



PRAYER FOR LIVING

DAILY REFLECTIONS FOR
LITURGICAL YEAR C~
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Monday, 1st August, St. Alphonsus Liguori.
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.

You give them something to eat

Often, we focus on Jesus providing food for the crowd and miss the message of this gospel. "*Give them something to eat yourselves*"- This is the key message of today's gospel. The disciples wanted Jesus to send the people away because they did not have enough bread to feed them. Instead, Jesus wanted them to be the ones to help the hungry crowd.

Like the disciples, we do not have enough "bread", which could mean time, energy, talent, compassion, etc., and think that we are not capable to feed a hunger or meet a need. Today, Jesus tells us again, "*Give this person something to eat yourself*" because He does not want us to wait for someone else to do it. Jesus counts on us to give people His love and peace by speaking words of encouragement, doing an act of kindness, lending a hand to someone who is having a hard time, etc. When we do our part in God's work and respond to the needs of others around us with compassion, there will always be more than enough joy and hope to go around.

Reflection question:

Am I holding back in reaching out to help others in need?

Tuesday, 2nd August, St. Eusebius of Vercelli, St. Peter Julian Eymard.

Jeremiah 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22, Matthew 14:22-36

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he sent the crowds away. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, while the boat, by now some furlongs from land, was hard pressed by rough waves, for there was a head-wind. In the fourth watch of the night he came towards them, walking on the sea, and when the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. 'It is a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying, 'Courage! It's me! Don't be afraid.' It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said, 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.' Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but then noticing the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord,' he cried, 'save me!' Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'You have so little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.' Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret. When the local people recognised him they spread the news through the whole neighbourhood and took all that were sick to him, begging him just to let them touch the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched it were saved.

Jesus is with me, with us

In today's gospel, Jesus, after sending the people away, went away to a quiet place by Himself to pray. He prayed because He wanted to spend time with God His Father. Often, we pray so that we can put a tick on the box on our "to do" list for the day. Jesus invites us to be people of prayer by spending time to enter into a dialogue with Him, seeking His presence in each situation we live, depending on His strength to face a difficult moment, etc.

Meanwhile, the disciples were out in the sea, struggling with strong waves and winds. They were even more terrified when they saw Jesus walking on water. Jesus calmed their fears with these words, "*Courage!*

It's me! Don't be afraid!. Let us stay with these words and allow Jesus' presence to comfort us and assures us that we are not alone. Like Peter, we might lose sight of Jesus, but we know we can cry out, "*Lord, save me! Help me! Stay with me!*". Jesus always comes and gives us His peace.

Reflection question:

Do I recognise Jesus' presence with me today?

Wednesday, 3rd August, 18th Week in Ordinary Time.

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.

The Canaanite woman's faith

In today's gospel, a Canaanite woman went to Jesus, hoping He would heal her sick daughter. However, Jesus did not answer her with a single word. This woman should have struggled with many doubts, "*Is this the same Jesus who showed compassion to the sick? Am I not worthy for Him now to take notice of me? Why He not healing my daughter?*". She, however, persisted in her request by crying out, "*Lord, help me*". When Jesus finally addressed her, He spoke rather harshly to her and said, "*It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs*". Yet, the woman persisted by identifying herself as "*little dog*" who would happily receive the little crumbs that fell from the table. Jesus admired her persistent faith and highlighted it as an example for His disciples to imitate.

Sometimes we experience our prayers being unanswered and that God seems silent. May we, like the Canaanite woman, strive for a persistent faith that never gives up but dares to wait patiently in the dark for the light of hope to shine.

Reflection question:

Do I have the faith to trust in Jesus?

Thursday, 4th August, St. John Vianney.

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.'

A rock and an obstacle

In today's gospel, Jesus named Peter to be the rock on which He would build the Church. However, as we continue reading the passage, we see Jesus calling Peter an obstacle in His path. Was Peter a steady, firm rock, or was He an obstacle, a stumbling block? Peter was both. He was a human person who had his good points and strengths as well as his weaknesses and flaws. Peter had the faith to recognise Jesus as "the

Christ, the Son of the living God", but his cowardice refused to embrace the reality that Jesus, the Christ, had to suffer.

Each of us, like Peter, is not a perfect person. We have our strengths and our flaws. We are not defined by our faults and mistakes. Despite our limitations, Jesus counts on us to lead others to God. Out of love, He continues to call us to follow Him and allow Him to be the Rock, the firm foundation of our lives.

Reflection question:

Can I identify myself with Peter as I pray with the gospel passage?

Friday, 5th August, Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major.

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.'

To deny to ourselves

"If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me". These are challenging words from Jesus to all of us. It is demanding because many of us tend to live a life focussing on ourselves, satisfying our needs, and seeking self-fulfilment. Therefore, it is not appealing to renounce ourselves. Yet, Jesus invites us to deny ourselves by going beyond ourselves and putting the interests and the needs of others before our own, which implies walking the path of the cross as we die to our selfishness and pride.

"Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it". This is the paradox of discipleship. If we want to gain the fullness of life that Jesus offers, we must learn to lose the tendency to live a self-centred life and choose to give ourselves in loving service to others.

Reflection question:

What prevents me from renouncing myself for Jesus' sake?

Saturday, 6th August, Transfiguration of the Lord.

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 or 2 Peter 1:16-19, Luke 9: 28-36

Jesus took with him Peter, John and James and went up the mountain to pray. And it happened that, as he was praying, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became sparkling white. And suddenly there were two men talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they woke up and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, 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 he was saying. As he was saying this, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.' And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

The mountain of prayer

"Jesus...went up the mountain to pray". Jesus would soon reach Jerusalem and He was aware that He would suffer rejection and persecution from the Jewish religious leaders. In this challenging moment, Jesus went up the mountain to pray and spend time with God the Father. He needed to find inner strength and peace from God so that He could embrace all that was to come. In prayer, Jesus experienced God's presence so profoundly that His whole being was transfigured and lit up with the Father's perfect and unconditional love.

We need to go to the mountain of prayer to allow God to touch us deeply with His loving presence. From the mountain of prayer, we then have the strength and peace to go back down to the valley of daily living, work, relationships, etc. Today, let us listen to God as He calls out to us, "*This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to Him*". May we spend time in prayerful listening and allowing Jesus' words to shape our lives and guide us in our steps.

Reflection question:

Do I set time and space to go up the mountain of prayer and listen to Jesus as He speaks to me?

Sunday, 7th August, 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time.**Wisdom 18:6-9, Hebrew 11:1-2, 8-19, Luke 12:32-48**

Jesus said to his disciple: 'There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it. For wherever your treasure is, that is where your heart will be too. 'See that you have your belts done up and your lamps lit. Be like people waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. In truth I tell you, he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them. It may be in the second watch that he comes, or in the third, but blessed are those servants if he finds them ready. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.' Peter said, 'Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?' The Lord replied, 'Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy steward whom the master will place over his household to give them at the proper time their allowance of food? Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. I tell you truly, he will put him in charge of everything that he owns. But if the servant says to himself, "My master is taking his time coming," and sets about beating the menservants and the servant-girls, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful. The servant who knows what his master wants, but has got nothing ready and done nothing in accord with those wishes, will be given a great many strokes of the lash. The one who did not know, but has acted in such a way that he deserves a beating, will be given fewer strokes. When someone is given a great deal, a great deal will be demanded of that person; when someone is entrusted with a great deal, of that person even more will be expected.'

God serves us so that we may serve others

In this world, many things clamour for our attention, and we lose focus on what is truly essential in life. Let us listen to God as He calls us to re-centre our lives on Him by being aware of His presence with us in our here and now. He is not an absent God but meets us daily in the circumstances of life, in the people we encounter, etc. The question is: Are we spiritually awake to perceive His presence in our daily lives? Having God as the centre of our lives, we are inclined to be at the service of others and work consistently for justice, peace and love.

"Blessed those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes...he will do up his belt, sit them down at table and wait on them". How amazing to stay with this image of God who comes to us to serve us. By experiencing His loving service to us, especially in His self-giving love in the Eucharist, we have the strength to go out and help others in our lives.

Reflection question:

Am I aware of God's presence in me and around me?

Monday, 8th August, St. Dominic.

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

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.'

Freedom rooted in love

Today's gospel might be challenging to understand. However, let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to grasp the message behind this passage that Jesus wants to convey to us today. Some tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus would pay the required temple tax. In Jesus' opinion, He, being the Son of God, was free not to do so. His disciples, who were part of God's family, were also not obliged to pay the tax. However, Jesus told Peter to pay the temple tax and not to scandalise them. Thus, Jesus chose to practice love rather than exercise His freedom.

The key question we should always ask is: "*What is the most loving thing to do in this situation?*". As Christians, our love for others should always mould and form our freedom. Although we might be free to do something or not to do something, sometimes it is necessary to renounce our freedom for the sake of choosing to love others and work for their good.

Reflection question:

What struck me as I prayed with today's gospel passage?

Tuesday, 9th August, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

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.'

To become like little children

In today's gospel, the disciples were concerned with being great in the kingdom of God. However, Jesus told His disciples that it was not about

becoming great but about becoming like little children that mattered the most. Today, Jesus extends this invitation to us too.

What does it mean to be like "*little children*"? Little children live simply in the present moment with a sense of joy and wonderment. They do not live in the past or worry about the future. Jesus invites us to become like little children and live in the present moment. It is in the present moment where God reveals Himself as a God who is with us. Although we need to work for a better future, we must not miss living the present moment with God. May we encounter His loving presence in each moment of today and learn to live at peace with Him.

Reflection question:

How can I respond to Jesus' invitation to become like little children?

Wednesday, 10th August, St. Lawrence.

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."

To fall, die and give life

"...*but if it dies it yields a rich harvest*". Jesus is the grain of wheat that chooses to fall into the earth and die so that others may have life in all its fullness. Today, Jesus calls us to follow His same path and be grains of wheat that fall into the ground and die to bear a rich harvest. What does it mean for us today?

We choose to fall into the grain and die to ourselves when we place ourselves at the service of others. It is by giving our time, talents, resources, etc. for the well-being of those around us that we ourselves become alive with God's life and bring His fullness of life to them. However, it is important to give of ourselves with a cheerful heart, not resentment and anger. St. Paul said in the first reading, "*God loves a cheerful giver*". May we serve and give ourselves to others cheerfully because we do everything out of our love for God.

Reflection question:

How can I be a "cheerful giver" today?

Thursday, 11th August, St. Clare.

Ezekiel 12:1-12, Matthew 18:21-19:1

Peter went up to Jesus and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times. And so the kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle his accounts with his servants. When the reckoning began, they brought him a man who owed ten thousand talents; he had no means of paying, so his master gave orders that he should be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, to meet the debt. At this, the servant threw himself down at his master's feet, with the words, "Be patient with me and I will pay the whole sum." And the servant's master felt so sorry for him that he let him go and cancelled the debt. Now as this servant went out, he happened to meet a fellow-servant who owed him one hundred denarii; and he seized him by the throat and began to throttle him, saying, "Pay what you owe me." His fellow-servant fell at his feet and appealed to him, saying, "Be patient with me and I will pay you." But the other would not agree; on the contrary, he had him thrown into prison till he should pay the debt. His fellow-servants were deeply distressed when they saw what had happened, and they went to their master and reported the whole affair to him. Then the master sent for the man and said to him, "You wicked servant, I cancelled all that debt of yours when you appealed to me. Were you not bound, then, to have pity on your fellow-servant just as I had pity on you?" And in his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debt. And that is how my heavenly Father will deal with you unless you each forgive your brother from your heart.' Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and he left Galilee and came into the territory of Judaea on the far side of the Jordan.

Lord, forgive us as we forgive others

"Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?". Peter wanted to quantify the number of times he should forgive another. By suggesting "seven times", Peter was placing a limit on forgiveness. Jesus told Peter, "Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-

seven times". For Jesus, forgiveness neither has limits nor is a quantifiable affair. Instead, it is a way of life, a way of loving. At the end of the gospel. Jesus added that forgiveness should come from our hearts, from a place filled with love and mercy, not bitterness and resentment.

However, our life experiences tell us that forgiving is not easy. We remember the hurts, betrayals, spiteful actions and angry words others have inflicted on us and carry the wounds of the past. Let us read the parable of Jesus slowly in today's gospel and allow the Spirit to open our hearts to grasp the message behind it. Forgiveness comes from God and His forgiveness has no limits. When we experience God's forgiveness, we can choose to share the forgiveness we have received.

Reflection question:

How can I make forgiveness my way of life?

Friday, 12th August, St. Jane Frances de Chantal.

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.'

Faithful love that builds communion

In today's gospel, some Pharisees wanted to test Jesus regarding the Jewish law on marriage. Faithfulness is the message Jesus conveyed to them and continues to present to us. Any human relationship, be it the love between husband and wife or the care of parents towards their children or children to their elderly parents or even in relationships between friends, must be a reflection of God's faithful love for His people. Faithfulness implies having a powerful love that stays with a friend, an elderly parent, a spouse, or a child during their "good times" and their "bad times".

"So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide". We know that betrayals, divisions and abandonments happen in human relationships. This is a reality. Jesus knows and accepts this reality, but He always calls us to work for unity in marriage, family life, and friendships.

Reflection question:

How can I bring God's faithful love to those around me?

Saturday, 13th August, SS. Pontian and Hippolytus.

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

People brought little children to Jesus, 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.

Let the little ones come to Me

In today's Gospel, people brought little children to Jesus because they recognised Him as a man of God. They wanted the best for their children, so they brought them to Him so that He could lay His hands on them and say a prayer for them. However, His disciples turned them away. Perhaps they considered the little children as unimportant for Jesus to busy Himself with. When Jesus saw this, He rebuked His disciples and said, *"Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me"*. Jesus invites us constantly to come to Him and bring our loved ones to Him, even those whom we consider "unworthy" or "unimportant".

"...for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs". For Jesus, those who have little status in society and are considered unimportant in the world have a unique place in God's heart. The invitation is for us to have eyes to recognise the weaker and insignificant ones in society and to have the compassion to welcome and care for them.

Reflection question:

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

Sunday, 14th August, 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Jeremiah 38:4-6,8-10, Hebrews 12:1-4, Luke 12: 49-53

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! There is a baptism I must still receive, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law.'

The cost of staying faithful to Jesus and His ways

"Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division". It seems strange that Jesus speaks about bringing division, not peace. Jesus, a lover of peace, does not come with the specific purpose of bringing division. Instead, He is saying that division is the consequence of His presence.

Jesus reminds us today that if we are truly committed to following Him and living our lives according to His values of honesty, truth, justice and peace, we will face opposition, even from our family members. We must know that people will not always agree with our choices when we align ourselves with the values of the Kingdom of God. Today, let us pray that we may never lose sight of Jesus and can follow Him faithfully and courageously to the end.

Reflection question:

Will I remain firm in my following of Jesus even in the midst of challenges?

Monday, 15th August, Solemnity of the Assumption of 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 forever. Mary stayed with her some three months and then went home.

To love like Mary

When Mary heard the good news about her cousin, Elizabeth, she did not wait or procrastinate. Instead, she was in a hurry to love by placing Elizabeth's needs above hers because she knew that this was the loving thing God would want from her.

God always wants us to go out of ourselves and to be in a hurry to put love for others into practice. We are called to imitate the footsteps of Mother Mary. To love like her implies to have a love that conquers pride and does not indulge in jealousy or unkindness. A love gives oneself without seeking rewards or praises. As we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, let us ask for her help to guide our feet always to hasten to reach out to others, our hearts to selflessly care for others, our

minds to think for the good of others, our hands to carry the wounds of others.

Reflection question:

What prevents me from going out of myself to love and serve others?

Tuesday, 16th August, St. Stephen of Hungary.

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.'

God is our true God

"In truth I tell you, it is hard for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven". When Jesus' disciples heard what He said about riches as obstacles to entering the kingdom of Heaven, they wondered, *"Who can be saved, then?"* In the Jewish mentality, wealth was a way God rewards those who are faithful and obedient to Him. Thus, they were confused when Jesus instead regarded riches as a danger to God. Jesus was not against having money. However, He wanted to warn His disciples, and us today, that money and possessions should not take the place of God and that we are not meant to entrust ourselves to our riches. We always need to remember that we belong to God, and thus, it is to Him that we lean on for our daily strength, security and joy.

Today, let us have the courage to detach ourselves from relying on our wealth and possessions and attach ourselves to God, whose constant love will never fail us.

Reflection question:

What is Jesus inviting me to do in this time of prayer?

Wednesday, 17th August, 20th Week in Ordinary Time.

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

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: 'Now 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 around, 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 saying, "The men who came last 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 lastcomer as much as I pay you. Have I no right to do what I like with my own? Why should you be envious because I am generous?" Thus the last will be first, and the first, last.'

God is generous

In today's gospel, the landowner might seem unfair to the workers, especially to those who started work at his vineyard at the start of the day. In our minds, the workers who worked for more hours should be paid more while the rest who worked less should be paid less. This parable somehow challenges our understanding of justice. "*Now the kingdom of Heaven is like...*". Jesus presents to us a God whose way of thinking differs from ours.

God is like this landowner whose generosity extends to every person. He is not calculative, and His giving of Himself does not depend on how much or little we give ourselves to Him. He gives one denarius of His love and mercy to those who are worthy and those who are not. Today, we are called to rejoice and thank God for His love that is so generous and rich in mercy.

Reflection question:

Have I ever experienced God's generous love and mercy in my life?

Thursday, 18th August, 20th Week in Ordinary Time.

Ezekiel 36:23-28, Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus began to speak to the chief priests and the elders of the people in parables once again, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants with the words, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, my banquet is all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding." So these servants went out onto the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth." For many are invited but not all are chosen.'

The banquet of God's love

Like the king who invited the guests to come and join the wedding feast, God never stops to invite us to enter into the feast of His love, into a personal relationship with Him. He never forces but invites. On our part,

we need to respond to Him. We need to stop making excuses, "*I have no time*", "*I have more important things to do*", and instead make the daily effort to enter into communion with God by spending time to pray and listen to Him.

In the parable, Jesus speaks of a man who responded to the king's invitation and came for the feast without wearing a wedding garment. This shows that the man did not take the invitation seriously. What does it mean for us today? it is not enough for us to verbally say "Yes" to God's invitation, but we also need to respond by the way we live our lives. We put on our "*wedding garment*" by living a life of love so that the way we think, feel, speak, and act will reflect the God of love we have within.

Reflection question:

How can my relationship with God define the way I think, love, feel, speak and act?

Friday, 19th August, St. John Eudes.

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

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus 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 your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the 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.'

Love is a decision to be made again and again

Love is the heart of our Christian faith. Our love for God can never be separated from our love for our brothers and sisters. This is because we cannot love God without the desire to love Him, who also dwells in our brothers and sisters. Thus, in our simple self-giving acts of love for others, we show the depth of our love for God.

Often, we associate love with emotion. However, love is more than just emotion. It is a daily decision we make again and again about whom and what is important to us. Today, let us make a choice to love again by putting God at the centre of our lives and depending on Him for our daily

nourishment of strength and peace. When we love God, then it follows that we choose to express loving compassion and service to those around us. Christian faith is not about rules, but it is about love.

Reflection question:

How can I choose love today?

Saturday, 20th August, St. Bernard.

Ezekiel 43:1-7, Matthew 23:1-12

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

Greatness is seen in loving service

"...*they do not practise what they preach*". In today's gospel, Jesus was critical of the Jewish religious leaders of His time. They placed themselves as superior to the rest of the people and wanted to be recognised, respected and admired. Reflecting on the Church and society today, there are, unfortunately, leaders who continue to abuse their power and are more interested in titles, status and power.

Authority is a form of service. Whether in the family, friendships with others, parish ministries, faith communities, etc., we are always called to place ourselves at the service of others with love and humility. Jesus reminds us today that we have God as our Father, and so we are all

brothers and sisters; we have Jesus as our Teacher, and so we need to keep learning from Him how to be great in love.

Reflection question:

Today, who can I serve with love?

Sunday, 21st August, 21st Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Isaiah 66:18-21, Hebrews 12:5-7, 11-13, Luke 13:22-30

Through towns and villages Jesus went teaching, making his way to Jerusalem. Someone said to him, 'Sir, will there be only a few saved?' He said to them, 'Try your hardest to enter by the narrow door, because, I tell you, many will try to enter and will not succeed. 'Once the master of the house has got up and locked the door, you may find yourself standing outside knocking on the door, saying, "Lord, open to us," but he will answer, "I do not know where you come from." Then you will start saying, "We once ate and drank in your company; you taught in our streets," but he will reply, "I do not know where you come from; away from me, all evil doers!" Then there will be weeping and grinding of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrown out. And people from east and west, from north and south, will come and sit down at the feast in the kingdom of God. Look, there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last.'

To strive to enter by the narrow door

In today's gospel, somebody asked Jesus, "*Will there be only a few saved?*". This person, a Jew, would most likely hold onto the conviction that Israel was a nation favoured by God and they had the unique privilege to achieve salvation. Jesus did not answer him directly. Instead, He said that the way to salvation requires effort to walk through the narrow door.

Salvation springs from a person's personal encounter with Jesus, which leads him/her to live the identity fully as God's beloved child, and an effort to follow Jesus and live as He did. Jesus wants us to understand that salvation is not a matter of entitlement but our daily response to Him. We do so by entering through the narrow door, which is to follow Jesus faithfully and walk His same path of loving service to all, especially the poor and the vulnerable.

Reflection question:

Am I committed to entering into the narrow gate and making Jesus' way of life my own, or simply satisfied to have the title of "*I am a Christian*"?

Monday, 22nd 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 favor! 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.

Mary, woman of great faith

In today's gospel, Mary was greatly troubled and frightened by the Angel Gabriel's words. Like Mary, we too have experienced feeling afraid. Often, we live in fear: fear of losing our loved ones, fear of falling sick, fear of being unemployed, fear of loneliness, etc. Fear is a normal human reaction to the unknown future. However, fear is dangerous when we allow it to live in us and control us. The invitation for us is to live by faith, not fear.

Mary was afraid but did not allow fear to paralyze her in her search to understand God's will for her. Her faith led her to let God be God and trust His loving purpose for her life. Her response, "*Let it happen to me as you have said*" conveys her strong faith in God. As we pray with

Mother Mary, let us ask Her to help us live by faith, not fear, and to say "Yes" to what God wants from us.

Reflection question:

Do I allow fear to get in the way of trusting God more and allowing Him to be the God of my life?

Tuesday, 23rd August, St. Rose of Lima.

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.'

What God wants from us

"Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that it and the outside are both clean". Jesus had rather harsh words to the scribes and the Pharisees. He called them, "*Hypocrites*", people who put on good appearances just for people to admire them, but their hearts were not right with God and others. They were so focussed on following rules and regulations that they had forgotten to put into practice what was most important, i.e. love for God and love for others.

Like the religious leaders of Jesus' time, we often tend to give more importance to the outside than the inside. We are scrupulous in following laws to appear good, but our hearts are filled with judgement and contempt for others. Jesus does not want us to be hypocrites. He wants us to be the same inside and outside. Today, He calls us to go back to the heart of God and live a life of love, justice and mercy as He wants us to.

Reflection question:

How often do I tend to live for external appearances and forget the weightier matters of what my faith in Jesus is all about?

Wednesday, 24th August, St. Bartholomew.

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

St. Bartholomew is traditionally associated with Nathanael in today's Gospel passage. What message does this feast of St. Bartholomew have for us today? Nathanael encountered Jesus through a mediator, Philip. Philip had a profound life-transforming encounter with Jesus and went to Nathanael and told him, "*Come and see.*" Because of his "*Come and see*", Nathanael followed Jesus. Philip was an instrument to bring his friend to Jesus and Jesus to his friend.

Our following of Jesus often started because of the faith of our parents, friends, relatives, and mentors. Through a friend's testimony or a parent's good example, we begin our own journey with Jesus. In the same way that we have 'Philips' who inspire us towards Jesus, we too are called to be mediators to tell people, "*Come and see. Come and experience. Come and know.*" We will never know how our words and deeds can influence others to have greater faith and love for Jesus.

Reflection question:

How can I help others to draw closer to Jesus?

Thursday, 25th August, St. Louis, St. Joseph Calasanz.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9, Matthew 24:42-51

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming. You may be quite sure of this, that if

the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. 'Who, then, is the wise and trustworthy servant whom the master placed over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed that servant if his master's arrival finds him doing exactly that. In truth I tell you, he will put him in charge of everything he owns. But if the servant is dishonest and says to himself, "My master is taking his time," and sets about beating his fellow-servants and eating and drinking with drunkards, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.'

Awareness of God's presence

At the start of today's gospel, Jesus said: "*Stay awake*". This is a call to be attentive and aware of the various ways God enters our lives in unexpected ways and at unexpected times. The reality is that God is with us. However, we tend to be so preoccupied with worries and concerns and fill our days with many things to accomplish that we sometimes fail to recognise that He is with us. Our plans for tomorrow, the tasks we have to finish, and the chores we have to do distract us from God.

"*Stay awake*", to contemplate and pay attention to God's presence in the present moment, even in the stressful moments, is what Jesus asks of us. When we are aware that we are not alone and that He is with us, each ordinary moment becomes an extraordinary experience of His loving involvement in our lives.

Reflection question:

How can I turn my attention to God's presence even when I am busy doing everyday activities?

Friday, 26th August, 21st Week in Ordinary Time.

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

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Then 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 oil of prayer and action

What is the message for us today as we reflect on today's parable? We need to be like the five sensible wedding attendants, ready with our lamps full of the oil of prayer and action so that the light of faith in us will steadily burn bright.

Prayer is the first essential oil that fuels the fire of our faith to keep it glowing. Do we set time and space daily to be with God and listen to His word? Next is the oil of action. Prayer must lead us to live a life of love and service. Do we use our talents and resources to help our brothers and sisters? Let us not be complacent, like the five foolish wedding attendants. We cannot afford to acken in our faith. Every day is a new day for renewing our relationship with Jesus, our Bridegroom. Today, we can stay prepared and feed our faith with prayer and action, or we can let our faith fall into a deep sleep.

Reflection question:

Have I taken my faith for granted and been complacent in my relationship with Jesus?

Saturday, 27th August, St. Monica.

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

Jesus told his disciples this parable: '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."

To be faithful to what we have received

In today's gospel, the first two servants invested what their master had given them because they knew their master wanted them to use their talents well. On the other hand, the third servant hid the one talent he received because he was afraid of losing what he had been given and did nothing.

God has gifted us with various talents, and the greatest is the capacity to love like Him. This gift of love is not for us to set aside and keep buried

in the ground by fear, procrastination, laziness, pride, etc. When God gives us the capacity to love, He wants us to promptly exercise and put this gift into action every day by placing ourselves at the service of those around us. The more love we give, the more love we will receive. Let us not be afraid to put love into practice.

Reflection question:

What is Jesus' message for me today?

Sunday, 28th August, 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Ecclesiasticus 3:19-21, 30-31, Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24, Luke 14:1, 7-14

On a Sabbath day Jesus had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely. He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honour. He said this, 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man." And then, to your embarrassment, you will have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, "My friend, move up higher." Then, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up.' Then he said to his host, 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relations or rich neighbours, in case they invite you back and so repay you. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; then you will be blessed, for they have no means to repay you and so you will be repaid when the upright rise again.'

True humility

Humility is a virtue that is not attractive for many of us because we associate humility with the need to belittle ourselves and consider ourselves and what we do as nothing. What is the real meaning of humility? "*Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all*" (William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury). This is the humility that Jesus invites us to strive for.

In the passage, the guests picked places of honour because they wanted people to recognise and honour them. Like them, we want to be considered important by others. Today, the gospel challenges us to be humble by living as God intends us to live. We give of ourselves to others because of our love for God and His people, not because we want others to admire or praise us. If people praise us for our good work, we welcome it and give thanks to God, but we do not actively seek it. Let us have the same spirit of humility as Jesus.

Reflection question:

How can I be humble like Jesus is?

Monday, 29th August, The Passion of St. John the Baptist.

Jeremiah 1:17-19, Mark 6:17-29

Herod 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.

To stand firm for Christ

Today, we celebrate the memorial of the Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, who courageously spoke out against Herod for unlawfully marrying his brother's wife. In the end, he was killed by Herod for speaking the truth. Many people continue to suffer today because they dare to witness their faith in difficult and life-threatening situations. What about us? Do we have the courage to stand up for what we believe in?

Let us be faithful witnesses to the Gospel values of justice, love and truth and dare to proclaim them even if others ridicule, criticise or reject us. The good news is that God is with us and will always give us the strength and courage to stand firm and not waver in our faith.

Reflection question:

Am I ready to witness the Gospel value to those around me?

Tuesday, 30th August, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time.

1 Corinthians 2:10-16, Luke 4:31-37

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because his word carried authority. In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean devil, and he shouted at the top of his voice, 'Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked it, saying, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the devil, throwing the man into the middle, went out of him without hurting him at all. Astonishment seized them and they were all saying to one another, 'What is it in his words? He gives orders to unclean spirits with authority and power and they come out.' And the news of him travelled all through the surrounding countryside.

The life-giving presence of Jesus

In today's gospel, Jesus spoke, and people were deeply impressed with Him and His message. In this time of prayer, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us not to take Jesus and His words for granted but listen to Him with renewed joy and passion.

The passage also speaks of a man "*possessed by the spirit of an uncleaned devil*" who recognised who Jesus was. He shouted aloud, "*I know who you are: the Holy One of God.*" This man was afraid of what Jesus might do to him and wanted to be left alone. Like the man in today's Gospel, we too might have our own "*demons*" that we struggle with daily. These demons of pride, jealousy, anger, lust, laziness and deep wounds from past events are sometimes alive and actively influence how we live and love. Today, Jesus wants to lead us to live a full life of freedom and to follow Him with greater faithfulness. May we stay with Jesus and find in Him the source of our healing and comfort.

Reflection question:

What is Jesus' invitation to me as I listen attentively to His Word today?

Wednesday, 31st August, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9, Luke 4: 38-44

Leaving the synagogue Jesus went to Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in the grip of a high fever and they asked him to do something for her. Standing over her he rebuked the fever and it left her. And she immediately got up and began to serve them. At sunset all those who had friends suffering from diseases of one kind or another brought them to him, and laying his hands on each he cured them. Devils too came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God.' But he warned them and would not allow them to speak because they knew that he was the Christ. When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place. The crowds went to look for him, and when they had caught up with him they wanted to prevent him leaving them, but he answered, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns too, because that is what I was sent to do.' And he continued his proclamation in the synagogues of Judaea.

To nurture a life of prayer

"When daylight came he left the house and made his way to a lonely place". Even though Jesus was constantly with the people and busied Himself with helping each person that came His way, He made time for prayer. For Jesus, prayer is essential because He needed to be alone with God, His loving Father. Submerged in His Father's love, Jesus received the nourishment of strength, peace and joy.

No matter how busy or tired we are, we need to make time and space to be with God. In moments when we feel like we do not want to pray, we should pray all the more. In prayer, we let ourselves be loved by God, allow Him to guide us in the decisions we need to make and receive from Him all we need to live each moment with inner peace and joy. Let us be determined to become people of prayer.

Reflection question:

How can I be more faithful in having a life of prayer?

