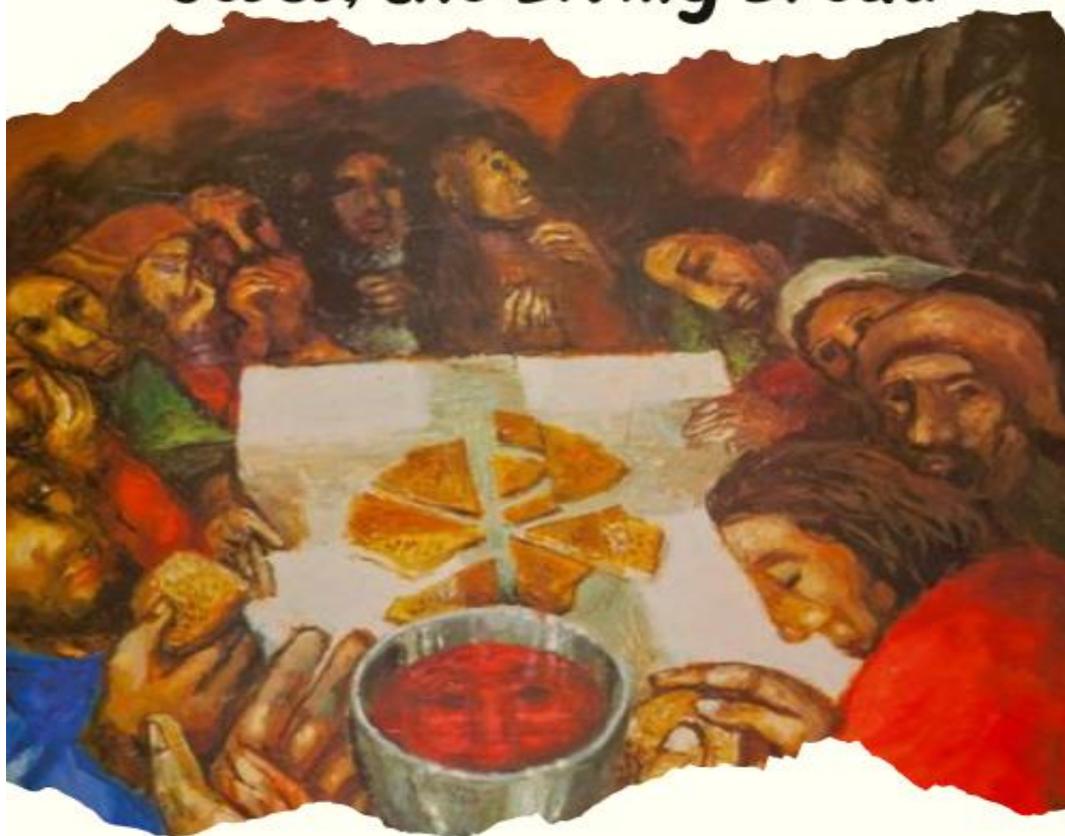


Jesus, the Living Bread



Prayer for Living Daily Reflections for Liturgical Year A~ June

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Verbum Dei Missionaries

PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR A

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Thursday, 1st June, St. Justin.
Ecclesiasticus 42:15-25, Mark 10:46-52

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus - that is, the son of Timaeus -- a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and cry out, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man over. 'Courage,' they said, 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'Rabbuni, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you.' And at once his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

From blindness to sight

Today's gospel tells us the story of the encounter between Jesus and Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. This story invites us to have the same active faith that Bartimaeus had. Though he was physically blind, his heart grasped who Jesus truly was. Thus, Bartimaeus persistently shouted out to get Jesus' attention even though the crowds around him demanded that he be silent. When Jesus called him, Bartimaeus responded with faith by throwing off his cloak, which represented his life of blindness and begging, and going immediately to Him. His tossing away his cloak shows his willingness to abandon his old life and embrace a new life with Jesus. After he regained sight, Bartimaeus followed Jesus as a disciple along the road of life.

We are often blind and struggle to see ourselves, others, or situations clearly due to the weight of the past, our disappointment, our prejudices, etc. Thus, we might feel restless, confused and even focus on the wrong priorities. Yet, the same Jesus that passed by Bartimaeus' life comes to us today. Let us have an active living faith to see Him and follow Him.

Reflective question:

In what way do I identify with Bartimaeus?

**Friday, 2nd June, SS. Marcellinus & Peter.
Ecclesiasticus 44:1, 9-13, Mark 11:11-26**

After he had been acclaimed by the crowds, Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked all round him, as it was late by now, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. Next day as they were leaving Bethany, he felt hungry. Seeing a fig tree in leaf some distance away, he went to see if he could find any fruit on it, but when he came up to it he found nothing but leaves; for it was not the season for figs. And he addressed the fig tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again.' And his disciples heard him say this. So they reached Jerusalem and he went into the Temple and began driving out the men selling and buying there; he upset the tables of the money changers and the seats of the dove sellers. Nor would he allow anyone to carry anything through the Temple. And he taught them and said, 'Does not scripture say: My house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples? But you have turned it into a bandits' den.' This came to the ears of the chief priests and the scribes, and they tried to find some way of doing away with him; they were afraid of him because the people were carried away by his teaching. And when evening came he went out of the city. Next morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree withered to the roots. Peter remembered. 'Look, Rabbi,' he said to Jesus, 'the fig tree that you cursed has withered away.' Jesus answered, 'Have faith in God. In truth I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, "Be pulled up and thrown into the sea," with no doubt in his heart, but believing that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. I tell you, therefore, everything you ask and pray for, believe that you have it already, and it will be yours. And when you stand in prayer, forgive whatever you have against anybody, so your Father in heaven may forgive your failings too.'

Faith and fruitfulness

In the gospel today, Jesus went to the Temple in Jerusalem and observed everything around Him. What did He see? Jesus saw that the people, especially the religious leaders, were busy with worldly affairs of buying and selling. Though they were in the Temple, they were not with God. Their faith was sterile, and their lives were not shaped by God's values of love, honesty and justice. Like the unfruitful fig tree, they failed to be fruitful as God had intended. As we prayerfully read the gospel passage, it is good to ask ourselves if our faith is alive and if we are

constantly connected to God in a vital and real relationship. When we are rooted in Him, good fruit inevitably flows from our life.

"Have faith in God". Jesus invites us never to lose the connection with God by making time and space for prayer and remaining in Him. Today, let us keep our focus on God and let Him be the centre of our lives.

Reflective question:

What does it mean for me to be a fruitful disciple of Jesus?

Saturday, 3rd June, SS. Charles Lwanga & Companions. Ecclesiasticus 51:12-20, Mark 11:27-33

Jesus and his disciples came to Jerusalem again, and as Jesus was walking in the Temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, and they said to him, 'What authority have you for acting like this? Or who gave you authority to act like this?' Jesus said to them, 'And I will ask you a question, just one; answer me and I will tell you my authority for acting like this. John's baptism, what was its origin, heavenly or human? Answer me that.' And they argued this way among themselves, 'If we say heavenly, he will say, "Then why did you refuse to believe him?" But dare we say human?' -- they had the people to fear, for everyone held that John had been a real prophet. So their reply to Jesus was, 'We do not know.' And Jesus said to them, 'Nor will I tell you my authority for acting like this.'

The question of authority

In today's gospel, the Jewish religious leaders wanted to discredit Him and protect their status and so, they asked about His credentials. They wanted to know who gave Him the authority to do what He did. By their question, they were revealing the desire of their hearts. Everything came down to authority, rights and power. They wanted to protect their power so that they could continue seeking their own interest instead of those of God's.

On the other hand, Jesus was neither interested in having such worldly power nor was He gaining approval from others and protecting His status. He knew that His authority came from God the Father (John 13:3) and thus, He freely lived out His authentic authority by loving and serving

the people because He knew that this was what God wanted from Him. Today, let us be true disciples of Jesus by living with authenticity and freedom. In our family, faith community and workplace, let us not focus on our own self-interest but exercise our authority to work for the best of others. May we never lose sight of God!

Reflective question:

How do I exercise my authority in my family, parish community, workplace, etc?

Sunday, 4th June, Trinity Sunday.

Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, John 3:16-18

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be judged; but whoever does not believe is judged already, because that person does not believe in the Name of God's only Son."

The Trinity of love

Today, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity. Very often, we associate the Holy Trinity with complicated concepts. However, let us not attempt simply to understand the Trinity intellectually to the point that we miss encountering the Triune God, the God of love. Love is not an abstract, impersonal thing but expresses itself in relationships. Thus, God is a community of three persons, i.e. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, who exist in a relationship of perfect, self-giving love.

Let us not forget that we have been created in the image of God, and so, we are invited to participate in the very life of the Trinity- a relationship of love and communion with God and one another. We do not live for ourselves but for others by loving, serving and working for their good. *"For this is how God loved the world: he gave his only Son..."* The Triune God invites us never to stop experiencing His personal love for each of us. His love shapes our hearts to love and guides us to build relationships with others.

Reflective question:

How can I experience the Trinity in my personal and community life?

Monday, 5th June, St. Boniface.

Tobit 1:3; 2:1-8, Mark 12:1-12

Jesus began to speak to the chief priests, the scribes and the elders in parables, 'A man planted a vineyard; he fenced it round, dug out a trough for the winepress and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized the man, thrashed him and sent him away empty handed. Next he sent another servant to them; him they beat about the head and treated shamefully. And he sent another and him they killed; then a number of others, and they thrashed some and killed the rest. He had still someone left: his beloved son. He sent him to them last of all, thinking, "They will respect my son." But those tenants said to each other, "This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they seized him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. Now what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and make an end of the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you not read this text of scripture: The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this is the Lord's doing, and we marvel at it ?' And they would have liked to arrest him, because they realised that the parable was aimed at them, but they were afraid of the crowds. So they left him alone and went away.

Stewards of God's vineyard

In today's gospel, the vineyard owner entrusted the land to the tenants so they could cultivate the land. However, when the time came for them to return to the owner what was rightfully due to him, the tenants thrashed one servant, shamed another and killed the others. Finally, they even killed the owner's beloved son. Out of pride, these tenants wanted to become owners of the vineyard.

Like the owner of the vineyard, God gives us vineyards of our life to cultivate and bear rich fruit. We are simply stewards of our vineyards, not the owners. Each of us has been created with unique abilities and talents, including our life experiences, skills, personalities, etc. Thus,

with all that we are and have, let us strive to work in our vineyards and bear fruit of eternal love.

Reflective question:

How can I strive to be fruitful today?

Tuesday, 6th June, St. Norbert.

Tobit 2:9-14, Mark 12:13-17

The chief priests and the scribes and the elders sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians to catch him out in what he said. These came and said to him, 'Master, we know you are an honest man, that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man's rank means nothing to you, and that you teach the way of God in all honesty. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay, yes or no?' Seeing through their hypocrisy he said to them, 'Why do you set this trap for me? Hand me a denarius and let me see it.' They handed him one and he said, 'Whose head is this? Whose name?' 'Caesar's' they told him. Jesus said to them, 'Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar - and to God what belongs to God'. This reply took them completely by surprise.

Belonging to God

The Jewish leaders wanted to discredit Jesus in front of the crowd who respected Him as a prophet and teacher. They asked Jesus a question regarding paying taxes to Caesar. Though Jesus knew their insincerity, He was patient with them. He took a coin bearing the image of Caesar, and asked, "*Whose head is this?...*" They answered, "*Cesar's*". Jesus answered their question by saying, "*Give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar.*" Going deeper, Jesus added, "*- and to God what belongs to God.*"

Like the coin belonging to the ruler of the country because it bore the ruler's image, we belong to God because we have been imprinted with God's image. And so, Jesus invites us to give God what rightfully belongs to Him. We do so by following Jesus and giving our lives to the work of love and service. We must never forget the truth that we belong to God, who loves us unconditionally. Living rooted in this sense of belonging to God, we can joyfully live for Him and with Him.

Reflective question:

How can I give my life to God today?

Wednesday, 7th June, 9th Week in Ordinary Time.

Tobit 3:1-11, Mark 12:18-27

Some Sadducees - who deny that there is a resurrection - came to Jesus and they put this question to him, 'Master, we have it from Moses in writing, if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no child, the man must marry the widow to raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first married a wife and then died leaving no children. The second married the widow, and he too died leaving no children; with the third it was the same, and none of the seven left any children. Last of all the woman herself died. Now at the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be, since she had been married to all seven?' Jesus said to them, 'Is not the reason why you go wrong, that you understand neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry; no, they are like the angels in heaven. Now about the dead rising again, have you never read in the Book of Moses, in the passage about the Bush, how God spoke to him and said: I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob? He is God, not of the dead, but of the living. You are very much mistaken.'

I am the Living God

In the gospel, the Sadducees confront Jesus as they try to trap Him and give the crowds reason to turn against Him. They ask Him about life after death because they do not believe in it. They confine themselves to their beliefs. Thus, they cannot open their minds to new possibilities and recognise God's power. Jesus, who knows God, tells them plainly that they are wrong. For Jesus, God is the God of the living, not of the dead. After death, life continues with God but in a radically different way.

God is much bigger than our ideas, logic, feelings, circumstances and plans. The truth is that God is of the living who was with us in our past, is with us now and will not abandon us when we die. This truth gives us the peace and strength to walk each day with hope. Today, Jesus calls us to open our minds to recognise the greatness of our God and His love for us here, now and forever.

Reflective question:

What difference does the belief that there is life after death make to how I live today?

Thursday, 8th June, 9th Week in Ordinary Time.

Tobit 6:10-11; 7:1, 9-14; 8:4-9, Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a 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 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 holocaust 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 anymore.

Love is the top priority

"Though we do not have our Lord with us in bodily presence, we have our neighbour who, for the ends of love and loving service, is as good as our Lord himself. How can I love you more, Lord? I know that I cannot separate you from the people around me. To love the people around me is to be patient, understanding, generous and kind to them. Lord, I want to love you...I want to love them" (St Teresa of Avila). What does God want from us? God wants us to love Him and love our neighbours as ourselves.

Our love for each person we encounter daily must be unselfish, i.e., a love concerned with their well-being. On our own, we might struggle to love others around us with such love, especially the unloveable ones in our lives. It is easier to be impatient, unkind, and indifferent to them. In this time of prayer, let us ask Jesus to enlarge our hearts and fill us with His unconditional love. When we experience ourselves being loved by Him, we can love others with the same love He has for us.

Reflective question:

How can I express my love for God by my love for others?

Friday, 9th June, St. Ephrem.

Tobit 11:5-17, Mark 12:35-37

While teaching in the Temple, Jesus said, 'How can the scribes maintain that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, moved by the Holy Spirit, said: 'The Lord declared to my Lord, take your seat at my right hand till I have made your enemies your footstool.' David himself calls him Lord; in what way then can he be his son?' And the great crowd listened to him with delight.

Jesus, human and divine

In today's gospel, Jesus raised the issue of His identity while teaching in the Temple. He said that the religious leaders got it wrong when they called Him "*son of David*" because they believed that He was the coming Messiah who would overthrow the Roman empire and free the Jews from oppression. Here, Jesus presented Himself as the Christ, the coming Messiah, but He was more than a political leader. Jesus quoted Psalm 110 to point out that the coming Messiah was greater than they could ever imagined. Psalm 110 should read as, "*The Lord (God) declared to my (David's) Lord (the coming Messiah, i.e. Jesus), take your seat at my right hand till I have made your enemies your footstool*". God called the coming Messiah, "*Lord*"; thus, Jesus was more than a political hero. He is Son of God, God incarnate, human and divine.

Today, let us ask ourselves, who is Jesus for me? Let us not put Him into a small box of our own assumptions and ideas. Instead, Jesus calls us to spend time with Him, enter into a personal relationship with Him and know Him more as who He truly is.

Reflective question:

Who is Jesus for me?

Saturday, 10th June, 9th Week in Ordinary Time.

Tobit 12:1, 5-15, 20, Mark 12:38-44

In his teaching Jesus said, 'Beware of the scribes who like to walk about in long robes, to be greeted obsequiously in the market squares, to take

the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets; these are the men who swallow the property of widows, while making a show of lengthy prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive.’ He sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the treasury, and many of the rich put in a great deal. A poor widow came and put in two small coins, the equivalent of a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘I tell you solemnly, this poor widow has put more in than all who have contributed to the treasury; for they have all put in money they had over, but she from the little she had has put in everything she possessed, all she had to live on’.

Give, not hoard

“Prayer with fasting and alms with right conduct are better than riches with iniquity. Better to practise almsgiving than to hoard up gold...” (1st reading). We give our resources, time, talents, etc., to others because we recognise that all we have and are is actually gifts from God. Nothing is ours! Thus, we generously give because we fully trust that God will care for our needs. Like the widow in today’s gospel, she gave her two small coins, all that she had, because she trusted in God’s faithfulness to her and that He would not abandon her. Her story inspires us to give all that we have and are and live with the same radical trust in God.

Today, let us give, but not grudgingly or guiltily, but with joyful willingness because we want to follow Jesus, who is the first who gives His entire self to us.

Reflective question:

In what ways can I give of myself for the good of others?

Sunday, 11th June, Corpus Christi.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the Jews: ‘I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world. Then the Jews started arguing with one another: ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’ they said. Jesus replied: I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and

I shall raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, myself draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will draw life from me. This is the bread come down from heaven; not like the bread our ancestors ate: they are dead, but anyone who eats this bread will live forever.'

Jesus lives in me and I live in Him

Today, as we celebrate the feast of Corpus Christi, let us contemplate the joyful reality that Jesus, God incarnate, is present and alive in the Eucharist today. We might not fully comprehend the truth of Jesus' presence at the Eucharist, but we are asked not to understand it but to experience it. Each time we eat the living bread, we encounter Jesus and enter into loving communion with Him.

"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him". Through partaking in the Eucharist, we become part of Jesus and He becomes part of us. Let us not take this gift of God for granted. May we appreciate how loved we are!

Reflective question:

How can I respond to the reality of Jesus' living presence in the bread and wine?

Monday, 12th June, 10th Week in Ordinary Time.

2 Corinthians 1:1-7, Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went onto the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them: How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance. Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill. Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be recognised as children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.'

Living the Beatitudes

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...who comforts us in all our sorrows, so that we can offer others, in their sorrows, the consolations that we have received from God ourselves" (1st reading). St Paul experienced sadness in his life, but along with it, he experienced the consolation of God. The consoling presence of God gave him the peace he needed. Likewise, in our suffering, we go to God and experience the comfort that He provides. Our suffering makes us compassionate and opens our hearts to want to help others in their suffering. In this way, we can help others to discover God's loving presence in their lives.

In the gospel, Jesus also reminds us that God's path to life is unlike the world's. The world considers the rich and the powerful as "blessed". Jesus sees as blessed those who are poor, humble, gentle, peaceful, etc. Jesus Himself lived the Beatitudes and suffered because of it. However, His life, full of truth and honesty, was blessed indeed. Today, as His disciples, let us follow His path and start living real happiness.

Reflective question:

What is Jesus' message to me today?

Tuesday, 13th June, St. Anthony of Padua.

2 Corinthians 1:18-22, Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if salt becomes tasteless, what can make it salty again? It is good for nothing, and can only be thrown out to be trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of 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 the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven.'

Salt and light

“*You are the salt of the earth*”. Salt is important for us because it preserves food and adds flavour to food. Yet, its work is unseen, hidden. As salt of the earth, in small and hidden ways, we can bring out more taste to the lives of others by making a small gesture of kindness, saying a word of encouragement, taking time to listen and simply being present to another, etc.

“*You are light of the world*”. Light brightens a space and lets us see what is in the area. It helps us recognise and value what is good and illumine our path so that we do not stumble and fall. Jesus calls us, through our words and actions, to be light to those in our family, workplace, parish groups, neighbourhood, etc., and to brighten the darkness around us so that others will not stumble their way to life but come to know and encounter Him as the Light of the world.

Reflective question:

How can I respond to the call of Jesus to be salt and light of the world today?

Wednesday, 14th June, 10th Week in Ordinary Time.

2 Corinthians 3:4-11, 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. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man 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 man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Love is the commandment

Jesus did not come to abolish the Jewish law or the teachings of the Prophet. Instead, He precisely came to complete them by focusing everything on the commandment of love. One expert of the law asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment. Jesus told him “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your*

mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22: 37-40).

Looking at Jesus' life, words and actions, we grasp the full meaning of what it means to love. Today, we are invited once again to enter into an intimate personal relationship with Jesus. In this friendship with Jesus, we learn from Him how to love God and the people in our lives. May we, through our words, decisions and actions, make love a reality.

Reflective question:

How can I live this day striving to love as Jesus?

Thursday, 15th June, 10th Week in Ordinary Time.

2 Corinthians 3:15-4:1, 3-6, Matthew 5:20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: If your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. You have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must 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 his brother will answer for it before the court; if a man calls his brother "Fool" he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and if a man calls him "Renegade" he 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. I tell you solemnly, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.'

Above all, we love and reconcile

What matters most is that we live out the law of love, which is to love God, others and self. It is pointless to fulfil duties and obligations and even do grand deeds, but our hearts are empty of love. In today's gospel, Jesus speaks of anger as one of the common obstacles that prevents us from loving. Anger is a dangerous emotion that leads us to acts of

violence, words of abuse and causes unseen wounds in the hearts of others.

Jesus calls us to love, not to insult or despise anyone. Each person is a brother and sister who God loves. Today, let us ask Jesus to help us change and become a more loving and compassionate person. We look at our relationships with others and see if there is anyone with whom we need to work for reconciliation. Today, let us love and reconcile.

Reflective question:

Do I need to reconcile with someone today?

Friday, 16th June, Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Deuteronomy 7:6-11, 1 John 4:7-16, Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

The loving heart of Jesus

"My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God... because God is love". (2nd reading). As we celebrate the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, let us draw close to Him and allow Him to love us as we are so that His love can flow from us to those around us. He is God who is love, and thus, He is never far away from us but is always close to us. He is our security and foundation.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us, *"Learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart"*. He is our Teacher and Master and will never stop showing us how to love and serve as He did. Even when we fail to love, He will never give up on us but keeps believing in us that we will learn

how to love and serve others to the end. Let us contemplate Jesus' heart, the heart that unconditionally loves each of us and trusts in us to love others with His same love. We listen again to His voice calling us, "*Come and learn from me*".

Reflective question:

What is Jesus' invitation to me today?

Saturday, 17th June, The Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Isaiah 61:9-11, Luke 2:41-51

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

Imitating the heart of Mary

As we read the gospel passage, we find comfort that Mary did not understand the many things that were happening to her and her family. Yet, she was not disheartened. "*His mother stored all these things in her heart*". In her heart, Mary processed everything she lived that she did not understand. Instead of complaining or becoming disappointed, she treasured the events and experiences she lived and knew that God would, in His time and ways, make them clear to her.

We often do not understand why sad events happen to us and our family. We struggle with doubts and frustrations when we fail to see the light in the darkness of our suffering. We ask, Why? Where is God in this moment of pain? Like Mary, we might not know the answer to our many whys in life. Today, Mary invites us to ponder the good and bad moments of life in our hearts and trust that one day we will see the light and things will be made clear to us. We walk on with God, who is with us.

Reflective question:

How can I imitate the heart of Mother Mary and trust God even in dark times?

Sunday, 18th June, 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Exodus 19:2-6, Romans 5:6-11, Matthew 9:36-10:8

When Jesus saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest.' 'He summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon who is known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who was also his betrayer. These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them as follows: 'Do not make your way to gentile territory, and do not enter any Samaritan town; go instead to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those suffering from virulent skin-diseases, drive out devils. You received without charge, give without charge.'

To bring people to God

Today, Jesus continues to look at the world and see many people suffering from confusion, depression, poverty, injustice, violence, etc. His heart is filled with compassion as He still sees people '*harassed and dejected*' and "*like sheep without a shepherd*". Jesus invites us to follow

His gaze at the big harvest and see what He sees. He needs us, the young and the old, to serve as shepherds to His people.

“And as you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand”. Jesus entrusts us with the mission to proclaim the good news, i.e. to share God with the people and introduce them to enter into an intimate relationship with Him. Our mission is not to inform people about God but to form the hearts of the people to know and love Him. People need to know that God is present in their sadness and joys, hopes and disappointments. As friends of Christ, we need to give God to the people around us through our words and actions.

Reflective question:

How can I share God with the people in my life?

Monday, 19th June, St. Romuald.

2 Corinthians 6:1-10, Matthew 5:38-42

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

To walk God's illogical way

“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. This is the expected thing to do for many of us. We will naturally respond to violence with violence, insult with insult. Nevertheless, in today's gospel, Jesus went beyond what was expected and taught His listeners to resist retaliation. Jesus was neither against systematic justice nor endorsing sins. He was against people having hearts full of anger and hatred, seeking personal revenge and retribution for wrongs done. Instead, He desired His disciples to choose forgiveness and love over vengeance.

This teaching is not easy to put into practice, especially when people are caught up in a cycle of abuse and hatred. Though it seems illogical, the path of love and forgiveness is the one we are called to take and always

work for peace and reconciliation. Today, let us fill our hearts with God's love so that we can apply love, not hatred.

Reflective question:

How am I to respond to people who have done me wrong?

Tuesday, 20th June, 11th Week in Ordinary Time.

2 Corinthians 8:1-9, Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

A radical love

"But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike". Jesus' love is open to all people, the good and the bad, the saints and the sinners. On the cross, though in great affliction, He prayed for His persecutors, *"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34).

As His followers today, we are called to love like Jesus. Every person we encounter is our brother and sister, even our enemies and persecutors. Who are our enemies and persecutors? They are people who have broken our trust, hurt us with their indifference, wounded us with their cruelty and many other ways. Today, let us have these concrete people in our minds and hearts and pray for them. Do not harbour hatred in our hearts but yearn for peace instead.

Reflective question:

How can I concretely love my enemies?

Wednesday, 21st June, St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

2 Corinthians 9:6-11, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this 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 men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, 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; I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, 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 fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. When you fast, put oil 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.'

God sees our hearts

Deep down, what motivates me to help someone, give alms or attend religious activities? Is love for God and His people my motivation? We often want people to acknowledge and praise us for all we put in and our hard work. Moreover, society encourages us to focus on outward appearances and gain attention from people.

“...*your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you*”. Jesus calls us to do good actions in secret and to have the desire to be seen by God alone. The words of Jesus are a challenge as we do things with the need for attention and praise from people. Today, let us give of ourselves, love, pray, etc., “*in secret*” because we know that God our Father sees our hearts and takes delight in us.

Reflective questions:

Do I sometimes crave others' admiration and praise? What is Jesus' invitation for me today?

Thursday, 22nd June, St. Paulinus of Nola, SS, John Fisher & Thomas More.

2 Corinthians 11:1-11, Matthew 6:7-15

Jesus said to his disciples, 'In your prayers do not babble as the pagans 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.'

Our Father in heaven

"...your Father knows what you need before you ask him". In today's gospel, Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Today, He too comes to us and teaches us how to pray and relate with God. Prayer is not to babble words and expect God to answer our prayers exactly as we dictate them. It is also not some magical process we go through so that all our problems will disappear. Instead, Jesus tells us that prayer is nothing more than a relationship of loving trust between God and us. God knows what we need and will give us what is best for us. As His children, we need to depend on Him.

Let us believe and trust that God loves and care for us unconditionally and faithfully. As we slowly read the Our Father prayer that Jesus shares with us, let us dwell on the reality of who God is for us and deepen our awareness of Him daily.

Reflective question:

Which is my favourite phrase in today's gospel? Why?

Friday, 23rd June, 11th Week in Ordinary Time.

2 Corinthians 11:18, 21-30, Matthew 6:19-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where moth and woodworm destroy them and thieves can break in and steal. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor woodworm destroys them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too. The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows that if your eye is clear, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased, your whole body will be darkness. If then, the light inside you is darkened, what darkness that will be!'

Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be

"For wherever your treasure is, there will your heart be too". Let us allow these words of Jesus to sink deep into our minds and hearts. When we look at our hearts, what do we see? What is the treasure that we have within? The treasure we have determines how we live, the choices we make, the words we use, the actions we do, the friends we hang out with, and the habits we have. In today's first reading, St. Paul wrote out the list of his "achievements" that he accumulated: time in prison, being whipped, beaten with sticks, experiencing being shipwrecked, being in constant danger, etc. He endured all these gladly because of the treasure he had in his heart. His treasure was Jesus. His passion was the mission that Jesus had entrusted to Him. Thus, all his mind, heart and strength revolve around Jesus.

Today, Jesus wants to be our treasure here, now and forever. Are we ready to open our hearts to Him and let Him be our top priority? Are we willing to revolve our days around Him?

Reflective question:

What is my treasure?

Saturday, 24th June, The Nativity of St. John the Baptist.

Isaiah 49:1-6, Acts 13:22-26, Luke 1:57-66, 80

The time came for Elizabeth to have her child, and she gave birth to a son; and when her neighbours and relations heard that the Lord had shown her so great a kindness, they shared her joy. Now on the eighth

day they came to circumcise the child; they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother spoke up. 'No,' she said 'he is to be called John.' They said to her, 'But no one in your family has that name', and made signs to his father to find out what he wanted him called. The father asked for a writing-tablet and wrote, 'His name is John'. And they were all astonished. At that instant his power of speech returned and he spoke and praised God. All their neighbours were filled with awe and the whole affair was talked about throughout the hill country of Judaea. All those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts. 'What will this child turn out to be?' they wondered. And indeed the hand of the Lord was with him. Meanwhile the child grew up and his spirit matured. And he lived out in the wilderness until the day he appeared openly to Israel.

God is at work

Today, we celebrate the solemnity of the Nativity of St John the Baptist. St John the Baptist was indeed a miracle child because his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, had him when they were very old. Everyone who saw the miracle of his birth was filled with awe because they sensed God was at work. They wondered what this child would turn out to be. Though they did not fully understand, they anticipated something good would happen.

In our lives, we have also experienced God's works of wonders. Though we do not know where God is leading us and how our lives will turn out to be the next moment, we know that He is very present with us in the same way He was present in the life of St John the Baptist. Today, may we be able to perceive God's presence and rejoice that He is always at work in our lives for our good. With Him walking with us, we go through the ups and downs of life with hope and peace.

Reflective question:

How can I perceive God's presence today?

Sunday, 25th June, 12th Sunday In Ordinary Time.

Jeremiah 20:10-13, Romans 5:12-15, Matthew 10:26-33

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not be afraid of them therefore. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and

everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows. So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

Do not be afraid

"Do not be afraid of them therefore.... Do not be afraid of those who kill the body... So there is no need to be afraid..' Why did Jesus keep telling His disciples not to be afraid? He knew they would suffer rejection and persecution, even to the point of being killed for their faith. Despite all that they would go through, they should never let fear stop them from proclaiming the good news of God's love to others.

We might not be facing harsh persecution for our faith today. However, we are also invited to hold onto the words of Jesus, *"Do not be afraid..."* as we face our own personal challenges of uncertain future, health problems, family issues, and struggles with depression. We do not need to be afraid because God is with us, and His unfailing love will sustain us through and through. Allow God to be part of our lives and let Him give us His peace, hope and joy that only He can give.

Reflective question:

"Do not be afraid". How do I respond to these assuring words of Jesus to me today?

Monday, 26th June, 12th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 12:1-9, Matthew 7:1-5

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; because the judgements you give are the judgements you will get, and the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank

in your own? How dare you say to your brother, "Let me take the splinter out of your eye", when all the time there is a plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.'

Who am I to judge?

We are often blind to our own faults but quick to focus on those of others. We can sometimes be obsessed with the minor failings of others to the point that we cannot see their goodness. Jesus tells us, "*Do not judge...*" because He wants us to look at others with mercy and recognise the good in them. These words might be a challenge for many of us, but Jesus trusts that we can look lovingly at people around us, even those we cannot get along with.

Thus, Jesus invites us to draw close to Him and experience Him looking at us, with our faults and all, with love. In the same way He loves us, we are called to practice mercy in our relationships with others. In this time of prayer, let us honestly look at ourselves and identify the plank we have, the concrete fault in our own lives and ask Jesus to help us be merciful towards ourselves so that we can be loving towards others.

Reflective question:

How can I look at others with mercy, not judgement?

Tuesday, 27th June, St. Cyril of Alexandria.

Genesis 13:2, 5-18, Matthew 7: 6, 12-14

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls in front of pigs, or they may trample them and then turn on you and tear you to pieces. So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets. Enter by the narrow gate, since the road that leads to perdition is wide and spacious, and many take it; but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.'

Treat others always with love

"*So always treat others as you would like them to treat you*". These words of Jesus remind us of another verse in which He said, "*Love others as well as you love yourself*" (Matthew 22:39). Jesus invites us to

do what we want others to do for us. Thus, if we want to be loved, we must first give love to others. If we want to be treated with respect, we must treat others with greater respect. If we want to be understood, we must first try to open ourselves to understand others.

In this time of prayer, let us reflect on how we treat our family members, friends, community members, neighbours, and strangers. Today, let love rule our words and actions. When we make love our way of living, we walk the narrow road leading to us to have fullness of life.

Reflective question:

“So always treat others as you would like them to treat you.” How can I apply this concretely to my life today?

Wednesday, 28th June, St. Irenaeus.

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Matthew 7:15-20

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves. You will be able to tell them by their fruits. Can people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, a sound tree produces good fruit but a rotten tree bad fruit. A sound tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor a rotten tree bear good fruit. Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I repeat, you will be able to tell them by their fruits.'

True prophets and good fruits

In today's gospel, Jesus invites us to have discerning hearts to know the true prophets from the false prophets. "...*you will be able to tell them by their fruits*". Jesus tells us that we can know them by their fruits. False prophets centre on themselves and seek self-glorification. Thus, they manifest greed, pride and selfishness. On the other hand, good prophets speak the truth of God's love and inspire us to live the Gospel values of justice, love and peace. Rooted in their relationship with God, they bear fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

We are also called to be Jesus' disciples bearing good fruits. Today, let us ground ourselves in God and allow His love to nourish us so that we can be good prophets living out His truth.

Reflective question:

When people see me, can they recognise my identity as Jesus' disciple by the good fruits that I bear?

Thursday, 29th June, SS. Peter & Paul, Apostles.

Acts 12:1-11, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18, Matthew 16:1-19

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'. 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God'. Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'

Keeping the faith to the end

"My life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith..." (2nd reading). As St. Paul approached the end of his life, he looked back and recognised with gratitude how he had dedicated himself faithfully to loving God and serving His people. May we too be able to say the same when we draw close to the end of our earthly life. As we celebrate the Feast of St. Peter and Paul, we see two imperfect people who struggled with their weaknesses and made mistakes. Yet, they were great because of their faithful and passionate love for Jesus. They kept their faith and ran the race faithfully to the end.

“*Who do you say I am?*”. He wants our answer to come from a living encounter with Him today. May we honestly tell Jesus who He is at this point in our faith life.

Reflective question:

How do St. Peter and St. Paul inspire me to live for Jesus and His people?

Friday, 30th June, First Martyrs of the Holy Roman Church.

Genesis 17:1,9-10, 15-22, Matthew 8:1-4

After Jesus had come down from the mountain large crowds followed him. A leper now came up and bowed low in front of him. ‘Sir,’ he said ‘if you want to, you can cure me.’ Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, ‘Of course I want to! Be cured!’ And his leprosy was cured at once. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Mind you do not tell anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering prescribed by Moses, as evidence for them’.

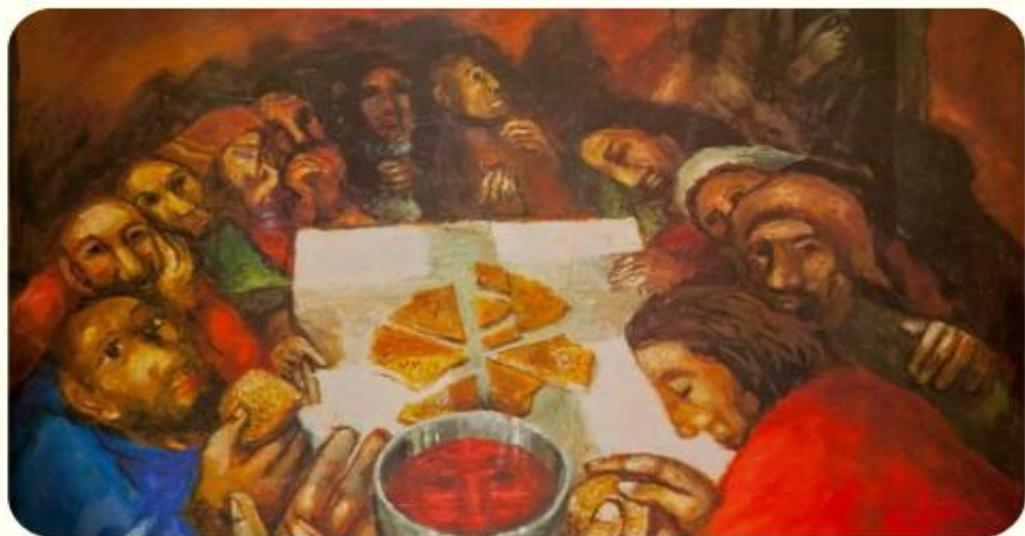
If you want to...

In the gospel, a leper came up and bowed low in front of Jesus. “*Sir, if you want to, you can cure me*”. He, an outcast of society, took the risk to draw close to Jesus because he somehow trusted that Jesus would not reject him but would help him. Jesus was not afraid of the leper but looked at him with love and wanted the best for him. Thus, He stretched out His hand, touched him and said, ‘*Of course I want to! Be cured!*’.

We do not have the physical illness of leprosy today. However, we suffer from the spiritual leprosy of anger, greed, jealousy, pride, etc. that disfigure and separate us from God and others. Do we dare to go close to Jesus and humbly ask Him to heal us? When we allow Him to touch our misery, we can have the courage to go out and touch others in their miseries.

Reflective question:

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



Artist: Fr. Sieger Koder