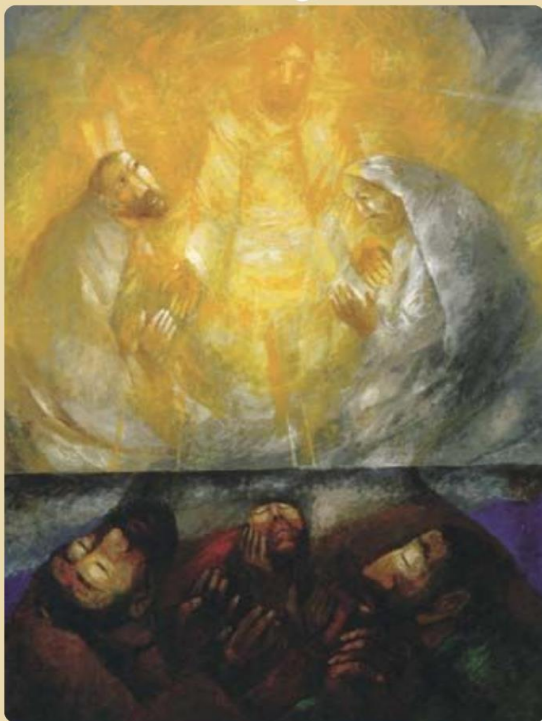


Prayer for Living Daily Reflections Liturgical Year B



“This is my Son, the Beloved.
Listen to Him.”

SR. MARIA JOSE
VERBUM DEI MISSIONARIES

PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR B

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

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12, Mark 6:7-13

Jesus made a tour of the villages, teaching. Then he summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs, giving them authority over unclean spirits. And he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -- no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They were to wear sandals but, he added, 'Don't take a spare tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the dust under your feet as evidence to them.' So they set off to proclaim repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

Called for a mission

In the same way that Jesus called the Twelve to bring the Good News of the Kingdom, He also invites us to share our faith with those around us today. The gospel emphasises what the disciple should not bring along: No bread, no haversack, no money, no spare tunic. Why? At first, it seems that all those belongings are necessary. But Jesus points out that the apostle should not have his security in all the external possessions in order to accomplish his mission. He needs to be rooted in God's love and have a passion for his Kingdom; then, he will be a true witness of the gospel and touch the people's lives as Jesus did.

We, who have already encountered Christ, are sent to bring his love to the different environments where we are, and for that, we do not need to excel in rhetoric or to have many titles in Theology. Instead, the thing we truly need is the fire of Jesus' love in our heart and the desire to show His face through our life.

Reflective question:

Having Jesus in my heart, how can I show his face to those around me?

Friday, 2nd February, The Presentation of the Lord.

World Day for Consecrated Life

Malachi 3:1-4, Luke 2:22-40

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord - observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord, and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now, in Jerusalem, there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: 'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel'. As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected- and a sword will pierce your own soul too-so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare'. There was a prophetess, too, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile, the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

Hope will not let us down (Romans 5:5)

Simeon was a man of faith, a man of God; he believed and hoped in the promise that he would see the Messiah during his lifetime. He waited

and waited by trusting in God's word. During his long life, Simeon lived in a relationship with God, being attentive to the insinuations of the Holy Spirit. That is why he could recognise the face of '*the Promise*' in Baby Jesus. Who in Israel would be able to see God in a child when people were expecting Him to be powerful and majestic? Only the pure in heart, those familiar with God's ways, could do it. The love for God sustained Simeon's hope.

What about us? Do we trust in God's words despite Him not answering us as soon as we want and in the way we want? Our hope is sustained by our trust in God, and our trust depends on our friendship with Him and on the love we have for Him.

Reflective question:

Can I look at the future with hope because I trust in God's words?

Saturday, 3rd February, St. Blasie, St. Ansgar.

1Kings 3:4-13, Mark 6:30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many could guess where; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

God sees our heart

In today's gospel, we can see how Jesus' heart was moved by the tiredness of the disciples and the eagerness of the people who needed His word and compassionate touch. He knew that the disciples were tired from the mission. Therefore, He wanted them to rest before they attended to the people. But when the Lord saw how much effort the crowd made to reach out to Him, He could not help but attend to them by pouring out his love for them through his teaching.

Jesus knows our hearts, sees our struggles and challenges, and knows what we need, and He is always ready to share with us. We only have to reach out to Him and listen to Him, as the people of the gospel did. We need His word, which sometimes comforts us and, other times, challenges us to live what we understand, knowing that in His word He is giving us all His love.

Reflective question:

Am I eager to go to Jesus to listen to Him and experience His compassionate love through his word?

Sunday, 4th February, 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Job 7:1-4, 6-7; 1Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23, Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law had gone to bed with fever, and they told him about her straightaway. He went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. And the fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door, and he cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another; he also cast out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was. Jesus quietly leaves Capernaum and travels through Galilee. In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him they said, 'Everybody is looking for you'. He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can preach there too, because that is why I came'. And he went all through Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils.

Jesus' activity: God and people

As we pray with the gospels, more and more, we submerge ourselves into the life of Jesus, in his ins and outs, His daily activities, and His motivations behind them. We can see how His heart is with God and the people. He absorbs the love of God, and He transmits it to those who are with Him in many different ways, for example, sometimes healing their sickness and other times talking to them about God, either

personally or as a group. But his energy, compassion, and motivation come from those long moments in solitude that He spends in dialogue with the Father. God is the one who moves His heart and will, indicating to Him what step to take next.

In today's gospel, we learn from Jesus that we need to have those quiet moments in which we ask Him how to go about in the situations we live in and what way to take. We learn how to make God the source of our daily energy in order to deal with the people and the situations we will face.

Reflective question:

Do I count on God as the source of my strength in my daily life?

Monday, 5th February, St Agatha 1 Kings 8:1-7, 9-13, Mark 6:53-56

Having made the crossing, Jesus and His disciples, came to land at Gennesaret and tied up. No sooner had they stepped out of the boat than people recognised him, and started hurrying all through the countryside and brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, to village, or town, or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were cured.

Touching Jesus

In the gospel, we encounter many situations in which Jesus felt compassion for the sick, the disabled and the blind, and He placed His hands on them to heal them. Some others approached Jesus and believed they would be healed by touching even the fringe of his cloak. Reading the gospel, we may think: "*If only Jesus would be here, and I could touch Him, as His contemporaries did!*" Let us be aware that Jesus continues to be present today in the Eucharist and His word. In the Eucharist, we can touch Him. Through His word, He touches us when we open ourselves to Him and believe in Him.

Jesus is alive in us. We can talk to Him, pour out our heart to Him and listen to Him through His word. St. Ambrose says, "*We have been given Sacred Scripture so that God and man may talk together; for we speak*

to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying." Let us allow ourselves to be touched by Him as we open our hearts to His word.

Reflective question:

Do I allow Jesus to touch my mind and heart when I pray?

Tuesday, 6th February, SS Paul Miki and Companions

1 Kings 8:22-23, 27-30, Mark 7:1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round Jesus, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and the Jews in general, follow the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves. There are also many other observances which have been handed down to them concerning the washing of cups and pots and bronze dishes. So these Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. The worship they offer me is worthless, the doctrines they teach are only human regulations. You put aside the commandment of God to cling to human traditions.' And he said to them, 'How ingeniously you get round the commandment of God in order to preserve your own tradition! For Moses said: Do your duty to your father and your mother, and, Anyone who curses father or mother must be put to death. But you say, "If a man says to his father or mother: Anything I have that I might have used to help you is Corban (that is, dedicated to God), then he is forbidden from that moment to do anything for his father or mother". In this way you make God's word null and void for the sake of your tradition which you have handed down. And you do many other things like this.'

The Tradition and the Law of God

The Jews had many traditions that, with time, increased considerably to the point of making it impossible for the commoners to fulfil all of them. The religious leaders considered sinners and outcasts for those who did

not follow all the traditional rituals and man-made laws. Jesus was not against the Law. He Himself said: *"Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true."* (Mt 5:17) However, He wanted that the Law would reflect the will of God and help people to live a meaningful life of love. The Law was not meant to be a burden for them.

Like the Pharisees, we are in danger of giving value to external rituals and forgetting what truly matters, which is to love God and others around us. Let us be like Jesus by giving importance to what really matters.

Reflective question:

Is Jesus my Law?

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

1 Kings 10:1-10, Mark 7:14-23

Jesus called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean. If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to this.' When he had gone back into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, *'Do you not understand either? Can you not see that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot make him unclean, because it does not go into his heart but through his stomach and passes out into the sewer?'* (Thus he pronounced all foods clean.) And he went on, *'It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean.'*

It is the evil things that come from within that make a person unclean

In the previous verses of the same chapter, Jesus told the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law how they emphasised the minor man-made laws and forgot the essential Law of God, which is to love God and neighbour. In this text, He is pointing out to the crowds and to us that we need to pay more attention to what is in our minds and hearts instead of being

so concerned with external practices and rituals. For example, if someone hurts us and we nurture resentment, the unforgiveness towards the person will make us move away from receiving God's merciful love. As Jesus Himself taught us in The Our Father: "...*Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" Let us follow the example of our Master by giving more importance to His New Commandment of loving God and loving one another than to the external man-made rules.

Reflective question:

Do I allow the mercy of God to change any bad intentions that I may have?

**Thursday, 8th February, St. Jerome Emiliani, St. Josephine Bakhita
1 Kings 11:4-13, Mark 7:24-30**

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

A mother's love

The gospel tells us that the woman was pagan, and not only pagan but Syrophenician, which means that she was polytheist, totally against the Jewish culture. But she was a mother with a sick daughter, and by her action (to fall at Jesus' feet, to beg Him to cure her, to insist with humility), we can see how great the love she had for her daughter and how she was suffering for her.

What parent would not go the extra mile to find a cure for their ill child? Our love for someone makes us move towards action and we would not

think twice if we have to plead with humility. Jesus saw the mother's pain she had and felt compassion for her. He healed her daughter. The Lord cannot resist seeing someone suffering. His action broke the barriers that His culture had of despising those who did not belong to the same race. Jesus teaches us to be compassionate with everyone, no matter what race or religion they are.

Reflective question:

How do I look at those people who are different from me?

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

1Kings 11:29-32, 12:19, Mark 7:31-37

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

Ephphatha! Be opened!

Jesus, looking up to heaven, sighed and said, "*Ephphatha*". Jesus came to open not only the ears of the deaf or the tongue of the dumb but also to open the hearts of the people. In our times, there continue to be many people who do not want to hear the cry of the suffering and do not want to see the realities of those around them who struggle to live. Today, Jesus tells us, "*Be open!*" Do not remain in your comfort zone, in your world, thinking that there is no way out of your problems. Be open to the reality of others and realise that for God, nothing is hopeless and everything has a solution because He is present, He is in us and His door is always open for us.

Lord, open my eyes to see You in me, to hear You, and to see others with your eyes.

Reflective question:

Are my heart and my ears open to hear the needs of others?

Saturday, 10th February, St. Scholastica

1 Kings 12:26-32, 13:33-34, Mark 8:1-10

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

How many loaves have you?

The crowd in the gospel was hungry, hungry for Jesus' words and hungry for physical bread. Jesus could see their hunger and so He spent days teaching them and being with them to satisfy their spiritual hunger. But the Lord was also concerned with the people's material needs, which was why He asked the disciples: "*How many loaves have you?*" Probably, they were thinking, "*Does it matter? The crowd is too huge to feed them.*" Despite their hesitations, they obeyed Jesus, and in the end, they even gathered seven baskets full of scraps.

We may think that we do not have enough strength, talent or time to help in a project or to collaborate in reaching out to those in need but Jesus asks us in prayer: "*How many loaves have you?*" Jesus tells us to offer our seven loaves to Him so that He will bless and give them to feed others. Through us, miracles may happen because it is the Lord who touches the lives of people.

Reflective question:

Are we ready to offer to Jesus what we have?

Sunday, 11th February, 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time**Leviticus 13:1-2, 45-46, 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 Mark 1:40-45**

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: 'If you want to' he said 'you can cure me'. Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured. Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him, 'Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery'. The man went away, but then started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around would come to him.

Of course, I want to!

In Jesus' time and culture, a leper was not only a person with skin disease but was also an outcast who would experience rejection and loneliness, separated from his/her family and loved ones. The leper in the gospel, pleaded with Jesus to be cured, not only from his sickness but from his loneliness too. Jesus understood his suffering and was eager to heal him at once.

In the same way that Jesus was prompt to help the leper, He is eager to help us in anything that we need. He also knows our struggles and sufferings. If we are open to Him, His love will touch us and thus heal us from anxiety, loneliness or any hardship that we may experience. At the same time, He invites us to be His hands today by reaching out to those who suffer so that His healing -through our care- may touch them too.

Reflective question:

Am I open to expressing to Jesus what I need and helping others with their needs?

Monday, 12th February, 6th Week in Ordinary Time

James 1:1-11, Mark 8:11-13

The Pharisees came up and started a discussion with Jesus; they demanded of him a sign from heaven, to test him. And with a sigh that came straight from the heart he said, 'Why does this generation demand a sign? I tell you solemnly, no sign shall be given to this generation.' And leaving them again and re-embarking he went away to the opposite shore.

Jesus is the sign

The Pharisees and the Scribes did not believe in Jesus and looked for ways to trap Him. No matter how often they witnessed His miracles, they would attribute them to evil spirits or dismiss them because their hearts were closed. In this passage, the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove that He came from God. Jesus felt frustrated, Why? Because He Himself is the sign that the Father has given to the world, as the prophet Isaiah prophesied: "*The Lord will give you a sign: The young woman is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel.*" (Is 7:14) He is the presence of God Himself, the Sacrament of the Father, and whoever sees Him, sees the Father (Jn 14:9).

Sometimes, we also ask God for a sign so that we can be sure of His will, without realising that "*the Sign*" is Jesus who walks with us, lives in and with us. We need to listen to Him more and let Him guide us daily.

Reflective question:

Do I ask other signs from Jesus to believe, or do I fully trust Him?

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

James 1:12-18, Mark 8:14-21

The disciples had forgotten to take any food and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. Then Jesus gave them this warning, 'Keep your eyes open; be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod'. And they said to one another, 'It is because we have no bread' And Jesus knew it, and he said to them, 'Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you not yet understand? Have you no perception? Are your minds closed? Have you eyes that do not see, ears that do not hear? Or do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves

among the five thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' They answered, 'Twelve'. And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many baskets full of scraps did you collect?' And they answered, 'Seven'. Then he said to them, 'Are you still without perception?'

Are you still without perception?

Through the lines of this passage, we can feel the disappointment of Jesus towards His disciples. If He was frustrated with the Pharisees because they did not believe, He also experienced disappointment regarding the lack of understanding of those who followed Him. We listen to Jesus through the Scriptures, attend faith formations and even belong to faith communities, etc., but we still tend to remain at the surface and not understand the deeper meaning of Jesus' words.

Let us find comfort that Jesus' disciples took time to understand and follow Him faithfully. Let us not be discouraged. Our faith journey may also be long, but if we remain faithful to Jesus', trying again and again to obey Him, our knowledge of Him and love for Him will grow more and more.

Reflective question:

Do I have my mind and heart open to walk on this journey of knowing and loving Jesus?

Wednesday, 14th February, Ash Wednesday.

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

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your 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. But 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.

Prayer, fasting and almsgiving

Today, as we start the season of Lent and have ashes put on our foreheads, we are told to: “*Repent and believe in the Gospel*”. How? In the gospel, Jesus invites us to live the three pillars of the Lenten journey: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We do these not to be praised or to feel good but to be closer to God.

The most important pillar is prayer, which is to listen to God and live in a relationship with Him. In prayer, when we listen to Him through His Word, we will be more aware of the needs of those around us and be more generous in sharing our time and material goods with them. At the same time, prayer leads us to understand the true meaning of fasting. Fasting might not just be fasting from food, but we can also fast from being selfish with our time, watching TV drama, etc. God tells us what is best for ourselves so that we can live a life of love. For that, we require time to pray.

Reflective question:

Are we ready to start this journey with Jesus?

Thursday, 15th February, After Ash Wednesday

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

Jesus said to his disciples: 'The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.' Then to all he said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, that

man will save it. What gain, then, is it for a man to have won the whole world and to have lost or ruined his very self?

Choose life!

The first reading tells us that we have the freedom to act by choosing what is good and not what is evil, choosing life and not death. God invites us to choose life by obeying His commandments.

To choose life is to choose God as our point of reference and not the worldly desires that may bring us far away from Him.

Jesus, in the gospel, invites us to follow Him choosing life too, by not focusing ourselves on our ego, in our comfort and image that make us lose the real purpose of life, but rather to fix our eyes on Him, offering the hardships and difficulties that life brings along our way, knowing that we do not have to live them by ourselves alone because we have Jesus as the companion in our journey who lived ahead of us.

Reflective question:

How can I choose life in the midst of the routine of daily life?

Friday, 16th February, Friday After Ash Wednesday

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

John's disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?' Jesus replied, 'Surely the bridegroom's attendants would never think of mourning as long as the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then they will fast.'

Fasting doing good

God, through the prophet Isaiah, says in the first reading: "*The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice... share the food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless...*" Fasting cannot be simply for the sake of fasting. It implies changing our lives to become more like Jesus. Our fasting must also benefit others. Looking at Jesus' actions of curing the sick, returning dignity to those outcasts, preaching the Good News, etc., all these showed the goodness of God and helped the people live a better life. He

criticised the fasting of the Pharisees because they fasted just for appearances' sake, but their lives were far away from God.

When we fast from our shortcomings, like impatience, it helps us to be more patient and more considerate with those we relate to. When we fast from food or drink, we open our hearts to help those in need. Let us fast as how God wants us to.

Reflective question:

How can fasting benefit my spiritual life and the life of others?

Saturday, 17th February, After Ash Wednesday

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

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

Stand up and follow Me

Levi was working for the Romans, collecting taxes from his own people, the Jews, and that was why they hated him. Because of that, Levi was considered a sinner and an outcast by his race. The gospel tells us that Jesus noticed him and called him. He did not judge or reject him for being a sinner, but He saw that this tax collector could change if given an opportunity. Levi responded with an attitude of taking action promptly. He was sitting and doing his job. When Jesus called him, he got up at once took the opportunity, left his past, comfort, wealth and perhaps his regrets, and followed Jesus.

Jesus also passes by our lives and calls us to follow His ways. He does not wait until we are perfect and sinless to call us. Sometimes, we understand his call amid our confusion or feeling we are far from Him. He calls us to get up and start anew with Him.

Reflective question:

Am I ready to leave behind whatever enslaves me and follow Jesus?

Sunday, 18th February, First Sunday of Lent**Genesis 9:8-15, 1 Peter 3:18-22, Mark 1:12-15**

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him. After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

Overcoming temptation with God

What can we find in the wilderness? The gospel only mentions that there were wild beasts. Why did Jesus go to the desert? Before He started His mission, Jesus needed time and space where He could be alone with God the Father. He wanted to learn from Him what and how the mission that was entrusted to Him should be done. In the wilderness, Jesus prayed, receiving strength to follow God's will. However, He was also tempted to use extraordinary powers to be more successful in the eyes of the world. Despite the struggle, He did not listen to the voices of the temptations and chose to submit Himself to the Father's will.

That is why He taught us, in the Our Father prayer, to ask God not to let us fall into temptation, to give us the strength to be faithful to Him, and not to follow the alluring values of the world. Jesus knows by experience what it is to be tempted and how to persevere in God's ways by being united to Him in prayer.

Reflective question:

Do I hold on to God and listen more to Him than myself in moments of temptation?

Monday, 19th February, First Week of Lent**Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18, Matthew 25:31-46**

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate

men one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me". Next he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food; I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink; I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, naked and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me". And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the virtuous to eternal life.'

Jesus is hidden in those who need us

Jesus' heartbeat was compassion. He reflected the love of His Father and told us to do the same: "*Be merciful as your Father is merciful*" (Luke 6:36). To be compassionate and merciful is what makes a person fully human. That is why in the gospel, the standard Jesus has to determine if we follow Him is by the way we love with His love.

Love is concrete and is neither a theory nor a feeling. When we concretise our love by helping others in one way or another, we love God because, as St. John says: "*If someone says he loves God but hates his brother, he is a liar. For he cannot love God, whom he has not seen if he does not love his brother, whom he has seen.*" (1John 4:20) St. John of the Cross said that, at the end of our life, God will only ask us: Have you

loved? Let us listen to Jesus asking us today, "Are you loving me by loving those around you?"

Reflective question:

How can I look at each person with Jesus' eyes of compassion?

Tuesday, 20th February, First Week of Lent

Isaiah 55:10-11, 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 knows what we need

The "Our Father" is the most recited prayer by all Christians. In it, Jesus summarises the essence of our Christian life. Therefore, the *Our Father* is not only a prayer to be said but to be lived. For Jesus, prayer and life go together, that is why when we pray: 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done', we are committing ourselves to bring His Kingdom of peace, love, and justice to the environment where we live. By doing so, we are doing His will.

Jesus teaches us to confidently place ourselves in the Father's hands, knowing He knows what we need. When we ask Him for our necessities, He reminds us to pray, not only asking for ourselves but also being concerned with the needs of others. God is not only 'My Father' but "Our Father". As we pray the *Our Father*, let us see others as members of the same family of God, and as such, we cannot be on good terms with God if we are not concerned and reconciled with our brothers and sisters.

Reflective question:

How can I live this prayer today?

**Wednesday, 21st February, First Week of Lent
Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11:29-32**

The crowds got even bigger and Jesus addressed them, 'This is a wicked generation; it is asking for a sign The only sign it will be given is the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. On Judgement day the Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and there is something greater than Solomon here. On Judgement day the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation. and condemn it, because when Jonah preached, they repented; and there is something greater than Jonah here.

Asking for signs

"*The crowds got even bigger...*" Jesus was not impressed with the crowds, since He knew that they followed Him because of His miracles and not because they understood and accepted His teachings. Those who followed Him were fascinated by the healings that He performed, but their minds and hearts remained close to having faith in Him. They failed to understand that the real sign they asked for was Jesus Himself. God the Father sent His Son as the greatest proof of His love for us: "*God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through Him.*" (1Jn 4:9)

Jesus is the sign of God's love for us; we do not need any other. In Him, we see how much we are loved by The Father. When we receive Him in our life, when we believe and live His words, we receive eternal life. Let us give thanks to The Father for sending us Jesus and be open to welcoming Him through His words.

Reflective question:

Is my faith strong enough to believe in Jesus?

**Thursday, 22nd February, Chair of St. Peter, The Apostle
1 Peter 5:1-4, Mathew 16:13-19**

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.

'Who do you say I am?'

Jesus had already been living with the disciples for some time, going around the towns preaching and healing the sick. He wanted to know how people understood who He was and His mission. Thus, He asked his disciples: *'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'* For some, Jesus was a prophet who spoke God's words and performed great signs. Some others thought He was Elijah who was expected to return. But Jesus was more concerned with knowing who He was for His disciples. Therefore, He asked them: *'You, who do you say I am?'*

Today, He also asks us directly: *'Who am I for you?'* Jesus does not want us to give Him theoretical answers. But He wants us to look at our lives, recognise who He really is in our daily lives and what role He plays in our decisions and choices. Is Jesus the companion of our life to whom we constantly refer to? If He truly is, we can then say, like Peter: *You are the Christ, my Lord and God!*

Reflective question?

What is my answer to Jesus' question?

Friday, 23rd February, First Week of Lent Ezekiel 18:21-28, 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.

Being in peace with God and with people

The Law given by God to Moses was at the centre of the Jewish religion. The Law was good and meant to guide people to live in a holy and good moral way. But the Pharisees and Scribes tended to follow the letter of the Law without the spirit of it. Jesus accused them of the superficial way of living it. He taught His disciples to go beyond obeying the Law superficially by living out its spirit: Love for God and love for people.

In today's gospel, Jesus clarifies that we cannot separate being at peace with God from being one with others. The call to reconcile with our brothers and sisters who have hurt us does not mean that we have to like them but that we have to love them by choosing not to keep resentment towards them, to pray and wish goodness to them. Today, let us ask God for the strength to be at peace with Him
Our offering to God is also a sincere heart that wants to forgive and be forgiven.

Reflective question:

What is Jesus telling me through this passage of the gospel?

Saturday, 24th February, First Week of Lent Deuteronomy 26:16-19, 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.

Be perfect by loving the imperfect

As disciples of Jesus, we need to pay attention to His teachings that can sometimes go beyond human logic. In today's gospel, it seems logical for us to reciprocate the wrong actions of the other person. However, Jesus tells us that such a reaction is not Christian.

We need to acknowledge that we are all imperfect people and be secure that God loves us as we are, even when we err. Experiencing ourselves loved by Him in such a manner, He asks us to act as His children by not closing our hearts to those who hurt us. In accepting our own imperfections and the imperfections of others, we become perfect in love as God is perfect. There is a saying that states that when we hate someone, it is as though we take a drink of poison and wait for the other person to die. Thus, we know that when we hate someone, the main one who is affected is ourselves. Let us pray for those who hurt us, knowing that God loves them, as He loves us.

Reflective question:

Do I experience being loved by God in moments of failure?

Sunday, 25th February, Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 22:1-1, 9-13,15-18, Romans 8:31-34, Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There in their presence, he was transfigured: his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus: 'Rabbi,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah'. He did not know what to say; they were so frightened. And a cloud came, covering them in shadow; and there came a voice from the cloud, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.' Then suddenly, when they looked round, they saw no one with them any more but only Jesus. As they came down from

the mountain he warned them to tell no one what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They observed the warning faithfully, though among themselves they discussed what 'rising from the dead' could mean.

'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to Him'

It was normal for Jesus to retreat to a quiet place to pray, but He did not go alone this time. At this point, He was on the way to Jerusalem and knew that His mission would come to an end soon. Jesus needed to discern if His ways were in accordance with God the Father's will. Moreover, He also needed strength to continue this difficult and dangerous journey. While in prayer, He experienced Moses and Elijah encouraging Him. However, the climax was when God spoke and recognised Jesus again as His beloved Son. With this declaration, God placed Jesus over Moses (the Law) and Elijah (the Prophets). Thus, it is to Jesus that we have to listen attentively and follow closely.

Let us centre our attention on Jesus. Today, God continues to tell us, "*Listen to Him!*"

Reflective question:

Do I listen to Jesus more than to the voices of the world?

Monday, 26th February, Second Week of Lent

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

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

There is greater joy in giving than in receiving

God is the giver of life, peace, joy, pardon, etc. He rejoices when we receive His gifts. His ultimate gift to us is Jesus, His Son. He is the source we can go to in order to be filled with what we lack. Jesus, in the gospel, encourages us to experience the joy of giving and sharing His love with

others by forgiving someone, giving an encouraging word to someone struggling with sadness, visiting a lonely person, catching up with a friend who needs to be listened to, etc.

'Give and there will be gifts for you.' When we give of ourselves for the sake of others, we will receive an abundance of joy and peace from God. If we close our hearts to those around us, we will also be close to receiving the compassion, joy, and peace that God wants to give us. Let us be open to give and receive so that we may fully experience God's gifts.

Reflective question:

Have I experienced the joy of giving?

Tuesday, 27th February, Second Week of Lent

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

Addressing the people and his disciples Jesus said, 'The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practise what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. 'You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted.'

Living the law of love

Jesus spoke strongly towards the Pharisees and the Scribes because they manipulated the Law of God by focusing on man-made rules and missing the spirit of the commandments, which was to love God and love

neighbour. They had full knowledge of their religion, but their lives were far from it.

Jesus warns us not to fall into the same pit. Our Christian faith is not about having intellectual knowledge but putting it into practice. Only when we try to live the spirit of Jesus' teachings will we acquire His attitude of humility and not seek honour or recognition from those around us. Faith cannot remain only in the mind. We cannot think that by knowing the teachings, we are living them already. Like the Pharisees, we may be far away from it. Let us listen to Jesus and learn how to live the law of love from Him.

Reflective question:

What is Jesus teaching me through this gospel?

Wednesday, 28th February, Second Week of Lent Jeremiah 18:18-20, Matthew 20:17-28

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, and on the way he took the Twelve to one side and said to them, 'Now we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man is about to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the pagans to be mocked and scourged and crucified; and on the third day he will rise again.' Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came with her sons to make a request of him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom'. 'You do not know what you are asking' Jesus answered. 'Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can' 'Very well,' he said '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 pagans the rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be 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.'

Power versus service

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah experienced the persecution of his own people because they could not accept God's message of conversion. Like Jeremiah, Jesus suffered the same reality from the religious authorities, who could not open themselves to the novelty of the Good News of the Kingdom. Not only the religious leaders, His disciples too could not accept His message of the Kingdom as they centered on their own selfish desire for power.

Today, we see the same ambitious desires in our parishes and Christian communities: To be respected as a leader, to hold onto positions and titles, etc. Jesus tells us: *'Look at Me and learn from Me!'* As we read the gospels, we see how Jesus is always at the service of the people without expecting anything in return. Are we ready to follow Him in His way, or do we belong to those who search for honour and recognition?

Reflective question:

In following Jesus, do we choose power or service?

Thursday, 29th February, Second Week of Lent

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

Jesus said to the Pharisees: *'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even came and licked his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his bosom. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames". "My son," Abraham replied "remember that during your life good things came your way, just as bad things came the way of Lazarus. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to stop anyone, if he wanted to, crossing from our side to yours, and to stop any crossing from your side to ours." 'The rich man replied, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house,*

since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too". "They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham "let them listen to them.". "Ah no, father Abraham," said the rich man "but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead".'

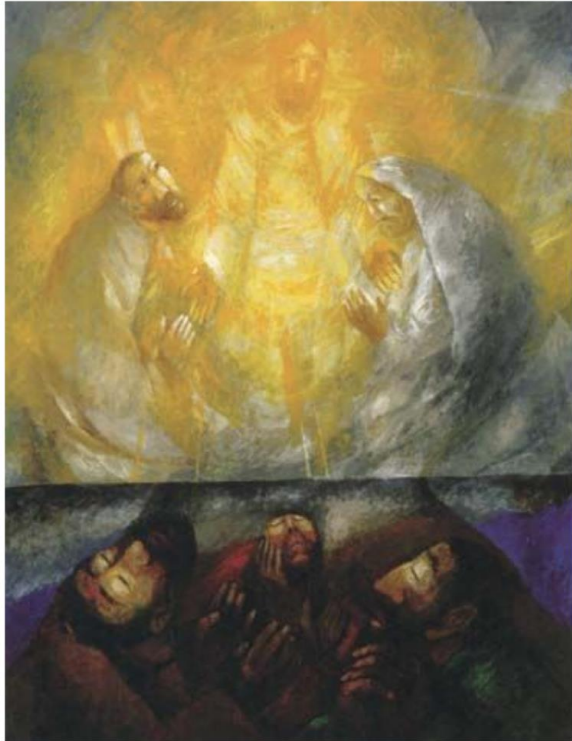
Lord, help us to see with your eyes

The rich man was a Jew who knew the Law of Moses but failed to apply its essence: showing mercy and compassion to the person in need. The rich man ignored God and allowed his richness to blind him; thus, he lived just for himself. Interestingly, there was no mention of the name of this rich man. It is a way to show us that his richness overpowered his identity. By contrast, the poor man had a name, Lazarus, revealing him as a person with dignity, loved by God despite his poverty.

We, as Christians, have many means, such as the Word of God to guide our journey, the sacraments that nourish our spiritual life, the possibility of belonging to faith communities to help us in our faith, etc. Does our faith, supported by these means, make us see the needs of those around us and have the love to reach out to them? Let us ask God for eyes that see others and a compassionate heart to love them.

Reflective question:

How can I not be blinded by my material comforts as well as all my cares and concerns?



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