Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Luke 24: 46
Lord open our eyes as we meditate on your word. Amen

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On Our Knees In His Hands

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Today our hearts are joyful, as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today ends the 40 days of Lent and the Holy Week. We enter into a period of celebration for the victory we receive through the resurrection. Through the last 40 days the Lord has been calling us back to Him. If we had gone away from the Lord, He was calling us to return to Him.

Smith Wigglesworth, an evangelist and author from Europe in the 1800’s, wrote about being in full surrender to the Lord. He called this place of surrender “The Favoured Place”. He said we are in a favoured place or a priceless position if we have no way out of a problem and nowhere to go but to God. He explains that this favoured place is our precipice of receiving a miracle from God. This Easter Sunday, let us find our favoured place to a greater experience of the Risen Lord inside our hearts.

This is true in the lives of the Lord and His followers. In the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, St. Peter recounts the ministry of the Lord Jesus and the details of the Lord’s passion. After the Lord was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, St. Peter slowly left His side and abandoned the Lord. But now, after the resurrection and Pentecost, he is able to stand firm and preach about the Lord. How was this transformation possible? We learn in the Four Step retreat that when St. Peter denied the Lord for the third time, he realized his sinfulness. At that moment he looked into the eyes of the Lord and would have felt ashamed of himself. He had done the thing he had promised he would not do. This was his favored place. He had no answer to his sinfulness and nowhere to turn to, but to the Lord. While St. Peter could not love or accept himself, the Lord Jesus still loved him. He experienced the Lord at the lowest point of his life and this was the foundation of his ministry. Once the Holy Spirit descended upon him, he was able to go out, preach the Word of God and become the St. Peter the Lord had always envisioned him to be.

In the Gospel proclamation, Mary of Magdala had witnessed the death of her master. She had no answers to what had taken place in the last few days and in this despair she came to the tomb; to find solace in the Lord. This was her favoured place. Like St. Peter, in her despair when she turned to the Lord, He gave her a miracle and
spoke her name—the stone of the tomb was rolled away. He had risen and was speaking to her personally.

The Lord Jesus’ favoured place began in the garden of Gethsemane. He was weak and facing death. He was so disturbed that He shed blood. In this struggle He sought the Father and He gave the truth of His heart to Him. This was His favoured place. In Gethsemane, the Lord surrendered and accepted everything from the hands of God. When the Lord said “not my will but yours be done” the angel came to comfort Him. From then on, He walks to the cross in internal rest. He is able to forgive those who persecute Him, give His mother to John and finally die on the cross. He is able to think beyond Himself and focus on the needs of others because He is at rest inside, at the favoured place. In John 19:10-11 Pilot asks Him, “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” The Lord Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” This is what it means to walk by faith. It looks foolish and stupid, but the Lord Jesus is walking in surrender to God. He knew that the Father wanted Him to be placed in this situation and be led to the crucifixion. He is taking everything from the hands of God. Just before dying, while hanging on the cross the Lord says “It is fulfilled”. He fulfills the mission the Father has given Him. God became silent and everything was finished in obedience. The Lord Jesus Christ is near His miracle. It was then that God begins to do something totally new- soon the dead body of Christ becomes the Glorified Risen Lord of history.

We may have come to this favoured place many times in our lives. We have been in situations of despair where we have had no answers and have gone from pillar to post looking for any kind of relief. This Easter, the Lord is calling us to find Him in the struggles, rejections and uncertainties of our lives. In the past we may have been afraid to enter a situation or problem that had no answer or solution. Having since met the Lord and travelled with Him from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, we should not be afraid to go where there is no answer, because this is our favoured place. It gives us the desperation we need to cling on to the Lord and seek Him deeper. When we are weak we will search for God and become strong. When we surrender we are held by God. Our spirituality may have been about holding on to God, but now God will hold on to us. That is where we will have perfect internal rest and freedom. Then we will not want a result, but in that rest we will be satisfied with the union and relationship we have with the Risen Lord.

*Prayer: Abba Father, I thank You for all the past problems and struggles in my life. I pray that I may encounter the victorious Risen Lord in this favored place. Amen.*
Salvation means different things to people. But in Romans 10: 8-11, St. Paul explicitly states what salvation is - ‘to believe in your heart, that Jesus is Lord, that God raised Him from the dead and proclaim it with your mouth.’ Today’s readings present those who followed these principles.

The Apostles were cowering in fear in the upper room. They were discouraged and filled with a sense of dejection, tinged with doubt whether the promised power of God demonstrated by the Lord Jesus, was really theirs. But under the anointing of the Holy Spirit a dramatic change took place. Peter who once cringed before a servant maid enough to betray his beloved master. Now galvanised into action he fearlessly and passionately declares what God had done despite people’s betrayal of His Son. The life, death and resurrection of the continuing power of Christ, which he preached was a pattern for subsequent teaching contained in the New Testament. While many described the Lord Jesus as a defeated Prophet, Peter defended Him by quoting the Scriptures where David prophised the coming of the Messiah. He preached with such power that about 3000 people were added to the community. Here was Peter, a bumbling, vacillating illiterate fisherman, constantly misunderstanding the mission of the Lord Jesus, speaking with such fiery fervour that nothing not even death itself could stem the tide of power unleashed by the Lord Jesus. His accusation of the authorities for crucifying the Lord, would have put him at risk. But undaunted he took a giant leap from his limited and mundane human framework, into the exciting adventurous life of the supernatural. The Holy Spirit enabled him to praise in tongues, to prophesise and communicate with daring and boldness, the truths he experienced.

In the Gospel proclamation we meet a group of women who too followed the rules laid down for salvation. Paradoxically they encountered the Risen Lord first through the empty tomb. Armed with the staggering truth that the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead, they rush to proclaim the Good News. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who were at the cross and when the Lord was laid in the tomb now receive the reward of their love and faith in encountering the Lord. Let us wait in lingering anticipation of Pentecost that we may have the same transformation experience.

Prayer: Abba Father, we await your promise of salvation. Amen.
Tuesday 3rd April

Pray in obedience and patience

Once the apostles and disciples were baptised in the upper room, Peter preached for the first time to a large crowd. He said something that shocked everyone. He said “Let all Israel be assured that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified both Lord and Christ. When the people heard this they were cut to the heart and asked Peter what they should do (Acts 2: 36-37).

Now Peter was a disciple who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and he was a radical person as well. We could say this because he was the only one who was not afraid to walk on water when the Lord Jesus called him as the rest of the apostles shuddered in fear. He was the one who cut the ear of the slave Malcus and later followed the Lord Jesus Christ right up to the courtyard of the High priest. Not all apostles did things which Peter did. Even though he was a fast moving person he did not have the right words to say at the right time in many instances. We see this when the Lord Jesus Christ rebuked him by saying “get behind me Satan” (Mt 16:23).

Today’s reading tells us after Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, every word that came out of him had so much of power and authority that the Israelites who would usually stone those who spoke anything else other than what the Torah says listened to every word. The scripture says “they were cut to the heart”. After Peter preached, the Israelites asked only one question and that was the question that Peter wanted them to ask him. It was the most appropriate question at that moment. Actually the people could have asked a thousand different questions since it was this very people who put the Lord Jesus Christ to death a couple of weeks before. The Holy Spirit persuaded the hearts of the people. In just one sermon about 3000 people were baptized. Many of us speak about God for days but find it hard to convince a hand full of people. We should always remember before the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit they prayed together for 40 days with Mother Mary. Instead of obeying the leading if they had been loitering around doing whatever they felt like doing, I guess even till today they would not have received it. Since they held onto the promise of the Lord they received the greatest power that people could ever ask for. Today the Lord is inviting us to do the same.

Prayer: Abba Father, we ask you for patience and pray in obedience along with Mother Mary so that you will fill us with your Holy Spirit. Amen
Wednesday 4th April

“Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people”

Acts 3:1-10
Ps. 105:1-4, 6-9

The Church is journeying through the season of octave Easter. The Church awaits the feast of Pentecost. The records of the Acts of the Apostles are the acts of the Holy Spirit. The cure of a crippled beggar in the first reading is an account of a miracle which happened through the hands of Peter and John after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The promise of God to the disciples of the Lord Jesus came true when they waited for power from above.

Every miracle and every life transformation that took place in the Acts of the Apostles is because the Holy Spirit was poured into the disciples and Apostles of Christ Jesus. The beauty of this miracle is that the beggar’s expectation was futile and limited while the alms he got was the entire transformation of his life. We too are like this beggar asking God for deteriorating material gains and vanishing possessions in the world.

In the Gospel proclamation St. Luke speaks of the author of life. The interior disposition of the two disciples moving away from Jerusalem was beautifully portrayed in the words given in the Gospel today. It was nearly evening, they were downcast and their eyes were blinded. This is a description of our internal disposition when we face challenges that we cannot cope with, in limited human strength. We are fortunate because the Holy Spirit is poured into us and the Spirit himself prays on our behalf with groans when we are downcast.

The Risen Lord acted promptly and met with the two who were going back to their old way of living. The Risen Lord appeared to them and not only gave them hope but gave the entire world what is important especially at moments when we are discouraged. The Risen Lord revealed to them that He is also the Eucharistic Lord. Careful scrutiny of the Word shows us that the two disciples could not recognise the Lord Jesus and that they could recognise him only at the breaking of bread. The Eucharist which was established by the Lord Jesus on Maundy Thursday by words was established on Golgotha on Good Friday in action. The words of the two disciples show that the ‘Words and Deeds’ of Christ Jesus go hand in hand.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to always accept both the Name and the Body of Christ Jesus as the essence of my being. Amen.
If someone had asked me this question when I was a teenager, I would have had a different perspective of my future. At that time, I expected that I would graduate, get married, have a family and maybe have a career. None of those was particularly strong ambitions for me, but those were my expectations nonetheless. Today's readings speak about the pointlessness of expectations and the need to dispense with them to recognise truth. In all three readings, the scriptures speak the mistaken expectations of their times and how they blinded the Israelites to the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel proclamation talks about the story of the disciples going to Emmaus. Back in Jerusalem they share their experience of the Risen Lord Jesus with their comrades who had also heard that the Lord Jesus had appeared to Simon Peter. Unexpectedly the Lord Jesus Himself appears in their midst. The fact that He comes unexpectedly, although the doors were locked, indicates that His presence is now of a different kind. He wishes them peace. In spite of what they had heard, they are frightened and think they are seeing a ghost. "What are you afraid of?" the Lord asks them. He shows them His pierced hands and feet. The Greeks mocked the idea of bodily resurrection but St. Luke highlights the physical reality of Christ’s risen body, that is, the wholeness of the person of the Risen Lord Jesus.

How do our expectations today keep us from the opportunities of salvation? How do we still, up-to-date, attach ourselves to the expectations and demands of our times and culture? It is easy to get lost in expectations and to think that the world revolves in an entirely material manner and that our achievements in that context are what matters. Those expectations can become prisons, though, blinding us to the possibilities of eternal life. That is the only victory that truly matters, in the end. Today the Risen Christ is inviting us this Easter Season to aspire to something more. Let us make it our goal to come closer to the Risen Lord and to get to know Him in an intimate relationship.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to go through that process of radical conversion and a change of life which brings about a deep reconciliation with God. Teach us to have expectations through You and not through this material world. Amen.
In the reading we see how St. Peter and St. John are brought before the entire Jewish High Court for questioning after they had demonstrated the power of the Lord Jesus by healing the cripple at the Beautiful gate. This is the first recorded persecution of the Christian era. Since then millions of Christians have suffered and died for their faith. In some countries, many Christians cannot worship freely or openly. Many believers have spent years behind bars for nothing more than preaching the Gospel.

St. Peter has three choices: 1) He can apologize for making trouble. There is no way he is going to do that. 2) He can say nothing and hope for the best. Peter never “said nothing” in his whole life. 3) He can seize the moment to preach the Gospel—which is exactly what he does. After all, he’s got the entire Jewish leadership right in front of him. Money could not buy this kind of audience. And they were all sitting at his feet waiting for him to talk.

St. Peter would have remembered the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 10:18-19, “On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say.” He did not waste time. He testified to the truth with the power of the Holy Spirit. The result was that thousands accepted the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Peter refers to the Lord Jesus as the chief cornerstone. (Acts 4:11) The cornerstone is the first stone set in the construction of a foundation. It is important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone. This ultimately determines the position of the entire structure. Is the Lord Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone of our lives?

We have been strategically placed by the Lord in various places to share the same good news that St. Peter and St. John testified to. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, most beautifully tells us “The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through Baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself.” (Lumen Gentium, 33)

*Prayer: Abba Father, I offer myself to you completely. Make me an instrument in Your Hands. Amen.*
Last Sunday we celebrated the feast of Easter – the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus in all His glory! Peter and John who had lost their bearings after the crucifixion were suddenly filled with a boldness that amazed the Jewish leaders. They had refused to believe even when Mary Magdalene related her experience, until the Lord Himself appears to them and rebukes them and commands them to ‘Go into the world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.

In the first reading we see Peter and John boldly standing there and witnessing to the power in the name of Jesus of Nazareth that cured the lame man. They were not swayed by the threats of the council, so much so that when they were asked never to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus, they boldly declared that ‘Judge for yourself whether it was right in God’s eyes for us to obey you, rather than God. We cannot stop speaking of what we have seen and heard’.

We too have witnessed many miracles. That same power released through the power of the resurrection to every believing person is alive today. Do we proclaim this power and speak of it in circles where we may not be accepted if we did? This is our challenge!

In the Gospel it is re-emphasized. The church has a preaching task, a healing task. It is the duty of every Christian to spread the good news. The Lord of the church is still in the church and is still the Lord of Power in the person of the Holy Spirit. The church is never left alone to do its work. Christ works with it and in it and through it. And the ultimate message is that the Christian life is lived in the presence and in the power of him who was crucified, died and was risen again. Let us therefore not live powerless lives of doubt, faithlessness, indifference, and ignorance. Christ chose to empty himself and take the form of a slave. He submitted to the Father totally - he became obedient unto death. He destroyed the lord of death.

Esther Gulshan who at 18 years experienced a miraculous healing and special touch of the Lord’s love witnessed to His love even when in prison. No obstacle could stop her despite the harsh treatment she received even from her own family.

Prayer: Lord we pray that we can be bold witnesses of your power in our lives. Amen
St. Pope John Paul II declared the Sunday after Easter, as the Divine Mercy Sunday. In today’s world, the Mercy of God has to a large extent become merely a beautiful concept, distant and unreal. As we reflect on today’s Readings the reason for this sad state becomes clear. We, who call ourselves children of God, seem to have failed miserably, in reflecting the Mercy of our God, to the rest of His children who are yet to know Him.

The First Reading gives us a glimpse of what the Christian community must be like. There cannot be any needy persons where Christians live together, because the Lord asks those who have in abundance to share their resources with those who do not have. As long as there is plenty of food in our homes, there should not be anyone starving in another household. Similarly if some of us have our wardrobes filled and overflowing with clothes, we cannot have people in our communities who lack basic clothing. It should be the same for all basic and simple needs of life.

The Lord is challenging us today. We lament and complain about the world being Godless but have we stopped to wonder where this Godlessness started? Isn’t it in our own hearts where it began? Have we not caused disillusionment in those who are yet to know the Christ, by our self-centered and uncaring lifestyle? On this Divine Mercy Sunday, St Barnabas challenges us to follow his example: “Barnabas sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:36-37). Can we dare?

Through today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus takes us further into the depths of God’s Mercy. He was cruelly treated by humankind and was deserted by His own disciples. While He hung on the cross it seemed as if the Lord Jesus had failed in His ministry for which He came to this world. Yet, the Risen Lord came back to His friends who were not worthy to be called His friends. He visited them while they were hiding in fear in the upper room. There was St Peter, who denied Him thrice, despite vowing that he would never desert his Master. There were also the others who ran away, for the fear of getting arrested along with their Master. He offered them His Peace, in return for their unfaithful behaviour, and breathed His own Spirit upon them, so that His Peace would become real in their hearts.
Going a step further, the Lord Jesus proved that He was indeed the Good Shepherd, mindful of His whole flock, even the troublesome ones. St Thomas was not present at the time The Lord appeared to the rest. The rational man he was, he refused to believe what others said, though he should have remembered the words of his Master regarding His death and Resurrection. The Merciful Lord chose to minister to the one who was struggling to believe. The Risen Lord appeared when St Thomas was present, addressed him by name and ministered to his unbelief.

What about us? How merciful are we towards those whom we minister to? The dictionary defines ‘mercy’ as “compassionate or kindly forbearance shown toward an offender, an enemy or other person in one’s power.” Let us learn from Our Lord Jesus its true meaning. Often we remember the meaning of “mercy” when we expect mercy, but like the unmerciful servant in the parable (Matthew 18:23-35), we are very or often unwilling to show mercy to others. Let us choose to allow the Lord to make a difference in our depths today and fill us with His Mercy. Let us visualise and dream of a future when, empowered by the Holy Spirit we will take this same mercy to our homes, workplaces, prayer communities, parishes and the world at large.

The Second Reading tells us how the Divine love and mercy help us to live a victorious life. St John reiterates in 1 John 5:3 ("In fact, this is love for God: to keep His commands."), his Master’s exhortation in John 14:21 “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me”.

What are His commandments? The Lord’s answer was to love our God with all our heart and with all our soul and mind and with all our strength; and to love our neighbour (all others) as ourselves (cf Mark 12:30-31). Our social services and serving God through our prayer communities and parishes become useless if we do not keep the above commandment. It is impossible to keep this commandment by our self-effort, simply because we are inherently selfish and self-centered, unless the Power of Resurrection transforms us. When we come to the Lord as we are, give the truth of our heart to Him and surrender our lives totally to His rule and authority, the Risen Lord comes into our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we submit our ways to the Lord who lives inside of us, we begin to manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives more and more.

Prayer: Abba Father, You made the stone that the builders rejected, become the cornerstone. So we rejoice and give glory to You Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Today we celebrate the Annunciation of the Lord; the day the angel Gabriel came to the Blessed Mother and asked her to be the mother of the God who would one day save His people from their sins.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah asks King Ahaz to ask God for a sign, but the King responds that he will not put God to test. At this Isaiah gets angry and annoyed. As I read this verse, my mind goes to Matthew 4:7 where the Lord Jesus responds to the devil's temptation to throw Himself off the highest point of the temple. The Lord's answer was “It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” This response of the Lord Jesus makes God happy. How do these same responses ignite such opposite reactions?

Prior to the verses in today’s readings, King Ahaz knows that Jerusalem is going to be attacked by other kings and is planning on joining forces with Assyria. It is during this time that God sends the prophet Isaiah to the king to tell him that the Lord will protect him from any harm. God is asking the king to trust in Him. However, King Ahaz could not believe or trust in God. The Lord wants to comfort King Ahaz by giving Him a sign that He is with Him but Ahaz is unable to hear any of it. Instead, he tries to mask his unbelief by trying to appear God-fearing by saying, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test” (v.12).

When the Lord Jesus give this same response to God, He was not trying to appear God-fearing, as King Ahaz was. Over the 30 years of His life He had built an intimate relationship with God. Therefore, in everything He did, He wanted to please God. With every action He took, He wanted to glorify God. His heart was genuinely in love with God and He trusted Him wholeheartedly.

The Angel Gabriel comes to a young Mother Mary in today’s Gospel proclamation. God wanted to send His only Son to bring salvation to the world. However, it is in God’s nature not to work alone and He wanted someone to partner with. When there was no person for God to work through, then what God wanted to do in that place or time could not be done. Therefore, for God to bring salvation into the world, He needed to partner with the Blessed Mother. When Angel
Gabriel came to Mother Mary and asked her to be the mother of God, he waited for her to agree. When she said “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to be according to thy word” her agreement brought God’s presence into the world.

How was she able to say yes in the midst of all problems it would cause her? She could have said no and no one would have blamed her. She was young and unmarried. She could have reasoned with the angel that she was too young to be a mother and could not face the world being pregnant outside of marriage. But instead of focusing on how the world would perceive her, she was focused on pleasing God. Like her son, she wanted to obey God at any cost. She trusted that God would be able to see her through any difficulty. Even at her young age, she was spiritually mature. When she responded to the angel by saying “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to thy word”, like the Lord Jesus, she too was putting God first in her decision. She only wanted to please God in everything she did.

The Psalmist and the author of the second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, tell us that Christ came into the world to do the will of God. Both readings say that God did not require sacrifice, burnt offerings and sin offerings. Instead all he required was a body to sacrifice for the sins of the world. Christ became that sacrifice in obedience to God His Father when He said “Look, I have come to do your will, O God.” In every decision He made, He wanted to please God; even if it meant giving up His life. And this attitude pleased God. Because of the inner responses of Mother Mary and the Lord Jesus to please God in everything they did, God rewarded them with the resurrection.

Even in our lives, our spiritual maturity is shown when we do things to obey God. At first, like King Ahaz, we may want to appear as if we want to obey God, but in reality we could be obeying our own desires. It is only through an ongoing relationship with God through struggle and pain that we will genuinely come to a place where we want to please the Lord in everything we do. It is a long journey and a big struggle to come to this place of spiritual maturity. It is only through a real relationship and intimacy with God that we can get to this place in our lives. Today the Lord is calling each of us to look to Mother Mary as our role model. She is the person who taught the Lord Jesus how to respond to the Father’s calling in His life and she is able to guide us along the same path. We can pray for her intercession to help us to always give God the first place in every decision we make in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to be able to emulate the Blessed Mother and the Lord Jesus Christ and please You in everything I do. Amen.
In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord speaks to Nicodemus about being born again. He speaks the same to us as well. What does this mean? We were accepted into the family of God through our baptism. Cleansed through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Christ becomes part of us through Holy Communion. As Catholics we have all gone through these stages and may feel that we have been born again several times throughout our lives. Is this the born again experience the Lord Jesus is speaking of? No. He is speaking of something much greater than just going through the motions of rituals without any meaning or change taking place in our lives. He is speaking of being born again into a new role. We may have said our prayers, attended mass and said the rosary without anything really changing our lives. Today, the Lord wants us to find a deeper experience that will not only cleanse us of our sins, bring life and meaning to our religious practices but change our thoughts and behavior.

An example of this experience of being born again is shared in the second reading. When the Christians of the early church had a tangible experience of the Lord, the way they behaviour and thoughts changed. They no longer wanted to hoard possessions but sold what they had and shared all the possessions. They no longer wanted to live selfish lives focused on themselves or their families. Acts 4:32 says, “The whole community of believers was of one heart and mind.” God had given them the same heart and mind to serve each other and live together. This is what it means to be born again-- to change not only externally but internally as well.

In our lives, the Lord calls each of us to be born again. We must change from blindly reciting prayers to knowing God, and changing our behavior and lifestyle. I remember when I first experienced the love of God and came to the Community of the Risen Lord, it felt like the early church. I felt like I was being welcomed into a large family of God. In communion, fellowship and serving together, I became closer to those I served with and today they are more than just friends or acquaintances. They are my family. My heart and behavior changed and I became a part of family.

*Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for calling me to be born again in You. Thank you for giving me a life filled with hope and happiness. Amen.*
Today is the day when we are called to turn towards the light. Genesis chapter 1 says “God created the heavens and the earth and said; Let there be light” What God brought first into this world through the Holy Spirit was Light. In that light people were created with a free will to choose between right and wrong.

As long as people used their free will and chose to be connected to God, they lived a blessed life without sadness, oppression, illness or loneliness. Yet, on the day people used the same free will to allow satan to enter into their lives they fell into darkness and sin. As a result of this, people faced problems, struggles, illnesses, sadness and sorrow began to rule their lives. Through this darkness jealousy, hatred and selfishness filled the lives of people. But God never gave up on the world and tried in many ways to turn back this greatest creation of God towards His light. It looked like His efforts were futile for humans were still engulfed in darkness.

Though the first plan of God was unsuccessful, because of the immense love He had for the world, God set out His second plan. What the Gospel proclamation speaks to us today is about that second plan. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” – John 3:16. It is not the desire of our creator to see that any one of us is destroyed by the darkness. In this world where darkness ruled above everything, God brought in light through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is our duty to walk from darkness to light. St. John says “Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of Light because their deeds were evil” – John 3:19. As long as we are not connected to our Creator and our Saviour, what rules us will be the darkness of the world. The Lord is inviting us today to turn back to the Light. in John 8:12 the Lord tells us “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” – John 8-12. The psalmist tells us today “Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame” Let us use our free-will today and decide to turn back to God. He loves us just the way we are. Let us accept that love and enter into His Light.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for your love. Give us the grace to defeat darkness and become a child of your Light, Amen!
Thursday 12th April

This is a significant passage from the Bible. We see a lot of precious gems. He is above all things. He came from above. He sees things in eternity and bears witness in the temporal world. This is the highest status and surpasses all manner of description. But suddenly the passage says people would not accept His testimony (Jn. 3:32). Is the problem with Him or His listeners? The passage tells us how ignorant, arrogant and self-centered we are as sinners. We often respond wrongly to God’s revelation.

The man who accepted His testimony certifies that God is truth (Jn. 3:33). This tells us that when Christians believe, they are certified with the testimony of God. This is valuable. All other value come from people who do not have the foundation of value in the first place. They think that just because they assume things have value, they will automatically have value. Those who receive the testimony of the Lord Jesus also receive the enlightenment of the Spirit, the affirmation of God, the light of the truth. It is sad indeed when a person rejects the testimony of God. They assume their own existence is real and God’s existence is not real. But this is not true. This is likened to the situation where we are sick and we need medicine to be healed. It is not that we are forced to take the medicine or we will be threatened with death. The wages of sin are death. And the Gospel offers us the way of salvation. It is not so much about giving us a freedom of choice or a threat but just displaying the fact and giving us the solution.

Because of God’s compassion, He sent His Son to die for our sin. He intervened in history, demonstrated His supernatural grace in the natural world. Do we think it does not matter if we are not awakened year after year? We are numb and miscalculate the tolerance of God. Sometimes we think our achievements are our own. And because God is patient and we often consider His tolerance something to be taken advantage of; so we do all kinds of evil things. The most important human response is that of obedience towards Christ. God sent Him from heaven and gave Him the Spirit without limit. If we believe in Him we have eternal life, else we remain separate from God. Let us choose to live under his grace and goodness.

Prayer: Abba Father, stretch out your gentle but strong hands to save me. Save me from doubt, from my inner fears and anxieties, from my lack of trust in your Divine Providence. Amen.
Friday 13th April

St. Martin I, pope & martyr

If it is from God you will not be able to destroy it

Acts 5:34-42
Ps. 27:1, 4, 13-14
John 6:1-15

The Holy Spirit takes an illiterate fisherman from the shores of Galilee and transforms him into a powerful weapon, challenging the highest echelons of power - the Sanhedrin. The mind-boggling miracle of the escape of the Apostles from prison, would have confounded them. Surely the same angel who rescued them would have influenced Gamaliel - a highly respected scholar and lawyer. He could have been impressed by their boldness and courage and Peter’s first sermon. Forbidden from preaching, St. Peter affirms ‘we must obey God rather than man’. The authorities could not lock up the truth they proclaimed or the Lord they obeyed. Deflecting the rage of the Sanhedrin, Gamaliel a spokesman for God, put before them, irrefutable arguments that stopped them from convicting the apostles to death. Thus was the early church, saved from extinction. The Holy Spirit had appointed the right man in the right place at the right time.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Holy Spirit would have moved a nameless boy who was willing to give his all at the Master’s request. Phillip the practical rationalist felt hopeless in the face of the crisis - of feeding the multitude with such meagre resources. But Andrew the ever hopeful tells the Lord Jesus of the bread and fish, the little boy had. The Lord Jesus gives thanks, breaks the bread and the crowds are fed with more food to spare. The trifle surrendered to Him becomes abundant in His hands. This breaking of the bread is a prefigurement of the Eucharist and the heavenly banquet to be one day shared by His followers.

In recent times, the prophesy of Isaiah (Is 43: 18) ‘Behold I make all things new has manifested in a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that has shattered the very mind set of the Christian world. Lord Tennyson put it practically saying, ‘The old order changeth - yielding place to new and a new hymn echoes the same theme - ancient types have all departed - newer rites of grace prevail. The Revivial movement is the result of this prophesy. The basic traditions of the Church lasting more than 2000 years can never change. But the Holy Spirit released after the resurrection was lying dormant. In Sri Lanka we are blessed with the 4 steps retreats which have brought us once again to a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for calling me to a living experience in my life through the Revivil. Amen.
Today first reading, shows us a beautiful path to handling disputes and grievances. The setting is the time of early Christendom. As the number of disciples grew there were obviously disgruntled and unhappy groups of people. It was no different to our typical issues today in our own homes, churches and communities. The reading also gives us a great lesson in priorities in the way we serve as individuals or as groups.

In the midst of the complaints, the twelve Apostles calls in the whole body of disciples together. Here it shows that the perfect communication is done with the whole group and not chosen pockets of people. This leads to further dissention. Together they identify what was a priority for them as disciples. It was first to give themselves to prayer and then to the ministering of the Word and not to wait on tables. Then they identified suitable people for waiting on tables and prayed over them for an anointing. The Word of God says that the whole community agreed. The harmony in which the whole dispute was settled, in and through the dispute how priorities were identified and the methods practiced, all leave the reader with such an aura of calmness that it was no surprise that the whole community agreed on the decisions taken. In the Gospel proclamation today we are taught of a different kind of conflict that we are may face as faithful followers of Christ. We know from our past experiences in life how we can get paralyzed with different kinds of fears and are unable to move forward in life. The Lord Jesus Christ has the answer to all our fears in one simple sentence – “It is I! Don’t be afraid!” St. Peter as the leader of the church was not spared either of these fears and many conflicting issues. But his guiding comfort and strength to lead his flock may have been the numerous occasions the Lord assured him and the disciples that with Him amidst them, there would be no reason to fear. The Gospel proclamation reveals another beautiful truth. It says that the Apostles in the middle of their fears recognized the Lord Jesus on the waves and wanted to take the Lord into the boat, but immediately, the boat was at the shore to which they were heading. When we recognize the Lord as our Saviour in the middle of our storms, he takes us to our assigned destination faster than we could ever struggle to get their on our own.

**Prayer: Abba Father, many are my fears but give me the grace to see you hovering over them. Amen**
Once I met this lady who shared her testimony with me. She was from an affluent background and enjoyed a lifestyle that most of us would be envious of. Although she had been invited to join our prayer meetings, she felt no need to attend. She was a church going catholic who thought that those who attended the prayer meetings were overdoing religion. Then one day she discovered that her Husband had been fooling around with a friend, who was part of her inner circle. Her world came crashing down. She reacted in anger and indignation. She went to this friend’s house and blasted her using the choicest of language.

The fall out was bad. She stayed away from her inner circle. As she felt alone and betrayed, she decided to come for our prayer meetings, just to see what it was all about. She soon started finding comfort in the word and loved the times of worship. She started a new chapter in her life with a personal relationship with our Lord Jesus. This gave her much peace and meaning to her life.

One day, as she was getting into a van to go for a retreat, her foot slipped and she grabbed Mercia Amma’s hand to break the fall. At that moment a string of thoughts flashed through her mind. The thought went like this. “It was I, It was I, all along. It was I who allowed your husband to stray away. If not for that you would never have sought me. It was my way of calling you back in to my heart.” By this time, she loved the Lord so much, that in the light of this revelation, she perceived her husband’s indiscretion as a blessing. Later, she visited her friend who had betrayed her and apologised for speaking to her so badly, and asked for her forgiveness.

What is it that made this lady apologise for her behaviour, which although bad, was perfectly understandable? Today’s second reading tells us “Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them.” She had experienced God’s love and had begun to see life from the divine perspective. She saw the person who had betrayed her as a vehicle that brought God’s love and meaning to her life. This made it impossible for her to hate that person. It was not because she had taken a decision to become good. It was because of what God had done in her heart. Our behaviour is a mirror that tells us how real
God’s love is to us.

In today’s first reading St. Peter explains that although our Lord’s crucifixion was the work of scheming and conniving Jews, there is another reality at work.” But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.” Even though it seemed that things had gone out of control, even though it seemed that the schemes of the more learned and cunning prevailed, from the divine perspective, something greater was happening. While it did not absolve the Jews from what they did, looking back at the event from the divine perspective gave St. Peter the ability to reach out to the very ones who denied and crucified the Lord.

From where did St. Peter learn this secret? In today’s Gospel reading the Risen Lord visits His disciples and “He opened their eyes to scripture.” He reminds them that He had said these things to them before, but it seems that none of these ideas had registered. It is only when the Lord opened their eyes to scripture that they began to see the biggest crisis of their lives from the divine perspective.

As I look at the Lord Jesus, I discover that even the worst of things happen for a divine purpose. When I live for that purpose, no matter how cunning and scheming my enemies may be, God will have his way.

As I look at St. Peter I realize that even the worst crisis can become the beginning of a new thing the Lord does in our lives, provided we begin to see it from the divine perspective.

Did you notice that the Lord does not start explaining scripture as soon as He enters the room? He connects with them first and tells them “it is I”. He explains scripture only after he establishes a relationship with them. Scripture, when perceived in a divine encounter and relationship lets me see the incidents of my life from a divine perspective. Did you also notice what brought the Lord into their midst in such a tangible way? It was the sharing of the testimony of those who had just returned from Emmaus.

As we remember the past through the divine perspective, we see the hand of God. Thereby He invites us to trust Him with our present, when we encounter problems and crisis that threaten to destroy us.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace of walking with you in a relationship, for your purpose. Open our eyes to scripture so that we may learn to see our world through your eyes. And as we share our testimonies, encounter those around us in a new and tangible way. Amen
Monday 16th April  

“The work God wants is this: that you believe in the One Whom God has sent”  

John 6:29

In the Gospel proclamation today we hear how the Jewish people went looking for Jesus. They had seen the miracles He performed, they heard the message He preached and they ate and were satisfied with the bread He provided on the mountain. They were thirsting for more of Him and ask Him what else they need to do. They specifically ask Him, “what are the works that God wants us to do?” The Lord Jesus could have told them to pray harder, to fast more, to do more good but interestingly He tells them something strange. He tells them to believe in the One that God has sent. The work that God wants His people to do is to believe in the person of Jesus Christ. Everything else that is expected from a Christian follows on from that initial belief in the person of the Lord Jesus.

Often times in my journey with God, I get so bogged down with the work that I feel like I need to do. There are countless meetings to attend, so many different ways that I am expected to serve, the pressure to have a better prayer life, the need to be a better person, to be kinder, to be more gentle, to be more generous with my time and money, to pay more attention during mass – the list is endless and inexhaustible. And sometimes, it feels like it is a bit too much. Like I will never measure up. Often I have lost the person of Jesus in the duty of my religious activities. Once again, I have let my mind overtake my spirit and I have lost my Jesus in the busyness of this life I have created for myself. But today He reminds me that all the work He expects of me is to believe in the person of Jesus. That is all. Everything else flows on from that. All my striving for good works, to be a more efficient server, to be more faithful to Him - all of this will effortlessly follow if I can keep my eyes fixed on the person of Jesus.

In the reading today we see St Stephen living these exact words. He was surrounded by liars and schemers, people wanting to bring him down. But his reality was Jesus. The Word says that his face shone like an angel. The circumstances surrounding him didn’t matter as much as the truth of the Lord Jesus. The Gospel proclamation is a good reminder to me today to stop my striving. To take a step back and focus on the One Who holds my heart, the One to Whom I belong.

Prayer: Abba Father, I come back to you today admitting that I have shut the Lord out in the busyness I have created for myself. Father, help me to know Your Son personally. May this be my greatest delight. Amen
Tuesday 17th April  

3rd Week of Easter

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty...” John 6:35

Today’s first reading speaks of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Stephen belonged to the group of seven deacons whom the Apostles appointed to carry out the church ministry work (Acts 6). He was filled with the faith and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5) he showed himself as a man of God, radiating divine grace and apostolic zeal. Stephen was a true imitator of Christ even to the extent of completely giving himself up for others and praying in his suffering for those who executed him. Many of us the moment we encounter a crisis, easily give up our faith and drift away from the Lord. We miss out on the glorious end the Lord has at the end of every trial. But Stephen is a great example for us to imitate, to stand in faith even during persecution and trials. It wouldn’t have been possible for him if he was not filled with the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost, as the apostles received the power of the Holy Spirit which made them to preach the Good News to all nations. Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit that gave him the courage to withstand persecutions. As the first witness to Christ, Stephen faced his opponents with strength and courage and the promise made by the Lord Jesus “Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given to you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit”(Mark 13:11). It was the Holy Spirit that made him pray for the executioners at the point of death; “While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:59-60) By doing the will of God by withstanding the persecution he became the first Christian martyr.

In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus says, “I am the bread of life through which He says there is no life for us without Him. We do not go to Jesus because He gives us better life, we go to Him because He is life. He says “whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Actually this verse gives us the answer to what our hearts long for in this world. The reason why we remain unsatisfied is that we do not permit Him to fill us. Instead we run behind worldly things. Let us allow our Creator to fill us and satisfy us.

Prayer: Abba Father, permit me to come to you with my heart open to be completed by You so that wherever I go I may carry Your love and presence. Amen!
Wednesday 18th April

3rd Week of Easter

Receive strength from the bread of life

John 6: 35

The death of Stephen was the turning point of Saul’s life. Stephen received grace from God to die as the Lord Jesus did, because he was able to forgive those who stoned him. The power of that forgiveness had a great impact on Saul.

We see something interesting in the reading today. The Church was scattered but the Apostles remained in Jerusalem. Was it not that the leaders were hunting after the Apostles? Stephen was a Hellenized Jew (Greek cultured Jew) therefore the false accusation on Stephen was that he spoke against the Holy place of the Jews. The Temple of Jerusalem was everything for the Jews and they would not tolerate anything said or done against that Holy place.

When God is for us who can be against us? God knew well that Stephen never spoke against the Holy place but spoke of the Messiah and connected the entire doctrine (Old Testament) to Jesus the Nazarene and proclaimed that Christ Jesus is the Messiah. Those who could not accept this sermon acted against Stephen. God could turn any curse into a blessing. The disciples who were Hellenized Jews were sent out of Jerusalem or rather, they left Jerusalem went to other regions and proclaimed Christ to the people. Thus the Church grew and many signs and miracles took place and people accepted Christ Jesus as their Messiah. Stephen’s death became a blessing and God turned that sorrowful incident into a joyful incident because people accepted Christ and were saved. People converted to consume the Body of Christ, they ate the bread that came from above.

The Lord Jesus revealed himself as the food for the world. The bread he raised at the table of the last supper was raised on Golgotha on the Cross. Thus the Lord Jesus became food (bread) for the world. The promise given by the Lord Jesus was that anyone who accepts Him will never be in need. What does this mean? We will be content and fulfilled human persons and receive eternal life. Don’t we cheat, lie and act as sub standard human persons to fulfill our needs? The need can be anything, may material, financial, physical, psychological, emotional, mental or spiritual, the Lord Jesus Christ is the answer for all our needs. Let Him touch our inner being.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for revealing your Son to us and the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Amen.
Today’s first reading speaks about Philip going around the nations and proclaiming the Good News. In the Acts chapter 6, we read that the Apostles appointed seven men in the congregation at Jerusalem to take care of the church’s ministry. Two of these have gained lasting fame. One was Stephen, who became the Church’s first martyr. The other was Philip, whose story we find in Acts 8:5-40; 21:8-9. After the death of Stephen, Philip went to Samaria where he preached the Gospel to the Samaritans. After listening to Philip, they accepted the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptized. After hearing that the Samaritans accepted Jesus as their Lord, Peter and John came to Samaria to bless the new converts and to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. In the eighth chapter we see that Philip was guided by the Lord to go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. On his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the book of Isaiah. Though he was reading he was not able to grasp the meaning of it and that’s where Philip helped him to understand the word and spoke about Jesus to Him. After hearing about the Lord the eunuch was converted and was baptized by Philip. Like Philip, we have a mission of taking the good news everywhere. We may think we are not “equipped” or “qualified” to do it. But God does not call the qualified. He qualifies the called. All we have to do is to say yes. We may never know how many people God has planned for us to minister to so that they will come to know our Lord Jesus and be saved. In today’s Gospel proclamation, what our Lord Jesus says is what we celebrate during the Holy Eucharistic. We receive His Body and Blood as we receive Holy Communion. Personally I believe this is the greatest blessing of being a Catholic. I can recall joyfully the earlier days of my journey with the Lord. Since I was from another religion, when I had a personal encounter with the Risen Christ and gave my life to Him, the only desire I had in my heart was to be baptized as a Catholic because I want to receive His body and blood through Holy Communion. I still stand amazed to see how the whole thing had happened but as I spent hours in prayer, asking the Lord to do this miracle in my life, within a year of having an encounter with the Lord, I was baptized as a Catholic. Since then, every time I receive Him through communion, the joy and peace he brings is beyond words. 

*Prayer:* Abba Father, as your Son comes into my life and make my heart Your dwelling place every time I receive Him through communion. Amen
As parents we feel the pain and suffering of our children when they fall sick or are hurt. We are ready to make any kind of sacrifice for the sake of their well-being. We do it out of a great love and caring. When Saul encountered Jesus, he was on his way to persecute Christians. He heard the voice of the Lord Jesus. The Lord asked him “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”. Had Saul ever met or spoken to the Lord Jesus before? No, he had not had such an encounter. But the Lord by answering the next question of Saul, reveals one of the great mystery. The Lord said “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting”.

The Lord spoke about the persecution and harm Saul has done to his holy people at Jerusalem. Today, the Lord reminds us the great mystery that He the risen one lives in us. He lives in our brothers and sisters. Therefore, it is essential that we as Christians understand and believe this truth. Unfortunately, this is something that we always forget. We forget that our body is the temple of living God. We forget that the Lord lives inside of my brother, sister or neighbor. Today’s Gospel (9.55-56), the Lord says “For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them”. There is an inseparable relationship between Jesus and us. This intimate relationship gives us the gift of life and eternal life.

In the same way, Saul’s eyes of faith were opened to see the truth which converted him. The Lord is inviting us to understand this truth and believe it. When I hurt someone, it is the Lord Jesus whom I persecute. When I do not respect or protect my own life letting every kind of junk into it, then it is the temple of God that I am destroying. Until Saul encountered the risen Christ he did not realise the purpose he has been called for. It was a total conversion. Saul was converted to Paul. The enemy of the church became the protector of the church. The Lord himself called him the Lord’s chosen instrument to proclaim His name to the Gentiles, their kings and to the people of Israel. And he was called to suffer for the name of Christ.

Prayer: Abba Father, have mercy on me. As I come before you and surrender my life today, accept me, fill me with your love. So that I become the temple of living God and instrument of your love. Lord, bestow your grace upon me so that I may live in this truth throughout the day, and forever. Amen!
Saturday 21st April  

"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"

John 6:60-69

“This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” many of His disciples said, some even left Him. Most of the time, what the Lord asks costs us something. Give up a wrong relationship, wrong ways of earning money, pay your tithes, sacrifice a weekend to serve in a remote place that has no basic facilities. Even though hard, we might obey some of these because it could have a payoff. He might then move on to the nearly impossible inner responses; kneel at the feet of John the Baptist – someone lesser than you or serve a family member who constantly rejects and makes your life difficult. Ask pardon from a person you hurt and reconcile. Just like the disciples who walked away from the Lord, we too walk away from Him by ignoring His voice, or by justifying our own reasons / actions.

What the Lord said didn’t make sense and was impossible for all the disciples. Those who stayed with the Lord would have been equally confused as those who left Him. Simon Peter’s reason for staying with the Lord however puts everything in perspective: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”. When what the Lord asked them to do was confusing and impossible to do, St. Peter pressed on to the Lord. He did not walk away, he probably even did not try to understand. He just accepted the Lord as the Holy one of God, and there was nowhere else he could go for answers.

We see the result of St. Peter staying with the Lord in the first reading. In the power of the Holy Spirit St Peter healed Aeneas, a man who was paralyzed. He raised Tabitha from the dead. The Lord was doing the impossible through St Peter, and the church started to grow in numbers.

The Lord is inviting us today, it may be difficult or impractical to obey Him. It may even seem as obedience to Him comes at a cost. He is revealing us a secret that St Peter found that day; He has the words of eternal life. His leading will come as we stay at His feet. He will meet every need, calm every storm. He will open doors in places that we never knew existed. He will do the impossible in us and through us as we obey Him especially in the secret places of our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the wisdom to know that your ways are perfect, and the grace to obey, when I do not understand the choices I have to make. Amen.
It was not too long ago that the Lord was captured and brought before the Sanhedrin. Peter had secretly followed Him that day at a distance. He was paralyzed with fear. He knew what they were capable of; he was afraid for the Lord’s life and for his own. He was not a man who feared death, but that day was different. It was his fear that drove him to do the unthinkable; he denied that he knew the Lord. It had been a roller-coaster ride since then. They went into hiding, back into their old lives. Then things changed, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. When they preached thousands were converted. The Lord confirmed the words they preached with signs and wonders. They knew it would be a matter of time before they too would be taken before the Sanhedrin.

In today’s first reading we find St Peter and St John before the Sanhedrin. They are on trial for healing a man who had been lame. Peter knew the risk to their own lives, but he was unafraid. This time, there is a shift in Peter. He was not the same man who had followed the Lord at a distance to the Sanhedrin when they captured Him. Nor was he the same man who regularly got into trouble with the Lord for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. He knew more than fear of death, he knew the power of the resurrection and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now he was Peter the Rock, the man the Lord promised, “I will make you fishers of men”.

Today’s first reading says Peter addressed the Sanhedrin ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’. He challenged them with the crucifixion of the Lord and His resurrection: “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed”. Everyone noticed the difference in them. The two men were ordinary Galileans, and people were astonished at their courage and confidence. People stopped to listen to them when they spoke. They witnessed the miracles that happened at the hands of the apostles. Suddenly, the movement that should have died with their leader crucified, started to grow by the thousands.

Back in the day, when the Lord was among them, I believe it must have been a struggle for them to understand what the Lord taught them. I doubt if they understood the Lord’s reference to Himself as the Good Shepherd: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd
lays down his life for the sheep”. They were no sheep, they were fishermen, tax collectors… they were men hardened by the sea, or by the corruption that was in their society.

Things however, changed when they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly, what the Lord taught them made sense. They understood what He meant by “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father”. They came to know the Lord intimately, much more than they knew Him when He was among them. His voice became clearer. Following His instructions became effortless in the power of the Holy Spirit. The fear for their lives were replaced by a boldness and passion to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Someone once said that while walking in the countryside in Bethlehem, she happened to see three shepherds with three flocks of sheep heading towards each other. When the three shepherds met, they stopped to talk to each other for a few minutes. The sheep intermingled into one big flock. When the shepherds parted each other’s company, each called out to his sheep. At the sound of the shepherd’s voice, the sheep separated into three flocks.

The Lord is inviting us to look into our own hearts; are we following the voice of the Good Shepherd or the hired hand? When I have intermingled with another flock, when I am on my own, whose voice do I hear louder? The hired hand that the Lord warned about could be, a wrong relationship, unethical practices by which we earn money, or our own ego and pride. It could even be the things that drive us, such as human appreciation, recognition, and value from others. Or it could be the external things we do in the name of the Lord without an inner journey.

The Lord warns us about the hired hand; it will abandon when the wolf comes. It is not capable of carrying us through a crisis. It will not give meaning or true happiness. The Lord is inviting us to come as we are to His feet, to give Him the truth of our hearts. When we surrender our lives to Him in a new way today, He will baptize us in the power of the Holy Spirit. We will begin to hear His voice the way the apostles did. His leading for our lives and for the world will become clear to us.

Prayer: Abba Father, may the power of the Holy Spirit invade my heart, my mind and may my spirit come alive to hear your voice and walk in your ways. Amen.
Monday 23rd April

Today’s Gospel proclamation has two distinct sections. In the first section, Our Lord Jesus identifies himself as the Shepherd. He enters by the gate, with the consent of the Gatekeeper. Contrast this with wicked dominating people who impose their will on others. Contrast this with addictions, compulsions, and weakness that dominate our lives and force us to behave in certain ways. “Whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber.” “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy.” Many of the things that end up destroying us are the things that come with a promise of happiness. An illicit relationship, bending the rules for quick money, are examples of such thieves. How do we tell the difference between the thief and the one who “came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly”?

Our Lord goes on to say “the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” “the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.” It is the relationship that the sheep has with the shepherd that gives them the ability to hear his voice and recognize his voice.

In the second section, our Lord identifies himself as the gate. The gate is not a thing, but a person. “Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” Pasture is the place of rest and tranquility. It looks like He is sharing with us the principles of discernment. Things that come through the gate, as a result of our relationship with Him, will result in the pasture. We see these principles applied in the first reading.

St. Peter is called to answer for his actions, which go against what the Jews have believed in for generations. They have been conditioned not to think outside this frame. Our attitudes, beliefs, and sense of right and wrong are like this. Sometimes when the Lord works outside the box, and we do not know what to do, the Lord reminds us that nothing is more paramount than cultivating a relationship with him. This applied to St. Peter as well as the community to discern the hand of God from the thief who comes to destroy.

Prayer: Abba Father, I live in a world that fills my ears and heart with Godless thoughts. Grant me the grace of knowing you and hearing your voice amidst the cacophony. Amen
Tuesday 24th April

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” Romans 8:39

Acts 11:19-26
Ps. 87:1-7
John 10:22-30

In this chapter even after persecution we have the success of the Gospel and the continuation of the good work that had begun at Antioch. The ministry of Barnabas and of Paul was on and the disciples were first called Christians. The psalm speaks of God’s favour upon Zion and its people being replenished with greater divine blessings. The Gospel proclamation relates the dispute Christ had with the Jews in the temple at the Feast of Dedication, where the Lord Jesus proclaims the ownership of His flock and that God and He are one.

The Catholic Church goes through persecution time and again. However this is God’s way of strengthening and spreading the gospel to the world. His way of drawing more and more lost sheep into His love and grace. Throughout the Bible we see how God raises a Shepherd to guide His flock to experience His love. He had to finally take the form of Jesus Christ, so that we may know His love in a more tangible manner. After His death and resurrection He appointed and anointed with the Holy Spirit the twelve disciples whom He had nourished to spread the gospel to the world.

Just as the Lord has appointed and anointed us with the Holy Spirit. The question is do we know that the Lord Jesus is our Shepherd? Do we follow His call in our lives? Or are we still saying like the Jews “Tell us, if you are the Christ?” After the death and resurrection of the Lord have we still not experienced His love? Was Lent just another event?

Nothing can separate us from the love of God; He has already paid the price!! We have been purchased by the shedding of His precious blood, to be His heirs. The Lord Jesus speaks to us “Do you know that you are mine? Nothing can take you away from me, not even your sin, brokenness or weakness”. As we pray through the four steps each morning we begin to hear His voice in silence, through the word of God, as a vision, a thought, a voice in your head and even a voice in your ear! As He speaks it is our duty to listen to the voice of our Shepherd and we begin to see ourselves more clearly, our faults, weaknesses, addictions, sinfulness that leads us into the sacrament of confession and communion with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Abba Father, Make me a channel of your peace. Where there is hatred let me sow your love. Amen.
Wednesday 25th April

St. Mark, Evangelist

Go out into the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation

Mark 16: 15-20

St. Mark the Evangelist was not one of the twelve apostles of the Lord. Instead he is often linked to one of the young men at Cana who filled the stone jars and the man who at the Lord Jesus’ arrest was in a loincloth, that he left behind when they tried to arrest him. Hence not belonging to the inner circle of apostles of the Lord, he did not witnessed firsthand the Lord Jesus speaking.

However, he was a companion to St. Paul, St. Barnabas and St. Peter. With regard to St. Paul he travelled with him and abandoned him the first time but later on visited him in prison. St. Peter regarded him as his own son and St. Mark received the insights for his Gospel narration from St. Peter. St. Mark died a martyr and as Bishop of Alexandria.

His personality is reflected in the first reading which encourages us to respect authority and clothe ourselves with humility. The same reading has a word which is greatly encouraging. It says ‘Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you.’

Often, we carry our cares close to our heart. They burden us and make us feel weary and down. We fail to cast or to throw them at the feet of the Lord. The meaning of ‘cast’ is to throw something forcefully in a specific direction. As believers we are called to cast all our anxieties in the specific direction of Christ crucified. This action was well-known to the fishermen who knew where to cast their fishing nets and rods to attract the best shoals of fish. When we cast our cares on to the Lord Jesus we immediately attract His love and attention. The lover of our souls is waiting for us to turn to Him when we face trials and hardships.

In the world we face trials and hardship but they become the best when we are in the service of the Gospel. We are commissioned in the Gospel of St. Mark to go out and proclaim the Gospel to all creation. We are assured that signs and wonders will accompany us and that demons will flee and we will be able to speak new languages. But in those times we will also face persecution and those are moments when we must all cast our cares on the one who cares for us. He will sustain us and give us internal victories unknown to the world.

Prayer: Abba Father, I choose to cast my cares on the cross of your Son that I may experience His comfort. love and answers in my life. Amen.
Thursday 26th April

Share the welcoming love of the Father

How often these very words of the Lord Jesus, which he speaks to his disciples in the Gospel, “whoever welcomes the one I send, welcomes me..”, have opened us to the deeper truth of what He meant. God made us to have an intimate relationship with him, so that He could lovingly guide us to enjoy the true meaning of peace, love and happiness.

From time to time, we see God using a person to carry out a certain part of His plans to bring people to achieve this reality. Even though Moses failed in his first attempts to convince Pharaoh to release the Israelites, he kept on following Yahweh’s instructions and it ended in a victory. I believe when the connection is made, when the ‘Yes’ is said, the joy and assurance of God’s presence in the heart of a person is such, one cannot pull away. When we are ready to welcome and accept Him, God makes certain that our trust in Him will be rewarded.

In the First reading, Paul is invited, by the president in the synagogue to give a word of encouragement to those present, and in his speech he gives an account of God moving with His people through mere human beings willing to welcome and accepts his word. He begins with Moses leading the people out of captivity from Egypt to the Promised Land.

From time to time God chooses a willing heart to put His plan into action. Paul explains how God’s plan to help the people at that time to seek guidance through the prophets and judges had to be done away to give in to the people’s demand that a king be appointed instead. Not pleased with the reign of King Saul, God uses another willing heart, David, calling him ‘a man after my own heart’, to carry out His plans. From the clan of David comes the promised Savior.

In the Gospel proclamation Jesus assures his disciples of His blessings if they are ready to carry out what the Master is expecting of them. The Lord Jesus gives them his assurance that he lives in the one who is ready to accept Him and not only Him, but God the Father Himself.

Prayer: Abba Father, what an assurance you have given me, yet, let, everyone whom I live with, those whom I know and those whom I will meet in the future, see and know You through me. Amen
Friday 27th April  

I will proclaim the Lord’s decree: He said to me, “You are My Son; today I have become your Father.

The first reading is reminding us of the Paschal Mystery. It is the central concept of Catholic faith; by the Lord Jesus’ passion, death, and Resurrection we are all reconciled with God – the work God the Father sent His Son to accomplish on earth is fulfilled.

We pay attention to what Jesus Christ has done for us through His passion, death, Resurrection especially during the liturgy, celebration of the Sacraments and the season of Lent. But these are not the only times when we should experience the Paschal Mystery. It is a part of our everyday life; it is the hope of all that we do and all that we are. How far do we believe in this and are conscious of it?

St. Paul reminds us of Psalm 2, this is considered an enthronement psalm, recited on the day the kings of Israel were anointed and adopted as sons by God. When the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, He was anointed for eternal Kingship and made to share in the glory of His eternal Sonship.

The Lord is reminding us of something important through the Gospel proclamation today” “Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.”-Jn 14:1 Can we truly hold on to this Word today? We may have gone through thousands of problems, thoughts and moments of anxiety but has it ever come to an end because we get anxious? Rather the Lord is calling us to believe in Him, we can keep our hearts in peace with the help of the Lord, it is something we could do. Let us make that choice to keep our hearts at the feet of the Lord and be in peace today. Only the peace of God that surpasses all understanding can calm our anxieties. The Lord is assuring us that He is preparing a place for us in our Father’s house. This is the eternal dwelling where the glorified angels and saints worship the Lord in the eternal liturgy. This is God’s house, His children live with Him in His house. The Lord Jesus gives us the answer of what we should do. He is the way, the truth and the life. Let us make a choice today to make Him the King of our lives, He gave His life for us so that we may come back to the Father and be one with Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that you will help me today to fix my eyes not on earthly things, but on things above. Help me to set my mind on You, and to have ears attuned to your voice. Amen
Saturday 28th April

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the gift of faith to see you and the father in every thing and every moment of my life. Amen!

Does your heart fill with joy, excitement and enthusiasm when you read the Bible, listen to a sermon, hear a testimony, participate in the Holy mass or come to a prayer meeting to thank & praise God in worship? If you do, then you are also like the people of the time of St Paul and St. Barnabas. They experienced our Lord Jesus’ love, peace, joy and His very presence. They too could not wait to hear more, see more and experience more of the mighty presence of our Lord Jesus amongst them.

Although our Lord Jesus was not with them physically, they experienced His mighty presence through Sts Paul & Barnabas. They knew He had defeated death by rising from death & now they were convinced that He came from the Father and the Father and He were one as He said.

Gods amazing love for us is so much that He has decreed that we hear His word and experience him first. That is why He stirs our hearts with so much love, peace & joy to experience Him.

In the Gospel proclamation today our Lord Jesus is clear that we will see the Father when we see Our Lord Jesus. St. Philip asks the Lord to show the Father to him although He tells Phillip that he has already seen the Father in Him. As he rightly said, we will truly be satisfied when we see the Father. But Philip did not realize that his heart was been filled with the same satisfaction in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Today the Lord Jesus asks us this same question. How often do our problems seem humongous, be it an illness, a financial crisis or a relationship issue. Yes we say “only God can solve this” but seldom believe it. We cry out to the Lord, but how often do we see the Father in Him who created every living thing in the universe. We have separated what has been from the time before creation. As our Lord said, we can do greater things; If we believe that the Father is in our Lord Jesus and He is in the father.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the gift of faith to see you and the father in every thing and every moment of my life. Amen!
The Gospel proclamation presents us with some powerful truths we must consider if we are to call ourselves practicing Christians.

Truth No 1: The Lord says ‘I am the True vine and my Father is the vine grower.

I am particularly intrigued by the word True vine. It means that there is an alternate to the true vine. We could mistake another vine for the true vine. This was the case in St. Paul’s life. He was thoroughly convinced that the teachings he had received were nothing but the truth. It even led him to murder and cruelty. Today so many people are internally assured that they are linked with the true vine. The result is they follow that inspiration and are comfortable with murder. Another kind of true vine can be a relationship or anything that satisfies us to the extent that we draw love and strength from it. However, today we are shaken from our erroneous thinking and the Holy Spirit is probing us to detect who our true vine is. The true vine should be the source of our life, inspiration, love, hope, joy and peace. If anything else is, we are in trouble.

Truth No 2: He prunes every branch that does not bear fruit, that it may bear even more fruit.

A life with Lord Jesus as the vine means that we will have to undergo shake ups and shifting foundations. Abraham was challenged to give up his only son. We may be faced with a loss of a job. This encourages us to consider where we stand. Many people have shared that their whole world collapsed after they came to know the Lord Jesus. The Lord does it to reset our thinking and living patterns. If we endure that time of resetting, He assures us that the purpose of resetting is that we will break from the ordinary and bear even more extraordinary fruit. From our brokenness will come more blessings.

Truth No 3: The branch cannot bear fruit by itself.

So many of us live lives backed by our educational qualifications, power, money and family ties. Our behaviour stems from this backing. But the Lord reveals to us this truth that we cannot bear fruit by ourselves. We may be bearing fruit in our own eyes but that fruit may not be life changing and challenging. It is sad to note that in my experience many Christians follow their own dreams of accom-
plishing their pet projects and accumulating knowledge, to satisfy the cry of their hearts. Assured within, they carry on their ministry in the way they see it should be done and do not bear substantial fruit. The hard truth I need to remind myself of today is that I cannot bear fruit depending on myself. My talents and capabilities may carry me forward to some extent but beyond that it they will become a display of my ego and foolishness.

Truth No 4: As long as you remain in me and I in you, you bear much fruit.

I am called to have a sap extracting relationship with the Lord. I am called to draw my strength from Him. I am called to spend time remaining in Him. It means I dedicate at least an hour to sitting in His presence. I should switch off my mobile phone and anything that will disturb my peace and steady my gaze on Christ crucified. Life giving sap begins to flow into my being and I receive the insight and strength to live as He wants me to live. I do not tell the Lord what has to happen with my future but I begin to receive from him life giving sap and direction to live as He wants me to live. It flows into my being and I begin to live in Him as he lives in me.

Truth No 5: If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask whatever you want.

As we remain in Him and He remains in us. We are so conditioned that even when we ask anything we ask it in His will, humility and in love with Him. Many people want to perform the same miracles that our Lord Jesus did claiming His word. The power that will come in our declaration will be a direct result of our union with the vine. Based on our intimacy with the Lord, we receive a proportional courage and power to proclaim His wonders and miracles. We should not be saddened when nothing happens, it is all dependant on our intimacy with the True Vine.

This intimacy and power was experienced by St. Paul. The early Christians were first apprehensive of him and feared his old reputation but as time went by and with Barnabas’ assurance they began to see the goodness and turn around in St. Paul’s life. St Joseph Vaz was able to call down rain from Heaven because his entire faith journey was entrenched in the True Vine and in such moments the Lord answered his prayers and petitions. May we cling to the True vine and find life.

Prayer: Abba Father, today you have posed serious questions to my faith. I pray that I will be united to the vine and bear much fruit. Amen.
Monday 30th April

Has the seed taken root in your life?

In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus emphasises the importance of obeying God’s law of love. He says those who really love Him will obey His commandment and therefore the Father will also love them. Several times the Lord has emphasised the need for obedience. This is brought out most powerfully in the parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1). The Lord speaks of the seeds that fall on the wayside, the seeds that fall on rocky grounds, the seeds that fall among thorns or thistles and the seeds that fall on good soil and produce fruit.

In the first category are people who listen to a good message or read the word of God and say it is good but they do not live it. They do not realise that the word of God is not a request but a command. It must be obeyed. We also need to realise that obedience needs dying to the self, being liberated from selfishness or self centredness. When a seed dies it germinates and a new tree springs from it producing plenty of fruits for others to eat.

In the second category are those who hear the word but they have no depth, they are not in a deep relationship with the Lord. So the word or the seed dries up soon and no fruit is produced. In the third category are those who hear the word, believe it and live it. But they also apparently do not have enough faith to believe that the Lord is with us in good times and bad, in triumph or tribulation. So when troubles come the word is forgotten and such people go into fear or worry, despair or anxiety. In the fourth category are the people who hear the word, believe it, claim it as being for them and live the word or obey it. Such people produce fruits—30, 60 or 90 times as much.

In which category are we? In our personal prayer today we need to go into deep meditation and give the truth of our lives to the Lord. Do we just hear the word, are our hearts like a rock, do we go into despair or depression when trouble arises or are we in the category who do what the Lord tells us to do even when we have to go through raging waters or when death is in sight. Let us pray for the grace to realise where we are and for the Lord to take us to the fourth category where we will co-operate with Him in building the kingdom loving one another as he loves us.

Prayer: Abba Father thank you for teaching us the importance of obedience so that from event to event and day to day we will become more like Christ. Amen
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