

Jesus was led by the Spirit
out into the desert ...



**Prayer for Living
Daily Reflections for
Liturgical Year A**

Sr. Sandra Seow
Verbum Dei Missionaries

PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR A

**Copyright © 2023 Sr. Sandra Seow
All rights reserved.**

**This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used
in any manner whatsoever without the author's written
permission.**

Wednesday, 1st February, 4th Week in Ordinary Time.

Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15, Mark 6:1-6

Jesus went to his home town, and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is despised only in his own country, among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, except that he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith. He made a tour round the villages, teaching.

May I recognise your presence, Jesus

Jesus was doing good by healing the sick, teaching in the synagogues, etc. However, instead of recognising that God was working in Him and through Him, the people of Nazareth refused to accept Him because they knew Jesus and His family. He was too ordinary for them, and thus, they rejected Him. Their lack of faith prevented Jesus from working miracles among them.

As we pray with this gospel passage, let us listen to Jesus speaking to us as He invites us to see His presence in the ordinary and the familiar with eyes of faith. When we have eyes of faith to perceive His presence in the normal routines of life, the ordinary encounters and those most familiar to us, we give Jesus space to work in us and through us. Jesus will never force us to welcome Him but waits for us to open our eyes to see, our ears to hear and our hearts to receive Him.

Reflective question:

What prevents me from perceiving Jesus' presence and living this day with Him?

**Thursday, 2nd February, The Presentation of the Lord.
Malachi 3:1-4, Hebrews 2:14-18, Luke 2:22-40**

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 opposed- and a sword will pierce your soul too -- so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.' 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.

Joyful encounters

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation in which Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the Temple where Simeon and Anna encountered them with great jubilation. Simeon and Anna were people of prayer and lived in close communion with God. Thus, they could

perceive God in the small, fragile baby. Simeon saw and recognised Jesus as the light for the world and glory for Israel. Likewise, in seeing the baby Jesus, Anna praised God.

Today, the Feast of Presentation continues when we open ourselves to meet Jesus in the silent moments of prayer, in our ordinary routines, in the challenges of life and in the people we encounter each day. No matter our age, Jesus invites us to live with this awareness that He is with us. Like Simeon and Anna, may God always bring joy to our hearts! As we celebrate World Day of Consecrated Life, let us pray for consecrated people to remain faithful to God and reveal His loving presence to the world.

Reflective question:

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

Friday, 3rd February, St. Blaise, St Ansgar.

Hebrews 13: 1-8, Mark 6:14-29

King Herod had heard about Jesus, since by now his name was well known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Others said, 'He is Elijah,' others again, 'He is a prophet, like the prophets we used to have.' But when Herod heard this he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead.' Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.' As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?'

She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.' The girl at once rushed back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, immediately, on a dish.' The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. At once the king sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in the prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Listen to the voice of God

"Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him". Herod respected John the Baptist and paid attention to his words. Unlike Herodias, who wanted to kill the prophet. However, Herod made an impulsive promise to Herodias' daughter in front of his guests by telling her that he would give her anything she wanted. Prompted by her mother, the girl said she wanted John the Baptist's head. Thus, despite knowing John the Baptist to be a good person, Herod listened to Herodias' voice and had him beheaded.

"Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled." (Hebrews 3:15). Like Herod, we sometimes do not know which voices to heed and follow. Today, let us ask Jesus to grace us with His strength so that we can listen attentively to the voice of the Holy Spirit within us and allow ourselves to walk the path of love and goodness.

Reflective question:

What is the Holy Spirit within me saying today?

Saturday, 4th February, 4th Week in Ordinary Time.

Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21, Mark 6:30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that there

was no time for them even to eat. So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many recognised them; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

Being with Jesus and others

"Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while...". In this time of prayer, Jesus calls us to be with Him and to find rest in His presence without needing to do anything. This is because being with Jesus is vital to our life of faith.

"So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length". Jesus' plan for rest was interrupted by the crowd needing Him. However, He responded to them, not with annoyance but with compassion. Let us learn from Jesus to look at others around us with eyes of compassion and be present to them as Jesus did with the people who went to Him.

Reflective question:

From being with Jesus the Sheperd, I am called to serve others with compassion. Do I see the need to be with Jesus and find rest in Him?

Sunday, 5th February, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Isaiah 58:7-10, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples, "You are salt for the earth. But if salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled under people's feet. You are light for the world. A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in heaven."

You are the light

Our faith in God is not a private matter. In today's gospel, Jesus calls us to shine brightly for all people to see and recognise the goodness of God. Jesus identified Himself as the Light of the world because God's unconditional love and goodness shone through the good works He did. Today, Jesus reminds us, "*You are light for the world*". It is now our turn to show our faith in God through our good deeds so that others can see God in us.

We make God visible when we choose to do what is loving and good. In the first reading, the Prophet Isaiah tells us, "*Share your bread with the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor, clothe the man you see to be naked and turn not from your own kin. Then will your light shine like the dawn...*". May our good works reveal the depth of our love for God and our faith in Him.

Reflective question:

When others see me, do they see God in me?

Monday, 6th February, SS Paul Miki & Companions.

Genesis 1:1-19, Mark 6:53-56

Having made the crossing, Jesus and his disciples came to land at Gennesaret and moored there. When they disembarked people at once recognised him, and started hurrying all through the countryside and brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were saved.

God cares

In the first reading, the Creation story reflects the conviction of the author of Genesis that God created everything and it was good. On the sixth day, He created humankind, and it was not only good, but the author declared it was "*very good*". We, human beings, are very good because we have been created in God's own image and likeness. Let us pause, savour and marvel at this reality that we reflect God, that His image of love is stamped upon us.

Jesus, the Word of God, is the fullness of God's revelation. In the gospel today, Jesus shows us that God is never indifferent to the pains and sufferings of humanity because He is a personal God who cares for His people. When people brought the sick to Him, Jesus touched and healed them. Likewise, we are invited to go to God and bring Him our often messy lives and painful experiences. God, who is in love with us, will never turn us away. Instead, He will bring us His healing touch and His comforting love.

Reflective question:

What is it that prevents me from going to Jesus?

Tuesday, 7th February, 5th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 1:20-2:4, Mark 7:1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, keep the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them to keep, concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So the Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions.' And he said to them, 'How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition! For Moses said: Honour your father and your mother, and, Anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is Korban (that is, dedicated to God)," then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother. In this way you make God's word ineffective for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.'

What matters is to love as God loves

"You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions". In today's gospel, Jesus confronted the Pharisees and scribes for placing more weight on human traditions than the commandment of God. Jesus cautioned these religious leaders to reexamine their hearts and get their priorities right.

Today, Jesus' words continue to echo to us. He calls us to allow God's commandment to shape our daily lives. The commandment of God is to love as He loves. As people of faith, we must never cling to human religious customs and rituals to the point that we forget what God truly wants from us. God wants us to put the weak and the vulnerable first, give voice to those suffering from injustice, take care of the sick, speak His good news of love to those searching for meaning in life, and share our resources with those in need, forgive those who have hurt us. In God's sight, love is all that matters.

Reflective question:

Is my heart centered on loving as God loves?

Wednesday, 8th February, St. Jerome Emiliani, St. Josephine Bakhita.

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17, Mark 7:14-23

Jesus called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean. Anyone who has ears for listening should listen!' When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Even you -- don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer? And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'

The call to have a renewed heart

"The Lord God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being" (First reading). We carry within us the breath of God, the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God in us shapes our attitudes, words and actions and leads us to share God's love and goodness with those around us.

In today's gospel, the religious leaders were concerned with external things like laws of what to eat and not to eat to be right with God. Jesus, however, cautioned the people to focus on their interior lives, i.e., their attitudes and values. Today, let us examine our hearts, our inner life and be aware of God's spirit in us who desires to shape our attitudes and actions to become wholesome and life-giving. In this way, we can live a life of love that God has meant for us.

Reflective question:

Am I aware of the abiding presence of God's spirit in me, and do I count on His help to lead me to live centered on doing God's will?

Thursday, 9th February, 5th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 2:18-25, Mark 7:24-30

Jesus left Gennesaret and set out for the territory of Tyre. There he went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there; but he could not pass unrecognised. At once a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him and came and fell at his feet. Now this woman was a gentile, by birth a Syro-Phoenician, and she begged him to drive the devil out of her daughter. And he said to her, 'The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' But she spoke up, 'Ah yes, sir,' she replied, 'but little dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.' And he said to her, 'For saying this you may go home happy; the devil has gone out of your daughter.' So she went off home and found the child lying on the bed and the devil gone.

A determined faith that keeps on asking

In today's gospel, when a pagan woman heard that Jesus was in Tyre, she quickly pleaded with Him to heal her sickly child. Jesus told her, "*The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's*

food and throw it to little dogs", meaning that the people of Israel should be fed first before the pagans. The woman was not offended by Jesus' words; instead, she was determined that Jesus should help her. With humility, she replied that little dogs could also enjoy the scraps of food from the children's table. Amazed by her faith, Jesus healed her daughter.

Today, let us learn from this Syrophenician woman to have unwavering faith in Jesus. We trust that He is always with us and will help us with our needs.

Reflective question:

Do I quickly give up on God when I sense that He is not answering my prayers?

Friday, 10th February, St. Scholastica.

Genesis 3:1-8, Mark 7:31-37

Returning from the territory of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Lake of Galilee, right through the Decapolis territory. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside to be by themselves, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is, 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, and at once the impediment of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they proclaimed it. Their admiration was unbounded, and they said, 'Everything he does is good, he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'

Ephphatha!

In today's gospel, a group of people brought a deaf man with a speech impediment to Jesus and begged Him to heal him. They were concerned for their friend and wanted the best for him. We need family and friends to guide us to Jesus in our faith journey. Likewise, we too can help play a role in bringing people to Jesus. Thus, we need others as much as we are needed by others. Let us give thanks for those whose life and faith

have helped us to become the persons God desire us to be. We also commit to becoming channels of God's presence to others.

We might not be physically deaf, but often, we are unable to hear what God has to say to us and fail to put His word into practice. Today, Jesus comes to us and tells us, "*Ephphatha*", "*Be open*". Jesus needs us to open the ears of our hearts to listen attentively to His life-giving words so that we can proclaim how good and loving our God is.

Reflective question:

What prevents me from truly listening and putting His word into practice?

Saturday, 11th February, Our Lady of Lourdes.

Genesis 3:9-24, Mark 8:1-10

A great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat. So Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. If I send them off home hungry they will collapse on the way; some have come a great distance.' His disciples replied, 'Where could anyone get these people enough bread to eat in a deserted place?' He asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' Then he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and began handing them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them among the crowd. They had a few small fishes as well, and over these he said a blessing and ordered them to be distributed too. They ate as much as they wanted, and they collected seven basketfuls of the scraps left over. Now there had been about four thousand people. He sent them away and at once, getting into the boat with his disciples, went to the region of Dalmanutha.

We see our lack; Jesus sees our potential

There was a large hungry crowd in a deserted place with Jesus and His disciples. Jesus looked at them, and His heart was filled with compassion for them. He wanted to make an effort to feed them. On the other hand, the disciples saw the same crowd and wanted to send them away. Today, let us ask ourselves, Am I compassionate to others? Do I care for others?

The reluctance of His disciples did not deter Jesus. He persisted and asked them, "*How many loaves have you?*". The disciples replied, "*Seven*". Jesus took the seven loaves and a few fish the disciples gave Him and fed the crowd. Today, Jesus wants to work wonders with our small and inadequate resources and gifts. Let us learn to trust Jesus enough to give and offer the little we have, knowing that He is the one multiplying our loaves and fish to nourish the people around us with God's unconditional love.

Reflective question:

Do I trust that God can do extraordinary things through me?

Sunday, 12th February, Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Ecclesiasticus 15:16-20, 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, Matthew 5:17-37

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. 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. You have heard how it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has

already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye should be your downfall, tear it out and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body thrown into hell. And if your right hand should be your downfall, cut it off and throw it away; for it will do you less harm to lose one part of yourself than to have your whole body go to hell. It has also been said, Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a writ of dismissal. But I say this to you, everyone who divorces his wife, except for the case of an illicit marriage, makes her an adulteress; and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again, you have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, since that is God's throne; or by earth, since that is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great King. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the Evil One.'

A heart formed by the Holy Spirit

Today, Jesus calls us to look at our hearts, our inner core because merely observing external laws is not enough. In today's gospel, He highlights the commandments of "*You shall not kill*" and "*You shall not commit adultery*" and challenges His listeners then and each one of us today to go to the roots of the actions, i.e. anger and lust. These attitudes and emotions are not right or wrong in themselves. However, we can sometimes allow them to direct our thoughts, words and actions, which can lead to harmful and damaging results for ourselves and others.

Jesus wants us to have His same heart of love that pulls down walls of division and turn hatred into peace. The good news is that He never demands what He does not enable us to do. He gifts us with His Spirit that shapes our emotions and attitudes and strengthens us to choose to walk the path of truth, mercy and justice. Thus, guided by the Holy Spirit, the way we live will be life-giving for ourselves and those around us.

Reflective question:

Do I open myself to be led by God's spirit and make life-giving choices?

Monday, 13th February, 6th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 4:1-15, 25, Mark 8:11-13

The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with Jesus; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to put him to the test. And with a profound sigh he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign? In truth I tell you, no sign shall be given to this generation.' And, leaving them again, he re-embarked and went away to the other side.

Jesus went away to the other side

In today's gospel, Jesus encountered a group of Pharisees who asked Him for a sign. The purpose of their request was to test Him and discredit Him in front of the crowd. All Jesus did was give a sigh expressing His frustration and hopelessness towards their hardness of heart. He then got back on the boat and went away.

Let us learn from Jesus how to deal with people who set out to find fault with what we do and say, no matter the good we do or the best we give to them. We have been in situations when people are not interested in our intentions or thoughts because they have already made up their minds about us. Arguing with such people would only create more tension. Like Jesus, we can walk away from them. In this time of prayer, let us pray for these people in our lives and ask Jesus to help us love them by accepting them and respecting their opinions of us.

Reflective question:

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

Tuesday, 14th February, SS. Cyril & Methodius.

Genesis 6: 5-8, 7:1-5,10, Mark 8:14-21

The disciples had forgotten to take any bread and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Then Jesus gave them this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod.' And they said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread.' And Jesus knew it, and he said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not understand, still not realise? Are your minds closed? Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear? Or do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' They

answered, 'Twelve.' 'And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' And they answered, 'Seven.' Then he said to them, 'Do you still not realise?'

A trusting faith

"...look out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod". Jesus warned His disciples against the Pharisees' and Herod's lack of faith, leading to their hardness of heart. This was because He knew that they were worried about not bringing enough bread for their journey. The disciples had witnessed Jesus' multiplying loaves and fish for multitudes of people, but they remained preoccupied with not having enough. Like the Pharisees and Herod, they saw but did not understand. Jesus wanted His disciples to have trusting faith in Him that He would take care of them.

We can perhaps identify with Jesus' disciples. We worry about a family problem, a sickness, the uncertainty of the future, etc., and we forget that we have Jesus with us. He is with us and will nourish us with peace and strength to face each challenge we face. Today, Jesus calls us to have deep faith that trusts in Him.

Reflective question:

Is my faith a trusting faith?

Wednesday, 15th February, 6th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 8: 6-13, 20-22, Mark 8:22-26

Jesus and his disciples came to Bethsaida, and some people brought to him a blind man whom they begged him to touch. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. Then, putting spittle on his eyes and laying his hands on him, he asked, 'Can you see anything?' The man, who was beginning to see, replied, 'I can see people; they look like trees as they walk around.' Then he laid his hands on the man's eyes again and he saw clearly; he was cured, and he could see everything plainly and distinctly. And Jesus sent him home, saying, 'Do not even go into the village.'

Slowly and gradually, his sight returned

In today's gospel, Jesus healed a blind man, but he did not see immediately. Instead, he recovered his sight gradually. When Jesus placed His hands on the man's eyes for the first time, he could only see people, but they looked like trees walking about. However, he could see everything after Jesus placed His hands on him the second time.

We can perhaps identify with the blind man in today's passage. Like him, we do not often see and understand situations, people and even God immediately but gradually. Therefore, we need the gift of patience to trust to journey through. Like Noah in the first reading, he had the patience to wait for the flood water to recede. It was only on the third try of sending out the dove that he realised there was no more flood, and all was well again. In this time of prayer, let us ask Jesus to help us to be patient and to trust that God is always working for our good.

Reflective question:

Do I dare to put patience into practice when things do not happen as quickly as I expect?

Thursday, 16th February, 6th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 9:1-13, Mark 8:27-33

Jesus and his disciples left for the villages round Caesarea Philippi. On the way he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say I am?' And they told him, 'John the Baptist, others Elijah, others again, one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he asked them, 'who do you say I am?' Peter spoke up and said to him, 'You are the Christ.' And he gave them strict orders not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of man was destined to suffer grievously, and to be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and to be put to death, and after three days to rise again; and he said all this quite openly. Then, taking him aside, Peter tried to rebuke him. But, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said to him, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking not as God thinks, but as human beings do.'

Who are you?

"Who do you say I am?". This is one of the most fundamental questions that Jesus asked His disciples. This is the same question that Jesus is

asking us today and is one we need to answer for ourselves. As we journey through life and face its joys and sadness, we need to listen to Jesus as He asks us, "*At this point of your life, who do you say I am?*". Today, let us respond to Jesus, not just from our heads but also from our hearts.

Though Peter answered, "*You are the Christ*", he still had a long way to fully grasp the significance of what he was saying. He wanted a Messiah, a Christ who would be powerful and glorious, and thus, could not accept Jesus as the suffering Messiah. The invitation is for us to let God be God. Jesus is patient with us as we journey to know Him as who He truly is, not who we want Him to be. There is always more about Jesus we do not know.

Reflective question:

Who is Jesus for me at this point of my faith journey?

Friday, 17th February, 6th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 11:1-9, Mark 8:34-9:1

Jesus called the people and his disciples to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life? And indeed what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? For if anyone in this sinful and adulterous generation is ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' And he said to them, 'In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'

The call to follow Jesus

Do we want to be Jesus' disciples? In today's gospel, Jesus tells us clearly what being His disciple means, i.e. the need to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and walk behind Him. When we want to follow Jesus, we will often have to die to ourselves- our pride, selfishness, indifference, anger, etc. and choose to walk in His path of loving service and to do what is good for others.

"...for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel". Let us keep these words in our hearts and minds. We do what we do for Jesus' sake, i.e. because of our committed and faithful love for Him; and for the gospel's sake, i.e., because of our desire to live out the gospel values of justice, truth and peace. Today, let us not give Jesus lip-service but concretely follow Him as His disciples and live life as He wants us to.

Reflective question:

Today, am I ready to follow Jesus?

Saturday, 18th February, 6th Week in Ordinary Time.

Hebrews 11:1-7, Mark 9:2-13

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain on their own by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his clothes became brilliantly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus, 'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus. As they were coming down from the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean. And they put this question to him, 'Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?' He said to them, 'Elijah is indeed first coming to set everything right again; yet how is it that the scriptures say about the Son of man that he must suffer grievously and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come and they have treated him as they pleased, just as the scriptures say about him.'

Only Jesus

In today's gospel, Jesus brought Peter, James and John up to a high mountain where He was transfigured. We must remember that the disciples, especially Peter, had a hard time accepting Jesus' prediction of His coming suffering, death and resurrection. Nevertheless, they were

given the grace to witness Jesus in glory on the mountain. In the end, the disciples heard the voice coming from the cloud, "*This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him*", and when everything was over, they saw no one but only Jesus. Thus, Jesus had to be their sole focus as they walked the arduous road to Jerusalem.

Today, Jesus invites us to enter into a deeper relationship of love with Him. When we experience difficulties, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus and listen to what He has to say to us. He is always present with us.

Reflective questions:

As I prayerfully read the passage, what is Jesus' word to me? How will this word guide me as I live this day?

Sunday, 19th February, Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18, 1 Corinthians 3:16-23, Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have heard how it was said: Eye for eye and tooth for tooth. But I say this to you: offer no resistance to the wicked. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well; if someone wishes to go to law with you to get your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone requires you to go one mile, go two miles with him. Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away. 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.'

Jesus' higher standard: To love like God

"Eye for eye and tooth for tooth": This was the Old Testament law to limit how much a person can take revenge on another. However, Jesus challenged His listeners to go beyond the need to seek revenge. He said, *"But I say to you: offer no resistance to the wicked... love your enemies*

and pray for those who persecute you". These words would be scandalous for His listeners at the time. Today, they continue to be words that are not easy for us to accept. Yet, Jesus calls us to choose love, even when others treat us badly. This is because we are called to have the merciful heart of God, who loves the good and the bad unconditionally. Regardless of how others relate to us, we are called to exercise our will to love them by seeking their good.

If we struggle to respond to this call to love, we can find the comfort that the Holy Spirit lives in us and He is the one who can empower us to become loving people as God intended us to be.

Reflective question:

Is it hard for me to respond to Jesus' call to love unconditionally?

Monday, 20th February, 7th Week in Ordinary Time.

Ecclesiasticus 1:1-10, Mark 9:14-29

When Jesus, with Peter, James and John came down from the mountain and rejoined the disciples, they saw a large crowd round them and some scribes arguing with them. At once, when they saw him, the whole crowd were struck with amazement and ran to greet him. And he asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' A man answered him from the crowd, 'Master, I have brought my son to you; there is a spirit of dumbness in him, and when it takes hold of him it throws him to the ground, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and goes rigid. And I asked your disciples to drive it out and they were unable to.' In reply he said to them, 'Faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.' They brought the boy to him, and at once the spirit of dumbness threw the boy into convulsions, and he fell to the ground and lay writhing there, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' 'From childhood,' he said, 'and it has often thrown him into fire and into water, in order to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.' 'If you can?' retorted Jesus. 'Everything is possible for one who has faith.' At once the father of the boy cried out, 'I have faith. Help my lack of faith!' And when Jesus saw that a crowd was gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit. 'Deaf and dumb spirit,' he said, 'I command you: come out of him and never enter

him again.' Then it threw the boy into violent convulsions and came out shouting, and the boy lay there so like a corpse that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him up, and he was able to stand. When he had gone indoors, his disciples asked him when they were by themselves, 'Why were we unable to drive it out?' He answered, 'This is the kind that can be driven out only by prayer.'

The life of faith is a journey

How many of us have ever experienced struggles in our faith? In today's gospel, the simple prayer of the sick boy's father, "*I have faith. Help my lack of faith!*" can help us in moments of our unbelief.

Let us walk on this journey of faith together with Jesus. When we struggle to believe and stumble along the way, let us not be ashamed but get up and walk on. Jesus listens to our deep desires. He welcomes the little faith that we have. All we need to do is keep trusting and asking Jesus to strengthen our little faith!

Reflective question:

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

Tuesday, 21st February, 7th Week in Ordinary Time.

Ecclesiasticus 2:1-13, Mark 9:30-37

Jesus and his disciples made their way through Galilee; and he did not want anyone to know, because he was instructing his disciples; he was telling them, 'The Son of man will be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death; and three days after he has been put to death he will rise again.' But they did not understand what he said and were afraid to ask him. They came to Capernaum, and when he got into the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' They said nothing, because on the road they had been arguing which of them was the greatest. So he sat down, called the Twelve to him and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must make himself last of all and servant of all.' He then took a little child whom he set among them and embraced, and he said to them, 'Anyone who welcomes a little child such as this in my name, welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

To have the ambition of being a servant of all

The priorities of Jesus' disciples were often not in line with His. In today's gospel, Jesus told them that He would soon suffer, be put to death, and become vulnerable in the hands of those who hated Him. Right after that, His disciples started to argue about which among them was the greatest. They sought to be great, but this was not the way of Jesus. For Jesus, to be great meant to be a "servant of all".

Even in the Church setting, we often place great importance on status, titles and wealth. However, let us listen to Jesus as He reminds us again what greatness truly means and calls us to become servants of all, including those we disregard as nobodies, those who are the weaker member of the community. Let us strive to please God by serving and not lording over.

Reflective question:

How can I be a servant of those around me today?

Wednesday, 22nd February, 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.'

Lent is about relationships

As we begin the season of Lent, let us listen to Jesus' call for us to almsgiving, fasting and prayer, but not to do these external observances simply to draw attention to ourselves by appearing pious. Instead, everything we do during Lent should lead us firstly to draw nearer to God and grow closer to our fellow human beings. Loving God and loving others should motivate us to do what we do.

Today, let us enter our private room, the sacred space within, and be aware of God's loving presence and listen to how He wants us to live this season of Lent. He never gets tired of calling us to come back to Him and discover again the depth of love He has for us and also to seek to do something good and loving for others

Reflective question:

How is God inviting me to live this Lenten season?

Thursday, 23rd February, 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 life by choosing love

At the start of Lent, God, through Moses in the 1st reading, calls us to "Choose life". To choose life is to choose love, i.e. to love God and love those whom He places in our lives. When we decide to walk the path of love, we must ready ourselves to renounce ourselves by letting go of certain values and attitudes incompatible with the gospel values.

In this time of prayer, let us look at our lives and see the attachments or habits we might have that are not helping us to live a life that flows from love. One obstacle that might prevent us from taking the path of self-denial is selfishness, which drives us to pursue our own interests regardless of others. Today, Jesus calls us to follow Him by living a life of love that chooses to open to others and work for their good.

Reflective question:

What is the loving thing that Jesus is asking me to do today?

Friday, 24th February, Friday after Ash Wednesday.

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

John's disciples came to Jesus 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 authentic fasting that pleases God

"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...Is that the sort of fast that pleases me...?" (1st reading). What sort of fast will please God? At the start of Lent, let us ponder and understand that God does not want pious acts of abstaining but fasting that leads us to a new way of love that promotes reconciliation, justice, generosity and compassion.

In the gospel, Jesus reminds us that He is present, not absent from us. Jesus, the Bridegroom is here with us always. We are no longer waiting for the coming of the Messiah, like John's disciples and the Pharisees. Therefore, His presence in us should make a difference in how we live this Lent. Let us be creative in how we fast and live out the spirit and true purpose of fasting! Let Jesus be the one leading us to fast for love!

Reflective question:

How can my fasting today benefit others?

**Saturday, 25th February, 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.'

Mercy

The tax-collectors in Jesus' time were the most shunned people. Yet, Jesus drew close to Levi, a tax collector, and called him to follow Him. Truly, Jesus' heart was filled with merciful love that looked at Levi and saw his dignity and potential, and not his sins. When Levi heard Jesus' invitation, something moved him to leave his wealth and all worldly securities and follow Jesus.

Like Levi, we will never lose our value in Jesus' eyes. Despite the wrongs we have done, He will never stop calling us to stay close to Him and follow Him. When we follow Jesus, He invites us to look at people around us, not with judgement, but with hearts of merciful love.

Reflective question:

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

Sunday, 26th February, First Sunday of Lent.

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7, Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the desert to be put to the test by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was hungry, and the tester came and said to him, 'If you are Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says: Human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' The devil then took him to the holy city and set him on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down; for scripture says: He has given his angels orders about you, and they will carry you in their arms in case you trip over a stone.'

Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says: Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. And he said to him, 'I will give you all these, if you fall at my feet and do me homage.' Then Jesus replied, 'Away with you, Satan! For scripture says: The Lord your God is the one to whom you must do homage, him alone you must serve.' Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels appeared and looked after him.

Guided by the Word of God

In today's gospel, the tempter tempted Jesus with things that appeared to be good. The first temptation was to satisfy His hunger by turning stones into bread. Next, the tempter suggested to Jesus that He could perform spectacular acts to get people's admiration and achieve domination over all. However, Jesus did not listen to the tempter's voice of using His power for His personal needs, to be popular or to dominate. Instead, in His most vulnerable moment, He turned to the word of God.

We are tempted by seemingly good things that we selfishly want to possess for our ego, pleasures, comfort and ambition. The first reading tells the story of Adam and Eve, who were tempted to eat the fruit from the tree to possess knowledge. They yielded to temptation because they focused on what they wanted instead of what God had told them. Lent is a time for us to draw close to God, listen to what He tells us, and allow His word to guide us to walk faithfully in His ways.

Reflective question:

Do I hold onto the word of God to help me face difficult moments in my life?

Monday, 27th February, 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.'

A journey of love

"*You must love your neighbour as yourself*" (1st reading). Lent is a time to deepen our relationship with God and the people around us. We must remember that our Christian faith is not about 'God and I', but 'God, others and I'.

Today, Jesus, our King and Master, identifies Himself with the poorest of the poor. Who are the poorest of the poor in our society today? They are the materially poor as well as the spiritually poor. Giving alms and donations during this Lenten season is a lovely thing to do. Yet let us go a step further and see how we can help bring love and meaning to those who are spiritually poor, i.e. those who hunger for love, for meaning in life. Many people around us are lonely and depressed. Do we see them? In this time of prayer, let us ask Jesus to open our eyes and recognise the people who need us to show them kindness and love.

Reflective question:

Today, who are the people to whom I can show love?

Tuesday, 28th February, 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.'

God knows, and so I trust

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him". This is the basis of every prayer, and every conversation with God. We need to recognise God as our Father, who loves, takes care of, protects and provides. He is our Father who knows every single need before we even articulate it. Therefore, we need to hold onto this sentence with loving trust, *"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him"*, whenever we enter into prayer.'

Therefore, we come before God with an uncomplicated heart that trusts Him enough to know that He will give us what is truly best for us in His time and in His way.

Reflective question:

Do I recognise God as my Father who loves and takes care of me?

