we cling onto, which we struggle to let go of, because we are convinced that we can find our security, happiness and comfort in them. Today, let us listen to Jesus as He beckons us to go to Him and find in Him as the source where we can find true happiness, security and peace.

Question for reflection:

What holds me back from the One who is the source of eternal life?

Tuesday, 17th August, 20th Week of Ordinary Time.

Judges 6:11-24, Matthew 19:23-30

Jesus said to his disciples, 'In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven.' When the disciples heard this they were astonished. 'Who can be saved, then?' they said. Jesus gazed at them.

'By human resources', he told them, 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.' Then Peter answered and said, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?' Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of man is seated on his throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life. Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

Happy are the poor, for they are rich in God's sight

"...it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven.", Jesus was not against money. Instead, He was against people who hoard money and make it to be their god. He was aware of the danger and temptation of having too many possessions. Wealth and material possessions can drive people to be proud and self-sufficient and live their lives without needing God. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus said, *"Happy are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven"*. The poor in spirit are the ones who recognise that they need God because He is the source of their daily strength.

Peter wondered, *"Who then can be saved?"* Jesus replied, *"...for God everything is possible."* Let us find comfort in these words because, in God's perspective, nobody is hopeless. He is always at work in our lives to draw us into His loving presence. As long as we open a little to Him, it is enough for God to come and give us the riches of His love.

Question for reflection:

Do I live my life depending on God?

Wednesday, 18th August, 20th Week of Ordinary Time.

Judges 9:6-15, Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Now the kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day and sent them to his vineyard. Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage." So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the

same. Then at about the eleventh hour he went out and found more men standing around, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because no one has hired us," they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too." In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first." So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner saying, "The men who came last have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the lastcomer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?" Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

God gives His love to all people without exception

In the parable, the landowner hired workers at different hours in the day, and in the end, paid them all one denarius each for their work. A normal landowner would have just paid the workers according to the hours they spent labouring in the field. This is considered fair and just according to the world. However, the landowner did not follow the ways of the world. This is point that Jesus wanted to make with this parable. God is like this landowner. His ways are not like the ways of the world. He goes beyond justice and acts based on mercy and love by not treating us according to our merits and what we deserve. Instead, God generously and lavishly pours His mercy and love to all, including to those we regard as undeserving.

As we pray, let us experience the inexhaustible and lavish love of God our Father. Let us allow ourselves to be loved by Him so that we can learn how to share His love with those around us generously.

Question for reflection:

How can I apply this parable to my life?

**Thursday, 19th August, 20th Week of Ordinary Time, St. John Eudes.
Judges 11:29-39, Matthew 22:1-14**

Jesus began to speak to them in parables once again, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants with the words, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, my banquet is all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their towns. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding." So these servants went out onto the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth." For many are invited but not all are chosen.'

Come to the feast!

The underlying message of today's gospel is that all people are welcomed to enter into God's banquet of His goodness and love. God invites us, and patiently awaits our response. The question is: Do we accept His invitation? Or do we make excuses and move away from Him? Let us be amazed that God's all-embracing love is not just for a select few but also for all, without distinction and condition.

Our "yes" to be with God in His banquet of love implies that we must put on our wedding garment. St. Paul makes clear what this garment looks like: *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together*

in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:12-14). Being with God and having His love in our hearts moves us to commit ourselves to share what we have with others.

Question for reflection:

Today, will I listen to God’s invitation to come to Him and be nourished in His feast of love?

Friday, 20th August, 20th Week of Ordinary Time, St. Bernard.

Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14-16, 22, Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to put him to the test, one of them put a further question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'

Loving God and loving our neighbour

“Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?”. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people observed many commandments to the point that they could miss out on what really matters. When the religious leaders asked Jesus this question, He took the opportunity to go straight to the basics of the religion, i.e. love God and love others. For Jesus, the greatest commandment of loving God was inseparable from the second commandment of loving others. This is also the core of our Christian faith.

Our love for God is expressed in our love for our neighbour. In this time of prayer, let us ask ourselves: Who is my neighbour? A “neighbour” is the people God has placed in our lives, and this includes even the people we do not like or those we disregard as insignificant. On our own, we might find it hard to love others in our lives. That is why we need to depend on God and allow Him to be the one empowering us to love others in the way He loves them.

Question for reflection:

Lord, who is my neighbour?

**Saturday, 21st August, 20th Week of Ordinary Time, St. Pius X.
Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11, 4:13-17, 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.'

To be great is to be at the service of others

"The greatest among you must be your servant..". For the religious leaders in Jesus' time, they strived to be in influential positions and for titles of honour. Jesus defined greatness as love for those around us and the willingness to serve the needs of others. In the life of Jesus, He was constantly placing Himself at the service of others. We remembered His humble action of washing the feet of the twelve disciples.

As Christians, we are called to follow Jesus, our Master, by walking the same path of love and service, and not of honour and pretence of self-importance. Jesus tells us that we have only one Master, one Father, one Teacher. Let us look to Jesus and be eager to follow His example of love and service. Let us enter into the heart of God our Father and allow ourselves to be loved by Him so that His love can be the foundation of our love for others.

Questions for reflection:

Do I want others to consider me as important? How can I follow Jesus in this path of loving service?

Sunday, 22nd August, 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Joshua 24:1-2, 15-17, 18, Ephesians 5:21-32, John 6:60-69

After hearing his doctrine, many of the followers of Jesus said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this disturb you? What if you should see the Son of man ascend to where he was before? 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset who did not believe and who was to betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me except by the gift of the Father.' After this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied him no more. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Choosing to follow Jesus today

After Jesus revealed Himself as the Bread of Life, many of His followers decided that they could not accept Him and walked away. Jesus asked His disciples, “*What about you, do you want to go away too?*” Peter responded with faith, “*Lord, to whom shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life...*”

To follow Jesus implies walking in faith. Faith is a gift from God, but it also involves us making a decision. Our faithful following of Jesus in the past does not guarantee that we will continue to follow Him today or in the future. We need to choose to be Jesus’ friend and disciple each and every day. Today, Jesus comes to us and asks us to make a personal decision, “*Do you want to go away? Will you choose me to be with me and let me be the one shaping your life?*” Like Peter, we need to exercise our faith to say to Jesus, “*I choose you today because you have the message of eternal life.*”

Question for reflection:

“*What about you, do you want to go away too?*”. What is my answer to Jesus’ question?

Monday, 23rd July, 21st Week of Ordinary Time, St. Rose of Lima.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 8-10, Matthew 23:13-22

Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of Heaven in people's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go who want to. 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and anyone who becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are. 'Alas for you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force; but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound." Fools and blind! For which is of greater value, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? Again, "If anyone swears by the altar it has no force; but anyone who swears by the offering on the altar, is bound." You blind men! For which is of greater worth, the offering or the altar that makes the offering sacred? Therefore, someone who swears by the altar is swearing by that and by everything on it. And someone who swears by the Temple is swearing by that and by the One who dwells in it. And someone who swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who is seated there.'

To bring people to God

Jesus came to be a bridge that linked God to people, and people to God by preaching the Good News of God's unconditional love for humanity. Therefore, in today's passage, Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of blocking others from encountering God.

As Christians, we have the task of leading those around us to come to know and love God, as well as supporting them in their journey of faith. We do so by our words and actions. Therefore, we are called to be authentic people whose words, thoughts and actions are consistent. That is why we need to set aside time to pray and encounter Jesus so that we will not be blind guides leading others away from God. Instead, may we be authentic guides that point people to walk the right path to a deeper faith in God.

Question for reflection:

Can people see God in me?

Tuesday, 24th August, St. Bartholomew.

Revelation 21:9-14, John 1: 45-51

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.' Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.' Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.' And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'

From sceptic to a disciple

According to Church's tradition, Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person. Nathanael dismissed Philip's testimony about Jesus being the Messiah because he could not accept that any good could come from Nazareth, where Jesus originated. However, he changed his mind and accepted Philip's invitation to "*come and see*". Often, we can too make up our minds about people based on their places of origin, family backgrounds, status in society, etc. May we let go of our prejudices and recognise the value each person.

Nathanael did not regret making the journey to Jesus. He entered into a personal dialogue with Jesus and changed his opinion of Him completely. Nathanael, in the end, declared Jesus to be "*the Son of God, the king of Israel*". As we celebrate the Feast of St. Bartholomew, let us have the openness to enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus and follow Him closely each day.

Question for reflection:

In this time of prayer, what is Jesus' message for me?

Wednesday, 25th August, 21ST Week of Ordinary Time, St. Louis, St. Joseph Calasanz.

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13, Matthew 23:27-32

Jesus said, 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption. In just the same way, from the outside you look upright, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the upright, saying, "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our ancestors' day." So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the children of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your ancestors began.'

God with us and in us

The Psalm of today, Ps 138:7-12, states: "O where can I go from your spirit, or where can I flee from your face? If I climb the heavens, you are there. If I lie in the grave, you are there." We often think that God is with us in the heavens, i.e. in happy experiences of life. However, the truth is that God is with us even in the darkest and most challenging places. He is there to comfort us with His peace and to give us the strength to walk forward with faith.

This God who is present with us desires to live in us so that His presence of love can drive and motive us to live a life of authentic love. In today's gospel, Jesus warned the religious leaders not to be overly concerned with their external images and neglected what was within, i.e. the state of their heart. What matters most to God is for us to have a loving heart. May we be comforted that God is surrounding us as well as He is dwelling in us today!

Question for reflection:

Do love and mercy drive my words and actions?

Thursday, 26th August, 21st Week of Ordinary Time.

1 Thessalonians 3:7-13, Matthew 24:42-51

Jesus said to his disciples: 'So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand

ready because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. 'Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy servant whom the master placed over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. In truth I tell you, he will put him in charge of everything he owns. But if the servant is dishonest and says to himself, "My master is taking his time," and sets about beating his fellow-servants and eating and drinking with drunkards, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.'

Stay awake, love!

In today's gospel, Jesus told His disciples and He is also reminding us to stay awake and be ready for the hour when the Son of Man would come unexpectedly. Jesus, our Master, comes to encounter us each day and at the hour of our death. How then can we prepare ourselves and be ready to meet Him? We find the answer in the first reading where St. Paul told the community in Thessalonica: *"May the Lord increase and enrich your love for each other and for the whole human race as much as we love you. And may he so confirm your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless in the sight of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones"*. For St. Paul, the person who loves others daily will be the one who stands ready when the Master comes.

Today, let us pray that we may live a life based on love, mercy, and integrity and constantly seek to serve God by serving others.

Question for reflection:

Am I preoccupied with the busyness of life that I forget to "stay awake" by living a life of love?

Friday, 27th August, 21st Week of Ordinary Time, St. Monica.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Matthew 25:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples: The kingdom of Heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late,

and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him." Then all those wedding attendants woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But he replied, "In truth I tell you, I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.'

Keeping the flame of faith burning

As we prayerful read the gospel passage, Jesus invites us to keep our light of faith burning each day and faithfully to the end. It is not easy, especially in this Covid-19 pandemic in which we are living. We might find that the darkness of uncertainties can threaten to dim the flame of our faith. Like the foolish wedding attendants, we might see that the flame of faith is growing weaker when we cannot sense God's presence or feel that He has let us down. Today, Jesus tells us, "*Stay awake*" because He is our Bridegroom who is never far from us.

Like the sensible wedding attendants, we wait with certainty for Jesus with our lamps lit. We keep the flame of faith burning by constantly praying, seeking comfort in His Word and living a life of love and service.

Question for reflection:

Am I willing to entrust myself to the darkness of uncertainty with the faith that Jesus is near?

Saturday, 28th August, 21st Week of Ordinary Time, St. Augustine. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-11, Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus told his disciples this parable: 'It is like a man about to go abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third one, each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out on his journey. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground

and hid his master's money. Now a long time afterwards, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Last came forward the man who had the single talent. "Sir," said he, "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back." But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have got my money back with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

God entrusts us with talents

In today's passage, talent refers to money, and it is the highest unit of currency in the time of Jesus. The master entrusted a considerable amount of money to each of his servants according to their abilities. The first and the second servants promptly went to invest the money that they had. However, the third one buried his one talent in order to keep it safe. When the master went through the accounts with them, he was angry because he did not want his money to be kept secure but he wanted the servants to use it well and show that they were worthy of his trust.

Let us recognise that God, like the master in the parable, has given us gifts and resources because He trusts that we will do good with what we receive. This means taking an active part in bringing God's presence to

the people we meet by our love, mercy and concern for others, as well as using our gifts to help relieve the suffering of others, especially those who are most in need of our help.

Question for reflection:

How can I use the talents that God has entrusted to me?

Sunday, 29th August, 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8, James 1:17-18, 21-22, 27, Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, keep the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow, and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them to keep, concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So the Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions.' He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'

What God wants is a heart that loves

The Pharisees considered the following traditions set by their elders as of utmost importance. In today's gospel, when they saw some of Jesus' disciples not washing their hands before eating, they were scandalous. Jesus used this opportunity to point out to the Pharisees that they were so focused on external practices that they had forgotten and neglected

the fundamental principles of their faith: love, mercy, integrity, and justice. He quoted Prophet Isaiah saying, *"This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. .."*. Jesus was making the point to them that legalism was a distortion of true religion.

St. James in the second reading states, *"Pure unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows..."*. Thus, today, let us pay attention to what is within our hearts so that loving actions will flow from that. May we remember that at the end of our lives, we will be judged on love alone.

Question for reflection:

What is the state of my heart?

Monday, 30th August, 22nd Week of Ordinary Time.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Luke 4:16-30

Jesus came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written: The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even while you are listening.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, 'This is Joseph's son, surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself," and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own country." And he went on, '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's love is for all

The people of Nazareth were impressed with Jesus initially, but later, their views changed when the good news that He spoke about became bad news for them. What made them switch from admiring Jesus to rejecting Him? Jesus spoke about the need to include others because God's love embraced the Jews and the gentiles, the saints and the sinners, the rich and the poor. The listeners' narrow-mindedness could not accept the God that Jesus came to reveal. For them, God was the God of Israel.

When we reflect on the gospel stories, we are constantly challenged by Jesus to open our narrow-mindedness about our understanding of God. God's love is for all, especially the sinners, the mentally ill people, the migrants, the "rebellious" teens, and those who find themselves on the margins at one point of their lives. Today, let us rejoice that everyone has a place in God's heart and ask for the grace to have a heart like His.

Question for reflection:

Is there anyone in my family, workplace, parish, neighbourhood that I find it hard to accept and include him/her in my life?

Tuesday, 22nd Week of Ordinary Time.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6, 9-11, Luke 4:31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because his word carried authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil, and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked it, saying, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the devil, throwing the man into the middle, went out of him without hurting him at all. Astonishment seized them and they were all saying to one another, 'What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out.' And the news of him travelled all through the surrounding countryside.

Authority to love, no dominate

“...his teaching made a deep impression on them because his word carried authority”. Jesus taught with authority because His words and actions are coherent. He lived what He preached. Unlike the religious leaders, Jesus did not just talk about the law, but He spoke of God and made God’s love real and tangible through His actions. Our words will not impact others’ lives if we do not try to live and practice what we say to them in our own lives. This is because people believe more in what they see than hear.

In the second part of the gospel, we read that a disturbed man, who was most likely mentally unwell, was rather hostile towards Jesus. Jesus could have just walked away, but He stopped and healed the man. For Jesus, authority is always about others: about service, about showing love. We, who have been given this gift of authority, are called to imitate Jesus in living out our authority, i.e., by serving and enhancing the lives of others.

Questions for reflection:

How do I exercise our authority as a parent/grandparent, aunt/uncle, employer/mentor?

