

Thursday, 1st March

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".'

Love the Poor

'Where do I find hope? In the poor Jesus, Jesus who made himself poor for us. And you spoke of poverty. Poverty calls us to sow hope. This seems a bit difficult to understand. I remember Fr. Arrupe [Father General of the Jesuits from 1965-1983] wrote a letter to the Society's Centers for Social Research. At the end he said to us: 'Look, you can't speak of poverty without having experience with the poor.' You can't speak of poverty in the abstract: that doesn't exist. Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures. Go forward, look there upon the flesh of Jesus. But don't let well-being rob you of hope, that spirit of well-being that, in the end, leads you to becoming a nothing in life. Young persons should bet on their high ideals, that's my advice. But where do I find hope? In the flesh of Jesus who suffers and in true poverty. There is a connection between the two.' (Pope Francis)

Human persons, especially the poor, are often treated as products to be used, ignored and discarded. Today, it is a real challenge for many of us to embrace the call to love the poor. There are many 'Lazaruses' in our midst, and so let us live with more courage and generosity in this time of Lent.

Friday, 2nd March

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 a vineyard; he fenced it round, 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? I tell you, then, that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.' 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.

Tenants in God's Vineyard

God is the owner of the vineyard and He prepares everything so that the tenants can be productive in their labours. We are the tenants in God's vineyard who enjoy the security of His protection as well as the gifts and talents he has blessed us with to work in the vineyard.

Yet, when God sends His messengers who are the people around us for a share of the fruits of our gifts: our skills, our knowledge, our company, our forgiveness, etc , what do we do to His messengers? How do we respond to

these pleas for kindness, for patience, for help, for understanding, comfort, encouragement and forgiveness? Do we “kill” God’s messengers with our rejection? Or do we keep them waiting forever because we have no time in our busy schedule for people who do not “add value” to our quality of life? Or do we stone them with our anger, our pride and our unforgiveness?

Today, let us not be deluded and think that we have given God his fair share just through the fulfilment of church obligations. In order for our lives to produce proper fruits, we need to listen to God humbly in prayer and let Him show us the people he sends to our lives whom we need to love generously.

Saturday, 3rd March

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

...Jesus 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."

The Father's Love

In this time of prayer, let each son in the parable speak to us. The younger son wants independence from his father and to live a life of indulgence. The elder son, on the other hand, did not rebel against the father and was faultless in his external behaviours. However, his heart was also far from the father. He was simply slaving away for the father.

God our Father cares for us. He is always waiting eagerly for us to come home – from the faraway places where we have wandered and from the fields of labour that burden us. He wants us to claim our 'belovedness' and live at home with Him.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) How is my relationship with God the Father? Do I identify myself with the younger son or elder son?
- 2) What are the areas in my life where I need to be loved by God again?

Sunday, 4th March, Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 20:1-17, 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, John 2:13-25

Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and in the Temple he found people selling cattle and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers sitting at their counters there. Making a whip out of some cord, he drove them all out of the Temple, cattle and sheep as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said to the pigeon-sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market'. Then his disciples remembered the words of scripture: Zeal for your house will devour me. The Jews intervened and said, 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' Jesus answered,

'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up'. The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this sanctuary: are you going to raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the sanctuary that was his body, and when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the words he had said. During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he gave, but Jesus knew them all and did not trust himself to them; he never needed evidence about any man; he could tell what a man had in him.

A sacred place where God dwells

St Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *'Don't you realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit of God was living among you?' (1 Corinthians 3:16)* This is the temple that God desires to dwell in. Each one of us is called to be a House of Prayer, a place where God lives, moves and exists in us.

Yet, we have the freedom to decide how we want our temple to be. Is it crowded with so many useless idols that God has no longer a space in it? Is God the one directing us in our options and way of life? Are we instead being enticed by the empty promises of the idols of greed, lust, power, etc?

As we enter deeper into the season of Lent, Jesus cries out to us again and again. *'Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market. I want to give you the real happiness that you have been created for.'*

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who is the one directing my daily options and the way I live my life?
- 2) Is my life a clear sign of God's presence? Why? How?

Monday, 5th March

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 one 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.

Jesus, I welcome you!

Indeed, Jesus' personal experience at Nazareth shows clearly that a prophet is not welcomed in his own hometown. Why? Most likely the people watched him grow, they knew his parents, etc. Thus, they could not open themselves to accept His words and acknowledge Him as a prophet.

We can be like the people of Nazareth too. We can become too familiar with Jesus and His words that nothing excites us anymore.

'Today Jesus might, at first glance, appear to be boring and not so exciting, but in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and charity, all the richness of love, faith and hope.' (Pope Francis)

We allow over-familiarity to cloud our eyes to see Jesus with renewed faith, and harden our hearts to be surprised by Him. Today, let us ask for more faith to welcome Jesus into our lives.

Jesus, I welcome you! Enter into my life and speak to me so that I can be enriched by you. Help me not to close myself from your presence. Give me the faith to acknowledge you now and to allow you into my life.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Do I take Jesus and His friendship for granted?
- 2) In this time of Lent, how can I choose to welcome Jesus more into my life?

Tuesday, 6th March

Daniel 3:25, 34-43, Matthew 18:21-35

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; but 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. "Give me time" he said "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. "Pay what you owe me" he said. His fellow servant fell at his feet and implored him, saying, "Give me time 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 him. "You wicked servant," he said "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.'

A Heart that Forgives

Forgiveness has no limits! This is Jesus' message to us today. We are called to forgive again and again even though someone wrongs us repeatedly. Why? This is because God forgives us again and again when we ourselves go away from Him repeatedly by our pride, by our choice to remain by ourselves, by our lack of love, etc.

Sometimes, we need to be the one taking the initiative to apologise when we are in the wrong. This is because our main priority is always to work towards reconciliation.

"I am sorry" and "I forgive" are two very essential words in order to heal wounds in relationships. Let us have concrete people in our prayer today whom we need to humbly work for reconciliation.

Jesus, give me humility to recognise the importance of asking for forgiveness and to forgive. Give me enough love so that I can work towards building up relationships of love.

Wednesday, 7th March, Ss. Perpetua and Felicity
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.'

The greatest commandment of love

Jesus has come, not to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to complete them by His Law of Love. Right before He embraced His death, Jesus gave a new commandment of loving one another as He has loved.

'And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.' (John 13: 34)

This Law of Love is embodied in Jesus' very own life. Look at the way He loved, even when His love was not understood and was rejected. He continued all the way to the cross, giving Himself to all.

'Only the simple appeal of the commandment of love - constant, humble and unpretentious, free of vanity but firm in its conviction and dedication to others - can save us.' (Pope Francis)

Do we really want to follow Jesus? If our answer is a firm 'Yes', then we should be daring to imitate the way He loves! Following Jesus' commandment of love leads us to live our life with greater meaning and greater purpose.

It goes against our nature to love like Jesus. Thus, we need to ask Jesus for the courage to take up His simple appeal of the commandment of love, and to take small steps to love with constancy, humility, unpretentiousness. Let us strive today to dedicate ourselves once more at the service of others.

Question for reflection:

1) What is stopping me from practising this law of love?

Thursday, 8th March, St. John of God
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.'

Think leniently of others

We might harbour within our hearts demons that prevent us from living a fulfilled and meaningful life. Today, Jesus longs to heal us and drive out the demons of selfishness, unforgiveness, pride, indifference, past hurts, etc, so that we can truly experience deep peace that nothing and nobody can separate us from God's unconditional and merciful love. In this time of prayer, let us allow Jesus to heal us and guide us to start living a life of love.

In the passage, there were some people who saw the miracle but they looked at Jesus with their hearts full of negative thoughts. They judged and it was hard for them to see goodness in His actions and words. This may happen to us, when we look at a person with preconceived ideas and judgements. Thus, no matter what the person does, it is never good enough.

'And it is the Lord, it is Jesus, who is my judge. Therefore, I will try always to think leniently of others, that He may judge me leniently, or rather not at all, since He says: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged."' (St. Terese of Lisieux)

Today, Jesus invites us to be lenient with the way we look at others, and to see the goodness in others more than their weaknesses.

Lord, help me to draw closer to you today!

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Why do I feel the need always to play the judge?
- 2) What is Jesus' personal invitation to me today?

Friday, 9th March, St. Frances of Rome

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.

Love God, Love Others

Our Christian commandment can be summed up in just one word: LOVE. Our whole life is a journey of loving God more and of growing in our awareness of who our neighbours are and to love them as children of God.

Who are our neighbours? The person who lives next door? Our family members? Our relatives? Friends? Colleagues? Parishioners? Community members? Our neighbours are those whom we live with, relate to, socialise with and work with. Each person we encounter becomes a neighbour when we recognise them as children of God.

'Though we do not have our Lord with us in bodily presence, we have our neighbour, who, for the ends of love and loving service, is as good as our Lord himself. How can I love you more, Lord? I know that I cannot separate you

from the people around me. To love the people around me is to be patient, understanding, generous and kind to them. Lord, I want to love you...I want to love them.' (St Teresa of Avila)

In this time of Lent, let us allow ourselves first to be loved by God, and then to take small steps to love God back by showing love to His people.

Question for reflection:

1) How can I love God more today?

Saturday, 10th March

Hosea 6:1-6, 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.'

God looks at the heart

'The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' (1 Samuel 16:7)

What is God looking for? God wants us to have hearts that belong to Him, totally and completely.

In today's passage, the Pharisee loudly announced all his magnificent deeds. God was unhappy with the Pharisee's prayer. In contrast, the tax-collector acknowledged his sins and genuinely sought God's mercy. God was touched by this sinner's simplicity of faith.

We need not put up a fake appearance with God to create good impressions with Him. As we are, we come before God with humility, honesty and trust.

Jesus, in this time of prayer, invites us to become men and women after God's heart. Let us come before God today with a deep desire to give our hearts to Him - totally and completely.

Question for reflection:

1) Which character do I identify myself with - the tax collector or the Pharisee? Why?

Sunday, 11th March, Fourth Sunday of Lent

2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23, Ephesians 2:4-10, John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus: 'The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved. No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son. On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God.'

Be my light, Jesus!

'The man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God'

Jesus is the Light of the world who gently invites us to enter into His light of truth. There are people who reject the light because they fear the light as it would reveal all what they have really done and all what they have failed to do.

Yet, the truth would be known. On the other hand, those who are faithful in doing deeds of love have nothing to hide because God is their orientation.

'We stumble and fall constantly even when we are most enlightened. But

when we are in true spiritual darkness, we do not even know that we have fallen.’ (Thomas Merton)

Let Jesus be the light that shines on us. We might stumble and fall along the way but we know that we will rise and continue the journey towards God. May we never be in a darkness that is so dark that we do not even know we have wandered far from the Light.

Jesus, as we enter deeper into this journey of Lent, be my Light. Shine on me so that I may constantly be in the truth and live my life reflecting your love and peace.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Am I still trapped in the darkness of my sins and weaknesses?
- 2) How can I step out into the light so that all that I do and say will reflect Christ’s presence in my life?

Monday, 12th March

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. He went again to Cana in Galilee, where he had changed the water into wine. 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 realised 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.

Passion for hope

‘So you will not believe unless you see signs and portents!’

The official apparently received harsh words from Jesus when he requested

Jesus to heal his sick son. However, those words were meant for those around Jesus who needed to see signs and wonders before they could take the leap of faith.

But the fact that the official went to Jesus and made this request shows that he had strong faith in Jesus. He saw Jesus as a prophet from God and he held onto the hope that this prophet from God would not let him down. Truly, the official's hope in Jesus was not in vain. His son was healed.

In moments of darkness when we feel as though the weight of our sorrows and sadness overwhelm us, let us always remember that hope will never let us down. Our hope has a name. Our hope is Jesus.

'Jesus, the hope, renews everything. It's a constant miracle. He has not only done miracles of healings: those were only signs, signals of what He's now doing in the Church. The miracle of making everything new: what he does in my life, in your life, in our life. He rebuilds. And what He builds again is precisely the reason of our hope. Christ is the one who renews every wonderful thing of the Creation, He's the reason of our hope. And this hope does not delude because He is faithful. He can't renounce Himself. This is the virtue of hope.' (Pope Francis)

Question for reflection:

1) Is Jesus the reason for my hope? Why?

Tuesday, 13th March

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12, John 5:1-16

There was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now at the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem there is a building, called Bethzatha in Hebrew, consisting of five porticos; and under these were crowds of sick people - blind, lame, paralysed - waiting for the water to move; for at intervals the angel of the Lord came down into the pool, and the water was disturbed, and the first person to enter the water after this disturbance was cured of any ailment he suffered from. One man there had an illness which had lasted thirty-eight years, and when Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had been in this condition for a long time, he said, 'Do you want to be well again?' 'Sir,' replied the sick man 'I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed; and while I am still on the way, someone else gets there before me.' Jesus said, 'Get up, pick up your sleeping-mat and walk'. The man was

cured at once, and he picked up his mat and walked away. Now that day happened to be the Sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who had been cured, 'It is the Sabbath; you are not allowed to carry your sleeping-mat'. He replied, 'But the man who cured me told me, "Pick up your mat and walk"'. They asked, 'Who is the man who said to you, "Pick up your mat and walk"?' The man had no idea who it was, since Jesus had disappeared into the crowd that filled the place. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said, 'Now you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you'. The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had cured him. It was because he did things like this on the Sabbath that the Jews began to persecute Jesus.

I want to be well again, Lord!

What would we say if Jesus were to come and ask us, *'Do you want to be well again from your sickness, your addiction, your painful memories?'*

Sometimes, we become accustomed to our 'disabilities' that we prefer the pain, hurts, habits we have been practising rather than attempt to be well again. We become attached to our present realities and become comfortable with our inertia.

'To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.' (Cardinal Newman)

Today, Jesus extends his hand out to us, and invites us for a change - an internal change from everything that cripples us and prevents us from living life fully. He wants to heal us and make us well again, free again, happy again, hopeful again, walking joyfully through life again.

In this time of Lent, let us desire for an internal change so that we can be truly free to move forward and live our lives fully.

Wednesday, 14th March

Isaiah 49:8-15, John 5:17-30

Jesus said to the Jews: 'My Father goes on working, and so do I'. But that only made the Jews even more intent on killing him, because, not content with breaking the Sabbath, he spoke of God as his own Father, and so made himself God's equal. To this accusation Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the

Father doing: and whatever the Father does the Son does too. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself, and he will show him even greater things than these, works that will astonish you. Thus, as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to anyone he chooses; for the Father judges no one; he has entrusted all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son as they honour the Father.

Whoever refuses honour to the Son refuses honour to the Father who sent him. I tell you most solemnly, whoever listens to my words, and believes in the one who sent me, has eternal life; without being brought to judgement he has passed from death to life. I tell you most solemnly, the hour will come - in fact it is here already - when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and all who hear it will live. For the Father, who is the source of life, has made the Son the source of life; and, because he is the Son of Man, has appointed him supreme judge. Do not be surprised at this, for the hour is coming when the dead will leave their graves at the sound of his voice: those who did good will rise again to life; and those who did evil, to condemnation. I can do nothing by myself; I can only judge as I am told to judge, and my judging is just, because my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

I do what I see the Father doing

Jesus the Son is a mirror-image of God the Father. He loved the way the Father loves. He cared for the lowly ones in society the way the Father cares for them. He reached out to the poor and the weak, He forgave, He gave his time, He taught, He healed. Everything Jesus did was to mirror the heart of God the Father.

In the world today, competitive individualism undermines the lives of many people. They compete against each other in terms of business, grades, popularity, etc.

How beautiful it is if we ourselves can say the same words of Jesus- *'I can do nothing by myself, I can do only what I see the Father doing.'* As children of God the Father, we are called to do what God is doing, i.e. constantly loving. Love is our main task: Love that breaks down competitive individualism, Love that creates unity and solidarity, Love that liberates and not burdens.

God loves, and so we too love.

Thursday, 15th March

Exodus 32:7-14, John 5:31-47

Jesus said to the Jews: 'Were I to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid; but there is another witness who can speak on my behalf, and I know that his testimony is valid. You sent messengers to John, and he gave his testimony to the truth: not that I depend on human testimony; no, it is for your salvation that I speak of this. John was a lamp alight and shining and for a time you were content to enjoy the light that he gave. But my testimony is greater than John's: the works my Father has given me to carry out, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me. Besides, the Father who sent me bears witness to me himself. You have never heard his voice, you have never seen his shape, and his word finds no home in you because you do not believe in the one he has sent.

'You study the scriptures, believing that in them you have eternal life; now these same scriptures testify to me, and yet you refuse to come to me for life! As for human approval, this means nothing to me. Besides, I know you too well: you have no love of God in you. I have come in the name of my Father and you refuse to accept me; if someone else comes in his own name you will accept him. How can you believe, since you look to one another for approval and are not concerned with the approval that comes from the one God? Do not imagine that I am going to accuse you before the Father: you place your hopes on Moses, and Moses will be your accuser. If you really believed him you would believe me too, since it was I that he was writing about; but if you refuse to believe what he wrote, how can you believe what I say?'

Pleasing God alone

Jesus confronted the religious leaders with the truth that they had no love for God in their hearts because they sought human approval more than God's. Today, let us ask ourselves: Do we too barter our time, energy and personal opinions just to get others' approval? Will we do anything just to please others and get their affirmations? What about God's approval? Is that high on our list?

'As for human approval, this means nothing to me.'

Human flattery and praise mean nothing to Jesus. This is because Jesus was rooted securely in God's unconditional love. Thus, His only purpose for His words and deeds was solely to bring glory to the One whom He loved, i.e. God.

During this time of Lent, let us stay close to Jesus and learn from Him how to look for God's approval, so that our words and deeds will truly bring glory to Him.

Friday, 16th March

Wisdom 2:1,12-22, John 7:1-2,10,25-30

Jesus stayed in Galilee; he could not stay in Judaea, because the Jews were out to kill him. As the Jewish feast of Tabernacles drew near, after his brothers had left for the festival, Jesus went up as well, but quite privately, without drawing attention to himself. Meanwhile some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, 'Isn't this the man they want to kill? And here he is, speaking freely, and they have nothing to say to him! Can it be true the authorities have made up their minds that he is the Christ? Yet we all know where he comes from, but when the Christ appears no one will know where he comes from. Then, as Jesus taught in the Temple, he cried out: 'Yes, you know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of myself: no, there is one who sent me and I really come from him, and you do not know him, but I know him because I have come from him and it was he who sent me.' They would have arrested him then, but because his time had not yet come no one laid a hand on him.

I have come from God and it was He who sent me

'Yes, you know me and you know where I came from. Yet I have not come of myself: no, there is one who sent me and I really come from him, and you do not know him, but I know him because I have come from him and it was he who sent me.'

In this time of prayer, let us reflect on these words of Jesus. What does He mean? How does it challenge me to live my life today?

Out of Love, God sends Jesus, his only Son, into the world so that all will come to believe in Him and receive eternal life, fullness of Life. Jesus, the Son, lived his whole life spreading the Good News of His Father's love. He came to reveal the True face of God - the face of Love.

The life and message of Jesus caused divisions among the people. There were many people who turned against Him because they could not accept

His message. Yet, there were others who were attracted to Jesus and followed Him. Where do I stand - against Jesus or for Jesus?

Like Jesus, we have come from God and we are sent by Him to the world to be His messengers of love. We are here to share the message of peace, love, forgiveness. We have been sent to work for fraternal love and justice in the families, offices, parishes, society.

If we truly stand for Christ, then we will be committed to stand up for His message of love.

Question for reflection:

1) What holds me back from living my life for Christ?

**Saturday, 17th March, St. Patrick
Jeremiah 11:18-20, John 7: 40-52**

Several people who had been listening to Jesus said, 'Surely he must be the prophet', and some said, 'He is the Christ', but others said, 'Would the Christ be from Galilee? Does not scripture say that the Christ must be descended from David and come from the town of Bethlehem?' So the people could not agree about him. Some would have liked to arrest him, but no one actually laid hands on him. The police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought him?'

The police replied, 'There has never been anybody who has spoken like him'. 'So' the Pharisees answered 'you have been led astray as well? Have any of the authorities believed in him? Any of the Pharisees? This rabble knows nothing about the Law - they are damned.' One of them, Nicodemus - the same man who had come to Jesus earlier - said to them, 'But surely the Law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?' To this they answered, 'Are you a Galilean too? Go into the matter, and see for yourself: prophets do not come out of Galilee.'

Proud to be part of Jesus' rabble

'This rabble knows nothing about the Law - they are damned.' - These are the words of the Pharisees who saw Jesus' disciples as rabble. They were the ones who were attracted by Jesus and His teachings. They did not follow the Law that burdened them with fear, but they put their trust in God the Father

whose eternal love gave them inner joy and peace.

The Pharisees did not believe in Jesus and so, they did not know this God of life and love that Jesus revealed through His deeds and words. They were not free from their self-righteousness, and thus, they judged and condemned others.

Today, let us ask ourselves: Am I happy to be part of this rabble? What prevents me from letting my life be governed by God's love? Does my faith place me at the service of life, of Love? Or am I, like the Pharisees, ready to strike and kill others through my words and actions?

'Smile at each other, smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other - it doesn't matter who it is - and that will help you to grow in greater love for each other.' (Mother Teresa)

Being part of this 'rabble' is to follow the footsteps of love and this starts with simple acts of love. Let us live the Law of Love that Jesus has written in our hearts!

Sunday, 18th March, Fifth Sunday of Lent
Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 5:7-9, John 12:20-30

Among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. These approached Philip, who came from Bethsaida in Galilee, and put this request to him, 'Sir, we should like to see Jesus'. Philip went to tell Andrew, and Andrew and Philip together went to tell Jesus. Jesus replied to them: 'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you, most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground 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 the eternal life. If a man serves me, he must follow me, wherever I am, my servant will be there too. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him. Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it was for this very reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name!' A voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' People standing by, who heard this, said it was a clap of thunder; others said, 'It was an angel speaking to him'. Jesus answered, 'It was not for my sake that this voice came, but for yours. 'Now sentence is being passed on this world; now the prince of this world is to be overthrown. And when I am lifted up from the

earth, I shall draw all men to myself.' By these words he indicated the kind of death he would die.

The path of the grain of wheat

There were some Greeks who wanted to see Jesus, and so they approached Philip and stated their request. Have you ever wondered why Jesus, instead of answering their request in a simple 'Yes' or 'No', went on to talk about the parable of the grain of wheat?

Jesus knew that His end was approaching. He took every opportunity to teach His disciples, and strengthened their following.

For Jesus it was not enough for people to just 'see' Him and admire Him from afar. He wanted those who believe in Him to take the path of the grain of wheat.

This is the task for every Christian who desires to follow Jesus. We choose daily to fall to the ground and die to ourselves in order to gain more of Christ. It is only from dying to our selfishness and pride that we can bear the fruit of peace, love, joy, patience, hope, forgiveness and faithfulness. It is only when we fall to the ground and die to ourselves that we can leave behind footsteps that will lead others to Christ.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Which part of me must die so that I can follow Jesus with more authenticity?
- 2) How can I help others in their following of Jesus?

Monday, 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. This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to 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.’ Now all this took place to fulfil the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means ‘God-is-with-us’. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.

An unshakeable trust

What does today’s Feast of St Joseph have to do with our journey this Lent?

St. Joseph speaks to us about having an unshakeable trust in God. Many of us find it easy to say *‘I trust in the Lord’* and we find it even easier to tell someone in need, *‘You have to trust in God...’*

As for St Joseph, he put this trust into practice. His life theme was to trust God in every event, every hardship, every prayer, every relationship, every joy and suffering.

Many times, we tend to trust in anyone and anything other than God. We are inclined to trust our own judgement, the opinions of a person, the bus-driver, the advice of a doctor, etc. No doubt we believe in God but to trust Him is a completely different issue altogether.

Yet, today we are called to look at St Joseph - he believed and trusted in God and so he did as he understood what God wanted him to do.

Truly, this is a lifelong challenge. With each new relationship, each new failure, each new challenge, each new illness, each new crisis, we are called again to trust in God. Little by little, we can see God’s hand, gently and patiently, weaving the tapestry of our life - all the moments of pains and joys, failures and successes - all are intricately woven into a masterpiece by God.

Lent is a journey we make towards God. St Joseph has something to teach us on how to make this journey truly with God. Let us ask Him to teach us how to practice trust in our daily life, so that we can make trust our life theme.

Tuesday, 20th March

Numbers 21:4-9, John 8:21-30

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'I am going away; you will look for me and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.' The Jews said to one another, 'Will he kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, "Where I am going, you cannot come"?' Jesus went on: 'You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I have told you already: You will die in your sins. Yes, if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.' So they said to him, 'Who are you?' Jesus answered: 'What I have told you from the outset. About you I have much to say and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is truthful, and what I have learnt from him I declare to the world.' They failed to understand that he was talking to them about the Father. So Jesus said: 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of myself: what the Father has taught me is what I preach; he who sent me is with me, and has not left me to myself, for I always do what pleases him'. As he was saying this, many came to believe in him.

I have come from God and am going to God

Jesus told the Pharisees that he was going away. The Pharisees, however, did not understand what He meant. In fact, Jesus was talking about His return to God His Father. He told Mary Magdala, *'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'* (John 20: 17) Jesus told the Pharisees that they could not go to where he was going, i.e. to His Father, because they had closed their hearts to him and refused to believe in him.

Our life is also a journey back to God the Father, and we are called to walk the same path that Jesus has left for us. With Jesus opening the way to the Father, we walk without tying ourselves to any obstacles of greed, worldly ambitions, accumulation of wealth, etc. As Jesus' disciples, we choose to walk through this life by carrying a baggage full of trust and faith in God alone. We journey through life with the daily desire to do what pleases God.

Like Jesus, God will never leave us alone by ourselves, but He will always stay close to us and walk with us in our journey.

As we get closer to Holy Week, let us fix our eyes on Jesus!

Question for reflection:

1) What is Jesus telling me as I reflect on His Word today?

Wednesday, 21st March

Daniel 3:14-20,91-92,95, John 8:31-42

To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said: 'If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free'. They answered, 'We are descended from Abraham and we have never been the slaves of anyone; what do you mean, "You will be made free"?' Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, everyone who commits sin is a slave. Now the slave's place in the house is not assured, but the son's place is assured. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descended from Abraham; but in spite of that you want to kill me because nothing I say has penetrated into you. What I; for my part, speak of is what I have seen with my Father; but you, you put into action the lessons learnt from your father.' They repeated, 'Our father is Abraham'. Jesus said to them: 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do as Abraham did. As it is, you want to kill me when I tell you the truth as I have learnt it from God; that is not what Abraham did. What you are doing is what your father does.' 'We were not born of prostitution,' they went on 'we have one father: God.' Jesus answered: 'If God were your father, you would love me, since I have come here from God; yes, I have come from him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent, and by him.'

God our Father

"I have come from him; not that I came because I chose, no, I was sent, and by him."

Jesus knew that He came from God the Father, and was sent by Him to be the bearer of Good News. At the core of Jesus' message was that God is Father who cared for His people. He, through His words and actions, revealed the merciful face of God who came to forgive sins, dispel suffering and restore life. This God of life is for all, and cannot be monopolized by a pious elite or by a priestly class controlling the religion.

In today's Gospel, Jesus challenged the Jews to step out from their preconceived ideas about God, and to come to know who God truly was for them. They were meant to live their lives freely as children secure in the Father's love. They are not meant to be slaves living in sin, but children living in liberty.

Jesus, the Son, lived His whole life in true freedom, rooted in love. Everything

He did was marked by a genuine and pure trust in His Father. This trust led Him to seek to do only God's will, and lived His life as the joy of His Father.

In this time of prayer, let us listen to Jesus the Son and the Good News that He brings to us. Like Jesus, we too have come from God. However, do we truly know and love God? Do we find security in this reality that we have come from God? Do we live as God's children, i.e. in freedom and unreserved trust in God?

Let us spend this time to renew once more our relationship with God our Father.

Thursday, 22nd March

Genesis 17:3-9, John 8:51-59

Jesus said to the Jew: 'I tell you most solemnly, whoever keeps my word will never see death.' The Jews said, 'Now we know for certain that you are possessed. Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead, and yet you say, "Whoever keeps my word will never know the taste of death". Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? The prophets are dead too. Who are you claiming to be?' Jesus answered:

'If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all; my glory is conferred by the Father, by the one of whom you say, "He is our God" although you do not know him. But I know him, and if I were to say: I do not know him, I should be a liar, as you are liars yourselves. But I do know him, and I faithfully keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to think that he would see my Day; he saw it and was glad.' The Jews then said, 'You are not fifty yet, and you have seen Abraham!'

Jesus replied: 'I tell you most solemnly, before Abraham ever was, I Am'. At this they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself and left the Temple.

Through the eyes of the great I AM

What do you see when you look at the mirror? Too ugly? Too skinny? Too fat? Too old and wrinkled?

Many times, we feel insecure about ourselves and so we seek others to glorify us by telling us how good we look, how magnificent we are. We work hard to achieve awards and prizes. We chase for titles and positions.

'If I were to seek my own glory that would be no glory at all; my glory is conferred by the Father...'

If we were to seek our own glory that glory would be no glory at all! It does not matter what we say about ourselves, or what other people say about us. All these opinions of others come and go. What lasts forever is God's opinion about us.

Thus, the key question to ask is: When God looks at you, how does He see you?

God, the great I AM, sees each one of us as His masterpiece, His work of art in whom He is pleased. We are God's beloved, here, now and forever. He glorifies us when we live our lives loving Him alone and seeking to please Him in all our deeds and words.

Let us look at ourselves through the eyes of the great I AM, and listen to Him telling us, *'You are my beloved child. I am happy with you.'* From Him, we find ourselves secure and at peace.

Friday, 23rd March

Jeremiah 20:10-13, John 10:31-42

The Jews fetched stones to stone him, so Jesus said to them, 'I have done many good works for you to see, works from my Father; for which of these are you stoning me?' The Jews answered him, 'We are not stoning you for doing a good work but for blasphemy: you are only a man and you claim to be God.' Jesus answered: 'Is it not written in your Law: I said, you are gods? So the Law uses the word gods of those to whom the word of God was addressed, and scripture cannot be rejected. Yet you say to someone the Father has consecrated and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming", because he says, "I am the son of God". If I am not doing my Father's work, there is no need to believe me; but if I am doing it, then even if you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do; then you will know for sure that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.' They wanted to arrest him then, but he eluded them. He went back again to the far side of the Jordan to stay in the district where John had once been baptising. Many people who came to him there said, 'John gave no signs, but all he said about this man was true'; and many of them believed in him.

I believe!

The opponents of Jesus were ready with stones to kill him. Yet, He stood calmly and tried to win them with His words. Though Jesus did not directly tell them that He is the Messiah, He allowed His words and works to reveal who He is. The problem with the opponents was that they were too blinded with their own preconceived ideas and ways that they could not open their hearts to faith. They saw Jesus as a carpenter, an ordinary person, and thus, they could not accept Him as their long-awaited Messiah.

Jesus is the Light of the World. We have the choice to be in the Light or to remain in our darkness.

'If you refuse to believe in me, at least believe in the work I do.'

No matter what Jesus did, the opponents in Jerusalem chose to remain in the dark. They refused to see and believe. The simple people across Jordan, however, saw the works of Jesus and many believed in him.

What is our stand today? Do we believe?

There are many people today who still do not believe in God. How can we show them, by words and deeds, that God is real and that He is worthy of their love?

Saturday, 24th March

Ezekiel 37:21-28, John 11:45-56

Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him, but some of them went to tell the Pharisees what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting. 'Here is this man working all these signs' they said 'and what action are we taking? If we let him go on in this way everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy the Holy Place and our nation.' One of them, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said, 'You don't seem to have grasped the situation at all; you fail to see that it is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to be destroyed'. He did not speak in his own person, it was as high priest that he made this prophecy that Jesus was to die for the nation - and not for the nation only, but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God. From that day they were determined to kill him. So Jesus no

longer went about openly among the Jews, but left the district for a town called Ephraim, in the country bordering on the desert, and stayed there with his disciples. The Jewish Passover drew near, and many of the country people who had gone up to Jerusalem to purify themselves looked out for Jesus, saying to one another as they stood about in the Temple, 'What do you think? Will he come to the festival or not?'

Open your minds and hearts

Intolerance and fundamentalism between individuals and groups are getting more frequent in our society. The increasing diversity makes us look at each other with fear and discrimination, rather than acceptance and openness.

In today's passage, some Jewish people and their leaders, out of intolerance and fundamentalism, schemed to kill Jesus who stuck out like a sore thumb with His different beliefs and ideas. Narrow-mindedness made them disregard Jesus as a fellow human being who deserved their respect.

'...that it is better for one man to die for the people'

These words of Caiaphas sealed Jesus' fate.

What about us? Do we dare to live the value of respect and love beyond all differences? Do we, out of intolerance, try to 'kill' those with different skin, ideals, beliefs, etc, by our indifferent attitudes and bigotry?

'Let us break our heart open and believe in the Gospel, not in the fake Gospel, not in the light Gospel, not in the watershed Gospel, but in the Gospel of truth.' (Pope Francis)

As Christians, we are called to open and believe in the Gospel of truth that pushes us out to look beyond differences and respect each person, whatever their skin colour, practices, ideas, etc, as a child of God.

Today, let us break our heart open and stand for life, not death!

Sunday, 25th March, Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

Mark 11:1-10, Isaiah 50:4-7, Philipians 2:6-11, Mark 14:1-15:47

When they were approaching Jerusalem, in sight of Bethphage and Bethany, close by the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go off to the village facing you, and as soon as you enter it you will find a

tethered colt that no one has yet ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone says to you, "What are you doing?" say, "The Master needs it and will send it back here directly".' They went off and found a colt tethered near a door in the open street. As they untied it, some men standing there said, 'What are you doing, untying that colt?' They gave the answer Jesus had told them, and the men let them go. Then they took the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on its back, and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, others greenery which they had cut in the fields. And those who went in front and those who followed were all shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heavens!' He entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked all round him, but as it was now late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Our Humble King

Jesus did not enter Jerusalem on a horse that symbolises power and strength. Instead, He entered the city on a colt that represents a sign of peace. Jesus, as Messianic King, comes into our lives with meekness and humility. Do we truly welcome Jesus with open hearts?

'Let us return to today's Gospel passage and ask ourselves: what is really happening in the hearts of those who acclaim Christ as King of Israel? Clearly, they had their own idea of the Messiah, an idea of how the long-awaited King promised by the prophets should act. Not by chance, a few days later, instead of acclaiming Jesus, the Jerusalem crowd will cry out to Pilate: "Crucify him!", while the disciples, together with others who had seen him and listened to him, will be struck dumb and will disperse. The majority, in fact, was disappointed by the way Jesus chose to present himself as Messiah and King of Israel. This is the heart of today's feast, for us too. Who is Jesus of Nazareth for us? What idea do we have of the Messiah, what idea do we have of God? It is a crucial question, one we cannot avoid, not least because during this very week we are called to follow our King who chooses the Cross as his throne. We are called to follow a Messiah who promises us, not a facile earthly happiness, but the happiness of heaven, divine beatitude. So we must ask ourselves: what are our true expectations? What are our deepest desires, with which we have come here today to celebrate Palm Sunday and to begin our celebration of Holy Week?' (Pope Benedict XVI)

As we approach Holy Week, let us be determined to follow Jesus, our humble King, closely with a heart full of love.

Monday of Holy Week, 26th March
Isaiah 42:1-7, John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him there; Martha waited on them and Lazarus was among those at table. Mary brought in a pound of very costly ointment, pure nard, and with it anointed the feet of Jesus, wiping them with her hair; the house was full of the scent of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot - one of his disciples, the man who was to betray him - said, 'Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor?' He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he was in charge of the common fund and used to help himself to the contributions. So Jesus said, 'Leave her alone; she had to keep this scent for the day of my burial. You have the poor with you always, you will not always have me.' Meanwhile a large number of Jews heard that he was there and came not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Then the chief priests decided to kill Lazarus as well, since it was on his account that many of the Jews were leaving them and believing in Jesus.

I want to love you, Lord!

Martha, Mary and Lazarus were Jesus' closest friends. Sensing the tensions among their religious leaders, they sensed that it would be the last time Jesus would be dining with them in their house. Thus, they prepared their best for Jesus. Martha did what she was good at, i.e. cooking and playing hostess to Jesus, preparing His favourite dishes, making sure He had enough and was comfortable. Lazarus was sitting at the table, hanging onto Jesus' words, gazing at His face, soaking in His presence. Mary also wanted to express her love and so she took a jar of expensive ointment, knelt and anointed His feet. She tried to comfort Jesus as He approached His final destination.

Today, Jesus calls us friends too. What can we do to express our affection for Jesus as he enters into our house today?

Judas, one of his disciples, was not bothered about Jesus because his heart was not with Him. Instead, Judas was concerned about making money for himself. Is Judas in us?

At the end of the passage, we were told that Lazarus would be killed too because of his friendship with Jesus. What about us? Are we ready to die to our pride, 'face', addictions, laziness for Jesus' sake?

Jesus, I want to be like Martha, Mary and Lazarus. I want to bring comfort, affection and love to you. I am your Friend whom you can count on!

Tuesday of Holy Week, 27th March
Isaiah 49:1-6, John 13:21-33,36-38

While at supper with his disciples, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, 'I tell you most solemnly, one of you will betray me'. The disciples looked at one another, wondering which he meant. The disciple Jesus loved was reclining next to Jesus; Simon Peter signed to him and said, 'Ask who it is he means', so leaning back on Jesus' breast he said, 'Who is it, Lord?' 'It is the one' replied Jesus 'to whom I give the piece of bread that I shall dip in the dish.' He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. At that instant, after Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him. Jesus then said, 'What you are going to do, do quickly'. None of the others at table understood the reason he said this. Since Judas had charge of the common fund, some of them thought Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the festival', or telling him to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the piece of bread he went out. Night had fallen. When he had gone Jesus said: 'Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. 'My little children, I shall not be with you much longer. You will look for me, and, as I told the Jews, where I am going, you cannot come. Simon Peter said, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus replied, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now; you will follow me later'. Peter said to him, 'Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' 'Lay down your life for me?' answered Jesus. 'I tell you most solemnly, before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.'

Friends

Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas, as a sign of love for him. He tried to win Judas over from the dark path that he had chosen. But, Judas' heart was hardened against Jesus. Did Jesus curse Judas? Did he break the tie with Judas? No, Jesus continued to love him and gave him the freedom to choose his path. In our friendships with others, we too might have experienced

betrayals. What do we do with people who had betrayed us? Do we give up on them? Do we forgive?

Peter, another key character in this passage, zealously affirmed that he would follow Jesus to wherever he was heading. Jesus knew the sincere heart of Peter but He also knew that Peter would disown Him three times. Yet, Jesus held hopes for Peter. Jesus knew that he would one day give his life for Him but that night would not be the right moment.

In the same way, Jesus is patient and has high hopes for each of us, despite our weaknesses. He calls us *'Friends'* and waits for us, in our own time, to pick up our cross and follow him with joy and love.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Is there a friend who has betrayed and disappointed me? Can I forgive him/her?
- 2) What is Jesus' invitation for me in this time of prayer?

Wednesday of Holy Week, 28th March
Isaiah 50:4-9, Matthew 26: 14-25

Then one of the Twelve, the man called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you prepared to give me if I hand him over to you?' They paid him thirty silver pieces, and from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray him. Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus to say, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?' 'Go to so-and-so in the city' he replied 'and say to him, "The Master says: My time is near. It is at your house that I am keeping Passover with my disciples."' The disciples did what Jesus told them and prepared the Passover. When evening came he was at table with the twelve disciples. And while they were eating he said, 'I tell you solemnly, one of you is about to betray me' They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, 'Not I, Lord, surely?' He answered, 'Someone who has dipped his hand into the dish with me, will betray me. The Son of Man is going to his fate, as the scriptures say he will, but alas for that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! Better for that man if he had never been born!' Judas, who was to betray him; asked in his turn, 'Not I, Rabbi, surely?' 'They are your own words' answered Jesus.

Judas

Judas was not born a traitor. He was not a traitor when Jesus chose him along with the rest of the other eleven apostles. He became a traitor when He chose to walk away from the Voice of Love. Why? Why did Judas, a friend loved by Jesus, end up a traitor?

Judas betrayed Jesus because of his love for money. In the gospel of John, it was noted that Judas, who was in charge of the common purse, took money freely from it (John 12:6). In today's gospel passage, we see Judas choosing thirty silver pieces instead of staying faithful to Jesus.

The betrayal of Jesus continues today in many other ways. When a spouse betrays his/her marriage vows, when a Christian betrays his/her conscience, when a person works hard to gain the world's approval, etc. all these are moments when we open our hands to receive our '*thirty silver pieces*' and betray Jesus all over again.

Though Judas chose to betray his friend, Jesus never stopped loving him. In the scene of the Last Supper, Jesus bent down and gently washed the feet of his disciples, including Judas'. He loved his friends unconditionally.

Today, let us draw close to Jesus who never gives up on any of us even though we choose to walk away from His love. Let us root ourselves in Jesus' love!

Question for reflection:

1) Whom do I follow today? Do I follow Jesus or all the other idols that lead me away from Him?

Holy Thursday, 29th March, The Lord's Supper

Exodus 12:1-8,11-14, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, John 13:1-15

It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, and he got up from table, removed his outer garment and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; he then poured water into a basin

and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand'. 'Never!' said Peter 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me'. 'Then, Lord,' said Simon Peter 'not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' Jesus said, 'No one who has taken a bath needs washing, he is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' He knew who was going to betray him, that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. When he had washed their feet and put on his clothes again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand' he said 'what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'

You should wash each other's feet...

What a perfect example Jesus had set for us! Washing of the feet is usually left for the household servant to do. However, Jesus took up the role of the lowliest servant to wash the feet of the disciples', knowing that these same people would betray, deny and abandon Him at His moment of suffering.

'If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you.'

Am I willing to follow this servant-like attitude? Do I dare to embrace this service of love that Jesus had set as an example for me?

To serve those we deem as our superiors and those with certain authority over us is necessary and obligatory. However, we find it hard to serve the weak, the poor, the vulnerable. It is not easy also for us to be at the feet of the people whom we find difficult to love. Yet, Jesus, our Master, calls us once more to imitate His example of service that bends to serve all people.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Who can I serve today?
- 2) What prevents me from serving those who cannot repay my actions of love?

Friday, 30th March, Passion of the Lord

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9, John 18:1-19:42

... Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. Seeing his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son. Then to the disciple he said, 'This is your mother'. And from that moment the disciple made a place for her in his home. After this, Jesus knew that everything had now been completed, and to fulfil the scripture perfectly he said: 'I am thirsty'. A jar-full of vinegar stood there, so putting a sponge soaked in the vinegar on a hyssop stick they held it up to his mouth. After Jesus had taken the vinegar he said, 'It is accomplished'; and bowing his head he gave up his spirit.

The violence of love

'We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work.' (Oscar Romero)

The cross of Christ is a testimony of God's unconditional and faithful love that pushes us to leave our selfishness behind and encounter others in their own sufferings. As people who love the Crucified Christ, we are called to stand firmly with those crushed by sickness, poverty, exploitations, family disunity, broken relationships, etc. We hope, like Mary and the Beloved disciple, for the glory of Christ's resurrection to break through.

Today, Jesus on the cross tells us again- *'I am thirsty. I am thirsty for love in so many of your brothers and sisters who are suffering. I am thirsty for you. Will you come and quench my thirst with your love?'*

Today, as we contemplate the cross, let us choose again to leave violence and work always for unity by bringing love and hope to all those around us. May we quench the thirst of Jesus in others with our option to love.

Question for reflection:

1) How is Jesus on the cross inviting me to quench His thirst today?

Saturday, 31st March, Holy Saturday

Genesis 1:1-2:2 or 1:1, 26-31a, Genesis 22:1-18 or 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18, Exodus 14:15-15:1, Isaiah 54:5-14, Isaiah 55:1-11, Baruch 3:9-15, 32-4:4, Ezekiel 36:16-17a, 18-28, Romans 6:3-11, Mark 16: 1-7

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint him. Very early when the sun had risen, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb. They were saying to one another, "Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back; it was very large. On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.'"

Powerless no more!

In the gospel today, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary went to visit the tomb with hearts filled with powerlessness at the events that happened. Don't we sometimes feel powerless too?

When we see someone whom we love suffering, when our bodies weaken with age, when a problem seems to get out of hand or certain sin or lies we live weigh us down... When we witness the lack of ethical values in families and workplaces... When we read news about violence and killings in the world, we too feel powerless and hopeless. The sense of powerlessness is like a trap of negativism that leads us to think: What is the point of being good? There's no use in trying to change this culture in the office/ in the family? Why bother?

Today, as we stand at the threshold of Easter, we know that the power of sins, sufferings, death do not have the last word! We believe that beyond the sealed tomb, there is hope! Because God is not finished, the tomb cannot contain the power of His love!

'Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.'

The Resurrection is an event of Love that touches our lives and makes us to face the events of our lives differently - with hope, not despair.

'Hope is a gift from God, a virtue that God puts in your heart that is rooted in his promise not to let you lose your way.' (Pope Francis)

Our Christian hope is the Resurrected Christ who is alive. He is our hope that remains in our hearts always and He will never let us lose our way.