

God's extravagant love



Prayer for Living Daily Reflections for Liturgical Year A~ July

Sr. Sandra Seow
Verbum Dei Missionaries

PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR A

Copyright © 2023 Sr. Sandra Seow

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

Saturday, 1st July, 12th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 18:1-15, Matthew 8:5-17

When Jesus went into Capernaum a centurion came up and pleaded with him. 'Sir,' he said, 'my servant is lying at home paralysed and in great pain.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come myself and cure him.' The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured. For I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me; and I say to one man, "Go," and he goes; to another, "Come here," and he comes; to my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those following him, 'In truth I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found faith as great as this. And I tell you that many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of Heaven; but the children of the kingdom will be thrown out into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.' And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go back, then; let this be done for you, as your faith demands.' And the servant was cured at that moment. And going into Peter's house Jesus found Peter's mother-in-law in bed and feverish. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve him. That evening they brought him many who were possessed by devils. He drove out the spirits with a command and cured all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: He himself bore our sicknesses away and carried our diseases.

A heart for others

Today, as we reflect on the gospel reading, Jesus invites us to be compassionate and in solidarity with others, especially those suffering and marginalised. In today's gospel, the Roman Centurion, moved by compassion for his sick servant, humbled himself to ask Jesus to heal him. He went to Jesus not for himself but for a servant. Then, servants were considered insignificant and mere commodities that could be bought and sold. However, the Roman Centurion regarded his servant not as a thing but as a person who was in pain. His compassionate heart led him to suffer with his servant and moved him to act by seeking ways to alleviate his suffering.

We often speed through life to the point that we become blind and indifferent to the needs of others. Let us open our eyes to look at those around us and reach out to them in their joys and sorrows. Jesus Himself was never indifferent to anyone. In every encounter Jesus had with people, He recognised their humanity and desired to alleviate their suffering. May we be inspired to be less self-centered and work for the well-being of others.

Reflective question:

How can I be more compassionate today?

Sunday, 2nd July, 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16, Romans 6:3-4, 8-11, Matthew 10:37-42

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.'

Jesus, my number one

In today's gospel, Jesus underlines the truth about being His disciples. Discipleship implies choosing to live a life with Christ and for Christ. Because we choose to love Christ above all else, there will be consequences that we must prepare ourselves to embrace. One key consequence is that our choice for Jesus might bring division to those nearest and closest to us because our family members and friends might reject how we live as His disciples. Despite the challenges we face, we are called to put nothing and nobody before Christ. He has to be our highest priority.

“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me”. Jesus also speaks to us about the need to welcome others who come by our way. When we welcome those who work to make God’s kingdom alive each day, we extend hospitality to Jesus Himself. Each day, we have many opportunities to include others in our lives and be a sign of God’s love to them. Let today be one filled with moments of reaching out to others and serving them out of love.

Reflective question:

How can I make Jesus my top priority and fill my day with gestures of hospitality?

Monday, 3rd July, St. Thomas, Apostle.

Ephesians 2:19-22, John 20:24-29

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, 'We have seen the Lord,' but he answered, 'Unless I can see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving any more but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him: You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

Doubt and faith

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Thomas. Like Thomas, we too have experienced times when we struggled to believe and chose to doubt instead. Maybe we doubt God’s love when someone close to us leaves us or when we face a health crisis or unemployment. Don’t we struggle to have faith in these situations? It is alright to doubt as long as it brings us to Jesus. Thomas knew that only Jesus could replace his doubt with faith, and thus, he expressed his desire to encounter Him personally. Jesus did not give up on Thomas for doubting but came to meet him and moved him from disbelief to an experience of a deeper faith. Thomas did not simply call Jesus “*Lord and God*” abstractly but addressed Jesus

personally, “*My Lord and my God*”. This became the central truth of Thomas. For His Lord and His God, He lived and died.

Jesus constantly wants to meet us through prayer, Scripture, and the daily events of life. In this time of prayer, may we experience His presence and echo the words of Thomas, “*My Lord and my God*”.

Reflective questions:

Are there any phrases that caught my attention? Why?

Tuesday, 4th July, St. Elizabeth of Portugal.

Genesis 19:15-29, Matthew 8:23-27

Jesus got into the boat followed by his disciples. Suddenly a storm broke over the lake, so violent that the boat was being swamped by the waves. But he was asleep. So they went to him and woke him saying, 'Save us, Lord, we are lost!' And he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith?' And then he stood up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. They were astounded and said, 'Whatever kind of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?'

Lord, save us!

In today's gospel, Jesus and His disciples got into the boat to go to the other side of the lake. In the middle of their journey, they were caught in a huge storm that they were afraid. Many of us have experienced being overwhelmed by fierce storms of health issues, losing a loved one, and struggling with addiction and depression. In these times, Jesus seemed to be sleeping- absent, indifferent, and uncaring. The disciples went to Jesus and pleaded for His help, “*Save us, Lord, we are lost!*” He responded to the cry of His disciples by calming the storm.

Jesus calls us to have trust in Him. When we call Him, He hears us and stays close to us to bring peace to our troubled and stormy waters. Today, Jesus is in our boat. We are not alone as we journey through the ups and downs of this day. Let us find rest in Jesus.

Reflective question:

Have I experienced Jesus restoring peace to my anxious and troubled heart?

Wednesday, 5th July, St. Anthony Zaccaria.

Genesis 21:5, 8-20, Matthew 8:28-34

When Jesus reached the territory of the Gadarenes on the other side, two demoniacs came towards him out of the tombs -- they were so dangerously violent that nobody could use that path. Suddenly they shouted, 'What do you want with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torture us before the time?' Now some distance away there was a large herd of pigs feeding, and the devils pleaded with Jesus, 'If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.' And he said to them, 'Go then,' and they came out and made for the pigs; and at that the whole herd charged down the cliff into the lake and perished in the water. The herdsman ran off and made for the city, where they told the whole story, including what had happened to the demoniacs. Suddenly the whole city set out to meet Jesus; and as soon as they saw him they implored him to leave their neighbourhood.

Jesus present in all aspects of our lives

Two men approached Jesus for His help. They were wild and violent, and the villagers had already given up on them. Out of compassion, Jesus saw their suffering, drew near and healed them. Interestingly, the villagers neither rejoiced in the marvellous healing nor thanked Jesus for His loving act. The passage states, "as soon as they saw him they implored him to leave their neighbourhood". They asked Jesus to leave because they did not welcome Him into their lives.

We might disagree with the reaction of the villagers. However, we might sometimes do the same. Despite experiencing and witnessing His unconditional love and help, we ask Jesus to go away by not including Him in all parts of our lives. It is not enough for us to let Him in when praying or in a Church environment. Jesus wants to be part of our social, spiritual, family and working lives. He wants His words and values to influence how we relate with others, make decisions, etc. Will we let Him in or ask Him to leave?

Reflective question:

How can I live with Jesus in all parts and moments of my life today?

Thursday, 6th July, St. Maria Goretti.

Genesis 22:1-19, Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus got back in the boat, crossed the water and came to his home town. And suddenly some people brought him a paralytic stretched out on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Take comfort, my child, your sins are forgiven.' And now some scribes said to themselves, 'This man is being blasphemous.' Knowing what was in their minds Jesus said, 'Why do you have such wicked thoughts in your hearts? Now, which of these is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up and walk"? But to prove to you that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' -- then he said to the paralytic-'get up, pick up your bed and go off home.' And the man got up and went home. A feeling of awe came over the crowd when they saw this, and they praised God for having given such authority to human beings.

A living faith

“...*Seeing their faith...*” In the gospel, some people carried a paralytic man to Jesus because they knew that He could heal their friend. Their faith in Jesus moved them to action. Jesus looked at their faith and responded to the man by forgiving and healing him. Our faith in Jesus is not just a matter of verbally saying that we believe. Instead, it must also be expressed in our actions, i.e., how we share Christ with others, how we relate with others with honesty and love, how we spend our free time and resources, etc.

“*Get up, pick up your bed and go off home*”. Jesus does not want us to be spiritually paralyzed by disappointments, addictions, pride, etc. He calls us to get up and live life to the fullest, to live life fully alive and fully loving. At the same time, He calls us to “*go off home*”. Jesus is our home. He lives within us. We are called to enter within and be with Jesus where we belong. There, supported in His love and surrounded by His peace, we live with a dynamic faith.

Reflective question:

How should I respond to this gospel passage in prayer?

Friday, 7th July, 13th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 23:1-4, 19;24:1-8, 62-67, Matthew 9:9-13

As Jesus was walking on he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. Now while he was at table in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice. And indeed I came to call not the upright, but sinners.'

“Follow me!”

In today's gospel, we are invited to contemplate the call of Matthew. Jesus saw Matthew sitting at his desk and called him to follow him- not later, not in a year, but at that precise moment. What did Matthew do? *“And he got up and followed him”*. Matthew responded by following Jesus. Today, the gospel story is not about Matthew but about each one of us. Jesus is calling us today. In the midst of our busy life, He beckons us to follow Him.

Every day, Jesus calls us to follow Him by being His disciples, going out to the world to live His values of love and justice, and serving those around us with kindness. Every day, we can respond in the same way as Matthew did. Let us have the courage to recommit ourselves to following Jesus, radically and wholeheartedly. By doing so, we will not regret it.

Reflective question:

What will my response to Jesus' call to follow Him?

Saturday, 8th July, 13th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 27:1-5, 15-29, Matthew 9:14-17

John's disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a piece of unshrunk

cloth onto an old cloak, because the patch pulls away from the cloak and the tear gets worse. Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, the wine runs out, and the skins are lost. No; they put new wine in fresh skins and both are preserved.'

New wine, fresh wineskin

In today's gospel, the disciples of John the Baptist, like the Pharisees, valued fasting. They could not understand why Jesus and His disciples did not fast as they should. For Jesus, His coming opened a radically new way of living their faith in God. Instead of the conventional way of following rules of do's and don't's and getting lost in narrow-minded disciples and laws, Jesus invited them now to enter into an intimacy of love with God as reflected in the image of a bridegroom and his bride.

Today, Jesus continues to call us to celebrate our faith. Faith in God must be lived with joy, not burdened with rules and regulations. Therefore, Jesus wants our hearts to be like fresh wineskins that contain the loving presence of God. In this time of prayer, let our hearts be constantly renewed and refreshed by Jesus so that we can respond joyfully to God's intimate presence within us.

Reflective question:

Am I open and ready for the newness Jesus wants to give me?

Sunday, 9th July, 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Zechariah 9:9-10, Romans 8:9, 11-13, 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 little 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.'

A childlike trust

Pope John XXIII used to pray at night God, *"I've done the best I could in your service this day, Oh Lord. I'm going to bed. It's your Church. Take care of it!"*. This simple prayer of this great saint reveals his childlike trust in God despite his heavy responsibilities. What about us? Are we carrying the heavy burden of anxiety, fear, failure and despair? Listen to what Jesus has to say to us today. *"Come to me, all you who labour and are overwhelmed, and I will give you rest"*. The good news is that Jesus is never far away from us. He is the first to always come to us and takes the initiative to be with us. In the first reading, the prophet proclaims this good news of God's nearness with great joy: *"Rejoice... See now, your king comes to you..."* (1st reading).

Let us go to Jesus and bring to Him the heavy burdens that we carry. Like Pope John XXIII, we say to Him with trust, *"Lord, you know. Take care of this situation. Take care of this worry..."*. May we receive His presence of love with the trusting heart of a child.

Reflective question:

Do I find my rest in Jesus?

Monday, 10th July, 14th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 28:10-22, Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus was speaking to them, suddenly one of the officials came up, who bowed low in front of him and said, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and her life will be saved.' Jesus rose and, with his disciples, followed him. Then suddenly from behind him came a woman, who had been suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years, and she touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was thinking, 'If only I can touch his cloak I shall be saved.' Jesus turned round and saw her; and he said to her, 'Courage, my daughter, your faith has saved you.' And from that moment the woman was saved. When Jesus reached the official's house and saw the flute-players, with the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Get out of here; the little girl is not dead; she is asleep.' And they ridiculed him. But when the people had been turned out he went inside and took her by the hand; and she stood up. And the news of this spread all round the countryside.

Jesus' touch

In today's gospel, Jesus was asked by one of the officials to touch his dead daughter so that she might live again. Along the way, a woman suffering from haemorrhage quietly touched Jesus because she knew she would be healed from her sickness. When Jesus finally reached the house of the official, he went into the house, took the dead girl's hand, and she stood up. In just these few verses, there is a constant reference to touch.

Jesus is a personal God who is not afraid to touch and be in close contact with those around Him. This is because His hands that always reach out to touch others transmit life-giving love and convey acceptance. Today, we can go to Jesus and know that He draws close to us and is not afraid to hold our messy lives, handle our worries and embrace us in our tiredness, etc. He desires to be in connection with us. Let us go to Jesus and entrust ourselves into His hands. Like the Psalmist in today's responsorial psalm, we may confidently say, "My God, in you I trust" (Ps 90).

Reflective question:

What is Jesus' message to me today?

Tuesday, 11th July, St. Benedict, Abbot.

Genesis 32:23-33, Matthew 9:32-38

A man was brought to Jesus, a dumb demoniac. And when the devil was driven out, the dumb man spoke and the people were amazed and said, 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.' But the Pharisees said, 'It is through the prince of devils that he drives out devils.' Jesus made a tour through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness. And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers to his harvest.'

Jesus, the embodiment of loving compassion

In today's gospel, the people were amazed when they saw how Jesus healed the man. Though the Pharisees saw the same event, they rejected Him and refused to see God's hand in the miraculous act. Haven't we experienced such reactions from people when we do something good and loving? Some rejoice with our actions, while others criticise and speak ill of us.

What is astonishing is that Jesus did not allow the opinions of others to influence Him. The passage continues by stating that He went around all the towns and villages to preach the Good News of God's love and heal those who are sick. He displays His compassion and love to those in need. We are called to imitate Jesus by never stopping to show compassionate love to those around us, even when others fail to appreciate the good we do.

Reflective question:

How can I imitate Jesus by being sensitive to the needs of those around me and showing them my compassionate love?

Wednesday, 12th July, 14th Week in Ordinary Time.

Genesis 41:55-57; 42:5-7, 17-24, Matthew 10:1-7

Jesus 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.'

God calls, and He empowers

"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...". As we read the names of the people Jesus called and

chose, we can also add our names to the list. God calls us by name and gives us the mission of touching lives, forgiving those who sin against us and proclaiming the Good News of God's infinite love. Despite our limitations and failings, Jesus trusts us with His mission. Today, let us be grateful for Jesus' trust in us and respond to His trust by collaborating in the work He gives us.

When God calls us, He also equips us. Thus, He gives us what we need to undertake the mission. He promises us that He is always with us. With Him, we are never alone.

Reflective question:

How can I be an active collaborator in Jesus' mission?

Thursday, 13th July, St. Henry.

Genesis 44:18-21, 23-29; 45:1-5, Matthew 10:7-15

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: '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. Provide yourselves with no gold or silver, not even with coppers for your purses, with no haversack for the journey or spare tunic or footwear or a staff, for the labourer deserves his keep. Whatever town or village you go into, seek out someone worthy and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his house, salute it, and if the house deserves it, may your peace come upon it; if it does not, may your peace come back to you. And if anyone does not welcome you or listen to what you have to say, as you walk out of the house or town shake the dust from your feet. In truth I tell you, on the Day of Judgement it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.'

Sowers of Good News

"As you go, proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand". Jesus calls us to proclaim the Good News of God's unconditional love through our words and actions. Let us ask ourselves if we truly share with others that God is full of compassion and love and is a God close to them in their suffering and pain. Or if we reveal bad news of our pessimism and constant complaints of life, of situations of the world and church. Or if we

preach moral laws and put heavy burdens of do's and don'ts on people. What kind of news do we transmit? Is Jesus- His life, words and actions- good news for us?

What we have is what we will give. Thus, to share Good News, we need, first and foremost, to experience Jesus as our Good News. Let us always seek to encounter Jesus and experience being loved by Him. Jesus sends us out to give Him to others so that they can have a living faith in Him that sustains them as they journey through life with all its ups and downs.

Reflective question:

Am I transmitting Jesus and His message to others through my words and deeds?

Friday, 12th July, St. Camillus de Lellis.

Genesis 46: 1-7, 28-30, Matthew 10: 16-23

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be cunning as snakes and yet innocent as doves. Be prepared for people to hand you over to sanhedrins and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as evidence to them and to the gentiles. But when you are handed over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will come forward against their parents and have them put to death. You will be universally hated on account of my name; but anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved. If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another. In truth I tell you, you will not have gone the round of the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes.'

The Holy Spirit sustains

Jesus looked at the crowd with compassion and recognised that they were helpless and harassed, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). Today, He looks at the people around us who continue to go through life without meaning and hope. He sends us out to take the

Gospel to them. However, Jesus wants us to know that being His disciples is difficult as we might face resistance from people while proclaiming the good news.

“...*do not worry*”. This is Jesus’ consoling message to us. Though He speaks to us about the hardship of living for Him and working for His mission, He also assures us that we need not worry because the power of the Spirit will speak and act through us. We need to keep trusting the Holy Spirit, who is always with us and gives us the strength to persevere and witness.

Reflective question:

How open am I to leaving my comfort zone and collaborating with Jesus in His mission?

Saturday, 15th July, St. Bonaventure.

Genesis 49:29-33; 50:15-26, Matthew 10:24-33

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Disciple is not superior to teacher, nor slave to master. It is enough for disciple to grow to be like teacher, and slave like master. If they have called the master of the house "Beelzebul", how much more the members of his household? So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up 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 many sparrows. So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of human beings, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

No need to be afraid

“*So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows*”. We are often afraid of many things. We are scared of what will happen to us in the future, falling sick, losing our jobs, etc. Fear has

the power to either drive us forward or pull us back. Jesus knows that fear can stop us from truly living our identity as His disciples and following Him to bring the gospel to others. He has always been honest about the hardship we will experience when we say “Yes” to work in the mission field. However, He invites us never to lose sight of God. God, our loving Father, knows and cares for us. Thus, we need to trust that we are safe in God’s hands.

Discipleship implies a life centred on living in an intimate loving union with God. Let us live this day with the desire to be with God and experience His loving protection over us.

Reflective questions:

Do I struggle to trust that God knows and cares for me? Why?

Sunday, 16th July, 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Isaiah 55:10-11, Romans 8:18-23, Matthew 13:1-23

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, and he told them many things in parables. He said, 'Listen, a sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth, but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Anyone who has ears should listen!' Then the disciples went up to him and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?' In answer, he said, 'Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. So in their case what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled: Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using

their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me. 'But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! In truth I tell you, many prophets and upright people longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it. So pay attention to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the Evil One comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path. The seed sown on patches of rock is someone who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But such a person has no root deep down and does not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once he falls away. The seed sown in thorns is someone who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and so it produces nothing. And the seed sown in rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

Seeds sown on different soils

Jesus is like the sower, who goes to the field and sows the seed of God's Word extravagantly, generously, and seemingly recklessly, as some fall on the least favourable grounds that hold little or no promise for a good harvest. The soils represent the listeners and their responses: 1) path-indifferent listeners; 2) rocky soil- those who are shallow and superficial; 3) thorny soil- listeners who are caught up with worries and their love for worldly riches; and 4) good soil- those who listen and put God's Word into practice.

We tend to shift being a path, rocky ground or thorny ground. Jesus invites us to be good soil that allows His Word to shape our values, guide our decisions and influence our relationships with others. The comforting news is that despite our tendency to content ourselves to be a path, rocky or thorny ground, Jesus does not give up on us. He continues to sow and will never stop sowing God's Word. We pray for an open heart today.

Reflective question:

At this point in my life, how is my soil?

Monday, 17th July, 15th Week in Ordinary Time.

Exodus 1:8-14, 22, Matthew 10:34-11:1

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword. For I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; a person's enemies will be the members of his own household. No one who prefers father or mother to me is worthy of me. No one who prefers son or daughter to me is worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes an upright person because he is upright will have the reward of an upright person. If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then in truth I tell you, he will most certainly not go without his reward.' When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples he moved on from there to teach and preach in their towns.

The sword of division

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth: it is not peace I have come to bring, but a sword". These words of Jesus might seem strange. What does He mean? How can He, the Prince of Peace, bring a sword that divides one from another? Divisions happen when we choose to love God above all else by living a life in favour of the gospel message. By doing so, we risk being at odds with others who have not embraced the way of Jesus.

As His disciples today, we must always be ready to accept the consequences of following Jesus and His values, even if it means being excluded from our families and friends. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus and be determined to love Him above all else and follow Him faithfully to the end.

Reflective question:

How can I choose to follow Jesus faithfully today?

Tuesday, 18th July, 15th Week in Ordinary Time.

Exodus 2:1-15, Matthew 11:20-24

Jesus began to reproach the towns in which most of his miracles had been worked, because they refused to repent. Alas for you, Chorazin! Alas for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on Judgement Day than for you. And as for you, Capernaum, did you want to be raised as high as heaven? You shall be flung down to hell. For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have been standing yet. Still, I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on Judgement Day than for you.'

Stepping out of pride and opening ourselves to grow

We are used to seeing Jesus showing His compassionate love to the vulnerable and those in need, and we prefer to hear Him speaking of love, mercy and forgiveness. However, in today's gospel, we might not be comfortable with the harsh words that Jesus used against people too proud to accept Him and whose hearts are hardened to God. Jesus spoke in such a manner against the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because He wanted them to learn to be humble, listen to Him and follow Him. Out of love, Jesus wanted to break down their walls of complacency.

Jesus continues to call us to be careful not to be too self-satisfied with how we live our Christian faith. To be His disciples demands constant openness to learn from Him, to be willing to grow in greater humility and to have the desire to live out the gospel values. Today, let us allow Jesus' words to challenge us to go beyond our selfish and prideful motivations and follow Jesus the way He wants us to.

Reflective question:

Do I allow Jesus to challenge me so that I can grow in my following of Him?

Wednesday, 19th July, 15th Week in Ordinary Time.

Exodus 3:1-6, 9-12, Matthew 11:25-27

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 little 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.'

Pride and humility

Pride is a huge obstacle that prevents us from knowing and loving God more. Today, Jesus invites us to strive for humility that moves us to depend on God and acknowledge how little we know in coming to know God as who He truly is.

In today's gospel, Jesus distinguished between "*the learned and the clever*" and "*the little children*". The "*learned and the clever*" were the ones who considered themselves to know everything about God and His will. They were so proud of their own intelligence that they closed themselves to new things that Jesus came to bring. On the other hand, "*the little children*" were the "*poor in spirit*" (Matthew 5:3) who were always open to learning and humble enough to recognise their need for God, and thus, they were the ones who entered into a personal relationship with Him. Today, Jesus wants us to share His loving relationship with God the Father with us. Let us be willing to listen, learn, wonder and receive.

Reflective question:

Can I humble myself to know God and be drawn into a deeper relationship with Him?

Thursday, 20th July, St. Apollinaris.

Exodus 3:12-20, Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said, '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.'

Come to me

Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus knows our heavy burdens? He knows and invites us to go to Him and find rest in Him. "*Shoulder my yoke...*". In a literal sense, a yoke is a wooden bar that is placed on two animals pulling a heavy load. Farmers often pair a more experienced animal with a younger one, so the latter will walk along with the older animal and learn from it. Jesus wants to be our partner who walks alongside us and teaches us about life and God. We are never alone.

Jesus wants us to have His perfect rest. Rest means having inner calmness and peace and being secure and grounded in His love without running around in circles looking for meaning. Rest also means trusting that God cares for us and that we can depend on Him. Allow Jesus' words to sink into our minds and hearts, "*Come to me... I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me...*". Jesus invites us, and all we need to do is to go to Him.

Reflective question:

What strikes me the most as I listen to Jesus' words in today's gospel passage?

Friday, 21st July, St. Lawrence of Brindisi.

Exodus 11:10-12:14, Matthew 12:1-8

Jesus went through the cornfields one Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry and began to pick ears of corn and eat them. The Pharisees noticed it and said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing something that is forbidden on the Sabbath.' But he said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his followers were hungry- how he went into the house of God and they ate the loaves of the offering although neither he nor his followers were permitted to eat them, but only the priests? Or again, have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath day the Temple priests break the Sabbath without committing any fault? Now here, I tell you, is something greater than the Temple. And if you had understood the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless. For the Son of man is master of the Sabbath.'

To look at life through the eyes of Jesus

The Pharisees were supposed to help the people of Israel live the Law daily as an expression of their love for God. However, over time, they became so obsessed with the intricacies of the Law that they forgot what truly mattered- loving God and loving others. They regarded Jesus as a rebel. In today's gospel, they questioned Him regarding the action of His disciples plucking grains of corn during the Sabbath, which was not permitted. Their hearts were too hardened to see beyond the faults of others.

Jesus knew that His disciples were hungry and needed food to continue the journey. He looked at them compassionately and placed their needs above the Sabbath observance. As we pray today, we listen to the gentle invitation of Jesus to focus on what truly matters. We are called to love God and others, and not to centre our faith on mere external formality and simply to conform ourselves to the rigid following of rules and regulations.

Reflective question:

Is there any fundamentalism in me that leads me to be self-righteous and criticise others?

Saturday, 22nd July, St. Mary Magdalane.

Song of Songs 3:1-4 or 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, John 20:1-2, 11-18

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,' she said, 'and we don't know where they have put him.' But Mary was standing outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, as she wept, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she replied, 'and I don't know where they have put him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put

him, and I will go and remove him.' Jesus said, 'Mary!' She turned round then and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' -- which means Master. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' So Mary of Magdala told the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that he had said these things to her.

Encounter with the living Christ

Today is the Feast day of St. Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the Resurrection, the apostle to the apostles. Let St. Mary Magdalene speak to us on how to follow Jesus with greater faithfulness and love, even when we sense His absence in our lives.

In today's gospel, Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb but all she saw was emptiness. She wept in despair as she felt the absence of the one she loved. She could have just gone back home, defeated and lost. However, Mary Magdalene, the ever-faithful disciple, stayed. Jesus came to encounter her and changed her grief into life-changing hope. The temptation is often to give up and run away when we sense Jesus' absence in our life. The good news is that Jesus is never absent because He is God, who is close to us. May we learn from Mary Magdalene not to give up but to stay and trust that Jesus will come to encounter us. Like Mary Magdalene, He will send us back to our family and friends with a renewed purpose of bringing the good news of His Resurrection to them.

Reflective question:

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

Sunday, 23rd July, 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Wisdom 12:13, 16-19, Romans 8:26-27, Matthew 13:24-43

Jesus put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everybody was asleep his enemy came, sowed darnel all among the wheat, and made off. When the new wheat sprouted and ripened, then the darnel appeared as well. The owner's labourers went to him and said, "Sir, was it not good seed that you sowed in your field? If so, where does the darnel come from?" He said to them, "Some enemy has done this." And the labourers said, "Do you want us to go and weed it out?"

But he said, "No, because when you weed out the darnel you might pull up the wheat with it. Let them both grow till the harvest; and at harvest time I shall say to the reapers: First collect the darnel and tie it in bundles to be burnt, then gather the wheat into my barn." ' He put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.' He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.' In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: I will speak to you in parables, unfold what has been hidden since the foundation of the world. Then, leaving the crowds, he went to the house; and his disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable about the darnel in the field.' He said in reply, 'The sower of the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world; the good seed is the subjects of the kingdom; the darnel, the subjects of the Evil One; the enemy who sowed it, the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; the reapers are the angels. Well then, just as the darnel is gathered up and burnt in the fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of falling and all who do evil, and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then the upright will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

Darnel and wheat

There was a time when we dreamt of a perfect society where justice reigns, a perfect faith community where people are loving, a perfect family where all is united and even a perfect us. Along the way, we understand that good and evil co-exist in the world, the church, the family, and each of us. As Jesus said in the first parable in today's gospel, the darnel (weeds) and wheat grow together. Like the servants, we tend to want to uproot the darnel around us. Thus, we judge, criticise and get rid of people who do not think and act like us. At times, we are also disappointed with ourselves as we look at the darnel of pride, anger, and indifference in us and forget that we have the capacity to live for goodness and love too.

God always looks at us and others with patience, hope and mercy. He does not act in haste but allows time for His love to touch us and for conversion to begin. For God, what is bad can become good. Thus, we trust and hope in His merciful love.

Reflective question:

What does God's patience mean for me as I look at the weeds in others and myself?

Monday, 24th July, St. Charbel Makhluf.

Exodus 14:5-18, Matthew 12:38-42

Some of the scribes and Pharisees spoke up. 'Master,' they said, 'we should like to see a sign from you.' Jesus replied, 'It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign! The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah remained in the belly of the sea-monster for three days and three nights, so will the Son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. On Judgement Day the men of Nineveh will appear against this generation and they will be its condemnation, because when Jonah preached they repented; and look, there is something greater than Jonah here. On Judgement Day the Queen of the South will appear against this generation and be its 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.'

Do you see?

In today's gospel, the scribes and Pharisees went to Jesus and asked for a sign, for evidence, despite Him just healing a deaf-mute person in their presence (Matthew 12:22). Jesus did not do as they wanted because He knew that He did not come to cater to their whims and fancies. No matter what He did and said, they had already closed their hearts to Him.

What about us? Is it not enough to have His presence through the Scripture and the Eucharist? Is it not enough to know that everything good in our lives comes from Him? Is it not enough to perceive His love in the care and concern that others show us? Are we looking for more

proof of His faithfulness? Jesus calls us to have faith in Him and His words by spending time with Him in prayer. In prayer, we create space to meet Jesus, listen to Him and experience ourselves deeply loved by Him. Spending quality time with Jesus daily opens our eyes of faith to recognise Jesus constantly with us and at work in our lives.

Reflective question:

In my life, am I aware of Jesus' care and love for me?

Tuesday, 25th July, St. James, Apostle.

2 Corinthians 4:7-15, Matthew 20:20-28

The mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make a request of Jesus, 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.'

A clay jar displaying God to the world

"We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us..." (1st reading). St. Paul knew that He had been entrusted with a precious treasure: the message of the good news of God's unconditional love. Yet, he recognised that this treasure, though precious, was not kept in a box of pure gold or an imperial porcelain jar but in an earthenware jar, a simple clay jar. St. Paul pictured himself as this common, unimportant clay jar that held the power of the gospel. As we celebrate the Feast of St. James, we remember the many human clay jars that God has used

for the purpose of revealing His love. Today, we are also God's weak and fragile clay jars.

In today's gospel, the disciples wanted to be the greatest, to be served and given as much attention as possible. This can be a great temptation for us too. Yet, Jesus invites us to be common clay jars that display the power of God and the gospel, not ours.

Reflective question:

Am I truly happy to be a simple clay jar for Jesus' sake?

Wednesday, 26th July, SS. Joachim and Anne.

Exodus 16:1-5, 9-15, Matthew 13:1-9

Jesus left the house and sat by the lakeside, but such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat there. The people all stood on the shore, and he told them many things in parables. He said, 'Listen, a sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell on the edge of the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on patches of rock where they found little soil and sprang up at once, because there was no depth of earth; but as soon as the sun came up they were scorched and, not having any roots, they withered away. Others fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Others fell on rich soil and produced their crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Anyone who has ears should listen!'

God scatters without discrimination but love

As we meditate on today's gospel, we marvel at the sower's generous scattering of the seeds. Jesus reveals that God is this sower. God sows the seeds generously because He is love, and love always shares what is good. He does not withhold the good news from anyone. This is something that we can ponder on with wonder today: God does not discriminate between poor soil and good soil. We are reminded that God loves everyone, regardless of gender, status, race and more. Are we uncomfortable or even scandalous by God's unconditional love?

We tend to assume who is worthy and who is not worthy of receiving the good news of God's love. We welcome the "good soil", i.e. the loveable people we meet, and turn away from the "bad soil", i.e. those who live

messy and complicated lives. Today, we are asked to see the humanity in others and keep sowing the seeds of the good news to them.

Reflective question:

What does it mean to me that God loves without discrimination?

Thursday, 27th July, 16th Week in Ordinary Time.

Exodus 19:1-2, 9-11, 16-20, Matthew 13:10-17

The disciples went up to him and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?' In answer, he said, 'Because to you is granted to understand the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not granted. Anyone who has will be given more and will have more than enough; but anyone who has not will be deprived even of what he has. The reason I talk to them in parables is that they look without seeing and listen without hearing or understanding. So in their case what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled: Listen and listen, but never understand! Look and look, but never perceive! This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me. But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear! In truth I tell you, many prophets and upright people longed to see what you see, and never saw it; to hear what you hear, and never heard it.'

To listen with the heart

"...This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me. But blessed are your eyes because they see, your ears because they hear!...". Jesus points out the reality that there are two groups of people. Some are open to listening, understanding what He says and living His word out daily. Others hear His words but are unwilling to allow what they hear to make a difference in their lives. Which group do we belong to?

Jesus comes every day to sow the seeds of His word that reveal the mystery of the kingdom of God. The mystery is nothing more than knowing the God that Jesus comes to show us and experiencing ourselves being loved by Him. Let us not get tired of listening with our

ears and understanding with our hearts so that we can truly be blessed to have Him in our lives.

Reflective question:

Has my heart grown tired and dull over time of Jesus and what He wants to tell me?

Friday, 28th July, 16th Week in Ordinary Time.

Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Pay attention to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the Evil One comes and carries off what was sown in his heart: this is the seed sown on the edge of the path. The seed sown on patches of rock is someone who hears the word and welcomes it at once with joy. But such a person has no root deep down and does not last; should some trial come, or some persecution on account of the word, at once he falls away. The seed sown in thorns is someone who hears the word, but the worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word and so it produces nothing. And the seed sown in rich soil is someone who hears the word and understands it; this is the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.'

The four responses

In today's gospel, Jesus explained the parable of the sower, and His explanation centred on people's various responses to God's Word. The difference in the outcomes was not because of the seed sown but the type of soil to which it was scattered. Like the sower, God sows His Word that speaks of love, joy, hope and consolation into our hearts. How we listen and respond to the seeds of God's Word makes a difference.

Today, we are called to check the condition of our hearts and examine how we respond to God's Word. Are we mindless hearers who hear God's Word but readily dismiss it? Are we superficial hearers who hear but fail to assimilate God's Word? Are we so full of worries and cares about this world that the Word of God cannot find its home in our hearts? Are we fruitful Christians who listen and put into practice what God tells us? The good news is that God continues to speak to us His life-giving Word because His love never gives up on us.

Reflective question:

What strikes me as I listen to God through the gospel passage?

Saturday, 29th July, SS. Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

1 John 4:7-16, John 11:19-27 or Luke 10:38-42

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.'

Friendship

Today, we celebrate the feast of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus, the three siblings whom Jesus loved. Each reveals valuable lessons that we can also imitate in our friendship with Jesus. In the alternative gospel of today, Mary shows us the importance of slowing time and making time to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen attentively to Him. When Jesus is at the centre of our lives, He empowers us to serve others with love. From Martha, we can learn how to be boldly honest with Jesus. In today's gospel, she was free enough to complain, "*Lord, if you had been here...*". Her friendship with Jesus was so personal that she was not afraid to express her frustration and knew He would understand. Today, we can also tell Jesus our fears, complaints, joys and dreams. We do not know much about Lazarus. We know that Jesus went to his tomb and wept, which shows the deep friendship between Jesus and Lazarus.

Jesus wants to have a personal and intimate friendship with us. Let these three siblings inspire us as we enter the joy of being with Jesus.

Reflective question:

Is Jesus my friend?

Sunday, 30th July, 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12, Romans 8:28-30, Matthew 13:44-52

Jesus said to the crowds: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it. Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.' Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old.'

To live for God

In the first reading, God asked King Solomon, “Ask what you would like me to give you”. King Solomon did not ask for material possession, success or good health. Instead, he desired a wise and understanding heart to serve God’s people better. He knew that He had to depend on God for the task he had been entrusted with. Today, what would we ask from God? Let us allow King Solomon's simple desire to move us and to desire the same, i.e. an understanding heart, a listening heart that would hear what God wants from us. God continues to entrust us to be His living presence today. This task is huge, and we cannot do it by our will and strength but need to rely on Him daily.

In the gospel, Jesus calls us to place everything we consider as important in the service of the Kingdom of God. Like the two men who gave up all to have something greater, we also need to prioritise God and make Him the one shaping our values, guiding our choices and leading us to live a life of loving service.

Reflective question:

What would I ask from God?

Monday, 31st July, St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Exodus 32:15-24, 30-34, Matthew 13:31-35

Jesus put another parable before them, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.' He told them another parable, 'The kingdom of Heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.' In all this Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; indeed, he would never speak to them except in parables. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet: I will speak to you in parables, unfold what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.

The power of the mustard seed and leaven

In today's parable, Jesus speaks of a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, yet when sown in the field, it becomes the largest of all plants and even provides a place for birds to build their nests. Likewise, a woman mixes a small quantity of yeast with a large amount of flour. Hidden in the flour, the yeast starts the leavening process and produces abundant bread.

We often look at the little we do and wonder if we are creating any difference or bearing any fruit. Jesus assures us that the little love we put in, the little patience we exercise, the little effort to reach out to someone and the little acts of mercy we do can impact the lives of the people around us. Let us keep loving, and God will work wonders through us.

Reflective question:

What is God's message to me through this gospel passage?

