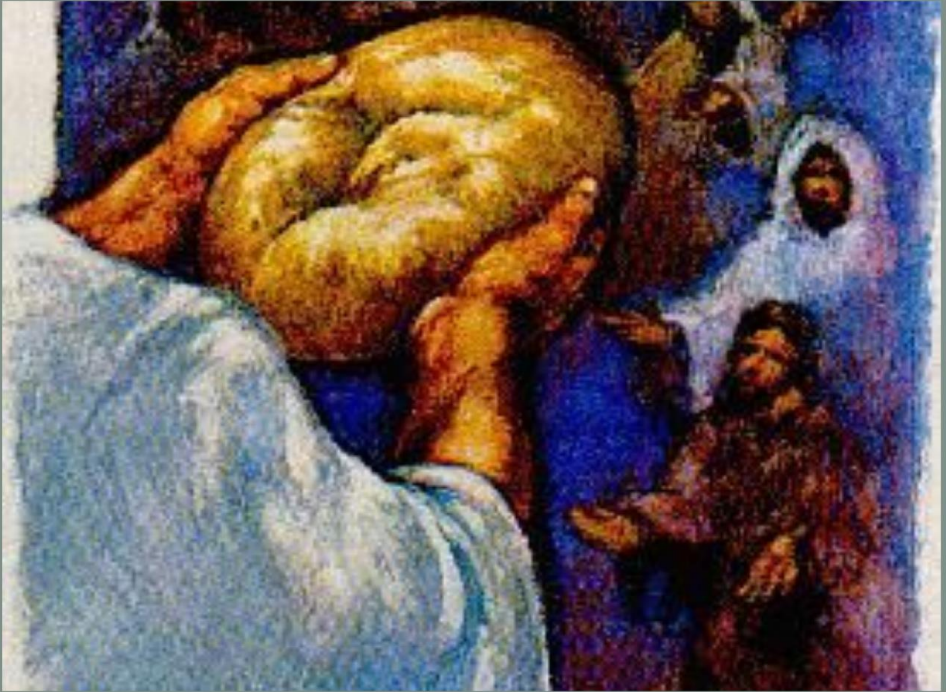


Prayer for Living  
Daily Reflections  
Liturgical Year B  
August



I am the Bread of Life

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VERBUM DEI MISSIONARIES

# **PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR B**

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**Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> August, St. Alphonsus Liguori.**

**Jeremiah 18:1-6, Matthew 13:47-53**

*Jesus said to crowds: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a dragnet that is cast in the sea and brings in a haul of all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen bring it ashore; then, sitting down, they collect the good ones in baskets and throw away those that are no use. This is how it will be at the end of time: the angels will appear and separate the wicked from the upright, to throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Have you understood all these?' They said, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Well then, every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old.' When Jesus had finished these parables he left the district.*

### Mouldable clay

"....Then this word of the Lord was addressed to me, 'House of Israel, can not I do to you what this potter does? Yes, as the clay in the potter's hands, so you are in mine.'" (1<sup>st</sup> reading). Like clay in the potter's hands, we are not the final product but a work in progress. We form our intentions and values and exercise our freedom along life's journey. Sometimes, we might be deformed by pride, greed, etc. Today, let us acknowledge that God is our potter and we are the clay in His hands. He calls us to be moldable and flexible so that He can shape and form us to His image of love. We trust that God works at the wheel for our good.

In the gospel, Jesus tells us that God, like the fishermen casting the dragnet widely, does not have favourites, but He loves all, the saints and the sinners. We need to respond to His gracious love by allowing His goodness to expand our hearts and make us live a life of love. In this time of prayer, let us allow ourselves to be loved by God so that we can love others with His same love.

### **Reflective question:**

How do the passages speak to me personally?

**Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> August, St. Eusebius of Vercelli, St. Peter Julian Eymard.**

**Jeremiah 26:1-9, Matthew 13:54-58**

*Coming to his home town, Jesus taught the people in their synagogue in such a way that they were astonished and said, 'Where did the man get*

*this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? His sisters, too, are they not all here with us? So where did the man get it all?' And they would not accept him. But Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is despised only in his own country and in his own house,' and he did not work many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*

### Knowing Jesus, a lifelong journey

In today's gospel, Jesus went to His hometown and taught the people there. Those who heard Him were surprised by Jesus' wisdom and deeds of power. However, they could not acknowledge that God was acting in the person of Jesus because they knew his family and had seen Him growing up in the village. They rejected Jesus because they thought that they knew Him and there was nothing else worth learning more about Him.

We can never know Jesus enough. The constant invitation for us is to know more deeply the person of Jesus - the way He loves, the motivations He has, the deeds He does. Today, let us spend time with Jesus, talking to and listening to Him, just as we would with a good friend. The more familiar we become with Jesus, the more our love for Him will grow, and the more we want to conform our lives according to His. Let us have heart-to-heart encounters with Jesus as we pray and live through this day.

### **Reflective question:**

What can I do to make time to get to know Jesus more?

### **Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 17<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time.**

#### **Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24, Matthew 14:1-12**

*Herod the tetrarch heard about the reputation of Jesus and said to his court, 'This is John the Baptist himself; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Now it was Herod who had arrested John, chained him up and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John had told him, 'It is against the Law for you to have her.' He had wanted to kill him but was afraid of the people, who regarded John as a prophet. Then, during the celebrations for Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced*

*before the company and so delighted Herod that he promised on oath to give her anything she asked. Prompted by her mother she said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head, here, on a dish.' The king was distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he ordered it to be given her, and sent and had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought in on a dish and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. John's disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went off to tell Jesus.*

### John the Baptist, a prophet of courage

John the Baptist was a man of God who faithfully gave his life to preach God's message, even to the point of losing his life for it. In the gospel, John the Baptist criticised Herod for his relationship with Herodias because she was married to his half-brother but left him for Herod. John the Baptist knew that what he said would offend those in power, but he did not compromise and stood his ground. In the end, he was beheaded by Herod.

The story of John the Baptist speaks to us about courage. He could have kept quiet. He chose to do what he knew was the right thing to do. What about us? Sometimes, we take the way of less resistance and less conflict because we do not want to offend others or avoid difficult consequences. Today, let John the Baptist inspire us to be courageous witnesses of Christ. In our own way, we can be God's prophets today and "*speak the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15).

### **Reflective question:**

Do I tend to shy away from standing up for truth and justice?

### **Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.**

#### **Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15, Ephesians 4:17, 20-24, John 6:24-35**

*When the people saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into those boats and crossed to Capernaum to look for Jesus. When they found him on the other side, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' Jesus answered: In all truth I tell you, you are looking for me not because you have seen the signs but because you had all the bread you wanted to eat. Do not work for food that goes bad, but work for food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you, for on him the Father, God himself, has set his seal. Then they*

said to him, 'What must we do if we are to carry out God's work?' Jesus gave them this answer, 'This is carrying out God's work: you must believe in the one he has sent.' So they said, 'What sign will you yourself do, the sight of which will make us believe in you? What work will you do? Our fathers ate manna in the desert; as scripture says: He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' Jesus answered them: In all truth I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread; for the bread of God is the bread which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. 'Sir,' they said, 'give us that bread always.' Jesus answered them: I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever hunger; no one who believes in me will ever thirst.'

### God provides

"I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel. Say this to them, 'Between the two evenings you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have bread to your heart's content. Then you will learn that I, the Lord, am your God.'" (1<sup>st</sup> reading). In the first reading, the Israelites complained to Moses because they were hungry. God heard their complaints, recognised their need for sustenance and provided food for them. Often, we are preoccupied with the fear that we do not have enough for tomorrow. Today, we are invited to trust God, who cares for us and provides the daily bread we need for today. He may not give us everything we want, but He always gives us what we need.

"I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever hunger." In the gospel, the people went to Jesus because they wanted Him to feed their stomachs. Jesus, however, wanted to satisfy their deeper hunger. Let us recognise our deep hunger within, which is the hunger for love, peace, self-worth, etc. Jesus calls us to draw close to Him today, and He will feed our hungry hearts with His loving presence.

### **Reflective question:**

What is my heart hungry for at this point of my life?

### **Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> August, Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major. Jeremiah 28:1- 17, Matthew 14: 13-21**

*When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the*

*crowds heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick. When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' So he said, 'Bring them here to me.' He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples, who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps left over, twelve baskets full. Now about five thousand men had eaten, to say nothing of women and children.*

### Jesus' compassionate heart

"...as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick." Jesus' heart was moved with compassion as He looked at the needy crowd. Likewise, Jesus is never indifferent or distant to our pain, loneliness and brokenness. Jesus is always close to those who are suffering. Nothing we go through can separate Him from us or us from Him. In moments of difficulty, draw close to Jesus and have the faith to look to Him and find peace, strength and much more in Him.

"Give them something to eat yourselves". These were Jesus' words to His disciples and also to us. Jesus invites us to collaborate with Him in His mission to "feed" someone- a colleague who needs encouragement, a person selling tissues by the road, a family member having a hard time, etc. Because of God's love for us, we have the capacity to respond to the needs of those around us. Let us be aware that we have a mission to give the world something to eat.

### **Reflective question:**

What is Jesus' message to me as I pray with the passage?

### **Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> August, Transfiguration of the Lord.**

#### **Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 or 2 Peter 1: 16-19, Mark 9:2-10**

*Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain on their own by themselves. There in their presence he was*

*transfigured: his clothes became brilliantly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them. Elijah appeared to them with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. Then Peter spoke to Jesus, 'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three shelters, 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 from the cloud there came a voice, '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 were coming 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.*

Just before the transfiguration event, Jesus told the disciples that He would soon face rejection and death, and they could not accept what He had to say. They then set out to Jerusalem, where Jesus would face His passion. Along the way, Jesus brought Peter, James and John up to the mountain to pray. There, the three disciples witnessed an extraordinary vision of Jesus in His glory.

*"Then Peter spoke to Jesus, 'Rabbi,' he said, 'it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three shelters...". Peter did not want to let go of this glorious moment. He would rather remain on the mountain and stay in the experience of glory than go down the mountain and face hardships. However, this was not the way of Jesus. Today, Jesus reminds us that we need to go through the path of life with its share of difficulties, struggles and pains, not alone but with Him. Only Jesus can lead us down the mountain and strengthen us with His life-giving words as we journey through the ups and downs of life.*

**Reflective question:**

In what way does today's passage equip me to walk the path of life with all its glorious and difficult moments?

**Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> August, St. Sixtus II and Companions, St. Cajetan.  
Jeremiah 31:1-7, Matthew 15:21-28**

*Jesus left Gennesaret and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district and started*



*shouting, 'Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil.' But he said not a word in answer to her. And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, 'Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us.' He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.' But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. 'Lord,' she said, 'help me.' He replied, 'It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' She retorted, 'Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'Woman, you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.' And from that moment her daughter was well again.*

### Eternally loved

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you" (1<sup>st</sup> reading). God's love for us is an everlasting love—a love that is not bound by time, space, conditions and merits. Henri Nouwen wrote, "God's love for us is everlasting. That means that God's love for us existed before we were born and will exist after we have died. It is an eternal love in which we are embraced". Let us spend a few moments to soak in this reality of God's eternal love and let it fill us with hope, strength and peace.*

In the gospel today, the Canaanite woman kept crying out to Jesus for help even when He seemed to ignore her. Have you ever experienced the silence of God when we go to Him with our prayers, perhaps for a health issue, a loved one suffering a crisis, a situation at work, etc? In such moments, God calls us to trust. He, who loves us with everlasting and faithful love, knows and hears us. He will give us what He knows is best for us.

### **Reflective question:**

What keeps me from believing that God loves me with an everlasting love?

**Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> August, St. Dominic.**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34, Matthew 16:13-23**

*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 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 and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency 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 community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'* Then he gave the disciples strict orders not to say to anyone that he was the Christ. From then onwards Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to rebuke him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said, 'this must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do.'

Jesus, you are...

"Who do you say I am?". Jesus poses this question to us today: "Who do you say I am? Who am I that you are spending this quiet time with me? Who am I that you choose to follow my ways?" More than replying with words, the way we live our lives is the best answer we can give to Jesus.

"Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do." Harsh words from Jesus to Peter. This was because Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him for speaking about rejection and death. For him, the Messiah had to be triumphant and glorious, not one who had to suffer and die. Like Peter, we may have faith in Jesus, but we can also be an obstacle to His mission when we continue to live according to the ways of the world and not of God. We become obstacles to building God's kingdom of love when we harbour resentments, hatred, greed and work against unity and peace.

### **Reflective question**

How have my words and actions revealed who Jesus is for me?

**Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> August, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.**

**Nahum 2:1, 3; 3:1-3, 6-7, Matthew 16: 24-28**

*Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life? 'For the Son of man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will reward each one according to his behaviour. In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming with his kingdom.'*

I no longer live, but Christ who lives in me

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die" (D. Bonhoeffer). These words from Bonhoeffer echo the words of Jesus in today's gospel: "*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" To follow Jesus implies the need to die to our ego. We often think that the whole world must revolve around our plans, likes, dislikes, desires, etc. We feel the need to be always right, to be important in the sight of others, to appear strong all the time, etc. When we let go of our ego, the emptiness inside us is filled by Jesus, whose presence guides us to look at ourselves and others in a whole new way. We can live for Christ and others only if we crucify our prideful ego.

Today, let Jesus be the centre of our lives. May we follow Him with faithfulness, humility and generosity.

**Reflective question:**

In what ways do I need to die to myself in order to live fully for Christ?

**Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> August, St. Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr.**

**2 Corinthians 9:6-10, John 12:24-26**

*Jesus said to his disciples: "In all truth I tell you, unless a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life loses it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me, must follow me, and my servant will be with me wherever I am. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him."*

### True joy comes from giving of ourselves

*"Each one should give what he has decided in his own mind, not grudgingly or because he is made to, God loves a cheerful giver"* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). How is our attitude when we give? We do not give out of obligation but because we are happy to give our time, resources, talents, etc, to others for their good. Moreover, our giving should come from a generous heart. Being generous is not about the amount we offer but our attitude when giving.

*"Whoever serves me, must follow me..."*. In the gospel, Jesus reminds us that if we truly want to serve Him, we must follow Him. The path He leads us implies the constant giving of ourselves to others, even if it entails suffering. Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Lawrence. He gave himself to serve God's people, especially the poor. During the persecution of Emperor Valerian, he was sentenced to a painful death by being roasted. He did not lose his sense of humour and joy as he told his executioners, *"I am done on this side. Turn me over"*. May St. Lawrence teach us to be generous in our giving and serving.

### **Reflective question:**

What is God telling me in this time of prayer?

### **Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> August, 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.**

#### **1 Kings 19:4-8, Ephesians 4:30-5:2, John 6:41-51**

*The Jews were complaining to each other about Jesus, because he had said, 'I am the bread that has come down from heaven.' They were saying, 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know. How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven?" ' Jesus said in reply to them, 'Stop complaining to each other. 'No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me, and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They will all be taught by God; everyone who has listened to the Father, and learnt from him, comes to me. Not that anybody has seen the Father, except him who has his being from God: he has seen the Father. In all truth I tell you, everyone who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the desert and they are dead; but this is the bread which comes down from heaven, so that a person may eat it and not die. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who*

*eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.'*

### Jesus, the bread of life

*"Get up and eat, or the journey will be too long for you"* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). The prophet Elijah was at the lowest point of his life. In doing God's mission, he had angered Queen Jezebel and had to run for his life. At this point, He had come to the end of his strength. God did not rebuke the prophet for running away or for feeling down. Instead, He cared for Elijah and provided him bread to eat to continue the journey of life and mission. Today, let us find joy in knowing God cares for us. He is with us to provide all we need to walk through our life's journey.

*"I am the bread of life"*. Jesus presents Himself as the bread of life who nourishes and sustains our lives with His love, mercy and peace. At the same time, Jesus calls us to become bread of life for the world. Receiving Jesus the bread of life, He invites us to become as He is, i.e., bread of life for the world. We can do so by speaking life-giving words and working for communion and unity.

### **Reflective question:**

Do I depend on Jesus to be my daily bread of strength, peace, joy?

### **Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> August, St. Jane Frances de Chantal.**

#### **Ezekiel 1:2-5, 24-28, Matthew 17:22-27**

*One day when they were together in Galilee, Jesus said to his disciples, 'The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death, and on the third day he will be raised up again.' And a great sadness came over them. When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel came to Peter and said, 'Does your master not pay the half-shekel?' 'Yes,' he replied, and went into the house. But before he could speak, Jesus said, 'Simon, what is your opinion? From whom do earthly kings take toll or tribute? From their sons or from foreigners?' And when he replied, 'From foreigners,' Jesus said, 'Well then, the sons are exempt. However, so that we shall not be the downfall of others, go to the lake and cast a hook; take the first fish that rises, open its mouth and there you will find a shekel; take it and give it to them for me and for yourself.'*

## God cares

In the gospel, some collectors went to Peter and who wanted to collect the temple tax from him. Peter was most likely worried about not having the resources to pay the half-shekel the collectors demanded. Jesus told him to go to the lake and fish, and he would find a shekel, enough to pay the tax for both of them.

The message for us is that God provides for us, sometimes in unexpected ways. God is our Father and Friend, not a distant and indifferent being. Pope Francis said, "*...Do not forget: entrust yourself to God — who takes care of the living beings in Creation...Our life passes quickly, tormented by many worries, which risk eliminating peace and balance; but this anguish is often pointless, because it cannot change the course of events. Jesus persistently exhorts us not to worry about tomorrow (cf. vv. 25, 28, 31), recalling that above everything, there is a loving Father who never forgets his children: entrusting oneself to Him does not magically resolve problems, but allows one to face them with the right attitude, courageously: I am courageous because I entrust myself to my Father who takes care of everything and who loves me very much.*" (Angelus, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2017).

### **Reflective question:**

How have I experienced God's care?

### **Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> August, SS. Pontian and Hippolytus.**

#### **Ezekiel 2:8-3:4, Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14**

*At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?' So he called a little child to him whom he set among them. Then he said, 'In truth I tell you, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. Anyone who welcomes one little child like this in my name welcomes me. See that you never despise any of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually in the presence of my Father in heaven. Tell me. Suppose a man has a hundred sheep and one of them strays; will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go in search of the stray? In truth I tell you, if he finds it, it gives him more joy than do the ninety-nine that did not stray at all.*

*Similarly, it is never the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.'*

### Eat the word

*"He said, 'Son of man, eat what is given to you; eat this scroll, then go and speak to the House of Israel"...I ate it, and it tasted sweet as honey."* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). God instructed the prophet Ezekiel to eat the scroll: to assimilate and digest the word of God. Filled with God's word, he was sent to be a messenger of the Good News to the house of Israel. Each time we pray with God's word, we are called to eat it and allow it to nourish us with His love. The word of God is sweet as honey when we respond to it by living it out in our daily lives.

God's word nourishes us so that we may become His voice that speaks His message of love and peace to those around us. In the gospel today, Jesus speaks of a man who left the ninety-nine and searched for one lost sheep. Like the shepherd, God never gives up on those far from Him. Today, He calls us to be part of His mission to speak His sweet, life-giving word to them so as to lead them to experience God's heart full of love and mercy.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I align my heart to the heart of God, the Good Shepherd?

### **Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> August, St. Maximilian Kolbe.**

#### **Ezekiel 9:1-7; 10:18-22, Matthew 18:15-20**

*Jesus said to his disciples: 'If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you: whatever the misdemeanour, the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain the charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a gentile or a tax collector. In truth I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. In truth I tell you once again, if two of you on earth agree to ask anything at all, it will be granted to you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.'*

### To seek for reconciliation

How do you deal with someone who has done you wrong? The easiest thing we do is to start gossiping about the person and build walls to separate us from them. Today, Jesus wants us to love by loving those who have wronged us. He calls us not to gossip but to go to them and talk to them face-to-face in order to help them understand their fault.

If the person refuses to change their ways, we can count on the help of others who can perhaps persuade the offender to see the wrong they have done. If all that we do fails, we do not give up on the person but continue to love them by praying for them. Today, let us look at our attitude toward those who have done us wrong. We pray for the grace to love, not to accumulate resentment, to work for reconciliation, not to gossip and judge.

### **Reflective questions:**

Is there someone who I struggle to love because of a wrong they have done to me? How can I love the person as Jesus wants me to?

### **Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> August, The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Revelation 11:19; 12:1-6, 10, 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, Luke 1:39-56**

*Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.' And Mary said: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant. Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name, and his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him. He has used the power of his arm, he has routed the arrogant of heart. He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly. He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty. He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful*



*of his faithful love -according to the promise he made to our ancestors -  
- of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever. Mary stayed  
with her some three months and then went home.*

### Assumption

Today, we celebrate the feast of the Assumption of Mother Mary into heaven. Unfortunately, we take this feast for granted and fail to allow it to impact us in our daily lives. On this feast, as we celebrate Mary's being taken into heaven to be with God, we too are invited to fix our eyes in that same direction, where we will be when our life here on earth ends. Mary also shows us that life with God begins here and now when we open ourselves to allow Him to work in us and through us to make the world a better place.

Today, let Mary's song of praise inspire us. In the Magnificat, she is aware of God's great works in her life and the life of her people. She praises God for reversing human structures and values because He is a God who stands with the poor and the vulnerable, not with the rich and the powerful. We are called to live our time on earth as God's servants, like Mary, and allow Him to use us to make a difference in the lives of others, especially the marginalised in society.

### **Reflective question:**

How open am I to allow God to use me for His purpose?

### **Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> August, St. Stephen of Hungary.**

#### **Ezekiel 16:1-15, 60, 63, Matthew 19:3-12**

*Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and to put him to the test they said, 'Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?' He answered, 'Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.' They said to him, 'Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?' He said to them, 'It was because you were so hard-hearted, that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: anyone who divorces his wife -- I am not speaking of an illicit marriage -- and*

*marries another, is guilty of adultery.' The disciples said to him, 'If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is advisable not to marry.' But he replied, 'It is not everyone who can accept what I have said, but only those to whom it is granted. There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb, there are eunuchs made so by human agency and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.'*

### From the beginning...communion

In today's gospel, some Pharisees tested Jesus by asking about divorce. Jesus replied, *"Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh? They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide"*. From the beginning, God created us for communion and relationships with Him and one another. Communion in marriages, family life, friendship, etc., begins when we put our selfish desires aside and practice selfless love that always seeks the betterment of others.

The call to communion is difficult because we tend to allow pride to rule us. We seek to be always the one in the right, carry resentments and make judgements. Today, let us go to God and remain in His love so that He can empower us to work for unity and not division.

### **Reflective question:**

Today, how can I love so that I can play my part in building communion with others?

### **Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> August, 19<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time.**

#### **Ezekiel 18:1-10, 13, 30-32, Matthew 19:13-15**

*People brought little children to him, for him to lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples scolded them, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of Heaven belongs.'* Then he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

### A heart for the least in society

In today's gospel, people brought little children to Jesus. The disciples scolded them for doing so because they considered the children unimportant for Jesus to spend His time with. They wanted to send them away. Instead, Jesus did the opposite. He told them, "*Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me*". Then, He gave His time and attention to the little ones.

As we pray with this passage, let us reflect on the heart of Jesus that always abounds in love and compassion. The ones whom the world considers insignificant are the ones greatest in the eyes of Jesus. Today, we are invited to have the same heart of Jesus. The weaker people in our family, faith community, parish, neighbourhood, and office are the ones who need our time, help, attention and concern. Let us ask Jesus to give us the grace to love like Him.

### **Reflective question:**

To whom can I concretely show my care and concern today so that I imitate Jesus' love for the little ones?

### **Sunday, 18<sup>th</sup> August, 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.**

#### **Proverbs 9:1-6, Ephesians 5:15-20, John 6:51-58**

*Jesus said to the crowd: I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world.' Then the Jews started arguing among themselves, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' Jesus replied to them: In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in that person."*

### Live life fully

*"Be very careful about the sort of lives you lead, like intelligent and not like the senseless people... recognise what is the will of the Lord" (2<sup>nd</sup> reading). The senseless people live their days drifting through life without purpose. Our lives belong to God. Thus, we need to constantly ask Him, "What do you want from my life? What is your will?" God's will is for us*

to love Him and love others. Let us put God first in our lives so that He can guide us to live life to the fullest.

In the gospel today, Jesus reminds us, "*I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world*". He calls us to eat Him because He wants to live in us. Jesus is our life. When we have Him in us, He nourishes us by His life, love, forgiveness, and compassion. Filled with His love, we are empowered to give it to others. Let us not waste time but live a purposeful life.

### **Reflective question:**

How does God want me to live my life today?

**Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> July, St. John Eudes.**

**Ezekiel 24:15-24, Matthew 19:16-22**

*There was a man came to Jesus and asked, 'Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said, 'Which ones?' Jesus replied, 'These: You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. Honour your father and your mother. You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?' Jesus said, 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But when the young man heard these words he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.*

### What more, Lord?

A man went to Jesus with a longing in his heart. He lived a good life by following the commandments but was not satisfied because he wanted to attain "*more*". He asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life, i.e. a life in God's presence. Like this man, we are good people trying our best to live the ways of God. Yet, there are moments when we experience a restlessness that draws us toward something "*more*": more of God, more of faith, peace and love. Jesus invited the man to give his wealth away and follow Him. However, he could not let go of his possessions because they were his security and happiness. Today, Jesus calls us to follow Him

more fully and to grow to become an even more authentic disciple. We need to let go of whatever is holding us back from responding to Jesus' personal call to us.

In this time of prayer, let us ask Jesus for the grace to recognise that He is the answer to the longings of our hearts and have the strength to follow Him in the here and now.

### **Reflective questions:**

What word/phrase strikes me as I prayerfully read the passage? Why?

### **Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> July, St. Bernard.**

#### **Ezekiel 28:1-10, Matthew 19:23-30**

*Jesus said to his disciples, 'In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven. Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven.' When the disciples heard this they were astonished. 'Who can be saved, then?' they said. Jesus gazed at them. 'By human resources', he told them, 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.' Then Peter answered and said, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What are we to have, then?' Jesus said to them, 'In truth I tell you, when everything is made new again and the Son of man is seated on his throne of glory, you yourselves will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life. 'Many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'*

### Solidarity

*"In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven."* It is indeed difficult because possessions and wealth can easily possess us and make us feel that excessively accumulating more money and things can give us security. It also makes us desire more wealth for ourselves and have a selfish heart that prevents us from sharing what we have with those in need. There is nothing wrong with having material resources. The issue is when we put them as our absolute and become attached to them. Thus, we become blinded to the needs of others.

Jesus calls for a change in our lives so that we can break the chain that makes us slaves to riches or even to the desire to have more possessions and wealth. Let us set our hearts on God as our treasure and have a generous heart for others so that no one around us lacks anything.

**Reflective question:**

In concrete ways, how can I share what I have with those in need?

**Wednesday, 21<sup>st</sup> August, St. Pius X.**

**Ezekiel 34:1-11, Matthew 20:1-16**

*Jesus told this parable to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner going out at daybreak to hire workers for his vineyard. He made an agreement with the workers for one denarius a day, and sent them to his vineyard. Going out at about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the market place and said to them, "You go to my vineyard too and I will give you a fair wage". So they went. At about the sixth hour and again at about the ninth hour, he went out and did the same. Then at about the eleventh hour, he went out and found more men standing round, and he said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" "Because no one has hired us" they answered. He said to them, "You go into my vineyard too". In the evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his bailiff, "Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last arrivals and ending with the first". So those who were hired at about the eleventh hour came forward and received one denarius each. When the first came, they expected to get more, but they too received one denarius each. They took it, but grumbled at the landowner. "The men who came last" they said "have done only one hour, and you have treated them the same as us, though we have done a heavy day's work in all the heat." He answered one of them and said, "My friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denarius? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last comer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why be envious because I am generous?" Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'*

Moved by compassion

*"Trouble for the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves!...You have failed to make weak sheep strong, or to care for strays or look for the*

*lost...*" (1<sup>st</sup> reading). God entrusted the religious leaders to be shepherds caring for the people of Israel. However, the leaders cared for themselves and neglected to look to the needs of the people. Today, we have leadership positions in the family, church or public life. As parents, mentors, godparents, uncles/aunties, religious brothers/sisters, priests, bosses, etc., we are responsible for taking care of those in our charge. God calls us to be shepherds willing to give of ourselves selflessly and lovingly to others for their own good.

In the gospel, the landowner gave all the workers a denarius, which was the amount just enough to support a family. If he had paid less than a denarius, it would not have been too little for them to feed their families. Like the landowner, God is always moved by compassion and acts for the good of others. Today, let us understand God's big heart and ask Him to extend our capacity to love.

**Reflective question:**

In my position as a leader in the family, church and public life, how do I live out my responsibility?

**Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, The Queenship of Mary.**

**Isaiah 9:1-6, Luke 1:26-38**

*The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you.' She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. And I tell you this too: your cousin Elizabeth also, in her old age, has conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing*

*is impossible to God.' Mary said, 'You see before you the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.' And the angel left her.*

### Do not be afraid

*"For there is a child born for us, a son given to us and dominion is laid on his shoulders; and this is the name they give him: Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace..."* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). The prophet Isaiah was writing these words to the people of Judah in a time of great uncertainty and fear. They did not know if God was with them or not. The prophet proclaimed to the people that a child would be born. He would be their wisdom and peace and be God with them. God's presence would be their joy despite the difficult times they had to go through. Today, let us find comfort in Isaiah's words. God stands with us and goes through every situation with us. Thus, we rejoice in His presence.

In the gospel, the angel Gabriel told Mary: *"Rejoice, you who enjoy God's favour! The Lord is with you"*. Like Mother Mary, we rejoice because we are deeply loved and cared for by God. Today, let us keep our eyes on God. With our eyes of faith fixed on Him, we find our peace.

### **Reflective question:**

Is God my source of joy and peace?

### **Friday, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, St. Rose of Lima.**

#### **Ezekiel 37:1-14, Matthew 22:34-40**

*When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees they got together and, to put him to the test, one of them put a further question, 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?' Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord you'" first commandment. The second resembles it: You must love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets too.'*

### Dry bones

*"The Lord said, "Son of man, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They keep saying, "Our bones are dried up, our hope has gone; we are as good as dead" (1<sup>st</sup> reading). This passage carries for us a message of hope. The context of this passage is that the people of Israel were in exile in Babylonia and faced a crisis of faith. Everything was taken away*



from them: their identity, land, Temple and Davidic monarchy. In the valley of dry bones, God breathed upon them, life entered them and they came back to life. The message for the Israelites in exile and for us today is that the valley of dry bones we find ourselves in, our problems, failures, etc., does not have the final word. God's promise is: "*You will live. All will be well*".

"*You must love your neighbour as yourself*". We truly live as God desires when we love Him and others as we love ourselves, as Jesus states in the gospel today. Let us ask for the grace to live life fully by loving. We love because God first loved us.

### **Reflective question:**

What is God saying to me today?

### **Saturday, 24<sup>th</sup> August, St. Bartholomew, Apostle.**

#### **Revelation 21:9-14, John 1:45-51**

*Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.' Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.' Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.' And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'*

#### Come and see

"*Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth...'*". After his encounter with Jesus, Philip overfilled with joy, went looking for his friend, Nathanael (or Bartholomew), so that he too could meet this man from Nazareth. He was not discouraged by Nathanael's dismissive attitude. He patiently invited his friend, "*Come and see*". There was no need for a long defensive argument from Philip. He knew that his joy from encountering the Messiah was enough to

convince Nathanael to take the steps to go to Jesus. Philip shows us how we can be Jesus' missionary disciples. Jesus needs us, as He needed Philip, to bear witness to Him and proclaim Him.

Because of Philip's "come and see", Nathanael encountered Jesus and was convinced that He was the Son of God. This experience with Jesus transformed his life and moved him to follow Him.

**Reflective question:**

How can I, through my words and actions, show Jesus to others and lead them to meet Him?

**Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.**

**Joshua 24:1-2, 15-18, Ephesians 5:21-32, John 6:60-69**

*After hearing it, many of his followers said, 'This is intolerable language. How could anyone accept it?' Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said, 'Does this disturb you? What if you should see the Son of man ascend to where he was before? 'It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the outset who did not believe and who was to betray him. He went on, 'This is why I told you that no one could come to me except by the gift of the Father.' After this, many of his disciples went away and accompanied him no more. Then Jesus said to the Twelve, 'What about you, do you want to go away too?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.'*

Lord, to whom shall we go?

In the gospel today, the people found that Jesus' words were challenging and the path He was showing them was not easy. They wanted Jesus to be their problem-solver, their supply of endless bread. They wanted Him to make them content and happy all the time. However, Jesus spoke about suffering, the cross, forgiving seventy times seven, unconditional love, the living bread, and eternal life. Thus, they left Him. There are times when we label ourselves as Christians, but we do not take Jesus seriously and live our lives according to the world's values and what we

want. The good news is that Jesus never gives up on us. We might wander away from Him, but He never abandons us.

Today, let us ponder Peter's reply to Jesus' question, "*What about you, do you want to go away too?*". Peter said, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life and we believe...*". Peter believed and continued to believe even in the lowest moments of his following. May Peter's response be ours, and may we experience the life only Jesus can give.

### **Reflective question:**

In the face of the challenges of following Jesus, would I want to go away?

### **Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> August, 21<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time.**

#### **2 Thessalonians 1:1-5, 11-12, Matthew 23:13-22**

*Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of Heaven in people's faces, neither going in yourselves nor allowing others to go who want to. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. Because of this, you will receive a very severe condemnation! Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over sea and land to make a single proselyte, and anyone who becomes one you make twice as fit for hell as you are. Alas for you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the Temple, it has no force; but anyone who swears by the gold of the Temple is bound." Fools and blind! For which is of greater value, the gold or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? Again, "If anyone swears by the altar it has no force; but anyone who swears by the offering on the altar, is bound." You blind men! For which is of greater worth, the offering or the altar that makes the offering sacred? Therefore, someone who swears by the altar is swearing by that and by everything on it. And someone who swears by the Temple is swearing by that and by the One who dwells in it. And someone who swears by heaven is swearing by the throne of God and by the One who is seated there.'*

#### Growing in faith and love

*"We feel we must be continually thanking God for you, brothers; quite rightly, because your faith is growing so wonderfully and the love that you have for one another never stops increasing; and among the*

*churches of God we can take special pride in you for your constancy and faith under all the persecutions and troubles you have to bear.” (1<sup>st</sup> reading). St. Paul thanked God with joy because he could see that the faith of the Thessalonians was not simply an intellectual faith but a trusting and practical one. Despite facing persecution, they continued trusting God and never stopped putting love for others into practice. In our prayer, we might ask ourselves if these words of St. Paul could apply to us, our faith community and our family personally.*

In today’s gospel, Jesus had harsh words to say to the scribes and Pharisees who were obsessed with the externals of religion and missed out on living the essentials. Let us ask Jesus to help us focus on what is important: to live a life of faith and love.

**Reflective question:**

When people look at me, can they see my faith in God and my love for those around me?

**Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> August, St. Monica.**

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 14-17, Matthew 23:23-26**

*Jesus said: 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay your tithe of mint and dill and cummin and have neglected the weightier matters of the Law-justice, mercy, good faith! These you should have practised, those not neglected. You blind guides, straining out gnats and swallowing camels! Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance. Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that it and the outside are both clean.'*

Justice, mercy and good faith

*“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such inexhaustible comfort and such sure hope, comfort you and strengthen you in everything good that you do and say” (1<sup>st</sup> reading). St. Paul wrote this prayer to the Thessalonians as he reminded them that God’s love, His inexhaustible comfort and sure hope had to be their constant comfort and strength. Today, let us prayerfully reflect on these words of St. Paul. Is God’s presence of love the source of our daily comfort and strength? With God in us, He empowers us to do every good work and say every good word.*

In today's gospel, Jesus told the religious leaders to stop and look if they have forgotten to live the fundamentals: justice, mercy, good faith. Despite outwardly appearing good, the scribes and the Pharisees failed to live a life as God desired them to. Let us examine our hearts and the way we relate with others. May Jesus guide us to take small steps to live a life pleasing to God.

**Reflective question:**

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

**Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> August, St. Augustine.**

**2 Thessalonians 3:6-10, 16-18, Matthew 23:27-32**

*Jesus said, 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption. In just the same way, from the outside you look upright, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build the sepulchres of the prophets and decorate the tombs of the upright, saying, "We would never have joined in shedding the blood of the prophets, had we lived in our ancestors' day." So! Your own evidence tells against you! You are the children of those who murdered the prophets! Very well then, finish off the work that your ancestors began.'*

God gives us peace all the time

*"May the Lord of peace himself give you peace all the time and in every way. The Lord be with you all"* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). St. Paul's words lead us to recall the ones of Jesus to His disciples: *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you..."* (John 14:27). God wants us to live in peace even when we struggle through the storms of sickness, loss, betrayal and failure. Difficulties can take away our peace only when we forget that God is with us. The constant call for us is to allow Him to be our firm foundation on which we firmly stand.

*"... from the outside you look upright, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness".* In today's gospel, Jesus pointed out the painful truth to the scribes and the Pharisees. They were so concerned with appearing good to people that they forgot to depend on God and let Him

empower and sustain them to live as His humble and faithful servants. Today, let us remember that God is with us and let His loving presence direct our every moment.

**Reflective question:**

What can I do to remind myself to keep looking at God as the source of peace?

**Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> August, The Passion of St. John the Baptist.**

**Jeremeiah 1:17-19, Mark 6:17-29**

*Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.' As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.' The girl at once rushed back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, immediately, on a dish.' The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. At once the king sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in the prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.*

## Passion to live for God

Today, we celebrate the memorial of the death of St. John the Baptist. He stood as a beacon of light against Herod and all those who rejected him. In the end, he was beheaded for standing up for the truth.

John the Baptist is not someone for us to admire. He is our role model, encouraging us to let the gospel's message shine through our words and actions. We choose to speak up for truth and work for justice even when we know that our words and actions might be unpopular with those around us. Today, let us go into our inner room, stay with God and listen to Him as He shows us how to witness to our faith. Let us also pray for those who are persecuted for working for truth and justice.

### **Reflective question:**

Is it difficult for me to live as how God wants me to?

### **Friday, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 21<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time.**

#### **1 Corinthians 1:17-25, Matthew 25:1-13**

*Jesus said to his disciples: 'The kingdom of Heaven will be like this: Ten wedding attendants took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones, though they took their lamps, took no oil with them, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "Look! The bridegroom! Go out and meet him." Then all those wedding attendants woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other attendants arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But he replied, "In truth I tell you, I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.*

### The extra oil of intentional faith

In today's gospel, Jesus spoke about the parable of the ten wedding attendants, five wise and five foolish. The wise wedding attendants came ready with extra oil for their lamps. However, the foolish ones did not and

found themselves lacking in oil due to the unexpected delay of the bridegroom. What is Jesus' message to us through this parable?

As Jesus' disciples, we need to live our faith with intentionality. An active faith is the extra oil that we need to have. Attending faith formations, reading spiritual books, listening to talks, etc., can help us to know more about our faith, but these are not enough. We must carry out purposeful acts of love to make the light of faith burn steadily and brightly, for example, carrying out small deeds of kindness, saying words of encouragement and making time and space to pray daily. In moments when we experience uncertainties in life and when we struggle to find Jesus' presence near us, our active faith continues to sustain us through.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I ensure that my lamp is filled with an active and living faith?

**Saturday, 31<sup>st</sup> August, 21<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time.**

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31, Matthew 25:14-30**

*Jesus told his disciples this parable: 'It is like a man about to go abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third one, each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out on his journey. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Now a long time afterwards, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Next the man with the two talents came forward. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness." Last came forward the man who had the single talent. "Sir," said he, "I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; so*



*I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back." But his master answered him, "You wicked and lazy servant! So you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered? Well then, you should have deposited my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have got my money back with interest. So now, take the talent from him and give it to the man who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough; but anyone who has not, will be deprived even of what he has. As for this good-for-nothing servant, throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."*

### The primacy of grace

*"Take yourselves, brothers, at the time when you were called: how many of you were wise in the ordinary sense of the word, how many were influential people, or came from noble families? No, it was to shame the wise that God chose what is foolish by human reckoning ..."* (1<sup>st</sup> reading). Recall our beginnings and remember those days when we were perhaps struggling with our faith, searching for something more, or simply Sunday Catholics. None of us were perfect and flawless. Along the way, God revealed His unconditional love for us and called us into a deeper relationship with Him. God made the first step to seek us before we sought Him out. His grace has led us to be who we are and what we are today. Let us not be so proud as to think that we are great because of our accomplishments.

We are invited to respond to the grace we have been given by using the talents we receive to good use. In the gospel, the last servant hid the talent without using it to enhance his master's business. Let us not be like him but be mindful to use the talents God gives us for the service of others.

### **Reflective question:**

How can I put my talents to serve those around me?

