

"Give me something to drink."



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

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Verbum Dei Missionaries

PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR A

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Wednesday, 1st 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 greatest sign

The crowds surrounded Jesus and wanted Him to perform spectacular and unusual signs for them. Unfortunately, they failed to recognise the greatest sign they had before them, i.e. Jesus Himself. Jesus declared Himself to be greater than Jonah and Solomon. In fact, He is greater than all the Old Testament figures because He is the Son of God, the perfect revelation of God Himself.

Like the contemporaries of Jesus, we tend to look for signs in extraordinary events and dramatic experiences that we miss the great signs of Jesus' presence in us and around us. He is present to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. He is also present in His Word, the Sacraments, the people in our lives, the poor, etc. In this time of Lent, let us not take Jesus for granted but be more aware of how He is present to us.

Reflective question:

Do I look for Jesus in the ordinary?

Thursday, 2nd 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.'

When God seems silent

In today's gospel, Jesus invites us to keep asking, searching and knocking because God will give good things to those who ask Him. Nevertheless, we might find Jesus' words challenging to accept. We have experienced asking God to heal a sick friend, to take away a family problem, to bring a family member back to faith, etc., but all we get is His silence to our petitions. The experiences of unanswered prayers can make us disappointed and even angry with God. Today, Jesus invites us to keep trusting God despite our unanswered prayers. This is because not everything has to go the way we expect.

Today, let us remember that prayer is not about getting results. It is about having a personal relationship with God where we love and trust Him even in difficult times when He seems silent.

Reflective question:

Do I sense a call to have a deeper trust in God?

Friday, 3rd 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.'

Jesus' standard of love

In today's gospel, Jesus invites us to always work for reconciliation with those who are divided from us. This is a struggle for many of us, but Jesus always calls us to love beyond our limits. In this time of Lent, we need the Holy Spirit to help us by infusing God's love into our hearts and directing us to work for reconciliation and build friendships with others.

"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...". Listen to Jesus as He speaks these words to us. Anger should not rule us but love. He calls us to let His love in us open our eyes to see the good in others and treat them with respect.

Reflective question:

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

Saturday, 4th 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 like God loves

"...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you". Jesus invites us to love others not as they deserve but as God loves them. A person's mistakes do not change God's love for them. God's love is unconditional. Saint and sinner- He loves them. Today, Jesus calls us to love our friends and enemies unconditionally.

In this time of Lent, let us take up this call to love as God loves. It is not to wait for others to be good before we show our respect and kindness to them. Even if they hurt and hate us, our relationships with others must always be marked with love. In this time of prayer, let us bring to mind the people in our lives who have wronged us. We pray for them and ask God to give us the grace to release the power of love in us.

Reflective question:

Whom among those I consider as "enemies" can I love today?

Sunday, 5th March, Second Sunday of Lent.

Genesis 12:1-4, 2 Timothy 1:8-10, Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as dazzling as light. And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you want me to, I will make three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and suddenly from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him.' When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them, saying, 'Stand up, do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but Jesus. As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order, 'Tell no one about this vision until the Son of man has risen from the dead.'

Only Jesus

In the gospel passage, Peter and the other two disciples witnessed Jesus being transfigured and Moses and Elijah conversing with Him. Peter exclaimed, "*Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here...*". Peter wanted to stay, basking in this wonderful God experience and be away from all the troubles awaiting them down the mountain. However, God silenced Peter, saying: "*This is my Son, the Beloved; He enjoys my favour. Listen to Him*". God reminded them to fix their eyes on Jesus, listen to and follow Him, even if it meant going down the mountain and heading

towards suffering and rejection in Jerusalem. Jesus personally went to them and touched them, saying, "*Stand up, do not be afraid*".

It is a challenge sometimes to go down the valley where overwhelming issues and demanding people await us. However, we must keep looking at Jesus and listening to what He says. Only Jesus can free us from our fears and tiredness and give us the peace and joy to face problems in life if we let Him come to us and touch us. In this prayer time, let us listen to Him, reassuring us, "*Stand up, do not be afraid*".

Reflective questions:

What strikes you as you pray with today's gospel passage? Why?

Monday, 6th 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

"*Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate*". Is it possible to be compassionate as God our Father is compassionate? What does compassion mean? To be compassionate is to empathise with the suffering of those around us to the point that we suffer with them. God, in His compassionate love, suffers together with us and for us. He is never indifferent to our troubles. In this Lent, Jesus calls us to strive to love like God.

One concrete way of showing compassion is by not judging others. It is spontaneous for us to look at the faults and mistakes of others. However, let us remember that we are in no position to play the judge. Let us ask Jesus to give us the grace to have the compassion to understand, accept and forgive.

Reflective question:

From my life experience, what is it like to be compassionate to others?

Tuesday, 7th 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.'

God as the centre

Jesus warned the people about the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. As experts of the Law, they taught but did not practice what they preached. They told the people what to do and not to do in all the intricacies of the traditions, but they did not do it themselves. The problem was that these leaders were more interested in getting admiration from others; as Jesus said, "*Everything they do is done to attract attention*". They centred on themselves, not God, and thus, lacked integrity. On the other hand, God was more interested in their hearts, i.e. their motivations, than in the external actions they did.

Today, we continued to be challenged by these words of Jesus. What motivates our actions, words and attitudes towards others in our family, friendships, workplaces, parish communities, etc.? Let us ask Jesus to help us to follow Him authentically and humbly.

Reflective question:

In what ways do my words and actions reflect the gospel values of honesty, truth and love?

Wednesday, 8th 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 be a servant of all

In today's gospel passage, Jesus predicted that He would soon suffer and die. However, His disciples centred on themselves and focussed on how they could be great. When the mother of James and John asked Jesus if her sons could take the places of honour with Him, the other ten disciples were indignant when they heard about it. This was because they, too, wanted to be great. However, Jesus was patient with His disciples as He explained the meaning of true greatness, i.e. the need to be a servant of all.

Today, Jesus does not want us to be great by accumulating more success, prestige, power, and wealth. Instead, He calls us to be great by placing ourselves in loving service for the good of those around us.

Reflective question:

How can I strive to be great by serving others?

Thursday, 9th 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."

An other-centred life

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus centres on Jesus' commandment to love our neighbours. Let us read through this parable and allow it to challenge us to open our eyes to see the needs of others and open our hearts to live an other-centred life. In the parable, Jesus highlighted the self-centredness of the rich man that led him to be blinded to the suffering of Lazarus, the poor beggar at his gate.

In this Lenten season, let us put love into practice by caring for those in need. We have been gifted with wealth, health, talent, education, work,

etc. Let us use these gifts to enrich the lives of others around us, especially those who are materially and emotionally poor.

Reflective question:

How can I share my resources with others, especially those who are most in need today?

Friday, 10th 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.

Entrusted to bear good fruits in the vineyard

In today's parable, Jesus invites us to bear good fruit for God. Like the tenants of the vineyard, God has generously endowed us with the resources and capacities to work in our vineyards and be fruitful. Our vineyard consists of our families, friendships, work, parish communities, neighbourhoods, etc. We are stewards entrusted by God to bear fruits of love, peace, truth, faithfulness, joy, etc. in our vineyards.

The parable also tells us that if we truly want to bear good fruits for the vineyards, we might face rejection and criticism from others. Yet, let us be faithful tenants and keep on working for God.

Reflective question:

What fruit do I want to produce for God today?

Saturday, 11th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20, Luke 15:1-3,11-32

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man,' they said, 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he spoke this parable to them: 'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would 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 his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, 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 paid servants." 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 tenderly. 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 are going to have a feast, a celebration, 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.

"Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, 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 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."

Compassion and love

"The Lord is compassion and love" (Taken from today's Psalm 102). The father in today's parable of the prodigal son reflects what compassion and love really are. He welcomed his wayward son back without resentment, blame and judgement. The passage also speaks of the elder son. Full of self-righteous anger, the elder son hardened his heart against his brother and accused his father of not appreciating the hard work he had done. Yet, the father did not give up on him. He came out of the house, called him "son" and reminded him of his rightful place in the house.

As we prayerfully read this passage, let us listen to Jesus as He reveals that God loves us in the same way the father loves his two sons. Lent is a journey to experience that God loves us. Today, we are invited to find comfort in God's compassion, and keep our hearts fixed on His love.

Reflective question:

Have I experienced God's compassion and love in my life?

Sunday, 12th March, Third Sunday of Lent.

Exodus 17:3-7, Romans 5:1-2, 5-8, John 4:5-42

Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me something to drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew. How is it that you

ask me, a Samaritan, for something to drink?' -- Jews, of course, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied to her: If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me something to drink,' you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.' 'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered, 'and the well is deep: how do you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob, who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?' Jesus replied: Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again; but no one who drinks the water that I shall give will ever be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will become a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life. 'Sir,' said the woman, 'give me some of that water, so that I may never be thirsty or come here again to draw water.' 'Go and call your husband,' said Jesus to her, 'and come back here.' The woman answered, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right to say, "I have no husband"; for although you have had five, the one you now have is not your husband. You spoke the truth there.' 'I see you are a prophet, sir,' said the woman. 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, though you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said: Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour is coming -- indeed is already here -- when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father seeks. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah -- that is, Christ -- is coming; and when he comes he will explain everything.' Jesus said, 'That is who I am, I who speak to you.' At this point his disciples returned and were surprised to find him speaking to a woman, though none of them asked, 'What do you want from her?' or, 'What are you talking to her about?' The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town to tell the people, 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I have done; could this be the Christ?' This brought people out of the town and they made their way towards him. Meanwhile, the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, do have something to eat'; but he said, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Has someone brought him food?' But Jesus said: My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work. Do you not have a saying: Four months and then the harvest? Well, I tell you, look around

you, look at the fields; already they are white, ready for harvest! Already the reaper is being paid his wages, already he is bringing in the grain for eternal life, so that sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the proverb holds true: one sows, another reaps; I sent you to reap a harvest you have not laboured for. Others have laboured for it; and you have come into the rewards of their labour. Many Samaritans of that town believed in him on the strength of the woman's words of testimony, 'He told me everything I have done.' So, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and many more came to believe on the strength of the words he spoke to them; and they said to the woman, 'Now we believe no longer because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he is indeed the Saviour of the world.'

Give me something to drink

In today's passage, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman who went to the well to draw water. Jesus began conversing with her, saying, "*Give me something to drink*". For Jesus to ask a Samaritan for a drink was highly unusual because Jews considered Samaritans unclean and inferior. Yet, to this Samaritan woman, He was unafraid of breaking social and cultural prejudices and religious conventions. Instead, he treated her as a person. Let us allow Jesus to open our eyes and recognise that every person is a gift, regardless of age, religion, status or condition. Like Jesus, we should not allow prejudices to make us build walls of separation.

Jesus turned the conversation around by offering her living water, i.e. the fullness of life, springing forth from a loving relationship with God. Like the Samaritan woman, we go to wells of popularity, wealth, social media, food, etc., to seek satisfaction and meaning, but our buckets remain empty. Only Jesus can help us quench our deepest thirst. Today, let us ask Jesus, "*Lord, give me this water*".

Reflective questions:

What do I find most challenging about breaking down walls between myself and others? Do I trust that God can satisfy my thirst?

Monday, 13th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

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

He 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 for all

In the synagogue, Jesus preached to the people that God was not only for the Jews but for all. He proclaimed a radical message that God's Kingdom is about inclusiveness despite knowing He would make His listeners uncomfortable and upset. This was because He was neither there to get the approval of His listeners nor increase His popularity status. Instead, He wanted to speak the truth of God and the depth of His love for humanity. The result was that the people rejected Jesus.

Each day, Jesus wants to present a new way of looking at others, especially those we consider outsiders. He wants us to be inclusive and treat people no longer according to their skin colour, religion, social status, etc. God's love is universal. He loves each person and calls us to go beyond the walls we build and to do the same.

Reflective question:

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

Tuesday, 14th 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 love is to forgive without limits

Like Peter, we too might wonder how often we must forgive a person, especially when they repeatedly hurt us. As we prayerfully read the gospel passage, we listen to Jesus as He calls us to keep on forgiving. If we think that forgiving someone again and again is unreasoning, then let us remember that God does not put a limit to forgiving us when we ourselves repeatedly go away from Him because of our pride, selfishness, laziness, etc. Forgiveness from God gives us the courage and strength to forgive others.

In this time of Lent, let us ask God to grace us with forgiveness that has no limits, no "ifs" and no "whys". May we grow to become forgiving people who strive to work for reconciliation.

Reflective question:

Am I willing to be forgiving to people who have done me wrong?

Wednesday, 15th 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.'

Call to fulfil the law of love

Jesus has come not to abolish the law or the prophets but to complete them with His law of Love, which can be summed up in the commandment of loving God, neighbours and self ((Matthew 22:37-39). For Jesus, it is not enough for us to observe external laws. He wants us to fulfil the law of love by showing love concretely to the people in our lives.

Often, we struggle to love in the way Jesus wants us to. In this time of prayer, let us approach Jesus and ask Him to help us to put love in our words, actions and attitudes.

Reflective question:

Is there more love in my family, workplace, parish community, and friendships because of me?

Thursday, 16th 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.'

Goodness reigns

In today's passage, some people who saw Jesus' good work of healing a dumb man started to judge Him harshly because they could not see goodness in His actions and words. It must be painful for Jesus to have His loving intention of helping someone to be misunderstood. Yet, despite all this, Jesus did not stop loving and doing good because He knew that God sent Him to preach the Good News of love.

Do I identify myself with the critical crowds? When I look at others, do I see the best in them, or does negativism blind me? Do I identify myself with Jesus? Have I experienced having my motives to love and do good misunderstood by others? Let us value our prayer time with God. Prayer is the time to nourish the love in us to keep working for the good of those around us and look at others with kindness.

Reflective question:

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

Friday, 17th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Hosea 14:2-10, Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a further question to him, 'Which is the first of all the commandments?' Jesus replied, 'This is the first: Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one, only Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to him, 'Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true, that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any burnt offering or sacrifice.'

Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And after that no one dared to question him any more.

Love gives direction and meaning to life

In today's gospel, one of the scribes asked Jesus which commandment was the first of all the commandments. Jesus responded that the first commandment is to love God and the second is to love our neighbours. These two commandments are inseparable. In fact, when we love God the most, we will love others without limits, even the unloveable ones we struggle to like.

Often, we think that love is a feeling or an emotion. However, love is more than feeling or emotion. Love is the will that propels us to do good and create loving relationships. In this time of prayer, let us draw close to God and allow ourselves to be loved by Him first. With hearts full of His love, we are compelled to be channels of love toward others.

Reflective question:

At this point in my life, what does it mean to love God and others?

Saturday, 18th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Hosea 6:1-6, 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

"The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, "I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like everyone else...". In the parable, Jesus portrayed the Pharisee as a man addicted to himself. He centred on himself so much that he had no space for God in his heart.

As a result, he failed to love by not looking kindly at the tax collector praying at the back of the Temple. Instead, the Pharisee judged the tax collector as an unjust sinner and felt superior to him. On the other hand, the tax collector went to pray because he knew he needed God. He bowed his head and said, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner*".

Today, may we come before God with the awareness that we need Him and that our constant prayer be, "*God, be merciful to me, a sinner*". We go to God because He is always ready to show us His loving mercy.

Reflective question:

With whom do I identify myself in the parable- the Pharisee or the tax collector?

Sunday, 19th March, Fourth Sunday of Lent.

1 Samuel 16:1, 6-7, 10-13, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?' 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered, 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him. 'As long as day lasts we must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.' Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (the name means 'one who has been sent'). So he went off and washed and came back able to see. His neighbours and the people who used to see him before (for he was a beggar) said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, but he looks just like him.' The man himself said, 'Yes, I am the one.' So they said to him, 'Then how is it that your eyes were opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go off and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I gained my sight.' They asked, 'Where is he?' He answered, 'I don't know.' They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had gained his sight, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'That man cannot be from God: he does not keep

the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was division among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' The man answered, 'He is a prophet.' However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind without first sending for the parents of the man who had gained his sight and asking them, 'Is this man really the son of yours who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but how he can see, we don't know, nor who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to ban from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.' So the Jews sent for the man again and said to him, 'Give glory to God! We are satisfied that this man is a sinner.' The man answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I don't know; all I know is that I was blind and now I can see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples yourselves?' At this they hurled abuse at him, 'It is you who are his disciple, we are disciples of Moses: we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from.' The man replied, 'That is just what is so amazing! You don't know where he comes from and he has opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to people who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of someone born blind; if this man were not from God, he wouldn't have been able to do anything.' They retorted, 'Are you trying to teach us, and you a sinner through and through ever since you were born!' And they ejected him. Jesus heard they had ejected him, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of man?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You have seen him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and worshipped him. Jesus said: It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight may become blind. Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, 'So we are blind, are we?' Jesus replied: If you were blind, you would not be guilty, but since you say, 'We can see,' your guilt remains.'

From darkness to light

In the gospel, Jesus healed a beggar who was blind from birth. With mud and saliva, Jesus, the light of the world, brought light into his darkness. When people asked him who healed him, he replied, "*The man called Jesus*" was the one who gave him sight. When the religious leaders interrogated him, he simply said, "*He is a prophet*". From his answers, we can see that the man did not know who Jesus was. However, deep within him, he knew that Jesus must be a good man who came from God. Thus, he stood firm in his replies to the point that the Pharisees expelled him from the community.

When Jesus knew what happened to him, He went to look for the man and opened his eyes of faith by revealing His identity as the "*Son of Man*", the "*Messiah*". In this Lenten season, Jesus wants to gradually bring us to see things, people, circumstances and even God with new eyes, i.e., eyes of faith. Let us open ourselves to the light that Jesus brings.

Reflective question:

Do I allow myself to be led by Jesus to see things, situations, myself, etc., with eyes of faith?

Monday, 20th March, St. Joseph.

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16, Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22, Matthew 1: 16, 18-21, 24 or Luke 2:41-51

Jacob was the father of 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 a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when 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 great man

Joseph lived a great life, not from having power or riches, but because of his simple heart that loved and trusted God. When Angel Gabriel appeared to him in a dream and asked him to take pregnant Mary home as his wife, Joseph simply said 'Yes' and did what the angel told him. Even though he was afraid and did not understand what was happening, he continued to put God as the centre of his life and trusted that God's plan would be better than what he had in mind.

We can learn so much from him. We tend to lead our life in pursuit of riches, power and status so that we can be seen as great and important in the eyes of the world. Yet, there is always a restlessness in our hearts that can never be satisfied by worldly things and achievements. Today, as we celebrate this feast, let us learn from St. Joseph, who displayed his greatness in his love for and trust in God.

Reflective question:

What can St. Joseph teach me in my journey of faith?

Tuesday, 21st March, 4th Week of Lent.

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12, John 5:1-3, 5-16

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. 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.

Show love to all

In today's gospel, Jesus encountered a man who was sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus asked him, "*Do you want to be well again?*". Instead of giving Jesus a firm "Yes", he grudgingly responded that he had nobody to help him to the pool. After being healed by Jesus, the man was not grateful for what he received. Instead, he went to the Jewish leaders and told them that Jesus had healed him. Thus, they started persecuting Jesus because the healing occurred on the Sabbath. The man, though physically made well again, was blinded by the presence of God in Jesus.

We might feel that this man did not seem to deserve Jesus' compassionate help. However, the God that Jesus came to reveal is a God who gives His love and help to all. As St. Matthew states: "*for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*" (Matthew 5:45). In our lives, we can look at each person, even the unlovable ones, as people in need of our love and show it to them through our words and actions.

Reflective question:

How can I show care, patience and kindness to someone today?

Wednesday, 22nd 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.'

I will never forget you

"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" (1st reading). God is love (1 John 4:16), faithful and true, and He wants us to grasp this great truth of our life. No matter what happens in life, even when we feel misunderstood, lonely and abandoned, God is with us because He is deeply in love with us, His children.

In the gospel, Jesus states, *"My Father still goes on working, and I am at work, too"*. We often have an image of God as a passive presence who does not do anything. However, Jesus points out that God is an active presence who never stops working for our good. God our Father, out of His love for us, is involved in our lives. In this time of prayer, stay with the word, *"Father"*, and find comfort that God is our loving Father who is always with us.

Reflective question:

How is God the Father speaking personally to me today?

Thursday, 23rd 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?'

I do what I do for God

"Human glory means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you". The religious leaders sought human admiration and praise. They prayed loudly in public, gave offerings in temple for people to notice, took pride in prestigious titles, and made a show of wearing religious clothes and symbols because they wanted people to praise them for being extra religious. As Jesus said in Matthew 23:5, *"Everything they do is done for people to see"*. By looking to impress others, they lost sight of God.

In this time of Lent, let us journey to God and seek a more personal and loving relationship with Him. We pray, do good works, and fast, but we

do with the motivation of having more of God in our lives. Today, let us ground our lives in God alone.

Reflective question:

Do I allow pride to get in the way and do things to get people's admiration?

Friday, 24th March, 4th Week of Lent.

Wisdom 2:1, 12-22, John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Jesus travelled around Galilee; he could not travel around Judaea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. As the Jewish feast of Shelters drew near, after his brothers had left for the festival, Jesus went up as well, not publicly but secretly. Meanwhile some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Isn't this the man they want to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they have nothing to say to him! Can it be true the authorities have recognised that he is the Christ? Yet we all know where he comes from, but when the Christ appears no one will know where he comes from.' Then, as Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he cried out: 'You know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of my own accord: but he who sent me is true; You do not know him, but I know him because I have my being from him and it was he who sent me. They wanted to arrest him then, but because his hour had not yet come no one laid a hand on him.

To see goodness in others

In today's gospel, Jesus went to the Feast of Shelters, and some people knew Him and where He came from. They were familiar with Jesus, His background, His family, etc. As a result, they doubted that He could be "*the Christ*". Many times, like the people in today's gospel, we think that we know someone very well to the point that we look at them through the lens of their faults and forget their goodness.

In this time of Lent, let us practice loving those we know well by appreciating their goodness and being less critical of their faults. When we show our love to those closest to us, we are loving God in our midst.

Reflective question:

Do I tend to judge the people closest to me and fail to see God's presence in them?

Saturday, 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.

Here I am. I have come to do your will

"...this is what Christ said, on coming into the world: 'You wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me... then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, 'God, here I am! I have coming to obey your will.'" (2nd reading). Jesus accepted that He had been given the gift of life to live a life of doing God's will. Likewise, God gives us life to be obedient to His will. What is God's will? God's will is to live a life of love, i.e. to love God and others. Like Jesus, our time here on earth is to do acts of love and service to make a difference in the lives of others.

In today's gospel, Mary accepted to do God's will even though she did not fully understand the full implications of what she just heard. In deep trust, she said, "Yes" to love God and "Yes" to conceive and bear the child of God for the good of humanity. As we celebrate the Annunciation, let us be ready to offer our lives in loving obedience to God.

Reflective question:

Do my fears get in the way of doing God's will?

Sunday, 26th March, Fifth Sunday of Lent.**Ezekiel 37:12-14, Romans 8:8-11, John 11: 1-45**

There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that he was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go back to Judaea.' The disciples said, 'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews were trying to stone you; are you going back there again?' Jesus replied: Are there not twelve hours in the day? No one who walks in the daytime stumbles, having the light of this world to see by; anyone who walks around at night stumbles, having no light as a guide. He said that and then added, 'Our friend Lazarus is at rest; I am going to wake him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he is at rest he will be saved.' Jesus was speaking of the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep'; so Jesus put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas -- known as the Twin -- said to the other disciples, 'Let us also go to die with him.' On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that God will grant whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said: I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is

here and wants to see you.' Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house comforting Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who had come with her, Jesus was greatly distressed, and with a profound sigh he said, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man. Could he not have prevented this man's death?' Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he died.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I myself knew that you hear me always, but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me. When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with strips of material, and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him.

God is here

"Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus...". Jesus had a close friendship with the siblings. Despite their close relationship with Jesus, Martha and Mary suffered the pain of losing their brother. We sometimes think bad things do not happen when Jesus is in our lives. Thus, we wonder, *"Where are you, Lord?"* when bad things happen. Though Jesus did not prevent Lazarus from dying, He went to the two sisters and wept because He felt their deepest pain. We need to find comfort in the reality that God is not indifferent to us but deeply experiences our pain. Whether it is the loss of a loved one, a broken friendship, a sickness, etc., we have a God who feels our pain and weeps with us.

Our Christian faith rooted in Easter reminds us that death does not have the final word but life. In the passage, Jesus called Lazarus to come out from the tomb, and he came out. As we go through hardships, let us have deep faith in God to believe He brings new life and beginnings.

Reflective questions:

How can faith in Jesus as the Resurrection and Life give me hope in moments of fear and doubt?

Monday, 27th March, 5th Week in Lent.

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30, 33-62, John 8:1-11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he straightened up and said, 'Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and continued writing on the ground. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. Jesus again straightened up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus. 'Go away, and from this moment sin no more.'

Sinners loved and forgiven by God

In today's gospel, the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery to Jesus for judgement. According to Jewish law, the woman would have to be stoned. The Jewish leaders wanted to trap Jesus because they were waiting to see if He would go against the Law of Moses. Jesus said, "Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her". Jesus challenged the Pharisees to look at their own lives and recognised that they too had sinned against God. They, like the adulterous woman, had been unfaithful to God. They hid behind their

mask of self-righteousness but lived an inconsistent life of worldly ambitions and unloving thoughts.

Jesus calls us to recognise that we are sinners. God loves us despite our faults and weaknesses. Thus, we need to stop playing the judge of others. This does not mean we have to ignore the sins others commit. Jesus Himself recognised that the adulterous action the woman did was wrong, but He did not condemn her but showed her loving mercy. Today, Jesus calls us to love, not judge others.

Reflective questions:

Who do I identify most in the gospel passage? Why?

Tuesday, 28th March, 5th Week of Lent.

Numbers 21:4-9, John 8:21-30

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'I am going away; you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' The Jews said to one another, 'Will he kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' Jesus went on: 'You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I have told you already: You will die in your sins. Yes, if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.' So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus answered: 'What I have told you from the outset. About you I have much to say and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is truthful, and what I have learnt from him I declare to the world. 'They failed to understand that he was talking to them about the Father. So Jesus said: 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of myself: what the Father has taught me is what I preach; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him'. As he was saying this, many came to believe in him.

God is with me

"...he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him." Jesus knew with certainty that He was never alone in His life. This was because God the Father was His refuge and strength in good and bad times. Jesus' relationship with God was complicated for the Jewish leaders to grasp and understand. They perceived God as God who demands perfection, punishes sinners, etc. Jesus, on the other

hand, spoke of God as a loving and compassionate Father who is a friend to saints and sinners alike.

As we journey in this Lenten season, Jesus draws us to experience God as He truly is. He is our loving Father with whom we can relate with trust. In this time of prayer, let us find peace in the presence of God, who will never leave us alone by ourselves.

Reflective question:

Do I find comfort and peace in the presence of God?

Wednesday, 29th March, 5th Week of Lent.

Daniel 3:14-20, 91-92, 95, John 8:31-42

To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: 'If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free'. They answered, 'We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, "You will be made free"?' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now the slave's place in the house is not assured, but the son's place is assured. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descended from Abraham; but in spite of that you want to kill me because nothing I say has penetrated into you. What I, for my part, speak of is what I have seen with my Father; but you, you put into action the lessons learnt from your father.' They repeated, 'Our father is Abraham'. Jesus said to them: 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do as Abraham did. As it is, you want to kill me when I tell you the truth as I have learnt it from God; that is not what Abraham did. What you are doing is what your father does.' 'We were not born of prostitution,' they went on 'we have one father: God.' Jesus answered: 'If God were your father, you would love me, since I have come here from God; yes, I have come from him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent, and by him.'

True freedom

"...you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free". Do we want to be free? We often think that freedom means "to do as I please". However, doing as we please makes us slaves to gain, profit, power and advancements. Today, Jesus invites us to be truly free by following him

to possess greater freedom, i.e., to live out our true identity as sons and daughters of God the Father.

Today, let us find joy in knowing that we are beloved children of God, created in His image and likeness, to bring His unconditional love to the world. This is the truth of our life that makes us truly free!

Reflective question:

What prevents me from living my true identity as a beloved child of God freely?

Thursday, 30th March, 5th Week of Lent.

Genesis 17:3-9, John 8:51-59

Jesus said to the Jews: 'I tell you most solemnly, whoever keeps my word will never see death.' The Jews said, 'Now we know for certain that you are possessed. Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead, and yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never know the taste of death". Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? The prophets are dead too. Who are you claiming to be?' Jesus answered: 'If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all; my glory is conferred by the Father, by the one of whom you say, "He is our God" although you do not know him. But I know him, and if I were to say: I do not know him, I should be a liar, as you are liars yourselves. But I do know him, and I faithfully keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see my Day; he saw it and was glad.' The Jews then said, 'You are not fifty yet, and you have seen Abraham!' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, before Abraham ever was, I Am'. At this they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

I know God

In today's passage, Jesus did not mince His words as He confronted the Jewish leaders that they had forgotten to be true to their identity as God's beloved children and stay in loving relationship with Him. Instead, they basked in their privilege as God's chosen people. Jesus knew that His listeners were furious with His words, but He continued to speak the truth out of love for them.

"*He is our God*" although you do not know him. But I know him...". Jesus knew God, not just intellectually but experientially. Rooted in His identity as God's beloved Son, He truly knew his Father and loved him with all His heart, mind and strength. Thus, He did God's will by living a life of loving service. As we draw close to Holy Week, let us appreciate our identity as God's beloved children. We enter into prayer to be in intimate communion with God our Father. Like Jesus, we can say, "*I know God and He knows me. We are one*".

Reflective question:

How can I consciously be aware of who I am for God today?

Friday, 31st March, 5th Week of Lent.

Jeremiah 20:10-13, John 10:31-42

The Jews fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them, 'I have done many good works for you to see, works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?' The Jews answered him, 'We are not stoning you for doing a good work but for blasphemy: you are only a man and you claim to be God.' Jesus answered: 'Is it not written in your Law: I said, you are gods? So the Law uses the word gods of those to whom the word of God was addressed, and scripture cannot be rejected. Yet you say to someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming", because he says, "I am the son of God". If I am not doing my Father's work, there is no need to believe me; but if I am doing it, then even if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for sure that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' They wanted to arrest him then, but he eluded them. He went back again to the far side of the Jordan to stay in the district where John had once been baptising. Many people who came to him there said, 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true'; and many of them believed in him.

Going to the far side of Jordan with Jesus

In today's gospel passage, the Jews fetched stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy. Yet, Jesus fearlessly stood his ground and based his claim on His personal relationship with God the Father. He said to His listeners with conviction, "*The Father is in me and I am in the Father*". After He eluded the angry crowd, Jesus went to the far side of the Jordan. This place was significant for Him because it was where He was baptised and

heard the voice of God proclaiming, “*This is my own dear Son, with whom I am pleased*” (Matthew 3, 17). Returning to the far side of Jordan, Jesus stayed there and rooted Himself again in being loved and called by God, thus finding the strength to walk on.

As we draw closer to the end of Lent, let us follow Jesus to the far side of Jordan and remember the God-moments in our lives when we experienced ourselves being loved and chosen by God. These memories of God’s love empower us to face difficulties with renewed strength and faith.

Reflective question:

What is God’s message for me today?

