

Prayer for Living
Daily Reflections
Liturgical Year B
July



The look of the
Good Shepherd

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PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR B

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Monday, 1st July, 13th Week in Ordinary Time.

Amos 2:6-10, 13-16, Matthew 8:18-22

When Jesus saw the crowd all about him he gave orders to leave for the other side. One of the scribes then came up and said to him, 'Master, I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.' Another man, one of the disciples, said to him, 'Lord, let me go and bury my father first.' But Jesus said, 'Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead.' Then he got into the boat followed by his disciples.

Follow me

Jesus calls us to become committed disciples who follow Him daily regardless of our circumstances. He does not want superficial disciples who verbally proclaim that they are His followers but live according to their whims and fancies. Through today's gospel, Jesus tells us that following Him is challenging because He does not promise a comfortable and easy life of having abundant money, always being strong and healthy, having power and security, etc. Are we still willing to follow Jesus?

Another person wants to go and bury his father first. Jesus gives a startling response, "*Follow me, and leave the dead to bury the dead*". The person's father is not yet dead. He is telling Jesus that he will follow when his father dies. Thus, he is telling Jesus, "*Not now but later*". Like this man, we might delay: "*I will pray, I will serve, but not right now because I want to watch TV, check my emails, etc.*" There is always something to delay us from being with Jesus and following Him closely. Today, let us allow Jesus to set our priorities and reorientate our lives so that we can truly be His disciples.

Reflective question:

Am I truly following Jesus?

Tuesday, 2nd July, 13th Week in Ordinary Time.

Amos 3:1-8; 4:11-12, 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?'

Peace, be still

What is the storm that you are experiencing right now? Is it sickness, the loss of a loved one, the pain of loneliness, etc.? We all have experienced difficulties that overwhelmed us and made us feel confused, afraid and lost. In today's gospel, the disciples were frightened as they faced the big waves and the strong wind. They cried to Jesus, "Save us, Lord, we are lost!" Like the disciples, in our moments of helplessness, we need to turn to Jesus and cry out with trust, "Save me, help me...".

Jesus is always in our boats, in our lives, and His presence makes all the difference. He asks us, "Why are you so frightened, you who have so little faith?". We need eyes of faith to perceive that He is there with us. He gives us the peace we need, even as the storms around us rage on. Jesus does not take away our problems but stays with us and helps us go through them with peace in our hearts.

Reflective question:

Have I experienced Jesus' calming presence in my life in the storms of my life?

Wednesday, 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.'

My Lord and my God!

"... you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit." (1st reading) We are dwelling places for God, even with all our imperfections and quirks. Are we aware of His presence in us? By making us His home, God is with us as we go through the ups and downs of life and shares with us all that He is- love, peace, joy, etc. Thus, we are never alone. This reality of being the dwelling place of God calls us to be a clear reflection of Him to others. When people look at us, they should see God.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of St. Thomas. His story gives hope to us. Though He was known as the doubter, his scepticism became a catalyst for a deeper faith. When he encountered the Risen Lord and touched his wounds, he exclaimed, *"My Lord and my God!"*. He committed his whole life to steadfastly preaching the Good News, to the point that he gave his life as a martyr. There is nothing wrong with having uncertainties as long as we follow Jesus closely and seek a personal encounter with Him.

Reflective question:

What is God saying to me today?

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

Amos 7:10-17, 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.

Jesus and the paralytic

In today's gospel, a group of people carried a paralytic man for Jesus to heal. He not only restored the health of the paralytic man but gave wholeness to him by forgiving his sins. What Jesus did to the man, especially forgiving his sins, caused the religious leaders to react against him. Instead of seeing the good He did, they focussed on what they deemed as "*blasphemous*". Today, Jesus invites us never to stop doing good, even when people misunderstand and criticise us. Let us put love as the motivation to help anyone in difficulties.

Let us also pause and reflect on Jesus' words to the paralytic: "*Get up, pick up your bed and go off home*". God has created us to live life fully and not lie down and feel stuck in disappointments, unforgiveness and hopelessness. Let us be aware of Jesus' presence with us, allow Him to bring joy to our lives, and make our hearts beat again with love, hope, and peace. Home is where Jesus is. Let us go home and stay with Him.

Reflective questions:

Which phrase/word from the passage strikes me in prayer today? Why?

Friday, 5th July, St. Anthony Zaccaria.

Amos 8:4-6, 9-12, 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.'

As you are...Follow me

Jesus looked at Matthew and saw in this tax collector the potential to be His disciple and give his life for the sake of the gospel. At that moment,

Matthew had to choose: To cling to his worldly securities and luxurious lifestyle or to follow Jesus, the itinerant and poor preacher. Matthew decided to respond to the call. Every day, Jesus calls us to follow Him: to follow Him in the way He lives, loves and serves. Let us answer the call of Jesus and trust that He will always lead us towards a purposeful and meaningful life.

The religious leaders struggled to understand the reason why Jesus dined with sinners. Jesus told them, "*Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice*". This is what He is telling us today too. Jesus wants us to have a heart like His by seeing beyond the mistakes and flaws of a person and recognising who he/she is, i.e. a beloved child of God. Today, let us allow Jesus to teach us what mercy truly means.

Reflective questions:

What do I say and do when God calls me today?

Saturday, 6th July, St. Maria Goretti.

Amos 9:11-15, 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.'

The bridegroom is with us

In today's gospel, John the Baptist's disciples went to Jesus and wanted to know why Jesus did not insist that His disciples fast. Jesus answered them that His disciples did not need to fast. Instead, they feasted because Jesus, the bridegroom, was with them. To follow Jesus as His disciples is to experience the profound joy that He brings. Today and each day, Jesus the bridegroom is with us. His presence with us is the cause of our joy and freedom. Are we aware of His presence with us, among us, in us?

“... *new wine in fresh skins.*” In Jesus’ time, wine was stored in wineskins. The gases from the fermenting new wine could cause the old wineskins to burst. Thus, new wine was needed to put into new wineskins that would be elastic enough to expand with the gases. Jesus is the new wine. He brings newness to our lives- a new way of looking at ourselves and others, a new way of loving God, a new way of working for justice and truth, etc. We can only truly live the newness that Jesus brings in renewed hearts.

Reflective question:

What is the message that I can draw from today’s prayer?

Sunday, 7th July, 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Ezekiel 2:2-5, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Mark 6:1-6

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

My grace is all you need

“...to stop me from getting too proud, I was given a thorn of flesh... I have pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me, but he has said, ‘My grace is enough for you...’ (2nd reading). St. Paul was suffering from a particular trouble and wanted it to go away so that his life would be problem-free. However, Jesus told him that His grace, i.e. His presence, would be enough for him to carry on walking in this difficult moment of his life. When we encounter trials, Jesus says the same to us: “My grace is enough. My presence will carry you through this time of adversity.”. Let us trust Jesus and depend on Him.

In today's gospel, Jesus was regarded as too ordinary, and the people in his home town were sceptical of Him. Yet, God worked in and through the ordinariness of everyday life. We need to see the grace of God is close to us. God's loving presence continues to be active in the familiarity of friendships, routines, care, sadness and pain.

Reflective question:

Do I struggle to recognise God's presence with me, especially in hard times?

Monday, 8th July, 14th Week in Ordinary Time.

Hosea 2:16-18, 21-22, Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus was speaking, 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.

I will speak to your heart

"I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart..." (1st reading). In prayer, God desires to bring us to the wilderness, the place of nothingness and silence, where He wants to speak words of love and hope. God never gives up on us, no matter how messy our lives or how our hearts are cluttered with pride, envy, anger, etc. With faithful love, He renews us and gives us hope.

In today's gospel, when Jesus arrived at the house of the official, people were wailing in grief because of the death of the young girl. However,

Jesus said, “*Get out of here, the little girl is not dead; she is asleep*”. They laughed at Jesus upon hearing what He said. Jesus had no time for these scorners. We might struggle with voices of doubt, negativism, and fear- these “scorners” in us prevent us from living life with joy and hope. May we turn our attention to Jesus and give Him room to speak His words that bring us life and love.

Reflective question:

What word does Jesus want to tell me today?

**Tuesday, 9th July, SS. Augustine Zhao Rong and Companions.
Hosea 8:4-7, 11-13, 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.'

To look with kindness

Jesus healed a dumb person, but the Pharisees reacted with spite. Jesus did not try to defend Himself. All he did was to continue going to the towns and villages, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of God’s kingdom and healing people from their illness. In the face of malice, Jesus chose to display love. Today, let us see signs of goodness in people. Like the religious leaders, we might tend to look at all the wrongs instead of rejoicing in all the rights of others. We need to humbly ask Jesus to help us be more loving in how we look at the people around us. Moreover, let us also imitate Jesus by showing kindness even when we face rejection and criticism. As His disciples, we are called to follow Him by loving the way He loves.

Today, Jesus looks at the crowd of people- people in our neighbourhood, workplaces, church, etc.- harassed and dejected, and he feels deep compassion for them. He needs helpers to bring people to God. Are we ready to collaborate with Jesus in His mission?

Reflective question:

Do I look with kindness and see the goodness in the people around me?

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

Hosea 10:1-3, 7-8, 12, 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 who never gives up on us

"Sow integrity for yourselves, reap a harvest of kindness, break up your fallow ground: it is time to go seeking the Lord until he comes to rain salvation on you." (1st reading). In the first reading, God recognised that the hearts of His people were divided. His people had been drifting away from Him and harbouring riches and worldly possessions as their gods. He called out to them to come back to Him. Today, God invites us to examine the state of our hearts. Do we love Him wholeheartedly? God wants us never to stop sowing integrity: to be people with a sincere heart, not a divided heart, and to be single-minded in our love for Him, no matter what. By sowing the seeds of integrity, we will reap a harvest of kindness and unending love.

In the gospel, we have the names of the Twelve apostles, who were not perfect people. Yet they were called, chosen and sent. This is our good

news! Despite our tendency to wander away from God, He calls us as we are, flaws and all, and entrusts us to collaborate in His mission.

Reflective question:

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

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

Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9, 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.'

God of love

"I myself taught Ephraim to walk, I took them in my arms, yet they have not understood that I was the one looking after them. I led them with reins of kindness, with leading strings of love. I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek, stooping down to him I gave him his food" (1st reading). All of us have misconceptions of God, where we view Him as a God who punishes, a God who is indifferent, etc. The God of the Bible is a God who loves with tenderness and compassion.

In the gospel, Jesus tells us, *"Proclaim that the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand."* The kingdom of Heaven is not a physical place but God's presence that comes to reign in our lives. The good news that we need to share with others is that God comes to reign, not as a punishing judge, but as a Father who overflows with love. Today, let us set ourselves on

God's unwavering and faithful love for us so that we can share His love with others.

Reflective question:

How can I be a catalyst to bring others to experience God's love?

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

Hosea 14:2-10, Matthew 10:16-23

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Look, 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.'

Go home where God is

"*Israel, come back to the Lord your God...*" (1st reading). The prophet Hosea cried out to His people to return to God, the One who loved them unconditionally. Only in Him would they find the fullness of joy and life. Today, let us take consolation that we can always make our way back to God, no matter how far we have wandered from Him. Even if we have stayed close to God, we are always invited to experience more of God and His faithful love. Let us make our way to God in prayer and allow ourselves to be loved by Him. Filling our hearts with His love will allow us to go out and love others with mercy, forgiveness and peace.

In today's gospel, Jesus presents us with the truthful consequence of living as God's beloved children and living out our convictions about God in the world. We will meet with conflict, even from the ones who are

closest to us. Let us take courage and follow Jesus, who commits Himself to help and lead us.

Reflective question:

How can I live this day with God and for God?

Saturday, 13th July, St. Henry.

Isaiah 6:1-8, Matthew 10:24-33

Jesus said to his apostles: '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.'

Here I am!

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: 'Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?' I answered, 'Here I am, send me.' (1st reading). In the first reading, God called the prophet Isaiah to tell the people of Israel to change their ways and come back to Him. When Isaiah heard God, he responded with a "yes" without fully knowing what he was getting into. Instead, Isaiah trusted in God and did as he was told. Even when the people never changed and continued living apart from God, the prophet continued his mission. Today, in our work for God, He does not call us to be successful but faithful. Thus, like Isaiah, we might not see the fruits of our mission, but we continue to be faithful and trust in God.

In the gospel today, let us take comfort in Jesus' words: "*Do not be afraid*". We can fearlessly live each day bearing witness to God's love because He will always take care of us. Let us ask Jesus for the grace to grow our trust in God and share the good news with those around us.

Reflective question:

Do I trust in God's care?

Sunday, 14th July, 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Amos 7:12-15 Ephesians 1:3-14, Mark 6:7-13

Jesus 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.

A prophet for God

By virtue of our baptism, we have been entrusted by God to the work of evangelisation. God calls us and gives us the mission to bring Him to others and to transmit the gospel values of love, peace, honesty, and justice. In the first reading, we see that Prophet Amos was faithful in speaking the message that God wanted him to say. Even though his message offended people, Amos stood firm because he knew that God called him to be his mouthpiece. On the other hand, the priest, Amaziah, lured by power and riches, had lost the capacity to speak the truth. Instead, he said things to please the king and the people. Let us be like the Prophet Amos and dare to be God's voice of truth and love to the people around us.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us that it is not easy to be His voice because many prefer lies to truth. The good news for us is that He sends us two by two- to be supported by the encouragement and company of others in a faith community. Let God use our lives to touch others.

Reflective question:

How can I live out my call to be God's prophet?

Monday, 15th July, St. Bonaventure.**Isaiah 1:10-17, 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.

Walk humbly with God and others

"When you stretch out your hands, I turn my eyes away. You may multiply your prayers, I shall not listen..." (1st reading). It might seem God is uncaring to His people, but He is not. He is weary of the hypocrisy of the people's religious acts. Their hearts are indifferent and unloving to those around them. God wants a radical change of heart for His people: *"Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow"*. Today, God does not want us to miss the point of what our Christian faith is all about. It is not enough simply to go to mass, attend talks after talks in different parishes, etc. Our faith in God and love for Him must lead us to do acts of love for others, especially those closest to us.

In the gospel today, Jesus further affirms what God wants from us. The call is for us to put Him above all others. With Him as the centre of our lives, we can then love others with genuine and unselfish love that seeks their betterment.

Reflective question:

What do I understand in prayer that I want to live out in my life today?

Tuesday, 16th July, Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Isaiah 7:1-9, 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.'

Change and grow

In the gospel today, Jesus had some rather harsh words for the people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because He wanted them to wake up from their stubborn hearts. These people had seen the powerful works done by Jesus in their cities and had listened to His teachings. However, they remained stuck in their old ways and attitudes and refused to repent.

These words of Jesus challenge us to look at our lives. God has sent people to bring the message of the good news to us and guide us in our faith journeys. He has done and continues doing His works of love in and through our lives. He has shown and continues showing us His mercy whenever we draw close to Him. Do all our experiences of God and His love for us lead us to love Him and live with Him and for Him? Do we allow God to transform our attitudes and shape our values so that we reflect Him in our lifestyle

Reflective question:

What is one thing I want to change in me so that I can clearly reflect Christ to others?

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

Isaiah 10: 5-7,13-16, 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

"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...". In His prayer to His Father, Jesus gives thanks for revealing the secrets of the Kingdom to "little children". Who are these "little children"? Jesus refers to those whose hearts are simple and humble, those who do not pretend to know but acknowledge their need to learn and those who depend on and trust in God's Word.

Jesus warns of pride that can keep us from opening ourselves to know God and love Him truly. When we have the prideful attitude of "I know", we are closing our minds and hearts to learn more about what God has to say, and we fail to enter deeper into the truths of our faith. Today, let the Holy Spirit guide us towards more of God and His love.

Reflective question:

Do I seek to nurture a childlike heart?

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

Isaiah 26:7-9 12, 16-19, 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.'

God is the first who longs to be with us

“The path of the upright man is straight, you smooth the way of the upright. Following the path of your judgements, we hoped in you, Lord, your name, your memory are all my soul desires. At night my soul longs for you and my spirit in me seeks for you...” (1st reading). These are the words of Prophet Isaiah, who deeply desires to follow the ways of God and longs to be with Him even amid troubles and difficulties. Do we yearn for God?

In the gospel, Jesus calls us, *“Come to me., I will give you rest”*. Jesus wants us to rest, not rush from one activity to the next and experience burnout. He is the first who longs for us to draw close to Him and find our rest in Him because He knows that that is where we will find our deepest contentment and true joy.

Reflective question:

As I read the 1st reading and the gospel, which phrase is meant for me?

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

Isaiah 38:1-6,21-22, 7-8, 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.'

Mercy

In the gospel passage, the religious leaders criticised Jesus for allowing His disciples to pluck the ears of corn and eat them because they were breaking the Sabbath law. Jesus dismissed them because plucking

grains to satisfy hunger was not considered against the Sabbath law. He even used King David and the temple priests to show that God did not find fault for their actions. Jesus wanted to highlight to the religious leaders that following rules and regulations should be motivated by merciful love towards others, i.e. human needs take priority over scrupulous adherence to a law or ritual.

Jesus quoted the words of the prophet Hosea: “*Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifices*” (Hosea 6:6). To be a merciful person is one who draws close to the people, identifies himself/herself with their suffering and places himself/herself in their service to relieve them from their pain and misery. Mercy must motivate us in how we look at others and relate with them. Today, let us pray that we act and speak more like Jesus did.

Reflective question:

What is the message that I draw from this time of dialogue with Jesus?

Saturday, 20th July, St. Apollinaris.

Micah 2:1-5, Matthew 12:14-21

The Pharisees went out and began to plot against him, discussing how to destroy him. Jesus knew this and withdrew from the district. Many followed him and he cured them all but warned them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: Look! My servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul delights, I will send my Spirit upon him, and he will present judgement to the nations; he will not brawl or cry out, his voice is not heard in the streets, he will not break the crushed reed, or snuff the faltering wick, until he has made judgement victorious; in him the nations will put their hope.

Jesus, the gentle servant

Jesus knew that the religious leaders were plotting against Him. What did He do in the face of this conflict? Jesus did not confront the Pharisees but chose to withdraw from the place. Though He stood for justice, He did not want the fight to be violent. Thus, Jesus withdrew and quietly went on doing good and placing Himself at the service of the weak and the poor. Jesus indeed fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: He was God's beloved, chosen servant whose justice was rooted in love, not through violence and force. He never treated anyone with contempt but always

showed gentleness and compassion to them. Through His words and actions, He brought hope to those around Him.

Today, Jesus comes to be with us and asks us to imitate His ways of justice rooted in love, to show gentleness, and always to give hope. We are God's beloved children who have been called and sent to go out to love and serve.

Reflective question:

How can I follow Jesus more closely today?

Sunday, 21st July, 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Jeremiah 23:1-6, Ephesians 2:13-18, Mark 6:30-34

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

The path of the Good Shepherd

"The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want...." (Responsorial psalm). As we read today's psalm, let us take comfort in the fact that God is our personal God who knows us through and through and takes care of us. As the psalmist says, even if we walk through the valley of darkness, pain and uncertainties, God is with us and walks with us. We are called to put our trust in Him, our Shepherd.

In the gospel, Jesus looked at the people with the heart of a Good Shepherd. When He saw that the people needed Him, He stopped and went close and be with them, like a shepherd feeding and caring for his sheep. Jesus calls us to be shepherds to the people in our lives and those who cross our paths, especially the marginalised. Today, let us

stay with Jesus, our Shepherd, and listen to Him as He teaches us how to walk the path of the Good Shepherd.

Reflective question:

How is Jesus my Good Shepherd, and how can I be a shepherd to others today?

Monday, 22nd July, St. Mary Magdalene, Apostle of the Apostles.

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.' 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.

Faithful to the end

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, known as the Apostle of the Apostles. Her faithful love for Jesus, her Master, empowered her to stay with Him instead of denying Him or fleeing from Him as the other disciples did. On the cross, she stood with Mary, the mother of Jesus and St. John, the Beloved disciple. She was still there when the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb. Her faithfulness did not end there. Early the following day, she was the first to return to the tomb,

braving the possible dangers the Roman and Jewish authorities posed. She was the first to witness the empty tomb and encounter the Risen Lord. She was the first to believe and proclaim the easter message even though the rest of the disciples doubted her words.

St. Mary Magdalene is truly the Apostle of the Apostles, to whom we can learn not to let disappointment, uncertainty and fear prevent us from staying close to Jesus and trusting Him. Today, Jesus calls us to be His committed disciples who faithfully follow Him, no matter what.

Reflective question:

Will I follow Jesus faithfully to the end, no matter what challenges life brings me?

Tuesday, 23rd July, St. Bridget of Sweden.

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20, Matthew 12:46-50

Jesus was still speaking to the crowds when suddenly his mother and his brothers were standing outside and were anxious to have a word with him. Someone said to him: Your mother and brothers are standing outside and want to speak to you. But to the man who told him this Jesus replied, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'

God's will is for us to love

"And stretching out his hand towards his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'" In today's gospel, Jesus is not telling us to give up our family ties or friendships with others. Instead, Jesus introduces us to the reality that we belong to a bigger family that goes beyond blood ties. We are part of God's family and brothers and sisters to one another when we desire and strive to do God's will daily.

What is God's will? Often, we complicate things by thinking that God's purpose for us is to do spectacular things for Him. However, our God is simple. His will for us boils down to one truth: love. Can we show love

through the mundane work we do, the words we say, the looks we give to others, etc.?

Reflective question:

What is God's message to me?

Wednesday, 24th July, St. Charbel Makhluf.

Jeremiah 1:1, 4-10, 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!'

Go now and speak...

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations" (1st reading). These were God's words to the prophet Jeremiah. From all eternity, God knew Jeremiah and chose Him as a prophet to the nations. Likewise, God has called us from all eternity to be His prophets and to speak His word of justice, truth, and love to the world and the Church. *"Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid them, for I am with you to protect you."* God told Jeremiah that He would be with Him. Likewise, God promises us His continuing presence as we collaborate in His mission.

In the gospel, like the sower, Jesus sowed the seeds of God's word, but not all grew to bear fruit. Yet, Jesus never stopped preaching the message of the Kingdom. As collaborators of God's mission, let us pray for perseverance to continue our prophetic mission even though we might not see the desired results.

Reflective question:

What is the source of my strength and joy in mission?

Thursday, 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 him, and bowed low; and he said to her, 'What is it you want?' She said to him, 'Promise that these two sons of mine may sit one at your right hand and the other at your left in your kingdom.' Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?' They replied, 'We can.' He said to them, 'Very well; you shall drink my cup, but as for seats at my right hand and my left, these are not mine to grant; they belong to those to whom they have been allotted by my Father.' When the other ten heard this they were indignant with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Jars of clay

"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). Earthenware jars are insignificant and ordinary containers that are replaced once broken. St. Paul states that we are these common jars of clay, yet we carry an extraordinary treasure of the word of God in us. Imperfect as we are, God entrusts us to reveal His message. In fact, His power is best seen through our brokenness.

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. James. In the gospel today, James and John, driven by their ambitions, plotted to secure their places next to Jesus when He came to power. However, Jesus told the disciples not to seek to be the greatest but to strive to be at the lowest place by placing themselves to serve others. Despite his ambitious desire, God never gave up on St. James but continued patiently shaping his life for service.

We are God's imperfect and fragile jars of clay, but we trust that He will guide us in living a life of love and service.

Reflective question:

What strikes me as I pray in my dialogue with Jesus today?

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

Jeremiah 3:14-17, Matthew 13:18-23

Jesus said to his disciples: '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.'

The four soils

In today's gospel, Jesus focuses on how we receive the seed, i.e. the word of God. The seed that falls on the hard path represents someone who hears God's word but remains indifferent to what God says. The seed that falls on rocky soil is the one who receives the good news but does not persevere in living it out daily. Thus, the word loses its power when facing challenges and difficulties. The seed that penetrates the thorny soil is the person who hears the message, but the "*worry of the world and the lure of riches choke the word*". The worry of having a sure and secure life occupies the heart of the person that God has no space to enter and be at the centre of his/her life. Finally, the seed that falls on good soil represents the person who listens attentively to the word of God and does God's will, thus yielding good fruit.

The good news is that Jesus never gives up on us and commits Himself to plough our hearts so that we can be open to receive and retain God's word.

Reflective questions:

Which soil do I identify myself? Why?

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

Jeremiah 7:1-11, Matthew 13:24-30

Jesus put another parable before the crowds, '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." '

A patient God

"Go and stand at the gate of the Temple of the Lord and there proclaim this message. Say, 'Listen to the word of the Lord,...Amend your behaviour and your actions and I will stay with you here in this place...'" (1st reading). God told the prophet Jeremiah to tell His people that going to the Temple and participating in the rituals did not mean that they were living with God and being faithful to Him. God wanted the people to change their ways and live a life doing good to others. Then, they would experience God's presence with them. Likewise, going to church does not make us faithful disciples of God. God wants to be with us daily, shape our values and attitudes and guide us to live a life of love.

The gospel passage reminds us that God, like the landowner, is always patient. He sees the darnels/weeds in our lives but never condemns us. Instead, He patiently waits, gives us opportunities for transformation of our hearts and minds, and allows the Holy Spirit to help us so that our habits, attitudes, and decisions may give growth to what is true and loving.

Reflective question:

How can I allow God to help me bear the fruit of love?

Sunday, 28th July, 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time.**2 Kings 4:42-44, Ephesians 4:1-6, John 6 :1-15**

Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee -- or of Tiberias- and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he had done in curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. The time of the Jewish Passover was near. Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread for these people to eat?' He said this only to put Philip to the test; he himself knew exactly what he was going to do. Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would not buy enough to give them a little piece each.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'Here is a small boy with five barley loaves and two fish; but what is that among so many?' Jesus said to them, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there, and as many as five thousand men sat down. Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; he then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted. When they had eaten enough he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing is wasted.' So they picked them up and filled twelve large baskets with scraps left over from the meal of five barley loaves. Seeing the sign that he had done, the people said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, as he realised they were about to come and take him by force and make him king, fled back to the hills alone.

Nothing is too small

"Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together..." (2nd reading). St. Paul urges us to strive and work for unity- unity in the family, friendships, parish, faith community, office and society. It is difficult because we often condemn, judge, bear grudges and are impatient with others. The path to true peace and unity begins when we put our self-centred pride aside and treat each other with gentleness and patience.

In the gospel, a young boy offered the only food, five barley loaves and two fish- he had to Jesus. Jesus took the offering and fed the large crowd of people. As we prayerfully read this passage, let us find comfort that our small attempts to work for unity and peace, to reach out to love and forgive, etc., can have significant effects in and around us. Jesus will take what we offer and use it for the good of ourselves and others.

Reflective question:

What is the one thing I can do today to offer myself to bring peace to my surroundings?

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

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

Luke 10:38-42:

Jesus came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

Contemplative-active discipleship

Today, we celebrate the feast of three siblings, SS. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were good friends with Jesus. In today's gospel, Martha welcomed Jesus into her house and got busy feeding Him and making Him feel at home. Martha's story invites us to welcome Jesus into our lives and allow Him to be at home with us. Moreover, we are not to hold back but to serve Jesus wholeheartedly, without counting the cost.

However, when working for Jesus, let us not forget to be with Him. Look at Mary as she chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His word. May we follow the example of Mary by making Jesus the centre of our lives and taking time daily to pray and listen to what He has to tell us. May our prayer life with Jesus lead us to serve Him with joy and freedom.

Reflective question:

How can I be like Martha and Mary?

Tuesday, 30th July, St. Peter Chrysologus.**Jeremiah 14: 17-22, Matthew 13:36-43**

Leaving the crowds, Jesus 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!'

Good over evil

In today's passage, Jesus left the crowd and went to the house, and His disciples went with Him. In this time of prayer, let us enter into the inner room of our innermost self, where Jesus is there waiting for us. Let us prepare our hearts to listen attentively to what He has to say to us.

From the gospel passage, one point that we can reflect upon is that the evil, i.e. the evil of pride, lust, anger, etc., is real and can invade society, the church and even our lives. We can see its effects as we look around and in us- broken relationships, betrayals, lies, injustices, acts of violence, etc. The good news is that evil does not have the final word. In the end, God's love will triumph. Now, we have the duty to allow God to work in and through us so that He can use our lives to be instruments of His love, justice and truth. With God, we can play a part in eradicating evil and making His kingdom a reality in the here and now.

Reflective question:

How can I help God to sow good news of His love, justice and truth?

**Wednesday, 31st July, St. Ignatius of Loyola.
Jeremiah 15:10, 16-21, Matthew 13:44-46**

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.'

God, the joy of our hearts

In today's gospel, Jesus presents us with two parables. In both, the protagonists discover something priceless: the person finding a treasure hidden in a field and the person recognising the priceless pearl. Both then go off in a hurry to sell everything to possess what they have discovered. Today, Jesus invites us to fall in love with God, our treasure and priceless pearl. Only He can give us the fullness of joy, peace, and meaning that we seek in life. We need to learn to let go of all the things that have, over the years, become our treasures instead of God, such as a lifestyle, a habit, etc.

Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order. May we follow the example of this amazing saint who found His priceless treasure and joyfully sold everything to dedicate his life to God and His people. In this time of prayer, let us truly recognise God as the treasure that we seek.

Reflective question:

Is God the treasure that I seek?

