



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

August 2016

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me
blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for
me— holy is his name..."

Luke 1:46-49

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August 2016

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“Take not the word of truth from my mouth”**Psalm 119:43**

Jeremiah 28:1–17

Psalm 119:29, 43,
79–80, 95, 102

Matthew 14:13–21

Down the ages, false prophets have preached the “truth” people wanted to hear, rather than the truth God wanted to communicate. God, in His mercy, continually sent prophets to Israel to warn people of the consequences of their sin and their need to turn to Him. Hananiah was one such prophet professing to speak Yahweh’s word. Jeremiah courageously challenged his false hopes and promises and predicts and therefore the Jewish leaders considered him an enemy since successive prophets had predicted the gradual fall of Israel, announcing at the same time the coming of another kingdom and a prophet to come.

The Lord Jesus was the last prophet ushering in a kingdom that was to last forever. Miracles were one way He used to demonstrate the Father’s love. He always went to meet the Father before meeting people. Seeing the crowds He was ‘moved to compassion’ – casting aside His need to rest, He ministers to the needy. He works through the hands of the disciples. Once more they have the opportunity to go beyond the circumstances of scarce means, and enter the spiritual realm to believe, all things are possible for God and nothing is impossible according to His word.

The words ‘seated’ ‘blessing’ ‘breaking’ and ‘giving’ are reminiscent of the last supper and a foretelling of the final heavenly banquet to come. He raises His eyes to heaven to indicate His personal relationship to the Father. The crowds came, hungry for the Word, but the Lord Jesus recognizes their physical need. The disciples are invited to share in His very work ‘bread’ is the fruit of the earth.

When we receive the Eucharist we are expected to show the same concern the Lord showed. The last words of the Holy Mass ‘go in peace to love and serve the Lord’ is practiced more in the breach than in action.

The Holy Spirit is moving today in an unprecedented way. Unfortunately, today like the Israelites of old, people tend to flock to where Christ is preached, sans the cross or the need for a sacrificial response to the call of the Gospel. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to lead us where the truth is preached.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to be a true disciple of Your’s – to take up my cross and follow You. Amen.

“So you will be my people and I will be your God.”

Jeremiah 30:22

Jeremiah 30:1–2,
12–15, 18–22

Psalms 102:16–23,
29

Matthew 14:22–36

God speaks to us from the first reading from Jeremiah. God says, “Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you” (v. 12-13). As I read this passage I thought of the sin I have accumulated in my life so far. All the things I have done that I wish I could take back. I hear God speaking directly to me. My sin is like an incurable wound, gone beyond healing. But God reminds me as I read on that I have a hope. A hope in a God who is beyond the incurable wound. Beyond the greatest and dirtiest sin in my life. This great God promises me a life restored when I come to Him. He restores me through the precious blood of His Son, my Lord Jesus Christ. When I come to Him drenched in my sin, He is able to cleanse me and make me new once more. Then the words from verse 22 are whispered into my ear “You will be my child and I will be Your God”.

The problem we face today is believing that the blood of Christ can save us from our past sins. Even though it is written a number of times in the bible, people still find it hard to believe that God can forgive and heal our sins. Today some people may think that the Word of God is outdated. That it has no relevance to people today. But the Psalmist says that words of the Lord are not only for the people of that time. Verse 18 tells us “Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord”.

The Gospel reading speaks of this same faith the Lord Jesus calls us to. It is displayed in St. Peter. We must put ourselves in the place of St. Peter. Would we continue to sit in the boat or jump into the water? When the Lord Jesus called St. Peter into the water, he would have evaluated his options if he jumped out of the boat. If he jumped he would not have the security, safety or protection of the boat. He did not know what was going to happen to Him in the water. All he knew was that the Lord Jesus was there in the water. He took a risk and jumped in and the Lord saved him. In the same way today the Lord is asking us to stop holding onto our disbelief about the forgiveness of sins. He is calling each of us to stop looking at our sin and take the risk and jump into His arms. He is waiting to completely heal and restore us to the people He created us to be. Today make a choice to come back to the Lord in repentance and let Your life be changed.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that my faith in You may be increased. Amen.

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."

Matthew 15:28

Jeremiah 31:1-7

Jeremiah 31:10-12, 13

Matthew 15:21-28

Today's Gospel reading tells us that the Canaanite woman was in the vicinity of where the Lord Jesus was and 'she came to him'. Despite being a Gentile, she addressed the Lord as the 'Son of David' because she knew who the Lord was. Before asking the Lord to heal her daughter, first she asked the Lord for mercy and forgiveness for herself. When I am faced with a crisis do I first seek the Lord, come into His presence and fall at His feet? Or do I rush with my problems to my friends, colleagues or family? Even though I am a Christian, do I really know the Lord as He would want me to know Him and have a relationship with Him? When I go through some calamity, injustice or sickness, do I ask the Lord to forgive me for any wrong that I may have done?

When the woman called out to the Lord, He seemed to ignore her. She did not receive encouragement from anyone who was there but she still persisted. She persevered, challenged and gave examples to prove a point so that the Lord would grant her request. In my life, I have gone through many situations where it seemed the Lord did not hear me or did not grant my request. But unlike the Canaanite woman, I cannot say that I persevered. Yet, in His mercy the Lord turned every crisis to become a blessing.

The woman's need was great, because of her great love for her daughter. Due to this, she was willing to go through any rejection or humiliation so that her daughter would be healed. She also had an immense and steadfast faith in the Lord, that not even His seemingly ignoring her or rejection could discourage her. When we read this scripture passage at first glance we may think that the Lord is very unfair. As we read on we may understand that through the rejection she was able realise how deep her faith actually was. Compared to the Apostles, Jews and Pharisees the faith of this Gentile was proven to be more.

She is also a good example of intercession. Maybe right now we are interceding for a person to turn to the Lord or for an impossible situation, healing or breakthrough. This woman's response is something that should encourage us to persevere with the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, most of the time the physical world around me is more real to me than Your spiritual Kingdom. Give me the grace to remain in You. Amen.

"For I will forget their wrongdoing and no longer remember their sin"

Jeremiah 31:34

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 51:12-15,
18-19

Matthew 16:13-23

In the Gospel reading today, the Lord Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do the people say the Son of Man is?" Except for St. Peter, no one is able to answer the question. The Lord says to St. Peter that it was only through the revelation from the Father in heaven that he was able to know the truth that Jesus Christ was the Son of the living God. The Messiah. This, then, qualifies St. Peter

to be named as the head of the Catholic or universal Church.

If, in the time of the Lord Jesus many did not know who the Lord was, in the first reading today Prophet Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant that God assures for His people. God the father watches the people of Israel breaking the commandments given to them over and over. It is in this context that God speaks of the new covenant that is to come. Not a covenant written on stone but a covenant written in the very heart of the people. A covenant that would be so merciful that even the greatest of sinners would be able to come to know who God is and will be able to have a lasting relationship with Him.

How was this transition going to take place? How was God going to forgive the grave wrongdoing of His people and no longer remember their sin? It was through the supreme sacrifice that the Lord Jesus made on the cross on Calvary. Our Lord Jesus wiped out our sins once and for all when He died on the cross as the Son of God.

Though it is a universal truth that Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross to redeem us from all our sins-- past, present and future; our sinful nature remains and we fall short of His Glory. Therefore, we have the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation coming down from the early Church Fathers, as a constant forgiveness of numerous sins. The Psalmist cries to God to give him the joy of salvation but we are a blessed people to receive the lost connection with God through confession.

Today is the feast day of St. John Mary Vianney. It is said that he listened to confessions for hours every day to reconcile people with God. One of his prayers was, "My God, if my tongue cannot say every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to you as often as I draw breath". One who has the Lord etched in his heart will be nothing short of a saint.

Prayer: Abba Father, transform me into a saint through Your grace. Amen.

“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever wishes to lose his life for my sake will find it” **Matthew 16:25**

Nahum 2:1, 3, 3: 1 –
3, 6 – 7

Deuteronomy 32:
35–36, 39, 41

Matthew 16: 24 – 28

The prolonged aggressive governance over many centuries on people made Nineveh the 'bloody city'. Unruly dominance became a natural lifestyle of the people. The same happened to our nation. Decade after decade unruly and cruel governance destroyed at least two generations of our nation. Currently we are experiencing what is mentioned in the first reading.

The promise of the judgment day was given. Once again God speaks of the mountain top. The bearer of good news announced peace from mountain top. The mercy of God flowed down to the whole world from that mountain top in the blood of the one who had true peace, love and joy. Today Deuteronomy says, “Learn that I, I alone, am God” (32:39). Only God can save us.

We have the temptation of believing that God punishes us. We forget that we walk into our own punishment by aggressive living. Anyone who does not want to live according to the discipline of God is living his/her own proud aggressive lifestyle. We need to become aware that our pride and aggressive lifestyle bring results accordingly.

In today's Gospel reading the Lord Jesus invites us to live under the condition of discipleship. Are we not made to live this life? Each one is called to carry out the mission of God. We falsely believe that only Christians and Catholics are called to fulfill the mission of God. This whole world belongs to God. Every Nation belongs to God. The best example is the King of Persia. He became a powerful instrument in the hand of God. He wasn't a Jew. Israelites were taken back to Jerusalem, freed from the Babylonian exile.

The Lord Jesus invites us to deny ourselves and to carry our cross. What does it mean to deny ourselves? It is to let go of our erroneous understanding of ourselves. The will of God cannot take place in our lives because some of us have low self esteem and some others have a superiority complex. Denying oneself is to let go of this wrong understanding. Carrying the cross means to accept the identity God gives us. It is the Mercy of God that can redeem us, transform us and make us disciples of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant me the grace to live in Your mercy. Amen.

“As to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

2 Peter 1:19

Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14 or
2 Peter 1:16–19

Psalm 97:1–2, 5–6, 9

Luke 9:28–36

The Lord Jesus was God in the flesh becoming man and walking amongst His own creation when He came to this world. He was forever eternally glorified in the presence of the Father. This is the vision that the prophet Daniel sees. He sees the ancient of days seated on the throne. He is called the ancient of Days because He has no beginning-- He is the beginning. God is seated on the throne because He is in control of all things. Even though life may look like everything is out of control God is in control. The prophet Daniel sees one in the likeness of the Son of man go into the very presence of this great, powerful and majestic God. The Lord Jesus who took on the likeness of the Son of man became a sin offering for the redemption of all mankind and was glorified by rising from the dead, defeating sin, hell and the grave and walking into the very presence of the ancient of days onto whom all authority, power and dominion is given.

For all this to happen the Lord had to obey the will of the Father. Eight days before the transfiguration happened the Lord Jesus had a revelation about His death and He shared this with His disciples in Luke 9:21–27. Then on Mount Tabor He was shown the glory that He had with God even before the creation of the world (John 17:5). He experienced the glory as a result of total surrender and then the voice from heaven came “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” (Luke 9:35).

The favor of God comes upon our lives once we have come to Him, given Him the truth of our lives and surrendered our hearts fully to Him. After experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit we begin to start hearing the voice of the Father. His leading in our lives starts becoming clear. Then we begin to experience what today’s Psalms tell us. We begin to experience that God is above all. We begin to experience the great power of God. That he is exalted over all; seated on the throne like the vision that prophet Daniel had in the first reading. Then our response is worship and in that moment of worship we are set free from all that holds us and we experience what St. Peter says “as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19).

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that I may be able to experience that God is above everything in my life. Amen.

Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one.

Hebrews 11:16

Wis. of Solomon 18:6-9

Psalm 33:1, 12, 18-19,
20-22

Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19

Luke 12: 32-48

Today's liturgy is all about knowing the Master and waiting for Him in readiness. This is not unusual for anyone who has been employed in whatever capacity, worked under a 'boss'.

The First Reading reveals the mindset of God's people, living in slavery in Egypt. They had a clear understanding about the nature of their God. One needs to know another quite well to be able to trust and wait upon the promises of the other person. How did they receive such a good knowledge of what was to be expected? It was through Moses, who had a close relationship with God and who had a two-way communication with God. They trusted God to bring about both deliverance of God's people and destruction of God's enemies by one and the same action of God. They had the inner peace to worship God in this sure knowledge and to accept good things and dangers alike, praising God all the same.

Today's Gospel Reading is also about watchfulness. We have been ordained into the Royal Priesthood through the Sacrament of Baptism and any Christian would readily agree that he/she is called to serve the Lord. What sort of a service are we being called to provide? St. Paul says that we who have been baptised into Christ have clothed ourselves with Christ; that is-- we have put Christ on. Therefore we have only one example to follow and imitate and it is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. The servant in the Kingdom of God need to be always ready for service and be prepared. There is no time to waste in idle talk and daydreaming, being self-righteous and judging others. We cannot postpone our duties to a later date, when we are less busy with running after money and fame. We cannot wait for our retirement to serve God. The service in the Kingdom of God should never be the second priority for us.

While the intellect agrees to the above statement, the flesh reacts at once. Who can do what the Lord Jesus did? Can I be connected with the Father all the time, living only to do His will and not our own will? Was the Lord a joyless person, when He said, "not my will but Yours be done"? Certainly not. The Lord Jesus received immense joy and satisfaction by hearing and seeing what the Father was doing in heaven and replicating it on the earth. What was the experience of the Apostles? They were confused, found it hard and too demand-

ing and challenging to follow in the Lord's footsteps, until they were baptised by the Holy Spirit. From that moment onwards, they were reborn. They became a new creation and they put Christ on. In short, they fulfilled the words of the Lord Jesus in John 14:12, "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." No emperor or sword could stop them. Taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth was not just one of the many tasks they had in life. Rather, each Apostle lived only to take Good News to the whole world.

What about us? We too have received much from the Lord, most of us having received this gift of faith from birth, been brought up in a Catholic environment and with Catholic values. Nearly none of us has had to suffer the persecutions that early Christians were made to suffer. Most of us have easy access to the Sacraments, the Eucharist and hearing the Word of God on a regular basis. We have been given much and so much will be demanded from us. We have been entrusted with much and much more will be asked of us. (Cf. Luke 12:48)

Yet, the more I reflect on this servanthood, the less confident I become in meeting with the expectations of the Lord. By my strength, I know I cannot be a vigilant servant of the Lord. My intellect and emotions demand rewards for being the faithful servant. My flesh starts defending my own self, justifying my own excuses to the Lord that I must look after my own needs before I serve others. Finally I cry out in all humility, "Lord I can't, but You can." It is then the Lord reveals the secret of being a faithful servant as given in today's Second Reading, namely the gift of faith. I am able to be the faithful servant only through the faith I have in the One whom I serve. I may not see any result of my service, rather I might receive brickbats and rejection from those the Lord wants me to serve in His Name. Yet, I believe that my Lord can turn brickbats to roses and take me to my permanent destination- the Eternal life.

Therefore, I have only One Master in life, be it at home, at workplace, in the parish or wherever. And that is my Lord Jesus. In every situation, I serve Him and Him alone.

Today, the Lord is calling each of us to a life of being a servant of God. It is only by the gift of faith in God that we can become this servant and fulfill the mission God has for us. No matter where you are pray for the gift of faith and God will surely bestow it upon you.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for calling me to be apart of spreading the Good News to all. Lord, I pray for the faith needed to fulfill this mission. Amen.

“They will kill him – but He will be raised on the third day”

Ezekiel 1:2-5, 24-28

Ps.148:1-2, 11-14

Matthew 17:22-27

The Israelites are living in Babylon as exiles. They believed it was because of their unfaithfulness to God. Taking God for granted and doing whatever they wanted. God raises up from among them Prophet Ezekiel. Being alienated from, and facing a probable destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, they feel that even God has abandoned them. Ezekiel, however, assures them of having seen the glorious and majestic presence of God where His people are. He is a jealous God and would not give them up for anything. He is never far away from His suffering people.

The positive side of their exile was their being purified through their experience of dying to all they held dear and meaningful. It is also said that the Hebrew Scriptures took final shape in Babylon, to encourage faithfulness to God and not fall victim to the worship of pagan gods.

Leaving the historical context, what message does it have for us? Sometimes we too may find ourselves in exile. Perhaps you are the black sheep of the family or community where you are kept at arm's length or feel unaccepted. Or probably a student who is last in class or has failed vital exams, while others have excelled. Loneliness and rejection are perhaps familiar experiences. Take heart, He is there and knows what you are going through and is sure to help.

God not only knows what we are going through but shares our destiny. He suffers with us. No wonder Isaiah says “it was our infirmities that He bore, our suffering He endured. He was spurned and avoided by men (like the exiles) - a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity – one of those from whom men hide their faces - spurned and held in no esteem”. “Oppressed and condemned He was taken away – cut off from the land of the living”. Yet, as the Lord shares in our suffering, He will also share His glory.

In the Gospel reading today, we are told the Lord had left His glory in Heaven. He becomes one with us. The Lord Jesus' tragic destiny was linked with our's. We could invite Him into our disturbed and frightening experiences. His resurrected power is at work in those who surrender their lives to Him. It is only a prodigal son who has been in the pig-sty of life would want to go to the father's house.

Prayer: 'Abba Father, may my soul awake from death to life. Amen.

“When one wanders away, He will leave the 99 and go to look for the one who wandered off.” Mathew 18:12

Ezekiel 2:8-3:4

Psalm 119:14, 24,
72,103,111,131

Mathew 18:1-5, 10,
12-14

In the First Reading from the book of Ezekiel the Lord speaks directly to our hearts. The word of God is so powerful that once we digest it our own lives are transformed. We are then able to reach out to others whose lives will be transformed. In the Letter to the Hebrews St. Paul confirms its power saying it is a double edged sword that cuts within and without and separates the bone from the marrow, probes the mind and judges the intentions of the heart.

In today's Gospel reading, the Lord shows us what attitude we should take on- that of a little child. This is the transformation that takes place in our lives. Not seeking for human greatness and worldly fame. He seeks out the lost sheep to bring it back to the fold. Like he did for St. Teresa whose feast day we celebrate today.

Edith Stein who stopped believing in God at the age of 14, was so captivated by reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila that she began a spiritual journey that led to her baptism in 1922. Twelve years later she imitated St. Teresa by becoming a Carmelite, taking the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Today we commemorate her feast day. Teresa Benedicta and her sister Rosa, also a Catholic, died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz on August 9, 1942 along with many other Catholics.

St. John Paul II canonized St. Teresa Benedicta in 1999. In his homily at the canonization Mass, he said: “A few days before her deportation, the woman religious had dismissed the question about a possible rescue: ‘Why should I be spared? Is it not right that I should gain no advantage from my baptism? If I cannot share the lot of my brothers and sisters, my life, in a certain sense, is destroyed.’” Addressing the young people gathered for the canonization, the Pope said, “Your life is not an endless series of open doors. Listen to your heart. Do not stay on the surface but go to the heart of things. And when the time is right, have the courage to decide. The Lord is waiting for you to put your freedom in his good hands.” My brothers and sisters this is certainly food for thought. Being safe in his hands is not being safe in this world, but the peace that passeth all understanding when we are in his will is beyond measure.

Prayer: Abba Father, Your merciful love will always sustain me and never lose me. Thank you lord for seeking me out always. Amen.

*“All goes well for those gracious in lending,
who conducts their affairs with justice”*

Ps. 112:5

2 Corinthians 9: 6 – 10

Psalm 112: 1 – 9

John 12: 24 – 26

We are invited to be images of Christ Jesus in the world, by being cheerful givers. There is a promise underneath the demand. We are called to be cheerful givers; so that we would be bountiful receivers too.

We come across people giving to others with conditions. Eventually the recipients become a prey to the donor. We come across parents spending for their children and play their cards to control their children by the strings that they have connected. Many children cannot live in freedom because parents are pulling the strings accordingly. We come across siblings doing things for the other members of the family, once again with strings attached. I have heard many stories that people's lives are miserable because their entire life, they have been under obligation. This is because in a tragedy someone helped with expectations. A child refused to get the parent's support for her higher education, She said she would rather earn and study than have to pay out of her life. These are few sad situations because people do not know how to be cheerful givers but want to receive bountifully.

The Lord Jesus made it clear and easy for us in the Gospel. We need to go beyond ourselves. Personally for me, these words were the foundational words when I entered an inner journey with the Lord.

Today we celebrate St. Lawrence's feast. He was a person who simply gave 100% of his life to Christ. He was a young energetic deacon who was in charge of the administration of the goods of the church and the responsibility of caring for the poor. At his trial, he said these words, "My God I honour, Him alone I serve, therefore I do not fear your torments; this night shall become as brightest day and as light without any darkness". When placed upon the glowing gridiron, he jested his executioners and the cruel tyrant, "Now you may turn me over, my body is roasted enough on this side". That's the extent St. Lawrence went to give himself to God, and he did receive bountifully.

This life of the Saint inspires us. We lament and grudge over the little money or time we spend on others. We forget the blessings we receive in heaven. In the power of the Holy Spirit we could be a Saint today.

Prayer: Abba Father, I confess that I'm full of myself and insensitive towards my neighbor's needs. Help me to be unselfish. Amen.

Unconditional Forgiveness

Ezekiel 12:1–12

Psalms 78:56–59,
61–62

Matthew 18:21–19:1

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy the Lord Jesus in today's Gospel passage tells us the important parable of the unmerciful servant. He tells this story with a vital divine message in response to a question raised by St. Peter who is often known to have put his foot in his mouth and bitten his toes instead of potatoes.

With the Lord Jesus emphasizing regularly the importance of forgiveness, St. Peter asks Him how many times he must forgive a person; should it be seven times a day. But the Lord Jesus answers—not seven but seventy times seven. Seven is one of the perfect or complete figures in Jewish symbolism and what the Lord Jesus says is that forgiveness through compassion and mercy needs to be unlimited and unconditional. We know that to err is human, to forgive is divine. So if we get the opportunity from God to forgive seventy times a day or seven hundred times a day it means that we are transformed seventy or seven hundred times more into the image and likeness of God. Who would not want that?

So to forgive and forgive and forgive is not foolish but the wisest of moves. We not only become more like God but as the Lord Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, it is by loving our enemies, helping those who hurt us, blessing those who curse and praying for those who persecute us that we grow to be perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect. Every time we forgive we open the door for God to take control of the issue or problem involved. When God takes control He works it out for the common good of all concerned and in a manner that is beyond our understanding, expectation or imagination.

In this Jubilee year of Mercy, the New Testament makes it clear that the whole universe or the cosmos is part of the body of Christ. John 1:3 says the universe is made for Christ, not for us, therefore we need to be merciful not only to all people but to all creatures and everything in Mother Nature—animals, the plants and the trees, the oceans, the rivers and the soil. To pollute the earth is a sin. To cut a tree is a sin, to waste water or to pollute the ocean is a sin. To kill any animal which is part of the Body of Christ is also a sin. We must take care of the creatures and things God has put humans in charge of.

Prayer: *Abba Father, search our minds, see the wickedness within and may we repent. Amen.*

"I will establish my covenant with you and you will know that I am the Lord"

Ezekiel 16:62

Ezekiel 16:59–63

Psalms Isaiah 12:2–6

Matthew 19:3–12

According to reports from Catholic News sources, divorced rates seem lower among Catholic faithful than others. This is welcoming news in the society we live today. We see the breakdown of the family unit for many different reasons. It is more prevalent in young couples who have little or no patience to adjust and love sacrificially.

Some of us sadly may have personally experienced the trauma of divorce either as a child or a spouse. The pain and suffering the whole family, extended family and even close friends go through is tremendous. Especially for the children involved. The psychological damage that a divorce causes may never be rectified fully except through a deep spiritual journey. It is only by the grace of God, when one is able to surrender one's life completely into the hands of the Lord that all curses are turned into a blessing.

In the Gospel reading today, the Pharisees try to test the Lord Jesus with a trick question about divorce. The Lord Jesus is precise in His answers and quotes from the scripture. For many people, even today, these words may seem harsh but the Lord Jesus was only concerned about saving His children from going through tremendous trauma as a result of divorce. The underlying theme of all teachings and miracles and healings of the Lord Jesus is love, mercy and compassion. In that context if we view His seemingly harsh words, we will see that it is always for our greater good that the Lord spoke hard truths.

The Lord God ordained marriage as a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman. Marriage was embedded in the order of creation. But all is not lost to those who decide to go through a divorce in ignorance of the full spiritual and biblical implications of a divorce. In the first reading today through Prophet Ezekiel the Lord shows the covenantal nature of God. The Lord speaks of dealing with our disobedience in breaking the covenant and says, though you have broken my covenant I shall set up an everlasting covenant with you and grant you pardon. This is the good news to all who have been knowingly or unknowingly been unfaithful to their marriages, families, communities and the universal Church. Our Lord is a forgiving God. If we are sincere in our repentance He will turn our curses into blessings.

Prayer: *Abba Father, let Your mercy and grace keep me from wondering away from Your everlasting covenant with me. Amen.*

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:14

Ezekiel 18:1–10,
13, 30–32

Psalms 51:12–15,
18–19

Matthew 19:13–15

In today's Gospel reading the Lord Jesus tells us again that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like little children. We are all children of the Father in heaven. This is something we keep forgetting when we live in this world. The problem is many of us do not live in this reality of our heavenly sonship but live in the reality of this world.

The First reading explains that we are so caught up in the reality of this world and what the world says about us. God is speaking to us through the prophet Ezekiel today, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me (Ezekiel 18:3-4). For many of us who we are is who our parents are, because we see in our own weaknesses in the situations we face. We may respond the same way that our parents did. By telling ourselves that this is how our parents and grandparents were we are making an excuse not to repent and change justifying our sinful behavior. We justify our behavior refusing to repent or change.

Today the Lord is inviting us, giving us a new Identity. Even though we were born to our parents before we were born we belonged to God. God is our ultimate and eternal Father. Let us stop believing in the lies of this world and start walking in the light of the truth of the Word of God. We cannot do this by our own strength but only by the Grace of God. King David understood this when he wrote the words in today's Psalm “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me”(vs12). It is the Holy Spirit that brings joy to my heart and sustains me to walk in His ways. “Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise”(vs 15). When the Holy Spirit opens my lips praise will flow out whatever the situation I am in. “Then bulls will be offered on your altar.” The Great animal within me will die on the altar of God by the sword of the Spirit. It will transform me into the child of God to whom belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. When I know that I am a child of God every problem and every pain will bring me closer to God. Now I know that I can go to my loving Father in heaven for comfort, relief and protection whenever I am insecure and overloaded with the things of this world.

Prayer: *Abba Father, thank You for the grace that gives us the strength to believe. Amen.*

Sunday 14th August

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

*Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,
fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith
Hebrews 12:1,2*

Jeremiah 38:4-6,
8-10

Psalms 40: 2-4, 18

Hebrews 12:1-4

Luke 12:49-53

I like to keep my kitchen spotless. I clean it before and after I cook. Yesterday while cooking, I wore my spectacles to read something. To my horror I found dirt trapped in corners and tiny ants on the walls. It was just a few minutes before that I cleaned the kitchen thoroughly. I could not understand how it got so dirty within a few minutes.

Then I realised I was wearing my spectacles. The dirt and the ants had been there all along. Only my weak eyesight had made me blind to them.

Jeremiah had his spectacles on. What was hidden to the rest of the world was crystal clear to him. God had revealed to him the political freedom that they were enjoying was temporary. The Babylonian army will return and take over Jerusalem. Jeremiah warned the people- if they remained in the city, they would die. The King's officials saw Jeremiah as a threat and a disruption. They found a quick solution; silence Jeremiah.

Jeremiah had no way of escaping from the muddy cistern he was stuck in. Most probably the more he struggled to get out, the deeper he sank in the mud. Yet, we find the creative solutions of God at work to reverse a decision of the king. God worked through Ebed-Melek, a eunuch and a servant in the palace to reverse the decision of the King. Obeying God comes at a heavy price. Just like Jeremiah we too may end up in muddy cisterns with the world against us. Yet God brings creative solutions for those who obey Him and to those who have chosen to live in His mission.

In today's Gospel reading the Lord says: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed". We get a glimpse into the heart of the Lord. He is excited about the fire of the Holy Spirit that will consume mankind. His longing is so great that He seems to have embraced His passion gladly.

Then His words take a different turn that leaves an unsettling feeling in us, "From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other". Our greatest encouragements as well as discouragements come from our family members. They are the ones that matter the most to us. We value their acceptance and their support.

Yet, when one person enters the experience of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, often the rest of the family turns against that person. The Lord says this experience could cost you your family. Parents could lose children and children could lose parents. It seems like too much of a price to pay. Just like God allowed Jeremiah to be thrown into the muddy cistern, He permits division to complete the purification process. While we are going through the purification process He will work out a creative solution for those who matter the most to us. He will send a Ebed-Melek into their lives. He will inspire to reverse a decision and a conversion of hearts will take place.

After my aunt came into this experience the rest of the family made fun of her. She sat quietly in every family gatherings smiling at jokes and hints passed at her expense. I am certain all those remarks made her find solace and comfort only in the Lord and continue to intercede for the rest of us who were lost in the ways of the world. Today I believe her intercession played a huge part in our lives and for our whole family to come to the Lord. It was her inner response to our ridiculing her and her prayers to God that allowed God to work a creative solution and bring us all into the same experience she had. God saw her response and fulfilled her desire to have all her family members to be reborn in Christ.

In the letter to the Hebrews the author says; "let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith". There is only one way to deal with the muddy cisterns and division in families as a result of obeying God. Today's second reading says, "let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us". Our circumstances are not mistakes. They have been marked out for us by God Himself. The situation we are stuck in because we obeyed God is marked out by Him. The division in our families as a result of obeying God is marked out by Him. Therefore He is inviting us to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus instead of our circumstances. When our eyes are fixed on Him, we begin to see what others are blind to. We see the revelations of God and we hear His voice. We experience His leading in situations that are beyond us. When our eyes are fixed on the Lord we receive courage and strength that is coming directly from the Lord and what is impossible becomes possible.

Today we may have family or friends that do not understand the journey we are on and ridicule us for our faith. God is calling us to hold on to Him in faith. He is going to do a creative miracle in their lives. ***Prayer: Abba Father, anoint me with the power of the Holy Spirit to live in Your mission. Give me the grace to have my eyes fixed on Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.***

Monday 15th August *The Assumption of the Blessed Mother*

“The mighty One has done great things for me, Holy is His name”

Luke 1:49

Revelation 11: 19, 12:
1 – 6, 10

Psalms 45: 10 – 12, 16

1 Corinthians 15: 20
– 27

Luke 1: 39 – 56

Today we celebrate the assumption of our dear Blessed Mother. Mother Mary was the beloved of God, before her birth and after her life on earth. She was chosen for a unique role in the salvific plan of God. Every human person has a role in the salvific plan, but no one else was called to be God's mother. That role was given to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Book of Revelation says that God's temple in heaven was open and the ark of God's covenant was seen. In the Exodus journey, Moses was instructed to build the Ark of the Covenant. Israelites believed and it was proven too that the God of Israel dwelled in the Ark of the Covenant. Author of Revelation was given this great sight of the Ark of the Covenant of God many years after the resurrection of Lord Jesus. The Glory of heaven and the presence of God are denoted beautifully in this book.

The book of Revelation; the last book of the Bible presented a woman in labour who gave birth to a Son. The first book of the Bible, Genesis also spoke of a woman and her offspring. This woman was the Ark of God's Covenant, where God dwelled.

St. Paul mentioned in the Epistle that death came through a human being to entire human race. Likewise life came to entire human race through a human being who was raised from the dead. Last enemy to be defeated was death, which came to the world through Adam and Lord Jesus Christ defeated death through His Glorious resurrection; the first fruit of those who fell asleep. It was possible because the virgin said yes to the messenger of God in Nazareth who was betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth. She conceived the Son of God in her by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is clear in the Scripture that anyone in the Spirit could accept and honour the Blessed Virgin Mary as the mother of our God. Elizabeth who was full of the Spirit recognized Mother Mary with Son of God in her womb.

God did not allow the physical body of Blessed Mother to corrupt. She actually became a part of God. She was bodily assumed to heaven to be crowned as the Queen.

Prayer: *Abba Father, have mercy on all those who reject the Blessed Virgin Mary. Amen.*

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Matthew 19:26

Ezekiel 28:1-10

Deut. 32:26-
28,30,35,36

Matt. 19:23-30

In today's Gospel the Lord Jesus says to His disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19: 23-24). In other words He says, it is an impossible task for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Who is this man the Lord Jesus identifies as 'rich'? Is it not this attitude that we carry that

we can live our lives in this world by our own efforts?

Many are caught up in this way of thinking of the world. Forgetting the Almighty God, we think we are wise, we have the capacity, we have the talents and we also control and manipulate others to gather treasures in this world. When we become rich and powerful in this world, we become proud and say, 'I am god'. Yet as the Lord says to Prophet Ezekiel to declare to the ruler of Tyre in today's first reading, "But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god." (Ez. 28,2) The inevitable truth is we are human and not god and our life in this world is temporary. Whatever we inherit in this world and whomever we associate in this world does not give an answer to death. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 19:29, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." The promise of the Lord Jesus to us is eternal life, that is life beyond death and now it is freely available to all of us.

How can we inherit eternal life? Is it not by letting go of the pattern and thinking of this world that we have to look after ourselves and provide for ourselves? This shift from the kingdom of this world that we have been entangled to Kingdom of God cannot be achieved by our own efforts. The Good News is the Lord Jesus Christ has already paid for our sins by His death and resurrection. Ascended to heaven seated at the right hand of the Father He is interceding for us and He is waiting to come to live inside of you and me in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then the impossible will become possible and the shift will take place in our lives from this world to the Kingdom of God where righteousness, peace and joy of the Holy Spirit reigns.

Today, let us repent for following the illusive ways of the world and return to God.

Prayer: Abba Father, we offer you our spirit, soul and body. Lead us Lord to live our lives according to the values of your Kingdom. Amen.

“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them” **Ezekiel 34:11**

Ezekiel 34: 1-11

Psalm 23:1-6

Matthew 20:1-16

Today’s reading reflects on Psalm 23 and it paints a beautiful picture of the reality of life. It shows the good and the bad season of life. It begins with acknowledging the goodness of our Lord, walking with Him in lush and fragrant pastures. It reveals joy, contentment and peace. But the very next verse says “even though I walk through the darkest valley; I shall fear no evil because You are with me”. This shows the storms in our lives, the struggles we have to face. That’s life. Because many think that if God is with us, if we walk with the Lord, then our lives should be problem free. But remember the word our Lord Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). What amazes me is the assurance, security, peace and joy God gives us when we walk through darkest valleys. When we surrender to Him, the Lord Himself strengthen us and carries us through. Is it not it what we thirst for-- peace, joy and rest in the middle of a crisis?

In Ezekiel, the Word speaks of God’s mercy towards His people. “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them” (Ezekiel 34:11). This is so true in my life. It is the Lord who came to seek me and saved me when I was lost in my own broken past, being caught up in my own broken realities. Not only did He bring me back to life, He made me whole, called me His own and blessed me with a life in all its fullness. What a privilege is this to have our Lord Jesus as our shepherd; to be led by Him and to call God our Father.

Through the parable of the workers in the Vineyard, the Lord reveals to us God’s unmerited grace. This can neither be earned nor do we deserve it. The master of the house would seem to be God and the vineyard is the place where those servants who have been called by the master work as labourers. The labourers are those who have been called and saved by God. The Lord Jesus says that any labourer who accepts the invitation to the work in the vineyard, which means anyone who returns to the Kingdom of God, will receive God’s unmerited grace irrespective of how early or late he turns to God. This is because He is our loving merciful Father who is waiting for us to turn to Him. It is never too late for us repent and receive His grace.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for Your mercy and calling me, a sinner, to work in Your vineyard. Amen.

For many our invited but not all are chosen

Ezekiel 36:23-28

Psalm 51:12-15, 18-19

Matthew 22:1-14

It is the change in the heart that will cause the people to turn to the Good Shepherd. The people receive a new heart that desires to please the Lord. The New Spirit he is referring to is the Spirit of Yahweh. This is the only the Spirit can empower people to fulfill the Word of God.

Reflecting on the human heart St. Paul wrote, “therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away.” The Holy Spirit changes the heart to cause the individual to follow the Lord. The Spirit enables and creates the desire in the heart of the person to do what is impossible. The only way to live a life pleasing to the Lord is by indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospel reading today, a story of the Lord Jesus’ always raises a question. It seems a bit unfair to be thrown out having been brought in at the last minute because you had no garment. The garment means that you want to be there willingly and able to take on the values of the feast. The garment is the desire of the heart to be a follower in name and deed. God invites all but expect us to come with a good heart. We often see people at the Holy Mass. They seem not to respect it and they may not come often. But God looks to the heart while He’s inviting one. He wants us to be with Him. The heart that follows is the heart that wants to pray, wants to do good and wants to love.

Every loving heart is a heart from God and that is the wedding garment. It all comes back to love in the end. The garment was love in the heart, willingness to be there and when that was not there the story took that turn - Costly grace.

The man knew he should not be there in his heart. The Lord Jesus sees into the heart and not just what into we do. Like some people put on the religious show for a baptism or a wedding or to come to a mass. What we look for is the sincerity in what brings them and that can be different for different people. Religion is firstly of the heart and then practice. We never know what is in the heart of people who come in faith. Let God be the judge of that.

God invites all but expects us to come with a good heart. You are invited!

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that You give me a new heart and put a new spirit within me. Remove from me the heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh. Amen.

I will put my Spirit in you and you will live

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 107:2-9

Matthew 22:34-40

The Lord is telling us today that he wants to bring to life the dry bones that we have in our lives. These can be the situations in our life where we walked with God mightily but because of a crisis that we faced the life we had has died and gone. We maybe still serving the Lord, we maybe still going for all the meetings, we maybe showing to everyone as if everything is ok on the outside but within us we maybe dead and like dry bones. There may be no power in our lives, nothing seems to be happening and today the Lord Jesus is giving us the answer.

The First step in the four steps is “Come as you are I love you”. No matter what the situation we face or the crisis we are in, God Loves us with an everlasting love and He calls us because of His loving kindness (Jeremiah 31:3). It is because of this love that that we are able to love Him back. “We love because he first loved us”(1 John 4:19). When we have experienced His love then we are able to live out what the Lord Jesus says “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is alike: “Love your neighbor as yourself”. (Matthew 22:37-39). This is why the Lord said all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments, not on the strength of our ability to love, but on the strength of the Grace of God and his ability to love us no matter what situation we are in. It all hangs on God’s strength. No Parent would depend on a child’s strength to protect them in a dangerous situation. Instead the parent would be responsible for the child’s protection. It is the same with the love of God.

That is why we see in the book of Ezekiel how God promises to raise the dead bones. “Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:13-14). By the power of the Holy Spirit we start walking with the Lord. Then when our lives are transformed as He gives us a new heart-- a heart that can love Him and love others like He has loved us.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit living in us. Give us the strength each day to live in this reality more and more. Amen.*

“...for you have one Father, and he is heaven.”

Matthew 23:9

Ezekiel 43:1-7

Psalms 85:9, 10-14

Matthew 23:1-12

In today's Word of God, the Lord Jesus explains that the Creator of the universe is my Father. Truly, my Father is alive. He is in heaven. Thus He is above all circumstances of my life. None can defeat Him. He is the Father of my relationships, my family, my office and my all. Therefore my Father in heaven resolves whatever crisis that I face. He turns everything into a blessing. Not only is He the Creator of this world He is also the owner. Therefore today He can supply all my needs. Because the Father does so much for us, we should praise Him. Thank you Father. Worship you. Praise you.

Matthew 23:10 says, “...for you have one Teacher, the Christ”. Our Leader is the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we have to surrender only to Him. Then He can influence our lives. In John 15:4 it is stated, “Remain in me and I will remain in you.” Using my free will, if I surrender my life to Him, He will come to live in me.

At this moment my mind is filled with so many thoughts-- sinful thoughts, fearful thoughts and envious thoughts. Likewise there are different feelings in my heart-- Lustful, fearful, disruptive and hateful feelings. Lord, today I am opening my mind to You. Lord Jesus come into me and live in my mind. Fill my mind with your beautiful thoughts. Lord, I surrender my ears to You to hear Your voice. Lord I surrender my eyes to You, to see You with my eyes. Lord I surrender my voice to You, for You to speak through my voice. Lord I surrender my body to You, live in me. Lord here is my heart. You come into my heart. Lord I surrender my feelings to You. Fill my heart with Your feelings. Lord I surrender my spirit to You. To see You; to hear Your voice, awaken my spirit and fill me with Your Holy Spirit.

You have come into me, a sinner, who seeks solutions for everything using my logic and knowledge and have filled me with Your divine rule.

When we surrender our lives on a daily basis to the leadership of the Lord Jesus, God who dwells in the temple mentioned in the book of Ezekiel comes to dwell in us. Today the Lord is calling each of us to surrender our whole lives and beings to Him. Give Him your mind, body, soul and spirit.

Prayer: Abba Father, Thou art in heaven. Holy is your name. Let Your kingdom come. Let Your will be done. Amen.

“Strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.”**Hebrews 12:11**

Isaiah 66:18–21

Psalm 117:1, 2

Hebrews 12:5–7,
11–13

Luke 13:22–30

Today's first reading is taken from the last chapter of Isaiah. The prophet is speaking to the community that has just returned from the Babylonian exile.

Babylon was a place where they worshipped different gods and a place where they followed practices that were alien to the people of God.

Whenever we go to work or to school, or the market place, or anywhere in the world, we too are among people who worship different Gods, such as the Gods of power, wealth, and pleasure. Whenever we come to the Lord in prayer, we are like the people of God returning from Babylon.

Today's first reading begins with a profound claim “I know them, I know their ways, I know what they are capable of, I know all their plans”. Who is the “them” that the prophet is referring to? In my opinion, “them” refers to the Babylonian captors and the people of God who got assimilated into the Babylonian way of life. Isaiah also uses the term “nations” in today's reading. The nations are Gentiles; those who believe in alien Gods, like the Babylonians and those who adapted their way of life. God promises that they are going to see God being glorified, even though they seem to be beyond the reach of God. How is God going to do this? He is going to place the survivors; people returning from Babylon, in strategic positions among the nations.

If I return to the Lord daily, I am the one who is returning from Babylon. I am the one the Lord is strategically placing in my work place, in my home, among my friends and among my relatives. I am the carrier of Gods glory among the nations.

What will I do? I will bring the brethren to the Holy Mountain, the meeting place of God, just like the Jews brought grain offerings. To me this looks like a call to intercede for the brethren; those with whom the Lord has strategically placed me. I am called to bring them to the Holy Mountain in intercession. From among those we bring to the Holy Mountain, the Lord will make Levites; those specially anointed to serve Him. Sometimes it could be that son who is totally sold to wine, women and song. Sometimes it could be that spouse whose life is totally messed up. Sometimes it could be that atheist colleague who considers us to be children that believe in fairy tales. God invites us to

expect the unexpected. There will be breakthroughs and conversions.

In today's Gospel reading someone asks our Lord Jesus if only a few will be saved. The Lord does not give a straight answer. He says that there is a narrow door. So hordes cannot enter, possibly only one by one. It looks like entry to the kingdom is via a personal decision and not because I belong to a certain band or because I follow the crowd. So I won't be able to enter just because I belong to a vibrant community.

He also says that this door has a lock, and the lock must be opened from the inside. He does not say for whom the door is unlocked. However, He tells us for whom the door is locked. Pleading and asking that the door be opened does not seem to yield results. Eating and drinking with the Lord and listening to His words does not seem to work either. So it looks like I cannot enter just because I pray or just because I attend mass or just because I listen to a powerful preaching. Yet amidst all these, the Lord seems to give a clue. He tells those who are locked out "I don't know you, or where you come from". The Lord seems to be implying that the door will be opened only for those who have a personal relationship with Him.

So while I am also called to intercede for those who the Lord has deliberately and strategically placed in my life, the Lord is inviting me to a personal relationship with Him. It is in this relationship that I will be taken out of Babylon and brought into the Kingdom.

In today's second reading the author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us that we will go through hardships and difficulties. However, he tells us, there is a divine purpose behind these hardships and difficulties. He invites us to accept difficult times from the hands of God as loving acts of discipline, which even though are painful, will produce fruits of peace and righteousness in my life. He exhorts us to "strengthen our drooping hands and our weak knees." How do we do that? The Responsorial Psalm answers that. Remind yourself that His love for us is great and that his faithfulness will never fail us and as an act of faith praise Him.

Today the Lord is calling each of us to a personal journey with Him. We can build this relationship with the Lord through the Four Steps. When we come to Him as we are, give Him the truth of our hearts and surrender our lives to Him, He will empower us with the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Abba father, grant me the grace to keep coming back when I find myself being assimilated into Babylon. Bless me with a personal relationship with You. I, on my part, will intercede for those You place in my life and will praise You through difficult times. Amen.

Hail Queen of Heaven!

Isaiah 9:1-6

Psalm 113:1-8

Luke 1:26-38

On this feast day of the Queenship of Mary, if we look at various teachings and quotes of great saints and Popes we will discover many reasons why the Blessed Mother should be given due recognition as the Queen of Heaven. However, if we choose to look at her life we will discover many reasons why the Blessed Mother should be our Queen.

To be a King or Queen implies that one has authority over a kingdom or situation with the appropriate power, wisdom and ability to have a say in a situation. Such was the case with our Blessed Mother. She came from humble circumstances, poor in worldly terms yet rich in spiritual graces. Her innocence was accompanied by a grace that saw her through life and she was able to respond in a way that was pleasing to God.

As we reflect on the life of the Blessed Mother, a crucial fact is that she was chosen to be the vehicle and means of the Lord Jesus' entry into the world. The King of Kings was conceived in her womb. We are well aware that power corrupts. In the Blessed Mother's life, power and privileges sanctified her. Right from accepting Angel Gabriel's invitation to be the handmaid of the Lord, though she did not understand the implications she accepted the role offered to her. Further she lived life with grace and dignity, embracing the cross and submitting to the Father's will.

As we celebrate the Blessed Mother's queenship we are witnesses to the intercessory power she pours into our lives specially when we pray for possessed people who frequent Tabor, the Community of the Risen Lord's nerve centre. At least once in a week we encounter possessed individuals and that's when we call on the intercession of the Blessed Mother when faced with difficult cases.

Mother Mary was Queen over every situation, joyful when she had to be joyful, graceful when faced with the impending death of her Son, hopeful when He left the earth, dutiful when she chided the Lord Jesus for staying in the temple and filled with praise when she sang the Magnificat. In her we have our Queen and Mother, we can call on.

Prayer: Hail Queen of Heaven, the Ocean star, guide of the wanderer here below. Remind your Son of us, our struggles and implore His mercy on us. Amen.

God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of
the Spirit

2 Thessalonians 2:13

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3,
14-17

Psalms 96: 10-13

Matthew 23:23-26

In his letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul urges them to not listen to the ways of this world, to the false teachings that are circulating. This warning echoes down the generations to us today and still stands true where everything around us is preaching news that is contrary to the good news we believe in. In our world today, we are told that there is no God, that human beings are supreme, that we should live life just to please ourselves. In the few instances where God is acknowledged, He is made small, someone secondary who could be remembered when needed and forgotten when convenient.

In the Gospel reading today, the Lord Jesus warns us of another kind of trap. We may acknowledge the presence of God, but foolishly think that we can deceive Him by our external behaviour. Like the religious leaders of the Lord Jesus' time, we go to church, we say our daily prayers and rigidly follow the rules that have been handed down to us. But we forget that God looks at our hearts, He sees the motive behind our actions, the reluctance behind our charity and is saddened by our inability to love our neighbour.

Today's saint, St. Rosa of Lima was reputed to be a woman of such beauty that she attracted many suitors. But in her love for the Lord, her desire to remain only for Him and to detract suitors, she marred her face with pepper until it blistered and disfigured her. St. Rose of Lima only slept 2 hours a day, the rest she spent in prayer. How often do we sacrifice our prayer time for a few hours of extra sleep?

Weak as we are, God called us to be first fruits saved by the sanctifying work of the Spirit. He loves us and wants us to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus. With the Psalmist we proclaim that the Lord reigns. We proclaim this to our world that refuses His presence and to our inner being, those parts of us that are selfish and broken and stubborn. The Lord reigns and He reigns in me today. He reigns in my loveless heart and changes it into selfless life giving love. He reigns in my addiction until I am set free to worship Him alone. So with the Psalmist I will continue to rejoice in the Lord for He comes into my heart, my life and my spirit today.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank You for loving me. I pray that Your love will continue to change me and that I may become a reflection of Your life giving love. Amen.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor!” Isaiah 61:1

Revelation 21:9–14

Psalm 145:10–13,
17–18

John 1:45–51

Today's Gospel is about the calling of Philip and Nathanael by the Lord Jesus. The Lord who is the beginning and the end walks into a temporary moment in their lives to encounter them and they are made to shift from the temporary kingdom of this world into the eternal Kingdom of God. We are amazed to witness how one word and one moment in the presence of the Lord Jesus can have such an impact that Philip and Nathanael would leave everything behind and follow Him throughout their lives on this earth. In the presence of the Lord they both found something that they were searching for all their lives. This could not be met by anything or anyone else. The Lord Jesus who carried the very anointing of God awakened their Spirits with just one word and one encounter.

Today the Church celebrates the feast of St. Bartholomew. The tradition of the Church considers that Nathanael referred to in today's Gospel and St. Bartholomew are one and the same person. St. Bartholomew's first encounter with the Lord Jesus in John 1 made him become a follower of our Lord from thereafter. According to the tradition of the Church, after Christ's Resurrection, St. Bartholomew evangelized in the East, in Mesopotamia, Persia and around the Black Sea. Historians report that St. Bartholomew had then converted the king of Armenia by casting out a demon from the chief idol in the temple.

As we reflect on the first encounter that this Saint had with the Lord, we are exposed to the heart of our Lord. The love of the Lord Jesus is not something which is stagnant and directed only towards the self. His love is alive and constantly moving towards those who are caught up with living in the struggles of this temporary world. When this love touches the heart of Philip he cannot remain any longer living only for himself, but he is moved by the Lord to share this experience with Nathanael. The encounter that Philip had with the Lord set him free to see beyond the kingdom of the world and to move in the Kingdom of God. He was empowered by the Lord to see beyond the limited norms and attitudes of the world and to see with the eyes of the Spirit what God was doing through the Lord. One word and one encounter with the Lord and we will be drawn to live in the Kingdom of God as well.

Prayer: Abba Father, may all of us encounter the Lord Jesus the anointed one in our lives today. Amen.

“Keep watch, be ready”

1 Cor. 1:1-9

Psalms 145:2-7

Matthew 24:42-51

We are a people who believe and worship God. Yet how many of us are ready for His coming? We believe on last day of this world, the Lord Jesus will come again in glory. But when will my life end? May be when I am 20, 30, 50, 60 or 80 years. At one of these ages unknowingly, my life will end. When my life ends in this world, on that day the Lord Jesus Christ will come. But am I

ready to enter into the eternal life with Him?

We do not know the precise time of our birth. Likewise we do not know the time of our death. But from the day way we are born, for every important event of our life we prepare ourselves. For example to go to school for the first time there is preparation, to face an exam there is preparation, to enter into married life or to join the clergy there is preparation and to deliver a child to this world there is preparation. Thus, we just do not face the important events of our life as they come. For all these moments of our lives, we prepare ourselves to the utmost detail. But for death and life after death many of us do not prepare ourselves adequately.

What many of us forget is that this life is a time given for us to prepare ourselves for eternal life after death. Because we are not awakened to this truth, we are taught and we strive to gain victory in this world. Many do not understand the biggest victory that we can have is to live our lives according to the plan and purpose of God in this world so that we will enter into eternal life to live millions of years in the heart of God. Therefore we lead selfish lives as if we will never die. We strive to beautify and satisfy our bodies that would one day decompose and become the soil of the earth instead of striving to nourish our spirit. Today's good news is awakening all of us to this truth.

‘So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him’ (Matt.24:44). God the Father has already prepared for us to live eternally, millions of years in His heart. The day that our life ends here on earth, the Lord Jesus Christ will come to take us there. Let us, let go of the illusion and lies of this world and through the sacraments prepare ourselves to receive that eternal life.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace today, to let go of the false victories of this world and to walk towards the biggest victory which is eternal life. Amen.

But to those whom God has called... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:24

1 Cor 1:17-25

Psalms 33:1-2, 4-5,
10-11

Matthew 25:1-13

On the surface the parable of virgins seems to be a teaching of the wisdom and prudence of this world. Yet in prayerful reflection the Lord Jesus teaches a profound truth of the Kingdom of God.

We all love to be called by the Lord, to encounter Him and establish a closer relationship with Him. We desire a blessed life, even for selfish reasons.

Today's Gospel Reading shows us that there is a fair amount of effort and commitment on our part that goes to fulfill that desire.

The five wise virgins had the wisdom to carry extra oil with them. They took time and trouble to think and prepare for their meeting with the Bridegroom. The oil that we need to carry is our prayer life, taking time daily to build a faith journey, so that we are prepared for the "rainy day". God's promises will be our bank account to draw from when we struggle in life. If we don't bother to build that account, we ourselves are to be blamed, simply because we were too busy or lazy to nurture our relationship with God.

The First Reading explains that we cannot have both the worldly wisdom and God's wisdom. Similarly this world's values and the Kingdom values don't meet. If they did, the Jewish elite would not have crucified the Lord Jesus. Yet the wonder of God's wisdom is that every disaster is turned around to become a blessing and the tomb leads to a resurrection. The Lord Jesus Christ is the power and wisdom for us who have been saved by the Blood of the Lamb.

How do we experience God's wisdom in our day-to-day life? It is by believing the Word of God over and above everything else. In a hopeless situation, I choose to believe the words in Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." When I feel unloved, I choose to believe Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." When my will clashes with God's will, I join with the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42). The list goes on.

Prayer: Abba Father, I repent for the time wasted in seeking worldly wisdom. I choose to trust Your Word alone. Amen.

God chooses those that have nothing to brag about

1 Corinthians 1:26–31

Psalms 33:12–13,
18–21

Matthew 25:14–30

In the first reading St. Paul invites us to think of what we were when we were called by the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:26). Have we forgotten when the Lord called us? It does us all a lot of good to remember what life was like before we met the Lord Jesus. If we remember where we started, we will appreciate much more the grace of God that has brought us to where we are today. Let us take a minute right now and go back to that moment with the Lord. There is a beautiful song that goes like this, 'All my failings surely would've drowned me. Still you made a way.' These words sum up my own life. God chooses those that have nothing to be proud about.

If the world threw a party, it is quite easy to imagine the kind of people who would be invited: the rich, the famous, the popular, the successful and the beautiful. These are the kind of people the world chooses, honours and celebrates. This is the practical and logical choice. St. Paul's words give us an insight into the heart of the Lord. They reveal to us the kind of people that are chosen by Him. His criteria are completely different. He chooses the foolish, weak, lowly, despised and the things that are not. (v 27-28).

Are we feeling insignificant, sinful, unworthy and far away from the Lord? The good news is we already have what it takes to catch His special attention. He is only waiting until we make ourselves available to Him. He promises that He will raise us up, turn our lives around and use our lives as a testimony to the world of His amazing grace. Let us humble ourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift us up in due time (1 Peter 5:6). Let us not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of thinking that we need to perform or be good to deserve God's attention and love. He has a soft spot for those who are broken and have no faith in their own capabilities.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Monica, the Mother of St. Augustine of Hippo. She was married and suffered much at the hands of her husband and mother in law who had violent tempers. She prayed unceasingly for the conversion of her family. After seventeen years of resisting, St. Augustine was baptized and went on to become one of the greatest Fathers of the Church. This is yet another testimony of God choosing the things that are not.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for choosing a sinner like me. Amen.

Sirach 3:19-21, 30-31
Psalm 68:4-7, 10-11
Hebrews 12:18-19,
22-24a
Luke 14:1, 7-14

This Sunday has a simple theme to speak about but a difficult theme to live. It is humility. I have derived a special meaning for the word humility. Humus is a dark rich organic material formed from decomposing animal and plant matter. When one realises that he or she is nothing but decomposing matter and will one day be turned into that, that is when true humility sets in.

True humility comes when a person is aware of the brokenness within and experiences brokenness in life. The shattering experiences make the person more aware of the reality of life. Perspectives, objectives, wants and needs are purified and humility becomes part and parcel of the person's behaviour.

Many Catholics were aware of the need for humility to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and experience its delights. St. Anthony was one such saint who chose to remain silent and accept the decision of superiors when asked to do a simple job in the seminary rather than preach. Finally when he was given the chance to preach, his exemplary gift became known to the world.

Saint Augustine once wrote "Only through the degrees of humility can one reach heaven. God is infinitely perfect, and pride keeps us far from Him, but through humility we are able to approach Him."

Saint Gemma Galgani understood this and her sanctity is demonstrated not by the extraordinary gifts and graces that God generously bestowed on her, but by her heroic practice of virtues- and above all, the virtue of humility. The fragrance of humility was ever radiating from her. "Oh Jesus" – she would say – "do not let me do things that are above me. I am good for nothing. I do not know how to return all these great graces you have given me. Seek someone else who will know how to do better than I." And to her God replied: "You do what you can: I want to make use of you, because you are the poorest and the weakest of all creatures."

Sometimes God, to whose presence not even Angels are pure, showed Himself to her in the brightness of His infinite light to humble her. "How is it that You show me Yourself? What a shame for me, Oh Jesus! And you want my soul? Take it, but hide it, so that nobody

may see it!"

In the first reading, Sirach tells us to be gentle and we will be better loved. It says be humble and you will find favour with God who accepts the homage of the humble. It goes on to say the heart of the sensible will reflect on the parables.

What does this teach us? Humility is not just hanging one's head low and wearing sombre clothing. It can be and should be seen in one's manner of behaviour, words and actions. We have seen this humility in two prominent members of the renewal in the clergy in Australia. The ease with which they can speak to anyone and love people leaves us gasping for grace. Each time we encounter them we wonder, where are we? Will we ever be like these priests of God, so open, loving, caring, unguarded and willing to even carry chairs?

Talking of chairs, in the Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus warns us about the picking the most prominent places in an assembly. He teaches us to choose the least place so that we will progress to a higher place rather than choose the highest place and be asked to shift, leaving us embarrassed. The Lord reminds us that we choose people to feed and celebrate with who can reciprocate our love and invitation. However, He invites us to give a feast to the poor, marginalised, down trodden and weak and in this way we will be repaid with the presence of God in our lives. Give to those who cannot repay.

St. John of the Cross wrote "To be taken with love for a soul, God does not look on its greatness, but the greatness of its humility." Saint Augustine wrote "There is something in humility which strangely exalts the heart." And he also said "It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes people as angels."

How do we achieve humility? St. Faustina, Divine Mercy in my Soul wrote He who wants to learn true humility should reflect upon the Passion of the Lord Jesus. The Lord had access to unbridled power and thousands of angels. He could have extracted instant revenge for every slap and act of disrespect. And yet our Lord chose to remain silent. He who had the better answers and the world at His disposal gave us the supreme example of humility. St. Therese said not every flower can be a rose. Some are wildflowers or daisies or violets. We strive to be noticed, loved and appreciated and yet we do not have to do anything special. God through the Lord Jesus has already loved us and given His life for us and we are saved and redeemed. Let us choose to live in the shadow of His love and protection.

Prayer: Abba Father, today You are reminding me of the need to enter into a life of humility and love. By Your strength may my heart be changed. Amen.

People who take God seriously will not remain silent about their faith.

Jeremiah 1:17–19

Psalm 71:16, 15, 17

Mark 6:17–29

Today we honour St. John the Baptist by celebrating a feast in remembrance of his martyrdom. The prophets Isaiah and Malachi spoke of him as the one that would prepare the way for the Messiah. (Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1)

The highlight of this day is actually St. John's courage to witness to the truth. He saw something wrong happening and could not be silent about it. Not to rub it in the king's face, like we do sometimes when we see someone messing up and we criticize them, judge them and gloat over them, but to see the king repent and receive the good news. He stood up to King Herod and told him there is right and there is wrong and what the king was doing was wrong and as a result he was beheaded.

In the world we live in, we Christians are told to keep our opinions to ourselves and be content with living our own lives the way we believe we should. I came across this fabulous passage on the internet. It is an extract from a book written by an archbishop named Charles J. Chaput. It goes as follows:

“People who take God seriously will not remain silent about their faith. They won't be quiet. They cannot be. They'll act on what they believe, sometimes at the cost of their reputations and careers. Obviously the common good demands a respect for other people with different beliefs and willingness to compromise whenever possible. But for Catholics, the common good can never mean muting themselves in public debate on foundational issues of human dignity. Christian faith is always personal but never private. This is why any notion of tolerance that tries to reduce faith to private idiosyncrasy, or a set of opinions that we can indulge at home but need to be quiet about in public, will always fail. That is like asking a married man to act single in public. He can certainly do that but he won't stay married for long.”

This defines the life of St. John the Baptist. When he saw something that was contrary to what he believed in he could not keep silent. Today the Lord wants us to remember how the saint was committed to the work God had given him that even when he was faced with death, he would not stop running the race set before him. (Heb 12:1).

Prayer: *Abba Father, I pray that You will reveal the mission You have for me today and give me the courage and boldness I need to fulfill it. Amen.*

Don't be afraid of the newness that the Holy Spirit works in us!

Pope Francis

1 Corinthians 2:10–16

Psalm 145:8–14

Luke 4:31–37

I remember long ago, when the great batsman Sachin Tendulkar, was playing his last match, a commentator made a profound remark. He said “without him, the Indian cricket team will be like a ship without radar.” I believe the same could be said about Christians who live without the Holy Spirit.

Today's readings speak extensively of the power and the authority of the Holy Spirit. We have all been given the Holy Spirit of God. He is a free gift poured on us, through the abundance of God's love for us. The Spirit alone directs and leads us into the beautiful plan God has for us. When we are overcome with the negative voices of our past, our mistakes, friends and our foes, we must know that we can confidently rely on the Spirit of God to direct us to the truth.

This is a testimony of a prayerful mother who was devoted to listen to the voice of the spirit on a daily basis. One day as she was preparing meals in the kitchen, a voice from inside urged her to stop cooking and go to her son's room. Feeling quite intrigued, she obeyed and started climbing the stairs that led to her son's room. Again the voice prompted her to leave her slippers and proceed bare feet. Being seasoned to listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit she obeyed. As she climbed up the stairs discreetly and opened the door to his room, she was astonished to see her teenage son watching pornography on the computer. She was outraged and wanted to bring the roof down. But without doing so, she was led to quietly keep her hand on the son's shoulder. When the son became aware of his mother's presence in the room, he was deeply ashamed.

The discerning mother sat with her son and discussed about his addiction. She led him through the 4 steps and that very day the son was liberated from his harmful addiction. What could have ended up as an embarrassing incident, turned out to be a life-transforming miracle; only because the mother knew how to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Today, we are called to tune-in to the voice of Holy Spirit. Allow Him to guide your every moment and expect to see miracles. **Prayer: Abba Father we pray that as mothers, fathers, CEOs, wives, husbands and children, that we will all receive the grace to become aware of the Holy Spirit, whom You freely gifted to us through the death and resurrection of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Grace of God upon my life

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Psalm 33:12-15,
20-21

Luke 4:38-44

The Apostle, Paul blames the Corinthians for being worldly and not mature in spirituality. He is unable to share with them the mysteries of the Kingdom. We see even our Lord Jesus doing the same with His disciples, the master teaches His people having understood their level of spiritual maturity.

What is worldliness in being ministers? Are we truly a servant of God or are we using God and the graces He has blessed us with for our own fame and glory? Have I made it 'My Ministry' with a fancy name? Am I doing everything to convince people that I am God instead of giving God the honour? We should examine ourselves. If God doesn't shown up then nothing will happen. God is all in all.

Our purpose is to fulfill God's will in our lives while giving Him all glory. For just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us (Romans 12:4-8). All gifts and powers exerted in the work of the ministry are from God. Given to all by the same Holy Spirit for the purpose of honouring God. We build our own fancies or false reasonings on the foundation of divine revelation, copy, fight, compare, compete and jab each other. Are we guided by our pride and passion or by the Holy Spirit? We are just ministers by whom people come to believe in God. We are mere instruments used by God. We should have a very close relationship with God through personal prayer so that we are able to know that we belong to God, understand clearly and execute our mission for His glory.

The psalm teaches us to give to God the glory. In the Gospel reading we see our Lord Jesus, our master, very clear on what He was sent to do. He used the power given to Him to perform many miracles but He took no credit and rebuked the demons He drove away by not allowing them to speak when they said "You are the Son of God!" He did not build a building or a people for Himself but went about doing God's will. Above all He made time to sit alone in communion and prayer with our Father in Heaven.

Prayer: *Abba Father, give me the grace to minister to Your people and to give Your glory in all I do, so that You may gain a people of faith in You. Amen.*

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