

To be loved by God



PRAYER FOR LIVING

DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR
LITURGICAL YEAR C~
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Tuesday, 1st March, 8th Week in Ordinary Time

1 Peter 1:10-16, Mark 10:28-31

'What about us?' Peter asked Jesus. 'We have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'In truth I tell you, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times as much, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land -- and persecutions too -- now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life. Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'

To follow Jesus even when it is not easy

Peter was curious about what they would get in return for leaving everything to follow Jesus. He wanted to know that all that they had sacrificed for Jesus was worth it. Jesus replied with total honesty by telling His disciples that those who left everything for His sake would "receive hundred times as much" in the form of the richness of belonging to a family of faith, the joy of being surrounded by others to journey through life with. As Jesus' disciples, this is what we will experience when we follow Him.

However, we need to note that Jesus also added: "*and persecutions*", which we naturally would want to avoid at all cost. Yet, persecutions come in the form of rejections and misunderstandings from others when we choose the more difficult path of going against the current and living the gospel values in the places where we are. Therefore, the path of discipleship is not easy. Although it is not easy, let us commit ourselves to follow Jesus, the one who is the source of fullness of life and love.

Question for reflection:

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Wednesday, 2nd March, Ash Wednesday.

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

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win human admiration. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your

right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. 'When you are fasting, do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they go about looking unsightly to let people know they are fasting. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put scent on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'

A start to a fruitful Lent

Today, as we begin the liturgical season of Lent, let us take a moment to reflect on what Lent means. Jesus mentioned three important practices that we rightly need to practice in this time of Lent. However, Jesus also warned against giving alms, praying and fasting to draw attention to ourselves. Pope Francis preached the following, "*Hypocrisy is the filth that Jesus tells us in today's Gospel that we have to remove. Indeed, the Lord tells us not only to carry out works of charity, to pray and to fast, but also to do these without pretense, duplicity and hypocrisy (cf. Mt 6:2.5.16). Yet how often do we do things only to be recognised, to look good, to satisfy our ego! How often do we profess to be Christians, yet in our hearts readily yield to passions that enslave us! How often do we preach one thing and practice another!...*" (Ash Wednesday Mass, 2020).

Let us desire to have a fruitful Lent by placing God as the priority in our lives and making Him the motivation behind our actions and words.

Question for reflection:

In this Lent, how can I strive to please God alone?

Thursday, 3rd March, Thursday after Ash Wednesday.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Luke 9:22-25

Jesus said to his disciples, 'The Son of man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.' Then, speaking to all, he said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, will save it. What benefit is it to anyone to win the whole world and forfeit or lose his very self'

Choose to live a meaningful life by loving

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today: I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then..." (1st reading). Moses urged the people of Israel: Choose life. As we enter into Lent, God calls us too to choose life. We choose life when we choose to love. We love, not just with words, but actions that start by entering into the dynamism of dying to self. It is a tough challenge for many of us because we live in a competitive culture where we place ourselves first before others. Dying to ourselves begins in small ways of not seeking attention, becoming less defensive in the face of humiliation, etc. Thus, this moves us away from being self-centered people and more other-centered.

This journey of dying to ourselves will eventually lead us to live a fuller and more meaningful life with God. At the start of Lent, let us choose life by opting to love the ones around us, even the unloveable ones.

Question for reflection:

What does it mean to die to myself today?

Friday, 4th March, Friday after Ash Wednesday.

Isaiah 58:1-9, Matthew 9:14-15

John's disciples came to him and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

The true fasting that God wants

In today's first reading, Prophet Isaiah challenged the people of Israel and us today to reevaluate the true purpose of fasting. He said, "*Look, you do business on your fastdays, you oppress all your workmen; look, you quarrel and squabble when you fast and strike the poor man with your fist*". The people of Israel were doing the religious thing, but they continued with their unloving and unjust ways. Today, God calls us to stop fasting for our own selfish interests and live for what truly matters. Our fasting should lead us to love, i.e., working for those suffering injustice, feeding those who are hungry, sheltering the homeless, etc. In the gospel, Jesus identifies Himself as our bridegroom who is always with us, never absent from us. His presence in us should move us to make a difference in the way we live, the decisions we make, the priorities we uphold, the opinions we form. In this Lent, may our fasting lead us to act for the good of others.

Question for reflection:

Are my prayer and fasting benefiting others, especially those in need?

Saturday, 5th March, Saturday after Ash Wednesday.

Isaiah 58:9-14, Luke 5:27-32

Jesus noticed a tax collector, Levi by name, sitting at the tax office, and said to him, 'Follow me.' And leaving everything Levi got up and followed him. In his honour Levi held a great reception in his house, and with them at table was a large gathering of tax collectors and others. The Pharisees and their scribes complained to his disciples and said, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' Jesus said to them in reply, 'It is not those that are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the upright but sinners to repentance.'

Who are we to judge?

In Jesus' time, tax collectors were regarded by the rest of the Jews as public sinners. In today's gospel, Jesus noticed Levi and saw Him, not just as a hopeless sinner, but His potential disciple. In fact, this is the reason why Jesus came and lived as a human person. He came not to judge and condemn but to forgive and love.

In this journey of Lent, Jesus calls us to join Him to partake in His mission and reach out to the present-day Levis. Who are they? They are the

outcasts and marginalised ones in our personal lives and society. Due to their failures, we tend to look upon them with dread. Let us remember that Jesus never stops drawing close to us, even when we are sinners. Who are we then to put distance between ourselves and others? All of us are sinners in need of God's merciful love. Today, let us experience ourselves loved and called by Jesus first so that we can go out and be part of His mission of love.

Question for reflection:

Do I struggle with being self-righteous and judgmental towards others whom I consider sinners?

Sunday, 6th March, First Sunday of Lent.

Deuteronomy 26:4-10, Romans 10:8-13, Luke 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, for forty days being put to the test by the devil. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone.' Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and their splendour, for it has been handed over to me, for me to give it to anyone I choose. Do homage, then, to me, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: You must do homage to the Lord your God, him alone you must serve.' Then he led him to Jerusalem and set him on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are Son of God,' he said to him, 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He has given his angels orders about you, to guard you, and again: They will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Having exhausted every way of putting him to the test, the devil left him, until the opportune moment.

To always choose God

Temptation is subtle and is all around us as it entices us to wander away from living the Gospel values. In today's gospel, Jesus was surrounded with temptations. Yet, rooted in God, He overcame them. Firstly, He was tempted to change stones into bread to satisfy His hunger. He, however, refused to use His power to serve Himself, but to empower and help

others. Next, Jesus was tempted to go the easy way in His mission. Yet, for Jesus, He was convinced that He came to serve God alone by doing His will. Lastly, Jesus faced the temptation to throw Himself down the parapet of the Temple to attract people to God. However, Jesus refused because He knew that He came not to perform sensational feats but to reveal God in His everyday faithfulness.

At our weakest moments, we will experience temptations following us and enticing us to give in to place ourselves first, work for personal glory, etc. Then, we have to decide to take the path that leads us closer to God or our ego.

Question for reflection:

What kind of temptation do I struggle with?

Monday, 7th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18, Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the upright will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Then he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, lacking clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask,

"Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me. And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the upright to eternal life."

God is there in the hungry, the thirsty...

When we see God at the end of our life, He will not ask if we have rigorously fasted from meat on Fridays or we have done our meticulously done our parish duty. Instead, He will look at how much we exercise loving others, especially those regarded as nobodies by society. *"In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me"*. God is in the elderly who is in need of words of kindness, in the person begging for money on the street, in the child suffering from low self-esteem, etc. Each human person is a sacred ground where God is present. Thus, when we love and serve others in their need, we are loving and serving God.

As we enter into the first week of Lent, may we open our eyes of faith to see God in others and orient our hearts to live a life of love as how He wants us to.

Question for reflection:

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

Tuesday, 8th March, 1st Week of Lent.

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

Jesus said to his disciples, 'In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the Evil One. Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.'

Prayer: loving encounter with God

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us what prayer is all about. It is not a time to bombard God with many words to manipulate Him to listen to us. Instead, prayer is to be with God and trust that He is there for us, and thus, we surrender ourselves in His loving hands. Jesus invites us to first focus on God and what He wants from us. Therefore, we say, "*may your will be done...*", i.e. to commit ourselves to make His will a reality in our lives. God's overarching purpose for us is to live a life of loving Him and others. In prayer, we listen to Him as He shows us the concrete ways to love and the specific people we can reach out to.

From focusing on God, we then move to ourselves by asking Him to give us our daily bread of physical and spiritual nourishment, to forgive our sins and help us forgive others, as well as to provide us with the strength not to succumb to temptation. Today, let us enjoy being with God and allow Him to speak to our hearts.

Question for reflection:

Which phrase in the Our Father prayer do I have difficulty with?

Wednesday, 9th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11:29-32

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

Jesus, the full revelation of God

The people around Jesus were asking for signs. Unfortunately, they failed to recognise that Jesus was the greatest sign pointing them to God's presence. Jesus told them, "*...look, there is something greater than Solomon here...there is something greater than Jonah here*". Yet,

they could not appreciate the richness of His presence and remained indifferent to His life-giving words and actions.

Today, let us appreciate that Jesus is the greatest sign. He fully reveals the loving and compassionate heart of God the Father. "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). Let us not be indifferent to Jesus, who continues to come to us in our prayer, in the Word, in the Eucharist, in the beauty of nature, in the loving presence of others, etc. We are invited to respond to His living presence in us and among us by bringing Him to others.

Question for reflection:

Do I have eyes to see Jesus' presence in my life?

Thursday, 10th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Esther 4:17, Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened. Is there anyone among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish? If you, then, evil as you are, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets.'

Treat others the way we want them to treat us

In this time of prayer, let us pause and reflect on the words of Jesus: "*So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the Law and the Prophets*". How do we want others to treat us? How do we relate with our family members, people in the parish, the strangers we meet, the marginalised ones in society? If we want others to respect us, we first need to respect them. If we want to be spoken to with kindness, then we should start by doing the same to our fellow brothers and sisters. The invitation from Jesus to us today is clear and simple: Apply love to others, and we will receive love.

Therefore, Jesus also reminds us that we need to keep on asking, searching and knocking on the door of prayer for God's help. On our own

human will and strength, we will struggle to love. May we never get tired of going to God, who can empower us to choose to love others.

Question for reflection:

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

Friday, 11th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Ezekiel 18: 21-28, Matthew 5:20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: 'For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven. You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. In truth I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.'

Reconciliation, not anger

Today, Jesus calls us to love with His radical love. "*You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court*". The law prohibits a person from killing another person. However, Jesus goes beyond the law and calls us to examine the inner emotions that form and mould our external actions. To be angry is a normal human emotion, but it becomes dangerous when we allow anger to brew and grow within and lead us to divide ourselves from those around us and behave in a harmful manner towards them. Let us be drawn to Jesus, who never stops calling us to become more loving people.

"... *go and be reconciled with your brother first*". Jesus calls us to make the work of reconciliation our top priority and heal any broken relationships that we might have with a parent, sibling, friend or member

in the faith community. It is pointless to do religious things when we refuse to walk the path of reconciliation.

Question for reflection:

Is there someone with whom I need to reconcile?

Saturday, 12th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Deuteronomy 26:16-19, Matthew 5:43-48

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

Loving with God's merciful love

"You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect". To be perfect like God implies loving others, including our enemies, with God's merciful love. God loves each person equally, even the ones we might look upon as enemies and sinners. Thus, as His children, we should also love in the same way. We struggle with this hard teaching because we find it humanly impossible to love our enemies and pray for those who want to hurt us or those we see as morally bad. Our human tendency is to limit our love to those who love and appreciate us.

Yet, Jesus knows that we do have the capacity to stretch our hearts wide to have room for the enemy as much as the friend. Thus, He continues to invite us to be places where all can find and encounter God's merciful love. Today, He gives us His Holy Spirit to transform our hearts of stone into hearts that love and who guides us to live our lives as God's children.

Question for reflection:

What prevents me from loving those who I consider unloveable?

Sunday, 13th March, 2nd Sunday of Lent.

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took with him Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. And it happened that, as he was praying, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became sparkling white. And suddenly there were two men talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they woke up and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, 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 he was saying. As he was saying this, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.' And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

Going up the mountain of prayer

On this second Sunday of Lent, we go up to the mountain of prayer with Jesus. There, we are strengthened to walk on the journey of life. At this point of His journey towards Jerusalem, Jesus knew that He would soon face His death because of the increasing hostility of the Jewish religious leaders. Yet, He spent time to be in prayer, in communion with God, and felt His consoling love. Soaked in the Father's unconditional love, Jesus was transfigured as He radiated the inner peace and joy. Prayer is the space where we encounter God and experience His love. Often, we pray to ask God for things, and we miss being with Him.

The disciples heard the voice of God coming from the cloud, saying, "*Listen to him*". Listening to Jesus is what will sustain us as we walk through the valley of life, of hardship, of tears. Whether we are, be in the mountain of prayer or the valley of life, we listen to Jesus and allow His words to comfort us, guide us, and direct our way.

Question for reflection:

How is my prayer life?

Monday, 14th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Daniel 9:4-10, Luke 6:36-38

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

Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate

Would people who know you well describe you as "compassion"? In today's gospel passage, Jesus said, "*Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate*". Pope Francis once said, "*Compassion is the language of God*" (Homily, 17th September 2019). God's compassionate love brings Him to draw close to us and suffer with us. He does not keep Himself at a safe distance from us and remains indifferent to all we are going through in life. God never judges or condemns us. In His compassion, He always shows us His mercy and forgiveness.

As we enter into the second week of Lent, Jesus calls us to make compassion to be our language too. Unfortunately, being compassionate is often looked upon with contempt in our individualistic culture. In order to be efficient and powerful, there is no room for others. Yet, the heart of Christianity is compassion. Let us ask Jesus to help us open our hearts to receive God's compassionate love so that we can readily give what we have to others.

Question for reflection:

Jesus calls me to be like God. What does this mean for me?

Tuesday, 15th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20, Matthew 23: 1-12

Addressing the crowds and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do and observe what they tell you; but do not be guided by what they do, since they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing

broader headbands and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted respectfully in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'

To serve, not to dominate

Jesus was always critical of the Jewish religious leaders who regarded themselves as morally superior to other people. They also wanted to be recognised as great by others, and thus, things like how people greeted them and where they were seated at banquets were vital for them. Jesus, however, warned His disciples not to be taken over by such self-centered attitudes. For Jesus, to be a leader is to be a servant of all. Jesus Himself lived His life serving those in need of His help, especially the poorest and the weakest.

Today, Jesus' message is the same for us. We are not here to stand above others or to dominate them. Instead, as parents, spouses, mentors, heads of parish groups, employers, we are called to seek to serve others with love, kindness and mercy. Unfortunately, having power, honourable titles and recognition from others continue to be a constant temptation for many people, even among our present-day Church leaders. Let us pray for them as well as for ourselves to be coherent in our words and actions and follow Jesus with greater faithfulness.

Question for reflection:

Do I exercise the same authority of service as Jesus?

Wednesday, 16th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Jeremiah 18:18-20, Matthew 20:17-28

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, and on the road he took the Twelve aside by themselves and said to them, 'Look, we are going up to

Jerusalem, and the Son of man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised up again.' Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom.' Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can.' He said to them, 'Very well; you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.' When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

To drink the cup of love

In today's gospel, the two disciples, James and John, were ambitious to be important in the kingdom of God. Through their mother, they made their request to Jesus. Jesus did not respond to the request but asked the two brothers if they could drink the cup of self-sacrificing love that implied walking the path of suffering and even death. Today, Jesus offers this same cup to us. As His present-day disciples, are we committed to taking this cup and following Jesus in living and loving the way He lived and loved?

When the rest of the disciples knew about it, they became indignant with the two brothers. With great patience, Jesus once again reminded them that true greatness meant being the least and the servant of all. What about us? Are we seeking greatness and constantly desiring to dominate others, even by being right all the time? In this prayer time, let us ask Jesus for the grace to become less important and live to serve God through serving others.

Question for reflection:

What is Jesus' message to me as I pray with the gospel passage?

Thursday, 17th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Jeremiah 17:5-10, Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there used to lie a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with what fell from the rich man's table. Even dogs came and licked his sores. Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels into Abraham's embrace. The rich man also died and was buried. In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his embrace. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames." Abraham said, "My son, remember that during your life you had your fill of good things, just as Lazarus his fill of bad. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to prevent those who want to cross from our side to yours or from your side to ours." So he said, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them." The rich man replied, "Ah no, father Abraham, but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead."

The rich man and Lazarus

In today's parable, a wealthy man lived in a self-contained world of fine robes and luxurious dining. When he died, he found himself in a place of torment. He was neither a morally bad person nor a doer of wicked crimes. His only fault was that he failed to notice the poor, hungry man, Lazarus. The rich man could have just given some scraps from his table, and those scraps would make a difference to Lazarus. However, the rich man failed to do anything at all.

Like the rich man, we can wrap ourselves up with our preoccupations, work and privileges, to the point that we do not see the "Lazarus" in our

lives. The first essential step is simple. First, we simply need to open our eyes to see that there are people in need, and then we open our hearts to help them. As we journey through Lent, let us allow this parable to motivate us to be more sensitive to those around us who are in need and start making a difference through our simple acts of compassion and kindness.

Question for reflection:

By telling me this parable, what is Jesus' message for me?

Friday, 18th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28, Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: 'Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them thinking, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance." So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They answered, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him at the proper time.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing and we marvel at it?' I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' When they heard his parables, the chief priests and the scribes realised he was speaking about them, but though they would have liked to arrest him they were afraid of the crowds, who looked on him as a prophet.

Called to be good stewards

Today, Jesus told a parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard and did everything for the piece of land to bear good grapes at harvest time. He had tenants to look after the vineyard, but they abused their responsibilities. These tenants even ill-treated the landowner's servants

and even killed his son, who was sent to remind them to do what was right and just. The tenants failed to recognise that they were not the owners but simply stewards entrusted to take care of the vineyard.

God placed us here on earth to be responsible tenants, and our mission is to make God's vineyard bear good fruit. Our society, neighbourhood, workplace, family, parish, and environment are the places where we are called to serve and love. However, we need to remember that we are not the owners of the vineyard, but God is. At the end of the day, God, as the Owner of all, expects a harvest of good fruit from us.

Question for reflection:

How can I be a good and responsible steward of God's vineyard?

Saturday, 19th March, St. Joseph.

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16, Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22, Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

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

St. Joseph: A person of faith

"When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do...". These words from the gospel sum up the faith of St. Joseph. Joseph was an upright man who was engaged to Mary. When he found out she was pregnant, he wanted to divorce her to avoid scandal. Yet, he was willing to allow God to change his plan. His living faith moved him to listen and do what God told him.

Our Christian faith is both listening and doing. The following words of St. James invite us to be listeners and doers of the Word, like St. Joseph: *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."* (James 1:22-24). Today, let us ask St. Joseph to share His faith with us, especially when bringing our faith into action is challenging.

Question for reflection:

Do I listen and do what God tells me?

Sunday, 20th March, 3rd Sunday of Lent.

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15, 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12, Luke 13:1-9

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than any others, that this should have happened to them? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell, killing them all? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.' He told this parable, 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to his vinedresser, "For three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied, "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."

God's never gives up on us

We often link the atrocities around us with God's punishing us for our sins. In today's gospel, two tragedies were mentioned: the first about the killings of the Galileans by Pilate and the second about the fatal fall of the tower. Jesus told those around Him that bad things happened due to the fragility of human life. Instead, Jesus used these unfortunate events to call the people to conversion. Today, let us listen to Jesus' call for us to repent. Each day, we need to live in the present moment by loving God and bearing the good fruit of love for others to enjoy.

The good news is that God is not a God who punishes us for our sins. Instead, He is like the patient gardener who never fails to cultivate and nourish us with His love. In His mercy, He waits for us to bear good fruit, even if we keep on failing to do so. Let us make our way back to Him and experience ourselves loved by Him.

Question for reflection:

Is there something in my life that Jesus is asking me to change in this time of Lent?

Monday, 21st March, 3rd Week of Lent.

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

Jesus came to Nazara and spoke to the people in the synagogue: 'In truth I tell you, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. 'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a town in Sidonia. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many suffering from virulent skin-diseases in Israel, but none of these was cured -- only Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him off the cliff, but he passed straight through the crowd and walked away.'

God is a God for all

Nobody owns God. This was the message that Jesus had for the people of Nazareth. He spoke about two Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha, to bring His point across to the people. Prophet Elijah helped a non-Jewish widow during drought, and Prophet Elisha healed a pagan officer from leprosy. Jesus revealed the God of the Jews was also the God of the pagans. When the people in the synagogue heard what Jesus said, they became angry because they saw themselves as God's chosen ones, and so, God was theirs. They wanted to get rid of Jesus in their rage by pushing Him down the cliff.

Do we identify with the people of Nazareth? Do we accept the God that Jesus came to present to us? Are we comfortable with the reality that God has no favourites and He loves all people? May we allow Jesus to reveal to us the universal, big and generous heart of God. God loves all. We, too, are called to open our hearts to all, regardless of their belief, age, social status, etc.

Question for reflection:

Is it 'good news' for me that God is a God for all?

Tuesday, 22nd March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Daniel 3:25. 34-43, Matthew 18:21-35

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.'

To become forgiving people

Peter asked Jesus, "How often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?". For Peter, forgiving someone seven times would be good enough. However, Jesus answered him, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times", and by saying this, He was saying that there is no limit to forgiveness. Jesus then told a parable that speaks of God's readiness to forgive. His forgiveness is born from His mercy that looks at a person with eyes of love and never fails to give him/her another new chance, another new opportunity to change, live, and love. In this time of Lent, Jesus invites us to be forgiving as God is forgiving.

"God's forgiveness is what we all need, and it is the greatest sign of His mercy. A gift that every forgiven sinner is called upon to share with every brother and sister he or she meets. It is beautiful to be forgiven, but you too, if you wish to be forgiven, forgive in turn. Forgive!" (Pope Francis, March 2016).

Question for reflection:

What prevents me from putting forgiveness into practice?

Wednesday, 23rd March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Deuteronomy 4: 1,5-9, Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. In truth I tell you, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, is to disappear from the Law until all its purpose is achieved. Therefore, anyone who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of Heaven; but the person who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of Heaven.'

Above all, love!

Jesus has come, not to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to complete them with His Law of Love. At the last supper, Jesus gave His disciples the commandment to love one another. *'And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.'* (John 13:34). Today, He says these same words to us too! The love that Jesus calls us to is not merely human love but one that

needs to find its source and foundation in our personal and intimate relationship with God. From having a relationship with God, we learn how to love. Our hearts are open to looking at others as people and their deepest needs and not projecting our own selfish interests. We welcome each person, even those whom we consider unloveable.

Today, may we ask Jesus for the courage to take up His simple appeal of the commandment of love and take small steps to love those around us, starting from those in our family.

Question for reflection:

How can I demonstrate love to others today?

Thursday, 24th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

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

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

The finger of God is at work

In today's gospel, Jesus was doing good by healing a mute person. However, there were people around Him who attributed His work as evil. God was at work, but unfortunately, they could not see the finger of God working in and through the person of Jesus.

In this Lenten season, may we have the eyes of faith to see the finger of God continuing working in and through the lives of others. Yet, like the people in today's passage, we might fail to recognise the good that others are doing due to our preconceived ideas and judgements. Jesus invites us to walk in this journey of repentance that involves us to be open to welcome the good that people are doing and to rejoice that the finger of God is present.

Question for reflection:

Do I allow my prejudices against someone to prevent me from recognising the good that he/she is doing for me, for others?

Friday, 25th March, Annunciation of the Lord.

Isaiah 7:10-14, 8: 10, Hebrews 10: 4-10, Luke 1: 26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favor! The Lord is with you. She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob 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.

Like Mary, I say "Yes"

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the "Yes" of Mother Mary to God. In the passage, the angel Gabriel announced that she would bear a son and that He would be the Son of God who would reign forever. Faced with this unexpected and astonishing news, Mary was afraid and also uncertain of what it all meant and asked, "*But how can this come*

about...?" When she understood that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and that God was the one making the impossible to be possible, Mary gave her "Yes".

We sometimes find ourselves being asked by God to do things that seem impossible for us to accomplish on our own. For example, the call to forgive someone who has deeply hurt us, the summon to follow Him more radically, etc. With the help of the Holy Spirit, what seems impossible for us is possible for God. Today, let us ask Mother Mary to share with us her trust and courage so that we too can say "Yes" to God's purpose for our lives.

Question for reflection:

Do I trust God enough to say "Yes" and surrender myself to His plan for my life?

Saturday, 26th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Hosea 5:15-6:6, Luke 18:9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else, 'Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else, and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get." The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." This man, I tell you, went home again justified; the other did not. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up.'

We are loved because God is good

"...what I want is love, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not holocausts" (1st reading). God neither wants us to pay Him lip service nor offer Him superficial worship. Instead, He longs for us to become people whose words, thoughts and actions are fueled by love. In today's gospel, the Pharisee proudly listed down all he had done and even looked down on the tax collector. The Pharisee did many morally good acts, but he failed to do all those things for love and with love. Unlike the Pharisee, the tax

collector centred his prayer on God and recognised himself as a sinner in need of God's mercy and love.

Let us allow our love for God to motivate us to do good and not feel superior to others just by what we do and achieve. Let us humbly come before God with all our flaws and receive His mercy and love once again, and learn to look at others with eyes of love, not judgement.

Question for reflection:

Do I identify myself with the Pharisee or the tax collector? Why?

Sunday, 27th March, 4th Sunday of Lent.

Joshua 5: 9, 10-12, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Luke 15:1-3,11-32

The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to Jesus, and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable: Then he said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me." So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men." So he left the place and went back to his father. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to

celebrate. Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property -- he and his loose women -- you kill the calf we had been fattening." The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found." '

This is God

The parable of the Prodigal Son reveals to us the true face of God, who loves all of us with unconditional love. In the parable, the father neither controlled nor forced His sons to do what He wanted. When the younger son wanted his share of the inheritance and to go off to faraway land to live his life, the father respected his decision and let him go. After the younger son came back, poor and broken, the father ran to meet him, embraced him, kissed him, as a mother would do. When the elder son refused to enter into the feast because he could not understand the father's compassion towards his younger brother, the father came out to remind him, saying, "*You are always with me, and everything I have is yours*".

Throughout the parable, Jesus is telling us: "*This is God. He loves you when you are self-righteous and judgemental as the elder son. He loves you when you choose to wander away from Him like the younger son*". So, as we continue our Lenten journey, let us allow ourselves to be unconditionally loved by God our Father.

Question for reflection:

Have I ever experienced God's unconditional love?

Monday, 28th March, 4th Week of Lent.

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

Jesus left for Galilee. He himself had declared that a prophet is not honoured in his own home town. On his arrival the Galileans received him well, having seen all that he had done at Jerusalem during the festival which they too had attended. He went again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. And there was a royal official whose son was ill at Capernaum; hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went and asked him to come and cure his son, as he was at the point of death. Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and portents you will not believe!' 'Sir,' answered the official, 'come down before my child dies.' 'Go home,' said Jesus, 'your son will live.' The man believed what Jesus had said and went on his way home; and while he was still on the way his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. They replied, 'The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.' The father realised that this was exactly the time when Jesus had said, 'Your son will live'; and he and all his household believed. This new sign, the second, Jesus performed on his return from Judaea to Galilee.

Just say the word, Lord!

Throughout Jesus' mission, people constantly went to Him asking for "signs and portents". In today's gospel, a royal official went to Jesus he begged Him to go to his house and heal his sick son. He was not someone whose faith was dependent on "signs and portents". Instead, when Jesus told him, "Go home, your son will live", the man believed in Jesus and trusted in His word. What great joy this man had when he returned home and saw that his son was well again.

In this time of Lent, Jesus calls us to have the faith of this royal officer, i.e. a faith that seeks to hear and believe the word of Jesus, and live our lives according to his word. The Scripture is where we hear the word of God. As we journey through life, His living word comes to us as a word of peace, a word of hope, a word of truth, etc. Like the royal officer, we need to hold onto the word of Jesus. When we trust His word, we will see His power working in and through us.

Question for reflection:

Do I truly believe in Jesus and trust in His word?

Tuesday, 29th March, 4th Week of Lent.

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

There was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem next to the Sheep Pool there is a pool called Bethesda in Hebrew, which has five porticos; and under these were crowds of sick people, blind, lame, paralysed- for at intervals the angel of the Lord came down into the pool, and the water was disturbed, and the first person to enter the water after this disturbance was cured of any ailment he suffered from. One man there had an illness which had lasted thirty-eight years, and when Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been in that condition for a long time, he said, 'Do you want to be well again?' 'Sir,' replied the sick man, 'I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way, someone else gets down there before me.' Jesus said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around.' The man was cured at once, and he picked up his mat and started to walk around. Now that day happened to be the Sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the Sabbath; you are not allowed to carry your sleeping-mat.' He replied, 'But the man who cured me told me, "Pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around." They asked, "Who is the man who said to you, "Pick up your sleeping-mat and walk around"? ' The man had no idea who it was, since Jesus had disappeared, as the place was crowded. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said, 'Now you are well again, do not sin any more, or something worse may happen to you.' The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had cured him. It was because he did things like this on the Sabbath that the Jews began to harass Jesus.

Jesus and the paralysed man

In today's gospel, Jesus asked a man who was paralysed for thirty-eight years if he wanted to be well again. We might wonder why Jesus asked such an obvious question. Jesus asked because He wanted the paralysed man to express his heart's deepest desire. Today, Jesus asks us, "Do you want to be well again? Do you want to be happy again? Do you want to be loved again?" He waits for our answer. He wants us to express our deepest desire and our deepest fears to Him. Jesus always takes us seriously and responds to us with his life-giving presence.

After the man was healed, he went to the Jewish authorities and told them about Jesus healing him on the Sabbath, and thus, because of his action, they started to harass and persecute Jesus. Did this experience of betrayal stop Jesus from doing good? No, He continued to go about touching lives. Today, we too are called to continue loving and caring for others, even in the face of rejection and ridicule.

Question for reflection:

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

Wednesday, 30th March, 4th Week of Lent.

Isaiah 49:8-15, John 5:17-30

Jesus said to the Jews: 'My Father still goes on working, and I am at work, too.' But that only made the Jews even more intent on killing him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he spoke of God as his own Father and so made himself God's equal. To this Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, by himself the Son can do nothing; he can do only what he sees the Father doing: and whatever the Father does the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he himself does, and he will show him even greater things than these, works that will astonish you. Thus, as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to anyone he chooses; for the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father. Whoever refuses honour to the Son refuses honour to the Father who sent him. In all truth I tell you, whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life; without being brought to judgement such a person has passed from death to life. In all truth I tell you, the hour is coming -- indeed it is already here -- when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and all who hear it will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself; and, because he is the Son of man, has granted him power to give judgement. Do not be surprised at this, for the hour is coming when the dead will leave their graves at the sound of his voice: those who did good will come forth to life; and those who did evil will come forth to judgement. By myself I can do nothing; I can judge only as I am told to judge, and my judging is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.'

Working for God

In today's first reading, God says, "Does a woman forget her baby at the breast, or fail to cherish the child of her womb? Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you". God never forgets us because He is a God who is close to His people. Thus, regardless of the circumstances that we are living, God never abandons us. On the contrary, he is with us to give us the strength to journey on. Today, Jesus calls us once again to experience God's love for us, even in our failures and shortcomings.

In the gospel, Jesus said, "My Father still goes on working, and I am at work too". As sons and daughters of God, we are called to work for God by living a purposeful and meaningful life doing good for others. The source of our love for others comes from our intimate relationship with God our Father. May His love be the motivation for us to work for the good of others.

Question for reflection:

"My Father still goes on working, and I am at work too". Do I work daily for the good of others?

Thursday, 31st March, 4th Week of Lent.

Exodus 32:7-14, John 5:31-47

Jesus said to the Jews: 'Were I to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be true; but there is another witness who speaks on my behalf, and I know that his testimony is true. You sent messengers to John, and he gave his testimony to the truth- not that I depend on human testimony; no, it is for your salvation that I mention it. John was a lamp lit and shining and for a time you were content to enjoy the light that he gave. But my testimony is greater than John's: the deeds my Father has given me to perform, these same deeds of mine testify that the Father has sent me. Besides, the Father who sent me bears witness to me himself. You have never heard his voice, you have never seen his shape, and his word finds no home in you because you do not believe in the one whom he has sent. You pore over the scriptures, believing that in them you can find eternal life; it is these scriptures that testify to me, and yet you refuse to come to me to receive life! Human glory means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you. I have come in the name of my Father and you refuse to accept me; if someone else should come in his own name you would accept him. How can you

believe, since you look to each other for glory and are not concerned with the glory that comes from the one God? Do not imagine that I am going to accuse you before the Father: you have placed your hopes on Moses, and Moses will be the one who accuses you. If you really believed him you would believe me too, since it was about me that he was writing; but if you will not believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?'

Our goal in life: To please God alone

"Human glory means nothing to me. How can you believe, since you look to each other for glory and are not concerned with the glory that comes from the one God?". We all look for affirmation and approval from others. We want people to appreciate us and not reject or abandon us. This is because we tend to measure our esteem on how others look and value us. For Jesus, His self-worth was not based on people's approval rating. In His mission, He was often rejected and ridiculed by the Jewish leaders, and in the end, He faced death on the cross. In fact, very few understood His teachings and appreciated His good works. Yet, He constantly placed His Father's will as the top priority and sought to please God alone.

Let us not forget that God loves us deeply and rejoices over our lives. Every day is an opportunity to please God by choosing to live a meaningful life filled with compassion, kindness, mercy and forgiveness.

Question for reflection:

Is doing God's will my first priority?



Painting by Fr. Sieger Koder