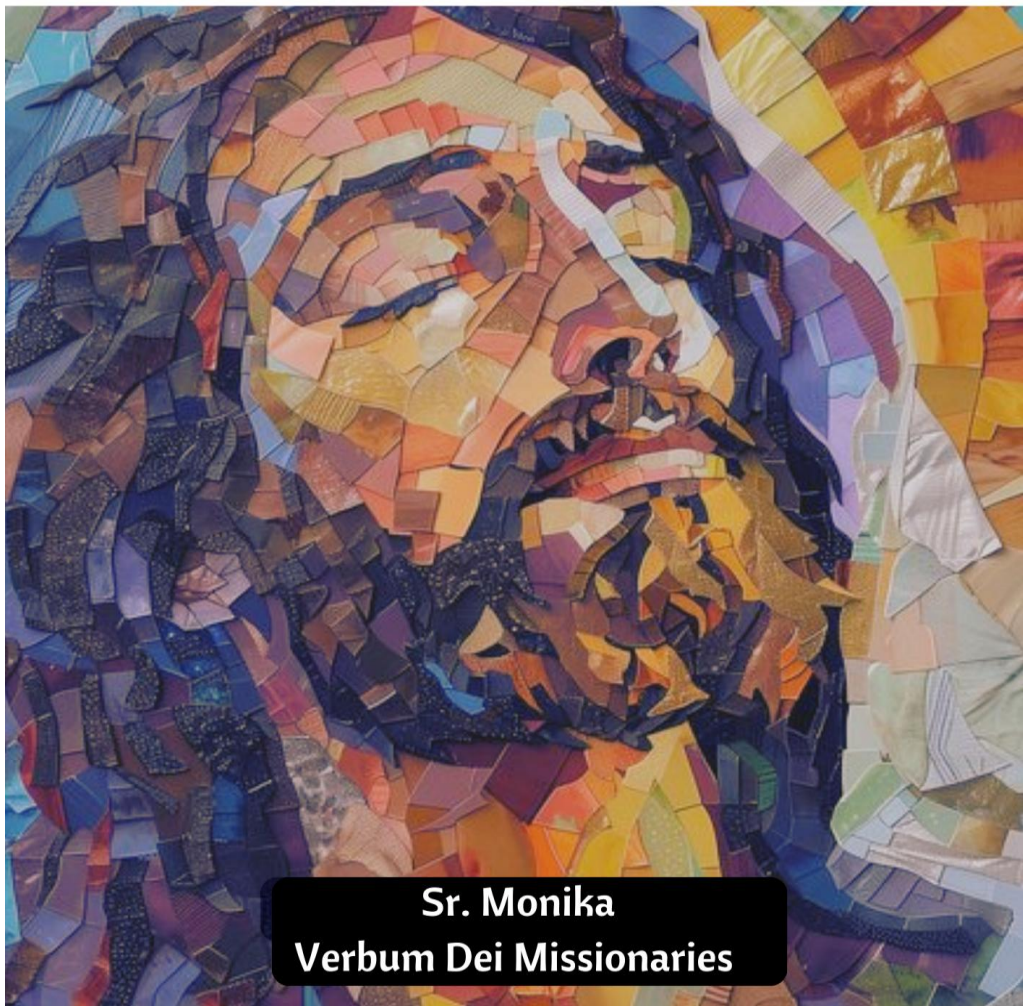


Prayer for Living
Year C
MARCH

**“This is my Son, the Chosen One.
Listen to Him.”**



Sr. Monika
Verbum Dei Missionaries

PRAYER FOR LIVING YEAR C

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Saturday, 1st March, 7th Week in Ordinary Time.

Ecclesiasticus 17:1-13, Mark 10:13-16

People were bringing little children to Jesus, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Then he put his arms around them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

Welcoming gesture of love

In Jesus' time, children had neither rights nor status in society. Moreover, they were considered to be poor and weak. Thus, they were usually shunned and marginalised. Yet, we see in the gospel that Jesus did not treat them as such. He welcomed them with openness, warmth and appreciation. Unlike how society sees them, to Jesus, they were not worthless; each little one was priceless to Him. We, too, are invited to imitate Jesus when we relate with those who have little consideration in our modern society. We open our eyes to see who the 'little children' are in our midst, starting with the ones close to us, who need our gestures of welcome and friendship.

In the silence of prayer, Jesus comes to encounter and love us in our poverty and weakness. Assured of His love, we rejoice deeper in our identity as God's beloved children. May we share the same joy and affirmation with each person we meet today.

Reflective question:

To whom can I show and share Jesus' welcoming and loving gesture?

Sunday, 2nd March, 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Ecclesiasticus 27:4-7, 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, Luke 6:39-45

Jesus told a parable to his disciples, "Can one blind man guide another? Surely both will fall into a pit? The disciple is not superior to his teacher; the fully trained disciple will always be like his teacher. Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the splinter that is in your eye,' when you cannot see the plank in your own? Hypocrite! Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see

clearly enough to take out the splinter that is in your brother's eye. There is no sound tree that produces rotten fruit, nor again a rotten tree that produces sound fruit. For every tree can be told by its own fruit: people do not pick figs from thorns, nor gather grapes from brambles. A good man draws what is good from the store of goodness in his heart; a bad man draws what is bad from the store of badness. For a man's words flow out of what fills his heart."

Look within

In today's parable, Jesus invites us to look within and see what is inside our hearts. He calls us to be aware of our blind spots. He leads us to be conscious of the motives behind our words and actions or the hidden prejudices that may colour our judgments and reactions. The gospel challenges us to a healthy self-examination: to recognise the 'planks' we may carry within. Jesus' purpose in drawing our attention within is not to inflict guilt, accuse or condemn us. Instead, He leads us to deeper self-knowledge, making us more honest and humbler in our self-perception and relationships with others.

In prayer, let us not be afraid to journey within with Jesus. Let us be open and allow Jesus to help us remove all that hinders our growth in love. Humbly, we ask Him for the desire to grow in maturity in our vision of self and others. With eyes of faith, we see Him coming gladly to guide us in goodness and love.

Reflective question:

What 'plank' do I have in my eye that Jesus is inviting me to remove?

Monday, 3rd March, 8th Week in Ordinary Time.

Ecclesiasticus 17:20-28, Mark 10:17-27

Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You must not kill; You must not commit adultery; You must not steal; You must not bring false witness; You must not defraud; Honor your father and mother." And he said to him, "Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days. Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, "There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to

the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were astounded by these words, but Jesus insisted, "My children," he said to them, "how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." They were more astonished than ever. "In that case," they said to one another, "who can be saved?" Jesus gazed at them. "For men," he said, "it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God."

Loved

In the encounter between Jesus and the wealthy man, we read of Jesus' unconditional love toward him. *"Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him"* even before the man responded to His invitation. Regardless of the outcome, the man was already fully loved. In the same way, each day, Jesus looks steadily at each of us and loves us without condition. In prayer, let us allow His gaze of love to sink deep into our hearts.

Only from the security of being deeply loved by Jesus can we have enough courage and trust to heed His invitation to love. He invites us to be free to love God and others, even if that means giving up the tangible worldly possessions we cling to for security or our intangible possessions like pride, worry, fear, etc. It is an invitation to love like Jesus. He was free to love others fully, even at the expense of His own life. By our human will and strength, *"it is impossible; but not for God: because everything is possible for God."* Today, may we live and love freely with Jesus.

Reflective question:

Do I believe that Jesus loves me without condition?

Tuesday, 4th March, St. Casimir.

Ecclesiasticus 35:1-15, Mark 10:28-31

At that time Peter began to tell Jesus, "What about us? We have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not be repaid a hundred

times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land – not without persecutions – now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life. "Many who are first will be last, and the last first."

For Jesus

"...for my sake and for the sake of the gospel." We know from experience that it can be challenging to opt for Jesus and live according to the gospel values. Persecution is part and parcel of living as Jesus' followers since His values are different from those of the world and often go against our selfish inclinations. However, today's gospel brings us Jesus' assurance that none of our efforts to follow Him in love is wasted. He sees and appreciates deeply our commitment to be His disciples.

Indeed, *"the Lord asks everything of us, and yet at the same time, He offers everything to us...He offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created"* (Pope Francis). In prayer, let us recall the times when we have tasted the true happiness of living our lives for Jesus. When it is challenging to choose Jesus above everything and everyone else, including ourselves, let us remember His faithful promise of love and life to us. In following Jesus, may we receive more and more of the true life He offers us!

Reflective question:

How can I choose Jesus and live according to the gospel values today?

Wednesday, 5th March, Ash Wednesday.

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

Jesus said to his disciples: "Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father

who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you."

Seek God, our Father

In today's gospel, Jesus invites the disciples to return to the heart of the religious practices of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. The inner desire to seek and encounter God is at the heart of these activities. When people are used to seeking and pleasing their egos, their true meaning and purpose are lost.

Today, let us listen to Jesus inviting us to go back and renew our desire to seek God above all. When we seek God sincerely, we shall find Him waiting to encounter us not as a scary, punishing God but, as Jesus tells us in the gospel, as our "*Father.*" This Lent, we ask for the grace to rediscover God as our Father who is "*all tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in graciousness*" (1st reading). Let us experience God as the One who has always listened to us and has helped us unflinchingly when we need Him (cf. 2nd reading). In doing so, may we become God's own ambassadors who lead others to encounter the same loving Father in their lives.

Reflective question:

Do I desire to seek God above all?

Thursday, 6th March, Thursday after Ash Wednesday.

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

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

Live in faith

As we read today's gospel, we see that Jesus' life was not exempted from difficult trials. He Himself told His disciples: *"The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected...and to be put to death."* Yet, given this impending tribulation, Jesus continued living His life in faith by trusting the Father's unfailing love for Him. His firm faith in God assured Him that suffering and death would not have the final word; rather, life and love would be victorious, and He would *"be raised up on the third day."*

In life's trying moments, it may not be so easy to live life in faith. Often, we can be overcome by fear, doubt, desperation and hopelessness. In these moments, let us experience Jesus encouraging us to *"choose life...in the love of God, obeying His voice, clinging to Him"* (1st reading). Today, we ask for the grace to choose life: to perceive God's faithful presence with us, listen and believe His word of love, and cling to Him as our support and security.

Reflective question:

What does it mean for me to live in faith today?

Friday, 7th March, Friday after Ash Wednesday.

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

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

Jesus, the true Bridegroom

"Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?" This question reveals how the Pharisees and John the Baptist's disciples relate to God. They relate to God in a transactional manner where fasting becomes a way to earn His loving favour. Jesus, on the other hand, gives a new and different image of relating with God by using the image of the bridegroom associated with the wedding feast. With this image, Jesus teaches them that God's love is not given as a reward for fulfilling laws and obligations. God, the true bridegroom, loves each person freely and totally, without asking for anything in return.

What about us? Do we understand Jesus' new teaching in our hearts? Or, like the Pharisees and John the Baptist's disciples, are we still stuck in the old understanding of a transactional relationship with God? Today, let us be open and allow Jesus to give us a new vision of how God loves us. In the silence of our hearts, we welcome Jesus, the true Bridegroom, who comes to love us as we are.

Reflective question:

What is Jesus' message for me today?

Saturday, 8th March, Saturday after Ash Wednesday.

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

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

Encounter with Jesus

Today's gospel recounts to us the life-changing encounter Levi had with Jesus. From sitting at his usual place, Levi moved immediately to leave everything, get up and follow Jesus. The movement from sitting down to getting up is not just a superficial, external change in position. It signifies a true, inner change in how Levi lived. If previously, he lived only in survival mode, without much meaning, now, life became full of joy as it was given its true purpose and direction. Jesus was the cause of Levi's transformation. Through Jesus' loving gaze and personal call, Levi experienced being truly seen and noticed, valued and loved. He wasted no time in placing people in contact with Jesus because he wanted them to taste the same experience of being loved by Jesus.

In prayer, let us relive the moment Jesus entered our lives and revived our hearts. Remember the meaningful transformation we gained with Jesus in our lives. Like Levi, with grateful hearts, let us become

instruments that bring others, starting from those around us, to encounter Jesus.

Reflective question:

What transformation has Jesus brought to my life?

Sunday, 9th March, 1st Sunday of Lent.

Deuteronomy 26:4-10, Romans 10:8-13, Luke 4:1-13

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf." But Jesus replied, "Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone." Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, "I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours." But Jesus answered him, "Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone. "Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said to him, "throw yourself down from here, for scripture says: He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again: They will hold you up on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone." But Jesus answered him, "It has been said: You must not put the Lord your God to the test." Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

Journeying through the wilderness

In our lives, there are moments when, like Jesus in the gospel, we find ourselves going through the wilderness. The wilderness symbolises the experience in life where one is not only out of his or her comfort zone but also alone and insecure inside. In such moments, the temptation is to turn immediately and find our security in material goods, other people, or our own power and strength.

Yet, Jesus showed us another way of passing through the wilderness. Instead of turning to anything or anyone else, He turned to God. This is evident in the three answers He gave as He faced the temptations. Even in difficult moments, Jesus did not lose His focus. He kept His heart fixed

on God and continued to trust in the Father's love for Him. Today, Jesus teaches us to have the same focus and faith in our Father. God will give us the necessary inner sustenance, the faithful companionship and the unfailing security of love as we journey through the wilderness.

Reflective question:

Can I look to God for the sustenance, companionship and security I need?

Monday, 10th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18, Matthew 25:31-46

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

Loving others is loving God

“Be holy...you must love your neighbour as yourself” (1st reading). In God’s eyes, to be holy is to love. Holiness consists in loving God and others. In fact, the two are inseparable, as St. John writes, *“We cannot love God, who we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen...whoever loves God must love others also”* (1 John 4:20-21). In the gospel, Jesus Himself affirmed those who have loved their fellow sisters and brothers, *“In so far as you did this to one of the least of these...you did it to Me.”*

In our modern society, we are called to recognise, not only those who are physically hungry, thirsty, sick, in prison, etc., but those around us who are spiritually and emotionally in need. There are many around us who hunger and thirst for affirmation and friendship. There are also those who are dealing with mental or emotional health issues, while others may be imprisoned in their bad habits or addictions. In prayer, we ask Jesus to teach us to see others’ needs and move our hearts to love them through our words and actions.

Reflective question:

Concretely, who is Jesus calling me to love today?

Tuesday, 11th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Isaiah 55:10-11, Matthew 6:7-15

Jesus said to his disciples, “In your prayers do not babble as the pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves be heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So you should pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us. And do not put us to the test, but save us from the evil one. Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either.”

God our Father

In today’s gospel, Jesus reveals to His disciples who God truly is: the loving Father who is always attentive to the needs of His beloved children. *“Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”* On

this certainty, Jesus invited the disciples to relate confidently and without any fear with God the Father.

“As the rain and the snow come down from heavens and do not return without watering the earth...so the word from My mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do” (1st reading). With the assurance of God’s loving faithfulness, we pray today and ask for our daily bread – what we deeply need at this moment in our lives. It may be peace, understanding, consolation, truth, strength, courage, etc. In the silence of our hearts, let us find God our Father being fully present with us and generously filling us with His word of love today.

Reflective questions:

What is the word/phrase that strikes me in prayer? Why?

Wednesday, 12th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11:29-32

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

Humble and open to believe

As Jesus addressed the crowd, He drew a comparison between those listening to Him with the Queen of the South who came to hear King Solomon and the people of Nineveh who listened to the prophet Jonah’s preaching. The difference lies in their listening attitude. While the Queen heard Solomon with humility and the Ninevites were open to believing Jonah, the crowd’s minds and hearts in Jesus’ time were hardened with pride. They became closed and did not believe in Jesus. They could not recognise that the one speaking to them was the living Word of God.

When we read scripture, do we realise that Jesus Himself comes to us and speaks personally with us? Do we humbly listen to Him, desiring to learn from the Master? Do we take His word to heart, believe in it, and act on it? As we enter prayer, let us heed the Psalmist's words: "*Oh that today, you would listen to His voice. Harden not your hearts*" (Psalm 95:7). We ask the Holy Spirit to help us be open to Jesus in His Word.

Reflective question:

How is my attitude in reading and listening to God's Word?

Thursday, 13th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Esther 4:17, Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said to his disciples: "Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. Is there a man among you who would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or would hand him a snake when he asked for a fish? If you, then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So always treat others as you would like them to treat you; that is the meaning of the Law and the Prophets."

Trusting dependence on God

In today's first reading, Esther, in her time of need, turned to the One whom she knew would answer her. In her prayer, she said, "*My Lord, our King, the only one, come to my help, for I am alone and have no helper but You*" (1st reading). In these words, we see the poverty of her spirit as she trusted and depended on God.

In today's gospel, this is also the attitude of trusting dependence that Jesus taught His disciples to have in prayer: to ask, search and knock at God's own door. Today, let us dispel any fear, doubt or tiredness of heart that prevents us from going to God to seek His help. Let us be encouraged to persevere in our dependence and trust in God. In prayer, let us find rest in the faithfulness of God as St. Paul says: "*The Lord is near...in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all*

understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:5-7).

Reflective question:

How can I persevere in my dependence and trust in God?

Friday, 14th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Ezekiel 18:21-28, Matthew 5:20-26

Jesus said to his disciples: "For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. You have learned how it was said to our ancestors: You must not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; if a man calls his brother 'Fool' he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and if a man calls him 'Renegade' he will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. I tell you solemnly, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny."

Words of anger and of reconciliation

Today, Jesus teaches us, as His disciples, to go beyond the law's literal meaning to grasp its true essence. Taking the commandment not to kill, He leads us to understand that beyond the physical act of killing, there are other acts that can cause real, lasting harm to another. In the gospel, we see that words spoken in anger are judged severely. Insults and demeaning words can deeply wound the other, while untrue speculations spoken carelessly behind a person's back can break or end relationships. Are we aware that our words of anger can cause such harm?

Let us take time in prayer to realise the moments when we may have hurt others, intentionally or unintentionally. Let us follow Jesus' invitation to *"go and be reconciled with"* others. Instead of using our words in anger, we learn to speak words of reconciliation and forgiveness. When

forgiving or asking for forgiveness seems to be beyond us, let us turn to Jesus for help. We ask for His love, strength and courage to persevere in our reconciliation efforts.

Reflective question:

Is there anyone Jesus invites me to be reconciled with?

Saturday, 15th March, 1st Week of Lent.

Deuteronomy 26:16-19, Matthew 5:43-48

Jesus said to his disciples: "You have learnt how it was said: You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven, for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike. For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Exercising Christian love

"I say this to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." From experience, we know that it is difficult to do this because our enemies are those who have hurt us deeply, brought harm to us and our loved ones or simply do not wish us well. Thus, the natural human reaction is to repay them in kind.

However, Jesus invites us to act and relate differently to our enemies. He reminds us that as God's children, we have been given the capacity to learn and imitate the ways of the Father who *"causes His sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and His rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike."* Jesus practised this in life: on the cross, He exercised His love by praying to the Father for His enemies. Similarly, we are called to exercise our Christian love to those who have offended us. We exercise our love by beginning to include them in our prayers. In doing so, may we resemble our loving Father more and more.

Reflective question:

Who is my enemy Jesus calls me to pray for?

Sunday, 16th March, 2nd Sunday of Lent.

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 9:28-36

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning. Suddenly there were two men there 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 kept awake 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 tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, 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.

Renewed encounter with God

In scripture, the image of a mountain usually symbolises a place of encounter with God. As Jesus journeyed closer to Jerusalem, the place of His passion, He consciously went up the mountain to pray and encounter God. *"As He prayed, the aspect of His face changed"* and in prayer, God re-affirmed His identity as the beloved Son. While prayer might not change Jesus' impending trial and tribulation, it gave Jesus a renewed inner affirmation that strengthened Him for the journey ahead.

In our life journey, we, too, need to pray. We need to hear God re-affirming us as His beloved children regardless of all our mistakes, falls and failures. God's love experienced anew has the power to change us from within. He makes us perceive hope in desperate situations. His love strengthens our resolve to love those we find difficult to be with. He deepens our faith to believe that all things are possible with Him. Today, Jesus beckons us to come with Him. Like the disciples, let Him take us to encounter God, who never gets tired of loving us.

Reflective question:

Do I realise the need to pray?

Monday, 17th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

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

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

Compassionate like the Father

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on the faithful. For He knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust" (Ps 103:13-14). The psalmist shows us that God's compassion is born out of a heart that looks at us and remembers who we are – limited human beings. In front of our fragility, the Father's heart is moved to provide mercy and understanding instead of condemning judgment. In today's gospel, Jesus calls us to emulate the Father. He teaches us to have a heart that looks at others kindly in their weaknesses as God does. We are called to remember that they, too, like us, are not perfect.

In prayer, we recall how God has been compassionate to us through His Word and His continued self-giving in the Eucharist. At other times, we experience God's compassion through someone who has been patient, kind, accepting, and forgiving toward us. Remembering the gift of compassion we have received in life, with gratitude, let us be moved to show the same compassionate love toward others we meet along life's journey.

Reflective question:

Concretely, how can I show compassion to others?

Tuesday, 18th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

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

Addressing the people and his disciples Jesus said, "The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must therefore do what they tell you and listen to what they say; but do not be guided by what they do: since they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy

burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will they lift a finger to move them? Not they! Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader phylacteries and longer tassels, like wanting to take the place of honour at banquets and the front seats in the synagogues, being greeted obsequiously in the market squares and having people call them Rabbi. You, however, must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor must you allow yourselves to be called teachers, for you have only one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted."

Called to serve

"The greatest among you must be your servant." In Jesus' eyes, greatness is not measured by intelligence, wealth, fame or power but rather by loving service to one another. Service, out of love for God and the other, is what we are called to put into practice in the community. That is how Jesus lived, at the service of everyone who needed Him, regardless of their status and background in life. He served by looking out for the other's good, encouraging the weary, speaking honest words courageously and defending the disadvantaged in society, even at the expense of His life.

All of us are called to be at the other's service, both the ones we like and dislike. As Martin Luther King, Jr said, *"Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."* Let us aspire to be great in service, personally and as a community, following Jesus, our Master-Servant.

Reflective question:

In life, do I aspire to serve like Jesus?

Wednesday, 19th March, St. Joseph.

2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16, Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22, Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was born Jesus who is called Christ. Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins." When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do.

Faith over fear

"Joseph, do not be afraid..." As with any other person, Joseph felt fear and uncertainty in the face of the unexpected turn of events. Yet, he did not let fear conquer the will to love. As the gospel tells us, he did not want to expose Mary to any unnecessary public shame. Moreover, his fear did not overshadow his faith in God. Joseph continued to be open to God's speaking freely in the silence of his heart.

In our silent prayer time, are we able, like Joseph, to give God space to speak to us? Can we hear Him calming our fears? Are we open to listening and seeing God's perspective of the situations we live in? God invites Joseph to take a leap of faith and trust Him. Through Joseph's act of faith, God came to be with His people in Jesus. As we celebrate today's feast, let us be inspired by the example of St. Joseph's life of faith. We pray that, through our lives, God's presence can be palpable in the world.

Reflective question:

Does my fear conquer or overshadow my will to love and my faith in God?

Thursday, 20th March, 2nd Week of Lent.

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

Jesus said to the Pharisees: "There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even came and licked his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his bosom. So he cried out, 'Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.' 'My son,' Abraham replied, 'remember that during your life good things came your way, just as bad things came the way of Lazarus. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to stop anyone, if he wanted to, crossing from our side to yours, and to stop any crossing from your side to ours.' The rich man replied, 'Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too.' 'They have Moses and the prophets,' said Abraham, 'let them listen to them.' 'Ah no, father Abraham,' said the rich man, 'but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent.' Then Abraham said to him, 'If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Recovering our sight to see

The gospel highlights the rich man's attitude to Lazarus' presence and plight, who was practically beside him each day. He was too engrossed in seeking life's enjoyment to notice Lazarus and what was happening to him. Progressively, he became blind to Lazarus' presence, and his heart was hardened with indifference to his plight. In today's society, we see the same blindness where the pursuit of gourmet food, exotic travels, luxury purchases, etc, made one oblivious and unconcerned with the other's fundamental well-being.

God's word today makes us to be aware of our inner blindness. Jesus calls us to recover our sight and notice the 'Lazarus' around us. For example, an isolated colleague at our workplaces, the lonely elderly

neighbour beside us, etc. Let us take time to see, stop, and spend a few moments acknowledging their presence in a friendly interaction. In doing so, may we discover with joy that the other is not an unknown stranger but a valuable sister or brother in God.

Reflective question:

Who is the 'Lazarus' God calls me to notice and interact with today?

Friday, 21st March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13, 17-28, Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people: "Listen to another parable. There was a man, a landowner, who planted vineyard; he fenced it around, dug a winepress in it and built a tower; then he leased it to tenants and went abroad. When vintage time drew near he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his servants, thrashed one, killed another and stoned a third. Next he sent some more servants, this time a larger number, and they dealt with them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.' So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They answered, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will deliver the produce to him when the season arrives." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone. This was the Lord's doing and it is wonderful to see'?" When they heard his parables, the chief priests and the scribes realised he was speaking about them, but though they would have liked to arrest him they were afraid of the crowds, who looked on him as a prophet.

Jesus, our keystone in life

"It was the stone rejected by the builders that became the keystone." In ancient times, the keystone was the most critical stone that held the whole structure together and prevented it from collapsing. Through the parable, Jesus presents Himself to the Jewish chief priests and elders as the keystone sent out of love by the Father to them. In the same way, Jesus offers Himself as the keystone of our lives. He does it by holding

us together in hope amid life's problems and crises that sometimes threaten to pull us apart. He assures us of His unchanging love. His love strengthens us to take another step forward in life's journey.

Yet, as we read in the gospel, the priests and elders refused Jesus' offer out of pride and fear of humiliation. Today, let us ask for the grace of humility to recognise our need in life for Jesus. May we experience having Jesus as our unshakeable keystone in life so that we can also say to others, *"This was the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see."*

Reflective question:

Do I take Jesus as my life's keystone?

Saturday, 22nd March, 2nd Week of Lent.

Micah 7:14-15, 18-20, Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. "This man," they said, "welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he spoke this parable to them: "A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, 'How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.' So he left the place and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening,

and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.' And they began to celebrate. Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. 'Your brother has come,' replied the servant, 'and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound.' He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, 'Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his women - you kill the calf we had been fattening.' The father said, 'My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.'

Our merciful God

In a world where making mistakes and being lost in life are often viewed as total failures, Jesus reveals God's perspective that thinks otherwise. Instead of scolding and punishing the younger son for his errors, the father responded unexpectedly with tender understanding and mercy. In this way, Jesus showed who God truly is: He is the Father who never forgets that we are, first and foremost, His beloved children.

Jesus invites us to believe and experience the merciful Father. Often, a small part of us may still doubt God's unending mercy because we feel that we have fallen too many times for Him to show mercy. Or, we wonder silently if God's mercy is really directed personally to us, not just to those around us. Just as the father, seeing the son from far off, was moved with love to run and embrace him with joy, in prayer, let us find that God, too, looks at us tenderly and is moved with love to embrace us with mercy.

Reflective question:

Do I believe in God's mercy for me?

Sunday, 23rd March, Third Sunday of Lent.

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15, 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12, Luke 13:1-9

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices." At this he said to them, "Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did." He told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, 'Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it one more year and give me time to dig around it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'"

God's true image

In today's gospel, we see the image of God in the people's minds as a calculative and punishing God who gives suffering as repayment for sins. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus called them to a conversion of their minds and presented God's true image through the parable. Like the gardener who continues to have hope in the fruitless fig tree, God, too, never gives up hope on His people, as stubborn as they might be. He continues to love and believe in their capacity to be transformed in mind and heart.

In our minds and hearts, what image of God do we have? Do we perceive Him as He truly is? Jesus renews our perception to see God as the loving gardener of our lives. Knowing our need to be loved, He nourishes us with His love. Daily, He walks by our side tirelessly and teaches us patiently how to place others' needs before us so that our lives bear fruit in love. In experiencing His care for us, may we discover with joy the ever-loving and hopeful God we have in our lives.

Reflective question:

What is the message of today's prayer for me?

Monday, 24th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

2 Kings 5:1-15, Luke 4:24-30

Jesus came to Nazara and spoke to the people in the synagogue: "I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. "There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any of these: he was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman." When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

Open to more

The gospel tells us how Jesus experienced not being accepted in His hometown. As the saying goes, *"familiarity breeds contempt."* The people of Nazara, who had seen Jesus in His growing years, could not see beyond their past familiarity with Him to get to know Him more. Jesus could not show them more of Him because of their fixed prejudices and assumptions of Him.

Through the attitude of Nazara's people, Jesus reminds us that the old prejudices and past assumptions we carry within may prevent us from seeing more in the other. We are called to recognise humbly that there is always more to discover in someone, and only God knows a person fully. With eagerness, Jesus invites us to be free to let God widen our narrow vision of the other person, especially those whom we think we know well, like our family members, close friends, etc. In doing so, our relationship with them grows deeper in knowledge, acceptance and love.

Reflective question:

What prejudices and assumptions prevent me from seeing more in the other?

Tuesday, 25th March, Annunciation of the Lord.

Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10, Hebrews 10:4-10, 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, so highly favoured! 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. Listen! You are to conceive 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 forever and his reign will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?" "The Holy Spirit will come upon you," the angel answered, "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. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God." "I am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary, "let what you have said be done to me." And the angel left her.

Walking with God in trust

"Rejoice...the Lord is with you." Just as these words were spoken to Mary in today's gospel, they are also addressed to us. Each day, God comes to remind us of the good news that we are not alone in life. He is present as our faithful companion in the journey. This is what we see in Mary's life. God was faithful to His word. He was with her at the beginning of the journey, and at each step along the way, through good and bad times. Likewise, God promises to be with us always.

Just as God walked with Mary, she, too, walked with God in trust. Her trust was made real in how Mary listened attentively to God's word and courageously carried it out. In prayer today, let us allow God to speak to us. When we understand God's word, we ask for the same courage as Mary to carry it out faithfully. In doing so, may our lives, like Mary's, become instruments that make real God's presence in the world.

Reflective question:

Do I trust God like Mary did?

Wednesday, 26th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9, Matthew 5:17-19

Jesus said to his disciples: "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven."

Learning to love

"The one who loves another has fulfilled the law...love is the fulfilment of the law" (Rom 13:8,10). As today's gospel tells us, Jesus is the One who brought to completion the Jewish law because He fulfilled the essence of what the law requires: love. Love is evident in the way He lived. For example, He did not judge anyone but related sincerely with everyone; He was attentive to people's presence and needs; He forgave untiringly the faults of His friends, etc. As such, His whole life becomes a valuable lesson of what it means to love.

Love is the lesson we are called to learn from Jesus. It is not just a concept to be understood intellectually or memorised and recited in words. It is a lesson to be practised in our lives. As we love, little by little, our lives show and teach others around us the same lesson of Christian love. Let us take the opportunity today to walk with Jesus in life and practice loving those we meet along the way.

Reflective question:

What concrete acts of love I am called to practice today?

Thursday, 27th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Jeremiah 7:23-28, Luke 11:14-23

Jesus was casting out a devil and it was dumb; but when the devil had gone out the dumb man spoke, and the people were amazed. But some of them said, "It is through Beelzebul, the prince of devils, that he casts out devils." Others asked him, as a test, for a sign from heaven; but,

knowing what they were thinking, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is heading for ruin, and a household divided against itself collapses. So too with Satan: if he is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? Since you assert that it is through Beelzebul that I cast out devils. Now if it is through Beelzebul that I cast out devils, through whom do your own experts cast them out? Let them be your judges, then. But if it is through the finger of God that I cast out devils, then know that the kingdom of God has overtaken you. So long as a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than he is attacks and defeats him, the stronger man takes away all the weapons he relied on and shares out his spoil. "He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters."

Union with Jesus

In today's gospel, Jesus reveals Himself as the stronghold of our lives to whom we can look for help, security and reliance. Amid life's unavoidable troubles like sickness, financial difficulties, failures or unforeseen hardships of our loved ones, it is easy to give in to worry and rely only on ourselves to handle them. Yet, in such times, He calls us not to be separated or divided from Him. We are invited to come even closer and be more united to Jesus.

"Listen to my voice...Follow right to the end the way that I mark out for you" (1st reading). Being united with Jesus starts from our listening to His voice in prayer. Gently, He reminds us that we are not alone, but together with Him. His presence brings calm and peace to us. Listening to Jesus, we are guided to follow Him to walk the ways of trust, patience, hope, kindness and endurance. By listening to His voice and following His ways, we grow to live in deeper union with Jesus in all life's circumstances.

Reflective question:

In what way is Jesus inviting me to be united with Him today?

Friday, 28th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Hosea 14:2-10, Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came up to Jesus and put a question to him, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "This is the first:

Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You must love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well spoken, Master; what you have said is true: that he is one and there is no other. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice." Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And after that no one dared to question him anymore.

Loving with all we are

In answering the scribe in the gospel, Jesus pointed out the call to love God *"with all"* that we are and the other as ourselves. This is the core of our Christian faith because this is what Jesus has done throughout His life. He loved God and the other unreservedly. We see this in how He dedicated time in prayer to stay connected with God so that He could know and do His will. Using His intelligence, He taught the people patiently. With His heart, He saw the ones suffering in life with compassion and empathy. Tirelessly, He spent His strength attending to those in need.

As His followers, Jesus invites us to use all we have, like time, creativity, willpower, sensitivity, intuition, energy, strength, etc, not for our selfish gains but for God and others. In prayer, let us be aware of the times when we have not loved with all our minds, hearts and strength. Today, may we love God and our neighbour, giving our all just as Jesus loved us.

Reflective question:

Have I given my all in loving God and others?

Saturday, 29th March, 3rd Week of Lent.

Hosea 5:15-6:6, Luke 18:9-14

Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else, "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood there and said this prayer to himself, 'I thank you, God, that I am not grasping, unjust, adulterous like the rest of mankind,

and particularly that I am not like this tax collector here. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes on all I get.' The tax collector stood some distance away, not daring even to raise his eyes to heaven; but he beat his breast and said, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' This man, I tell you, went home again at rights with God; the other did not. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the man who humbles himself will be exalted."

Humble need for God

"Humility is to walk in the truth" (St. Teresa of Avila). In today's parable, the tax collector recognised the truth of who he was before God. Without any list of virtues and law-abiding acts that the Pharisee had, he came to prayer, fully aware of his poverty and deep need for God's love and mercy. In asking God for what he needed, he encountered God in prayer. On the contrary, the Pharisee was too rich and arrogant within to see his need for God. In his self-sufficiency, he missed the opportunity to welcome God into his heart.

Are we humble when we come to prayer? Or are we blinded by the list of our achievements and talents to the point that we have no room for God in our hearts? Jesus continues to speak to us to cure us of our pride. *"Walking with God's people, walking with sinners, even walking with the proud: how much the Lord did in order to help the proud hearts of the Pharisees. ...Jesus always waits for us. This is the humility of God"* (Pope Francis). Today, let us walk humbly with God.

Reflective question:

Do I recognise my need for God?

Sunday, 30th March, Fourth Sunday of Lent.

Joshua 5:9-12, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. "This man," they said, "welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he spoke this parable to them: "A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me.' So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life

of debauchery. When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, 'How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants.' So he left the place and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.' And they began to celebrate. Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. 'Your brother has come,' replied the servant, 'and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound.' He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, 'Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his women - you kill the calf we had been fattening.' "The father said, 'My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.'"

God who comes

There are two moments in today's parable where the father took the step to go out of the house to meet both his sons where they were. He ran out to meet his younger son on the far road. He came out to plead with his elder son, who remained outside the house, refusing to go in. The father did not hesitate to step out towards his wayward sons to bring

them home. In this way, Jesus shows us that God does not hesitate to come to us. He is the God who comes. His love for us makes Him find us wherever we are in life to take us home.

In the silence of prayer, God never gets tired of coming to us. He encounters us where we are in life, be it in our confusion and failure like the younger son or in our stubbornness and anger like the elder son. Today, let us encounter the merciful God who goes out to find us and bring us home with Him.

Reflective question:

What strikes me from today's parable? Why?

Monday, 31st March, 4th Week of Lent.

Isaiah 65:17-21, John 4:43-54

Jesus left Samaria for Galilee. He himself had declared that there is no respect for a prophet in his own country, but on his arrival the Galileans received him well, having seen all that he had done at Jerusalem during the festival which they too had attended. Now there was a court official there whose son was ill at Capernaum and, hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judaea, he went and asked him to come and cure his son as he was at the point of death. Jesus said, "So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!" "Sir," answered the official, "come down before my child dies." "Go home," said Jesus, "your son will live." The man believed what Jesus had said and started on his way; and while he was still on the journey back his servants met him with the news that his boy was alive. He asked them when the boy had begun to recover. "The fever left him yesterday," they said, "at the seventh hour." The father realized that this was exactly the time when Jesus had said, "Your son will live"; and he and all his household believed. This was the second sign given by Jesus, on his return from Judaea to Galilee.

Believing in Jesus

In today's gospel, we see the contrast between the lack of faith that Jesus pointed out in the people of his hometown and the court official's act of faith in Jesus. He came to Jesus not with the attitude of testing Him but with a father's love and concern for his child. The official humbly looked to Jesus for his child's needs and put his trust completely in Jesus' word.

In life, we also carry in our hearts the various needs of the people around us, especially those of our loved ones. Like the official's child who was at the point of death, there are times when we see how great and urgent the needs of others are. In such moments, let us not lose hope. Instead, we come and bring the needs of those we care for to Jesus in prayer. Following the official's example, let us believe in Jesus and continue to walk life with faith in life. Seeing our trust in Jesus, may others come to believe in Him also.

Reflective question:

Whose needs am I called to bring to Jesus in faith?



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