



PRAYER FOR LIVING

DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR
LITURGICAL YEAR C - DECEMBER

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Prayer for Living Year C

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Wednesday, 1st December, 1st Week of Advent.

Isaiah 25:6-10, Matthew 15:29-37

Jesus reached the shores of the Lake of Galilee, and he went up onto the mountain. He took his seat, and large crowds came to him bringing the lame, the crippled, the blind, the dumb and many others; these they put down at his feet, and he cured them. The crowds were astonished to see the dumb speaking, the cripples whole again, the lame walking and the blind with their sight, and they praised the God of Israel. But Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them off hungry, or they might collapse on the way.' The disciples said to him, 'Where in a deserted place could we get sufficient bread for such a large crowd to have enough to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said, 'Seven, and a few small fish.' Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves and the fish, and after giving thanks he broke them and began handing them to the disciples, who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected what was left of the scraps, seven baskets full.

This is our God

Jesus looked at the crowd of people around Him and was filled with compassion. His compassion led Him to action, i.e. He cured the lame, the crippled, the blind and dumb, and fed the hungry. This image of Jesus healing and feeding the crowds links with the image of God in the first reading, in which God is seen as preparing a banquet of rich food and removing all mourning and shame, and even death would be destroyed. In this Advent season, God invites us to know Him as who He is. He is God who cares and always works for our good.

In the gospel, Jesus took the seven loaves and a few fish offered by His disciples to feed the crowd until “*they all ate as much as they wanted*”. Today, Jesus also wants us to provide Him with our “*seven loaves and few fish*” because He is the one who will work powerfully through the little resources that we have for the good of others.

Question for reflection:

How can I experience Jesus' compassionate care for me and allow Him to use my life as His instrument to help others?

Thursday, 2nd December, 1st Week of Advent.**Isaiah 26:1-6, Matthew 7:21, 24-27**

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

Listen+do=strong foundation

In today's prayer, let us ponder over these words: "...everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on rock". Jesus wants us to put His words daily into action. It is not enough just to hear and listen to His words, but we must take the step to put them into practice. By listening and living out His words, we are building our lives on rock, which refers to Christ Himself.

In the gospel, Jesus has given us not just words but also His life as an example to guide us each day, for example, the Beatitudes, the teachings on forgiveness and service, etc. However, if we do not put love, forgiveness, kindness, humble service, dying to self, trust, etc., into practice, we build our lives on sand. Nobody can force us to listen to Jesus and put His words into practice. Nobody can shape our lives for us. We are the ones who choose to build our lives on rock or sand.

Question for reflection:

Do I relate to the sensible person who builds his house on a solid foundation?

Friday, 3rd December, St. Francis Xavier.

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23, Mark 16:15-20

Jesus showed himself to the Eleven, and he said to them, 'Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These are the signs that will be associated with believers: in my name they will cast out devils; they will have the gift of tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands and be unharmed should they drink deadly poison; they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover.' And so the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven; there at the right hand of God he took his place, while they, going out, preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that accompanied it."

A life driven by passion for Jesus and His people

Today, we celebrate the feast of the Jesuit missionary priest, St. Francis Xavier, who the Church rightfully declares to be the patron of missions and missionaries. This Spanish missionary passionately went to India, Malacca, the Moluccas and Japan, and preached Christ to the people who had not heard of the gospel. He desired to go to China because he knew its impact on the rest of Asia. Sadly, St. Francis never got to set foot in China. He died on a deserted island facing the mainland. We might not do what St. Francis Xavier did, but we too can become missionaries who share our faith with those around us in our own ways.

"Mission is a passion for Jesus and at the same time a passion for his people" (Pope Francis, 2015). Today, out of love for Jesus, let us commit ourselves to bringing others to know and love Him through our words and deeds. May St. Francis Xavier be with us!

Question for reflection:

How can I share my faith with those I meet today?

Saturday, 4th December, St. John Damascene.

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26, Matthew 9:35-10:1, 6-8

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.' He 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 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. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.'

To be an instrument of Jesus' compassionate presence

"Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human." (Henri J.M. Nouwen) In today's gospel, Jesus saw the people burdened with tiredness and discouragement, and His heart was filled with compassion. He drew close to them, shared in their sufferings and touched their lives with His life-giving love. Today, He looks at us and calls us to continue His mission of compassion.

"The harvest is rich but the labourers are few". We are the labourers sent by Jesus in different ways to be His instruments of compassion for those living their lives with hopelessness and despair. Jesus needs us. Can He count on us to participate in His mission?

Question for reflection:

How can I be a channel of Jesus' compassionate presence in these Advent days?

Sunday, 5th December, 2nd Sunday of Advent.

Baruch 5:1-9, Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11, Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the territories of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, and while the high-priesthood was held by Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah, in the desert. He went through the whole Jordan area proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of Isaiah the prophet: A voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight! Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be levelled, winding ways be straightened and rough roads made smooth, and all humanity will see the salvation of God.

To be the voice that communicates God's word

In today's gospel, St. Luke wrote the historical and political details to set the concrete time when God entered and intervened in human history. At that particular time and place, God called John the Baptist to prepare the hearts of His people for the coming of Jesus, the Incarnated Word of God. He went through Jordan to proclaim a baptism of repentance by calling His listeners to have a change of heart and mind and embrace a whole new way of life that opened them to live a life for God. Some people welcomed his message, while others rejected him.

God continues to intervene in human history and into our own personal history. He invites us today to welcome the word of God that calls us to always to a deeper change of our minds and hearts and live a life of love. At the same time, as Christians, we are the John of Baptists of today. God entrusts us with the task to be the voice that communicates His message of love, hope and peace to those around us.

Question for reflection:

Lord, what do you want me to do today?

Monday, 6th December, St. Nicholas.

Isaiah 35:1-10, Luke 5:17-26

Jesus was teaching one day, and Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judaea and from

Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was there so that he should heal. And now some men appeared, bringing on a bed a paralysed man whom they were trying to bring in and lay down in front of him. But as they could find no way of getting the man through the crowd, they went up onto the top of the house and lowered him and his stretcher down through the tiles into the middle of the gathering, in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith he said, 'My friend, your sins are forgiven you.' The scribes and the Pharisees began to think this over. 'Who is this man, talking blasphemy? Who but God alone can forgive sins?' But Jesus, aware of their thoughts, made them this reply, 'What are these thoughts you have in your hearts? Which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' -- he said to the paralysed man-'I order you: get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.' And immediately before their very eyes he got up, picked up what he had been lying on and went home praising God. They were all astounded and praised God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'

Faith to bring others to Jesus

In today's gospel, there were some friends who brought a paralysed man to Jesus. Due to the crowd surrounding Jesus, they could not get their friend to Him. Instead of giving up, they thought of a way to get to their goal. They started to climb the roof, removed the tiles and lowered the stretcher down to where Jesus was. "*Seeing their faith*"- Jesus was moved by the determined faith of these friends and healed the paralysed man.

In this Advent season, let our faith in Jesus be strong and steadfast so that we can bring our family and friends to encounter Jesus and experience His merciful love. As we spend this time in prayer, let us also think of people we know who are spiritually paralysed due to mental and physical exhaustion, feeling of hopelessness and despair, living in fear and anxiety, etc. Having these people in mind, we can bring them to Jesus in our prayer and ask for the grace to help them experience Christ's hope and peace.

Question for reflection:

How can I bring a friend in need to encounter Jesus and experience hope and peace?

Tuesday, 7th December, St. Ambrose.

Isaiah 40:1-11, Matthew 18:12-14

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

The Shepherd's love

"... will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray?" In this parable of the lost sheep, Jesus presents to us the heart of God who always searches for the one lost sheep because that one is important for Him. We are that one lost sheep whenever we wander away from God and find ourselves far away from the path that leads to His love and life. God loves us and will never give up on us. Pope Francis once said, *"The whole of salvation history is the story of God looking for us: he offers us love and welcomes us with tenderness."*

As we ponder over the parable today, let us believe that we are loved by God our shepherd and have the assurance that we have a place in His heart. When we experienced ourselves being loved, our hearts will also be open to help God in looking for the *"little ones"*, our brothers and sisters, who have wandered away from His love and bring them back to the sheepfold.

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 8th December, Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Genesis 3:9-15, 20, Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12, Luke 1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you

who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

Mary's "Yes"

Today, we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Mother Mary's life was a constant "Yes" to God's will. Though she was "deeply disturbed" by what she heard from God, she trusted Him and wholehearted gave her "Yes" to be the mother of Jesus. What moved Mary to put aside her plans, set aside her fears and say "Yes" to God? Her total love for God opened her heart to trust Him and surrender herself to Him.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also our mother. As our mother, she constantly invites us to place God at the center of our lives and love Him with all our heart, mind and strength. With Him in our hearts, may we respond to His presence and give our "Yes" to His purpose for our lives. Let us also never forget that Mary, our Mother, is our companion in our lives, and thus, we can count on her to guide us to become the persons God wants us to be.

Question for reflection:

Do I listen and respond with a "Yes" to all what God wants from me?

**Thursday, 9th December, St. John Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin.
Isaiah 41:13-20, Matthew 11:11-15**

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

The least in the Kingdom is greater...

In today's gospel, Jesus regarded John the Baptist in high esteem. He was a prophet who spoke the truth. He was God's chosen herald whose voice cried out to prepare the way for Jesus. He was indeed the greatest because of the significant role that he had to play. Yet, Jesus went on to say: "*yet the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he*". Though John the Baptist was great, he did not experience the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, according to Jesus, we are greater than John the Baptist. Through the gospels, we have also experienced the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and come to realise God's immense love for us. Through our baptism, we have received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Through the sacraments, Jesus continues living with us and in us. Have we realised how blessed we are?

May we appreciate the gifts that we have received from God and take our place in the world as God's prophets to work for justice and heralds to communicate the good news of our faith.

Question for reflection:

What is the message that Jesus wants to communicate to me?

**Friday, 10th December, Our Lady of Loreto.
Isaiah 48:17-19, Matthew 11:16-19**

Jesus spoke to the crowds: 'What comparison can I find for this generation? It is like children shouting to each other as they sit in the market place: We played the pipes for you, and you wouldn't dance; we sang dirges, and you wouldn't be mourners. 'For John came, neither

eating nor drinking, and they say, "He is possessed." The Son of man came, eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.'

Recognising God's presence

In today's gospel, Jesus compared His contemporaries as children in the marketplace who refused to dance neither to a happy tune nor a sad tune. In the same way, His contemporaries stood apart from Jesus as well as John the Baptist. They criticised John the Baptist for being too austere and thus, dismissed his message. They regarded Jesus as a glutton who goes around eating with sinners and so rejected His message. Due to their own prejudices, they closed themselves to God's presence. "*Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds*". Indeed, God's wisdom, which is not of this world's, is seen in both the words and deeds of John the Baptist and Jesus. Only those with humble faith would perceive God among them.

In this Advent time, let us be open to the many different ways that God wants to come to us. He can come to us in times of fasting and feasting, in times of mourning and rejoicing. May we never reduce God to our narrow understanding but exercise our faith to recognise His presence in the journey of our lives.

Question for reflection:

How can I grow in my openness to the ways that God comes to encounter me?

Saturday, 11th December, St. Damasus I.

Ecclesiasticus 48:1-4, 9-11, Matthew 17:10-13

As they came down the mountain the disciples put this question to him, 'Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' He replied, 'Elijah is indeed coming, and he will set everything right again; however, I tell you that Elijah has come already and they did not recognise him but treated him as they pleased; and the Son of man will suffer similarly at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that he was speaking of John the Baptist.

Open my eyes, Lord, to see what you see!

"I tell you that Elijah has come already and they did not recognise him but treated him as they pleased". In today's gospel, Jesus pointed out that John the Baptist was the long-awaited Elijah, but the people did not recognise him for who he was. As a result, he was poorly treated and eventually beheaded. *"...the Son of man will suffer similarly at their hands".* Jesus recognised that He too was heading towards the same path trodden by John the Baptist. Many failed to see His true dignity and significance and could not appreciate His works and words, and thus, He was rejected and crucified on the cross.

As we draw closer to Christmas, let us examine the way we regard others. Often, when we fail to recognise the dignity of those around us, especially those we deem insignificant, we tend to end up crucifying them with harsh words and unloving actions. Today, let us start by looking at others through the eyes of Jesus and start by treating them with love and not hatred, with openness and not prejudices, with respect and not contempt.

Question for reflection:

Is it a challenge for me to see each and every person through the eyes of love?

Sunday, 12th December, 3rd Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday.

Zephaniah 3:14-18, Philippians 4:4-7, Luke 3: 10-18

When all the people asked John, 'What must we do, then?' he answered, 'Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none, and anyone with something to eat must do the same.' There were tax collectors, too, who came for baptism, and these said to him, 'Master, what must we do?' He said to them, 'Exact no more than the appointed rate.' Some soldiers asked him in their turn, 'What about us? What must we do?' He said to them, 'No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!' A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to wonder whether John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, who is more powerful than me, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather

the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.' And he proclaimed the good news to the people with many other exhortations too.

An attractive and authentic faith

The fire of passion for God led John the Baptist to live a life of simplicity, speak out against injustice, and be free from the comforts, fame, and wealth of this world. Those who gathered around him to listen to his teachings saw the authenticity of his life, and thus, they were attracted to the way he lived his life and asked him, "*What must we do?*". As we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas, let us look at how we live our faith and life. Are we attracting people to Jesus by the way we live with true freedom, honesty and love for God and others?

John the Baptist's reply to their question, "*What must we do?*" is to change themselves. He did not tell the tax collectors and soldiers to leave their jobs and embrace His radical lifestyle. Instead, he told the crowd to share with the poor, the tax collectors to be honest, and the soldiers not to oppress the people. He called them to put God into their relationships with others. May the words of John the Baptist challenge us to live out our faith in our daily life.

Question for reflection:

How can I live my faith in my life?

Monday, 13th December, St. Lucy.

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17, Matthew 21:23-27

Jesus had gone into the Temple and was teaching, when the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, 'What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?' In reply Jesus said to them, 'And I will ask you a question, just one; if you tell me the answer to it, then I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism: what was its origin, heavenly or human?' And they argued this way among themselves, 'If we say heavenly, he will retort to us, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?"; but if we say human, we have the people to fear, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know.' And he retorted to them, 'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this.

The authority to love

“Authority” is a word that is often associated with the abuse of power and control over others. In today’s gospel, the religious leaders asked Jesus, “*What authority have you for acting like this? And who gave you this authority?*”. They asked the question because they were threatened by Him. Jesus, however, answered them with another question because He knew that they were only seeking to protect their own power and position. As Christians, we know that Jesus spoke and acted with God’s authority, i.e. the authority to love and serve, not dominate and oppress. In the gospels, Jesus, rooted in power given to Him by God the Father, healed the sick, ate with sinners, empowered the outcasts, fed the hungry, washed the disciples’ feet, etc.

As we prepare ourselves to celebrate Christmas, let us commit ourselves to following Jesus and His ways. May we never be like the “*chief priests and elders*” by possessing self-seeking power. Instead, whatever authority we have, as parents, godparents, employers, mentors, etc., to use our authority in loving service, especially to help those in need.

Question for reflection:

How can I exercise my authority in the light of Jesus’ authority?

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

Zephaniah 3:1-2,9-13, Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people, "What is your opinion? A man had two sons. He went and said to the first, "My boy, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not go," but afterwards thought better of it and went. The man then went and said the same thing to the second who answered, "Certainly, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the father's will?" They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you, showing the way of uprightness, but you did not believe him, and yet the tax collectors and prostitutes did. Even after seeing that, you refused to think better of it and believe in him."

Words without actions have no meaning

Words and intentions are meaningless without actions. In today's parable, Jesus told of a man who had two sons. He asked his elder son to go and work in his vineyard. The son said, "no" to him, but he reconsidered his initial decision and decided to go instead. The second son wanted to help his father and said "yes" to his father's request, but did not go. The elder son's action was a "yes" to the father because his action spoke louder than his initial intention and words.

Our good intentions are not good enough. Like the younger son, we can have intentions to help, give, share, forgive, reach out, etc., but we do not follow the intention with action. We can easily make promises, but we struggle to give time and effort to do what we say. In this time of Advent, God our Father comes and invites us to work in his vineyard, i.e. to participate in His work of love and justice. May we say "yes" to Him by our words and our actions each day.

Question for reflection:

Do my words match my actions?

Wednesday, 15th December, 3rd Week of Advent.

Isaiah 45:6-8, 18, 21-25, Luke 7:19-23

John, summoning two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?' When the men reached Jesus they said, 'John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, "Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect someone else?" ' At that very time he cured many people of diseases and afflictions and of evil spirits, and gave the gift of sight to many who were blind. Then he gave the messengers their answer, 'Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind see again, the lame walk, those suffering from virulent skin-diseases are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the good news is proclaimed to the poor; and blessed is anyone who does not find me a cause of falling.'

It is ok to doubt

As John the Baptist sat in his prison cell, he began to doubt about Jesus. He had dedicated his life untiringly to the mission of preparing people's hearts for the coming of the Messiah. Yet, he started to doubt Jesus and

even his own mission at this dark moment of his life. In today's gospel, John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask, "*Are you the one who is to come...?*". Jesus neither belittle nor reproach John the Baptist for doubting. Instead, His reply gave John the Baptist what he needed to overcome his doubts. Jesus simply said, "*Look at the good works I am doing. Do not doubt but believe.*"

Have we doubted? It is ok to doubt, especially when we are facing difficulties in life. When we find our faith in Jesus wavering, let us remember John the Baptist. He doubted, but he turned to Jesus for answers. Jesus will always call us to keep the light of our faith burning as He reminds us of the good works that He has done and is doing in our lives.

Question for reflection:

When I face my doubts, how will I respond?

Thursday, 16th Decemeber, 3rd Week of Advent.

Isaiah 54:1-10, Luke 7:24-30

When John's messengers had gone Jesus began to talk to the people about John, 'What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No! Then what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? Look, those who go in magnificent clothes and live luxuriously are to be found at royal courts! Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and much more than a prophet: he is the one of whom scripture says: Look, I am going to send my messenger in front of you to prepare your way before you. 'I tell you, of all the children born to women, there is no one greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.' All the people who heard him, and the tax collectors too, acknowledged God's saving justice by accepting baptism from John; but by refusing baptism from him the Pharisees and the lawyers thwarted God's plan for them.

When people see us, they see Jesus

Jesus asked the ones around Him, "*What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swaying in the breeze? No! Then what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes!...*". His listeners had gone searching for John the Baptist and listened to his preaching. In the Jordan desert,

they neither see a swaying reed nor a well-dressed person like those in the royal courts. Instead, they encountered God's prophet, God's messenger.

Have we ever wondered what people see when they meet and listen to us? Do people see us as a reed swaying and bending to please others? Do people look at us as lovers of fine dining, branded goods, self-seeking power? Do people recognise us as Jesus' disciples whose words and actions reflect God's presence? Jesus needs us, through the way we speak and act, to reflect His loving presence in today's world. In this time of Advent, let us allow Jesus to be the center of our lives so that people can see Him in us.

Question for reflection:

When people look at me, what do they see?

Friday, 17th December, 3rd Week of Advent.

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

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

generations is therefore: fourteen from Abraham to David; fourteen from David to the Babylonian deportation; and fourteen from the Babylonian deportation to Christ.

The love story of God and humanity

As we draw close to Christmas, we are invited to contemplate the genealogy of Jesus. Jesus, the Incarnated God, did not appear out of nowhere but was born in a concrete family, culture and history. The people in Jesus' family tree does not consist of holy and saintly people. Instead, there are notorious sinners like Ahaz and Manasseh who were wicked kings. There were also four women listed in the genealogy, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, who had questionable backgrounds. Thus, this reveals that God is an inclusive God of unconditional love. We remembered Jesus' words in Matthew 5:45, "*For he makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil*". God's love does not exclude anyone, but each has a place in His work of salvation.

Today, let us acknowledge that it is alright to be human beings with limitations and faults. This is because God loves us and continues to call us to bring His presence to the world. He works in and through us, even in our weaknesses.

Question for reflection:

What challenges do I face as I pray with Jesus' genealogy?

Saturday, 18th December, 3rd Week of Advent.

Jeremiah 23:5-8, Matthew 1: 18-24

This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being an upright man and wanting to spare her disgrace, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.' Now all this took place to fulfil what the Lord had

spoken through the prophet: Look! the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom they will call Immanuel, a name which means 'God-is-with-us'. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

Trust in God

In today's gospel, Joseph gave his "yes" to God to be the husband of Mary and the father of Jesus. He consented to God's will even though he was unsure what his "yes" entailed and struggled with his fears of the uncertain future. Yet, Joseph trusted in God. *"Even through Joseph's fears, God's will, his history and his plan were at work. Joseph, then, teaches us that faith in God includes believing that he can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times, we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture"* (Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*).

St. Joseph invites us today to never stop trusting in God, even in moments when things do not make sense and even when we do not understand the events we live. May we embrace God's plan and trust in Him.

Question for reflection:

How ready am I to trust God and allow Him to guide me in this journey of life?

Sunday, 19th December, 4th Sunday of Advent.

Micah 5:1-4, Hebrews 10:5-10, Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could 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.'

Joy in midst of sorrow

In today's gospel, Elizabeth, upon seeing Mary coming to her house, was filled with the Holy Spirit and her child in her womb leapt for joy. Mary too rejoiced at the sight of her cousin, and she broke into her song of praise to God. Yet, joy does not mean an absence of challenges and difficulties. Instead, to truly appreciate joy, one must understand what sorrow means. Both women celebrated not because they had comfortable and easy lives. Instead, both of them were facing the challenges of being pregnant, facing many uncertainties, etc. Yet, despite having difficulties, they kept their joy because they recognised that God was present in them and among them.

As we look forward to celebrating Christmas, let us recognise that the joy that comes from God's presence is deeper than the fleeting happiness the world offers. It is a joy that sustains us in our struggles with the sadness of loss, sickness, anxiety, etc. It is a joy that carries us through the daily challenges we face. This joy is a gift from God for us.

Question for reflection:

What does it mean for me to have God's joy in my life?

Monday, 20th December, 4th Week of Advent.

Isaiah 7:10-14, Luke 1:26-38

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

and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.

God is with us

Christmas is coming soon. Many of us are most likely rushing to get presents for our loved ones, send cards to friends, plan Christmas meals, etc. Amid our busyness, let us stop and remember the reason for this celebration. In today's gospel, the angel Gabriel came to Mary with this message, "*Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you*". Let us sit with these words of angel Gabriel: "*The Lord is with you*". Christmas is the celebration of Jesus, Immanuel, God-with-us. This is the reason why we can rejoice and celebrate, even when things are not going well for us.

Often, when we have to live through the loss of someone we love, a sickness, a disappointment, etc. we can be tempted to believe that God has forsaken us. It is in those stressful and difficult moments when God is personally close to us. Today, may we receive this reality into our hearts with joy: "*The Lord is with you*". God-with-us, and so, we can live each moment of today with peace.

Question for reflection:

What is God's message for me today?

Tuesday, 21st December, 4th Week of Advent.

Song of Songs 2:8-14, Luke 1:39-45

Mary set out 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.'

The most wonderful Christmas gift

When we think of Christmas, we think of nicely wrapped gifts underneath the Christmas tree. However, in this coming Christmas, may we value another kind of gift that we can give to our family members and friends, i.e. the gift of God, Immanuel, God-with-us. More than material presents of chocolates, books, clothes, the greatest gift that we can offer to others is the gift of God's presence in us by sharing our joy, our peace, our faith. Through us, others can encounter God and experience His life-giving presence.

In today's gospel, Mary set out, carrying God's life within her, and went quickly to visit Elizabeth. She brought the gift of God to Elizabeth, who was then filled with the Holy Spirit, and even her unborn child within her leapt for joy. Let us bring the gift of God's presence in us to the people around us this Christmas.

Question for reflection:

What is the greatest gift that I can give to the people I love this Christmas?

Wednesday, 22nd December, 4th Week of Advent.

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

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.

Song of praise to God

The Magnificat reveals the God that Mary believes. She proclaims a God who intervenes in human history and works for the good of all. He lifts

the lowly and helps the poor and the weak. He brings down the proud and wealthy ones who oppress and dehumanise others. God is always with His people in His faithful love, especially the most vulnerable ones among us. In fact, Jesus, through His words and actions, reveals fully that God is love, He is the God of the weak and the vulnerable who always reaches out to those in need.

Often, we have false images of God, such as God as one who punishes us or as indifferent to our sufferings. As we pray with Mary's Magnificat, let us ask ourselves: What kind of God do I believe? Today, let us also experience ourselves as one of the lowly who longs for God's presence, and know that He will always fill us with His love. Filled with His presence, we continue to reveal to others the God as who He truly is.

Question for reflection:

If I were to write my own Magnificat, what would it be?

Thursday, 23rd December, 4th Week of Advent.

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24, Luke 1:57-66

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had lavished on her his faithful love, they shared her joy. Now it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said, 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name,' and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John.' And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him.

The newness that God brings

In today's gospel, Elizabeth and Zechariah rejoiced with the birth of their long-awaited child. They named him John. The neighbours and relatives were surprised and rejected the name because, according to the Jewish

tradition, they had to name the child after someone in the family. The parents insisted and said, “*His name is John*”. They broke with tradition by welcoming the newness that God was making in their lives.

We tend to allow ourselves to be tied to traditions, norms and habits to the extent that we often fail to allow God to bring newness to our faith and lives. Listen to God as He tells us: “*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*” (Isaiah 43:19). Today, as we stand at the threshold of Christmas, let us welcome Jesus into our hearts and allow Him to bring us to a new way to relate with Him and others, a new direction in life, a new path to embark. The newness that He brings is always for our growth and our good.

Question for reflection:

What is the newness that God wants to bring to me?

Friday, 24th December, 4th Week of Advent.

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16, Luke 1:67-79 (Morning mass)

John’s father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people, he has set them free, and he has established for us a saving power in the House of his servant David, just as he proclaimed, by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times, that he would save us from our enemies and from the hands of all those who hate us, and show faithful love to our ancestors, and so keep in mind his holy covenant. This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant us, free from fear, to be delivered from the hands of our enemies, to serve him in holiness and uprightness in his presence, all our days. And you, little child, you shall be called Prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare a way for him, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the faithful love of our God in which the rising Sun has come from on high to visit us, to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.’

God visits

“*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people...*”. Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit, sang his song of praise, proclaiming

that God has visited His people in the person of Jesus who comes “to give light to those who live in darkness and the shadow dark as death, and guide our feet into the way of peace”. Today, Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Light of the World, continues to come and visit us, His people whom He loves. Not only does He visits, but He also comes and stays with us. In our troubles and challenges that we face, He is with us and brings us His peace. This is the meaning of Christmas.

On this Christmas eve, we cling to Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us. He is God who comes. Let us be His people who welcome Him and stay with Him.

Question for reflection:

What does it mean that Jesus, Incarnated God, comes to visit me?

Saturday, 25th December, Nativity of the Lord.

Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-6, John 1: 1-5, 9-14

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him. What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John witnesses to him. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.' Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received -- one gift replacing another, for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Jesus: The reason for Christmas

“*The Word became flesh, he lived among us*”. The gospel of today sums up the meaning of Christmas. It is God entering our world in human form, in the person of Jesus. Thus, God is no longer beyond us or outside of us. Instead, God is near. In Jesus, we see a God who is Love and desires to be close to us. Thus, we do not need to fear God, but we too are called to fearlessly enter into a friendship with Him who loves us so much.

The gospel also speaks of Jesus as the “...*light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it*”. Sometimes, we find ourselves in a dark place for different reasons, for example, sickness, death of a loved one, failure in a relationship, loss of job, addiction, etc. Jesus, the true light, comes to shine in our darkness and bring us His comforting love and consoling peace. Today, as we celebrate Christmas, let us open our hearts to Jesus, the Light that shines in our darkness, the Word that reveals God’s love.

Question for reflection:

Do I have a room in my heart for Jesus this Christmas?

Sunday, 26th December, The Holy Family.

1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28, 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24, Luke 2:41-52

Every year the parents of Jesus used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was somewhere in the party, and it was only after a day’s journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. It happened that, three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions; and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, ‘My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.’ He replied, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he meant. He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people.

The Holy Family is not about perfection

Why do we have this particular gospel to celebrate this feast of the Holy Family? Many people have an image of the Holy Family as the perfect family without any problems, which is not true. Joseph, Mary and Jesus still had their own challenges and difficult moments. Today’s gospel

speaks of the agony of Mary and Joseph frantically searching for three days for the missing Jesus. Indeed, this was not a perfect situation. Yet, the Holy Family is holy in the sense that though they did not understand God's ways fully, they centered their lives on God and placed their trust in Him.

Today, the Holy Family invites us constantly to place God at the center of our family life and trust that He is in our midst, even in challenging times. Like Mary, we will face moments when we do not understand everything fully and we ask, "Why?". Like her, we might not see the full picture, but continue to walk as one family with and to God.

Question for reflection:

How can I play my part in building a family that is rooted in God?

Monday, 27th December, St. John the Apostle and Evangelist.

1 John 1:1-4, John 20:2-8

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

He run, saw, believed

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, who is also known as "*the one whom Jesus loved*". In the gospel, Mary Magdalene told Peter and John about the empty tomb. Their first reaction was to run to the tomb because nothing else mattered. John ran faster because he was enthusiastic about being where His Master was. Often we tend to procrastinate and forget to simply "run" to Jesus with the eagerness to be with Him. May we keep going to Jesus everyday in

prayer, in the silence of our heart and have this eagerness to stay with Him in the ups and downs of life.

When John saw the empty tomb, “*he saw and he believed*”. John saw and believed even though he did not fully understand what was happening. Today, Jesus calls us to see and believe that He is alive and is present with us in the routines of each day, in the presence of others, in moments of difficulties and times of happiness. Let us renew ourselves in Jesus’ love today!

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus’ message for me today?

Tuesday, 28th December, Holy Innocents, Martyrs.

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

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

Choose the ways of Jesus, not Herod

In the midst of our Christmas season, we have this gospel that describes the violent killing of children by Herod as well as Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus escaping from him to Egypt as political refugees. We often paint an idealistic image of the first Christmas where all was calm and happy. Yet, the truth is that Jesus lived in a time where political leaders abused their power. In the world where we live, we face situations where the poor suffer from inequality, children are used and abused, refugees risk

their lives for a safe life, etc. All because of self-serving actions by leaders and people in authority. Jesus, the Incarnated God, came to this world to show the power of love and service, not dominance and oppression.

Today, let this gospel passage challenges us to choose to follow Jesus, not Herod. As we celebrate Christmas, we once again commit ourselves to walk the path of love and service and give God's life to those around us. Let us also pray for the many suffering people in the world.

Question for reflection:

How can I give God's life to those I meet today?

Wednesday, 29th December, Fifth day within the Octave of Christmas.

1 John 2:3-11, Luke 2: 22-35

When the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord- observing what is written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord- and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is prescribed in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations; a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel. As the child's father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is oppos and a sword will pierce your soul too -- so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

For my eyes have seen...

Simeon was an elderly man who was “*an upright and devout man*” whose only desire was to see the promised Saviour before he died. On that day, prompted by the Holy Spirit, he went to the Temple and saw Mary and Joseph with the child in their arms. Immediately, with the eyes of faith, Simeon recognised Jesus as the Promised One of God, as the “*Christ of the Lord*”. He took the child in his arms and praised God.

Likewise, in our journey of faith, we too have seen Jesus, our Saviour, our Friend and Companion. Looking at our life’s experiences, we have encountered Christ’s presence of love, goodness and truth in the happy events of life, in the kindness of others, in the difficult circumstances, in the silence of prayer. We are never alone. The Holy Spirit, who led Simeon to encounter the child Jesus, always leads us to take paths towards Jesus each day.

Question for reflection:

What prevents me from seeing Jesus present in my life?

Thursday, 30th December, Sixth day within the Octave of Christmas.

1 John 2:12-17, Luke 2:36-40

There was a prophetess, too, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came up just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

God first

In today’s gospel, we meet Anna, who was described as a prophetess and a widow. She was eighty-four years old and full of faith in God and love for Him. This woman stayed in the Temple, serving God day and night with fasting and prayer. Anna is indeed a model of discipleship as her life speaks to us of putting God at the center of our lives.

Is God at the center of our lives? Is He the motivation behind our words and actions? Prayer is essential in our daily life. We are often so caught up with the many things that we have to do that we forget to set time and space to be with God and listen to His words. Let us value the importance of prayer and spending time with God and dare to “waste time” with Him once more.

Question for reflection:

How can Anna the elderly prophetess, inspire me to live my discipleship?

Friday, 31st December, Seventh day within the Octave of Christmas.

1 John 2:18-21, John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him. What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. A man came, sent by God. His name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness to the light, so that everyone might believe through him. He was not the light, he was to bear witness to the light. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. He was in the world that had come into being through him, and the world did not recognise him. He came to his own and his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself. The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John witnesses to him. He proclaims: 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he existed before me.' Indeed, from his fullness we have, all of us, received -- one gift replacing another, for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Jesus is our Light

As we stand at the threshold of another new year, many of us would be looking back on the past year's events- the good, the challenges, the losses, the regrets, etc. Let us look back with gratefulness and look at the future with hope. The gospel of today assures us that Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Light of God's love, is with us at this final day of 2021 and will be with us at the beginning of 2022.

"The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone...". Jesus Himself declared, *"I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12). In our dark moments of life, Jesus is our Light. He is the true light of God's unconditional love that shines in our human experiences, and that will empower us to live as God's beloved children. As we bid farewell to the old year and open the door to the new year, may we welcome Jesus and stay with Him. With Him, we are not afraid!

Question for reflection:

How do I want to live this final day of 2021?



verbum dei