



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

August 2017

**“It is better to be a child of God
than king of the whole world.”
– St. Aloysius Gonzaga**

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On Our Knees In His Hands

August 2017

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Tuesday 1st August

*St. Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop
and Doctor*

**Whoever sought Yahweh would go out to the Tent of meeting
outside the camp**

Exodus 33:7

Exodus 33:7-11,

34: 5-9, 28

Psalms 103: 6-13

Matthew 13:36-43

Moses pitched a tent outside the camp and called it the tent of meeting. Whoever sought Yahweh would go to this tent. Whenever Moses entered the tent God would visit him and a pillar of cloud would come down and remain at the entrance.

This reminds us that we too should have a particular place where we sit at the feet of the Lord on regular basis. There is no harm in changing places regarding where we pray, but if we identify a particular place either at home or elsewhere and schedule a particular time for our prayer that makes a huge difference and the tendency to go to that place and pray will be high. As we do this for a while we will realise that our desire to spend more time with the Lord will increase and we will experience peace within ourselves. Personally I have experienced this after trying this method shown to us by Moses.

The reading talks about another important character and something strange that he did. In Exodus 33: 11 it is said "But his young assistant Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent." Even after Moses and the presence of God had left the tent, Joshua remained seated at the entrance of the tent. That was how much he desperately longed for the Lord. During this time Joshua was just a young man who was assisting Moses and no one at that time would have thought of making him the leader after Moses. I do not think even Moses would have thought about it and Joshua would not have even dreamt of taking the place of Moses. His only desire was to sit at the feet of God even after the presence of God had left the place.

God saw that Joshua was the perfect man to lead his people and to take the mission forward after Moses because he saw the humble and genuine heart of a young man who longed for God and God alone. Today we know what history says about the great commander and chief of Israel, who led God's people into the promise land after bringing down mighty walls and defeating a multitude of armies. The simple young man who sat at the entrance of the tent of God just longing for the visit of the almighty is today known as one of the greatest leaders history has ever seen. The Lord invites us to set a place and time for Him so that He may visit our hearts and lives,
Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to allocate a place and time on a daily basis to listen to your voice. Amen

**“When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all
that he has and buys it”**

Matthew 13:46

Exodus 34: 29-35

Psalm 99:5-9

Matthew 13:44-46

Look to Him and be radiant (Psalm 34:5). This is what happened to Moses. He was in dialogue with God. When we spend time with God in our personal prayer our internal transformation manifests in our physical being. Moses found the true treasure of life.

We should not forget that when Moses was called by God he was not the best person on earth. Moses had his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Yet God's will in his life was fulfilled. This is exactly what happens in our lives too. When God calls us our lives become fruitful.

Symbolically a veil is interpreted as the spiritual blindness and the failure of the Jews to recognise Lord Jesus as the Messiah. The true spiritual meaning of the writing of the Pentateuch and the prophets is still veiled from the unbelievers. Throughout the Scriptures it is clear that God promised the Messiah. He prepared us to receive the Messiah. When the veil covers people they cannot accept this truth. Such people are missing out on the pearl of great price.

The pearl of great price is the Lord Jesus. Everything else in life is secondary to Him. One needs to experience this. This is what the Gospel proclaims today. People who have not found this great treasure or the pearl of great price will not be able to understand this. Anyone who has tasted the love and mercy of Lord Jesus will never want settle for anything else because the Lord Jesus is the best. Finding the treasure or the pearl of great price means the tangible love relationship we begin with our Lord Jesus. This treasure is not limited to material blessings, physical healing or obtaining power and possessions in the world, though we perceive them as blessings.

This is what happened to Saint Peter Julian Eymard. At the age of five he was missing at home and was found by his sister, inside the church near the tabernacle on a stool. To an unending and anxious question the simple answer he gave was “I am here listening to Jesus”. The beginning of a love relationship with Lord Jesus is to have the Kingdom of God within us. St. Peter Julian Eymard said, “God loved us, and to prove it to us became human to become our brother in the flesh.

Prayer: Abba Father, live in me with your Son and the Holy Spirit, because I need the Kingdom of God within me. Amen.

“Jesus replied..... ‘The Kingdom of God is in your midst”

Luke 17:21

Exodus 40:16-21,
34-38

Psalms 84: 3-11

Matthew 13:47-53

In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus brings the reality of the Kingdom of God so close and near to our hearts. This is the very heart and mission of the Lord Jesus; to reveal the Kingdom of God to an orphaned world. It is amazing to see that the Lord Jesus is placing so much emphasis in the Gospels on the truths of the “Heavenly Father” and the “Kingdom of God”. In the prayer taught to us by the Lord in Matthew 6: 9 – 10, He teaches us to invite the Heavenly Father to bring His Kingdom down and let His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven, even before we ask Him to give us our daily bread. The Lord Jesus invites us to “seek first His Kingdom and Righteousness, and all these things will be given” (Matthew 6:33). Such was the significance and intensity of living in the Kingdom of God, in the life of the Lord Jesus. He lived and died, immersed in the reality and the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

As I reflect on these words I am tempted to think and limit myself to the understanding that living in the Kingdom of God is only reserved for a few who have the inner strength to be good. However, the Lord reveals that “among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11). This invitation is for all of us who are the least today; the weak, the broken, the poor and the lost.

As we step into this day we may already be preoccupied with doing so much of work in the name of the Lord. However, today, the Lord is inviting each of us to simply fix our gaze upon Him and to seek to carry His heart into every circumstance in our lives. This was the very experience of the 600 Martyrs of Mannar in the year 1544. Historians report that the spark which set fire and spread the Kingdom of God in Mannar at that time, was the result of the heart and mission carried out by one Portuguese priest and a few other Religious who had visited the area in 1542, in place of St. Francis Xavier who could not go there himself. It is also amazing to understand that almost all of the Martyrs of Mannar who were led to stand firm in their Faith at that time were simple fishermen who were used by God to plant the seed of Faith, and today almost the entire Diocese of Mannar remains to be Catholic.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me your Grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to carry your heart throughout the events and the moments of this day today. Amen

Where did he get His wisdom and these special powers**Matthew 13: 55**

Leviticus 23:1,4-11,15-16, 27, 34-37

Psalms 81:3-11

Matthew 13:54-58

In the Old Testament times God revealed to Moses the important feast days when the people were required to assemble and offer sacrifices. These were holy assemblies where prayer and fasting was called for and no work was to be done.

The feasts mentioned include Yahweh's Passover which was when the angel of the Lord passed over the houses which were sprinkled with blood and spared the children of the Israelites. Then there was the feast of the Unleavened Bread celebrated for seven days where bread was supposed to be prepared without any yeast. Yeast has been likened to sin. When yeast is added it puffs up the bread and multiplies fast. It is impossible to remove once added in. So it is with sin. Once sin enters our life it grows and multiplies in leaps and bounds. Only the blood of the Lord Jesus can break the cycle of sin. The next feast was the Feast of Tents, Booths or Tabernacles which celebrated God's provision and is one of the most important feasts celebrated by the Jews.

There is so much that the Lord God dictated to the Jewish people, but the Lord Jesus offered them something more and refreshing. They wondered from where the Lord Jesus received His knowledge. While He left them spell bound, instead of commenting positively on the Lord's words they ridiculed Him, wondering how a carpenter's son could possess such knowledge. The people refused to see the Lord in the light of what he claimed to be - the Son of God - they stuck to linking Him to Joseph and Mary and from the village He came from.

One such person ridiculed by the world was St. Vianney. He was poor in his studies and failed miserably in all his exams. There seemed to be no hope for him. The only good trait he possessed was that He was a man of prayer. During the French Revolution he was inspired by the faith of priests who risked their lives to offer Mass for those willing to brave the threats of the revolutionaries. Years later he was ordained a priest and sent to one of the parishes where not a soul would visit the church. St. Vianney responded by spending hours before the Blessed Sacrament and hearing confessions. Thus he revived and restored the faith of the entire village and came to be declared as the patron saint of Parish Priests .

Prayer: Abba Father, you chose the humble and prayerful to win souls and lives back to your Son. May we recognise them with the inner eyes you give us. Amen

Saturday 5th August

*Dedication of the Basilica of
Saint Mary Major*

“Come and see what God has done He is awesome in His deeds
among mortals.”

Psalm 66:5

Leviticus 25:1,8-17

Psalm 67:2-3,5, 7-8

Matthew 14:1-12

Today marks the dedication of the Basilica of Saint Mary Major one of the four major Basilicas in Rome and is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is a place where Saint John Paul the second spent many hours in prayer.

Today's readings shows us the transition from the ancient traditional legalistic rules in the Old Testament to the New Testament call from Saint John the Baptist to repent and be right with God, to experience God's love and freedom.

The book of Leviticus was named as such, as a good part of it contained the sacrificial ritualistic laws prescribed for the priest; it explains how offerings to Yahweh must be presented, concentrating on the externals. Whereas the call from John the Baptist was to sincerely repent from within and experience internal transformation in our lives. We also see how sin rejects this and how Satan rises up against this through the anger and viscous scheming heart of Herodias who uses an opportunity to silence John the Baptist. John the Baptist prefigured the death of Christ. He was a living figure of grace and is characterised as a voice crying out in the wilderness. It was John's mission and greatness to proclaim the advent of the Kingdom and proclaim Kingdom values. From his mother's womb he was filled with the Holy Spirit. His vocation was to lead the way to the promised realm, to direct others to it. We are reminded of Moses close to death, standing on Mount Nebo and looking down on the Promised Land, he is not allowed to enter.

St. John's heart was such that he said, "You must increase and I must decrease." Not until he has passed through death does he come to the true Land of Promise. This is the reality in our own lives unless we die to ourselves we can never experience true salvation. We strive with so much self-effort to live perfect comfortable lives and work so hard trying to achieve it totally immersed in the materialistic world. Until a crisis hits us we remain closed to a perfect encounter with the living God. God in His infinite mercy enfolds us in his embrace and we realize what we have held on to was mere dross and ashes. We can with the Psalmist in Psalm 66 burst forth into song. 'Shout joyfully to God all the earth and sing of his glorious name.

Prayer: Abba Father, John told of our Lord Jesus' justice at the price of his life, make us faithful witnesses. Amen

See the Lord in a different light!

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Psalm 97:1-9

2 Peter 1: 16-19

Matthew 17:1-9

The readings this Sunday leave us in awe and wonder. They speak about the glory and magnificence of God. For most Christians and Catholic God is ordinary. So much so we easily equate him to other gods. The Lord Jesus himself came in all humility and poverty to this earth and remains with us in the shape of a simple circular piece of wafer and so it is so easy to disregard his presence and glory. It's just that our inner eyes are closed to His magnificence and power.

In today's readings certain people were given a taste of Heavenly splendour.

The Book of Daniel from the Old Testament speaks of Daniel's vision of Heaven. He sees God the Father in all His radiance seated upon His throne and the Lord Jesus being presented to Him. The Lord is given authority over all the nations and people and all things become subject to Him. The Heavenly vision is a riot of colour, flames, white light and a glorious spectacle. Daniel sees thousands and thousands of people. When our beloved Pope Francis visited Sri Lanka we saw the Galle Face as a mass of thousands of people. The crowd in heaven will be countless times that, so immense is the vision of Heaven. It is a literal ocean of people. The focus is God, He is at the centre of it all. We are so limited by time and live from day to the next day. But the Heavenly life will be eternal. When I was thinking of it I realised that I still have no clue of it and only God can give me an inkling of that perspective.

But I do have some idea because a non-believer shared his experience where he had reached the end of his tether in life and decided to end His life. In the experience that followed, in a dream He saw a large looming figure in blazing white with a heart which was a burning ball of fire. All He said was 'I am the way'. This person was shown the Divine Mercy picture and immediately He folded his hands and said, 'This is the person I saw.' Each time He talks of this experience He is at a loss for words and He folds his hands in reverence and awe of what he experienced.

St. Peter talks of his experience of the awe, magnificent glory and extraordinary word he heard when he was with the Lord Jesus at

the transfiguration. St. Peter heard the voice which said, 'This is my beloved Son, this is my Chosen One.

In the Gospel narrative it is said that the disciples, Peter, James and John fell to the ground and cowered in fear when they heard that voice.

Let's pause for a moment. Many of us fail to make a proper sign of the cross or genuflect in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament simply because we have never tasted the glory of God. Many of us do it, out of social obligation and the fact that people are watching us. If we have never known the glory of God we will never feel like bowing down and worshipping the Lord, the maker of Heaven. It is only in spending time in worship that we begin to diminish and the God of creation grows larger than life. Most saints were marked by great humility because they tasted the glory of God. They became fully aware of how small and insignificant they were in the presence of the Maker of all mankind.

I just saw a video of people watching a Boeing plane take off. The people were gathered behind the engine. The pilot revved the engine to take off and lo and behold the people just flew into the air. In fact one woman died because she hit a wall. Such was the power of a man-made engine. Imagine when the God of all creation breathes on us. We will be renewed and revitalised.

In the Transfiguration we read that Moses and Elijah were seen speaking to the Lord Jesus. Moses represented the law while Elijah represented the ministry of miracles. What they offered the Lord Jesus in their discussion was the third angle to the heart of God which was the passion and death that the Lord Jesus was about to go through. Peter interrupts the meeting with his thoughts of making tents and living there. Many of us and even great preachers, when we see the glory of God unfold want to live in that glory and remain there in time. But even the Lord was told that He had to move on from that glorious miracle ministry to the point of suffering and death. The advice that the Father offered was, 'Listen to Him.' We are to listen to what the Lord Jesus is saying and not to what our hearts and desires are dictating. When we experience the glory and wonder of God we will fall to the ground and find ourselves on our knees. The Lord tells us in those times, 'Stand up, do not be afraid.' We need that word for Him. The truth is we will need His strength one day when we stand before the Throne of the Almighty. Let us wake up from our limited, small vision and allow God to give us a new perspective of His glory.
Prayer: Abba Father, open my spiritual eyes to see your glory, power and presence. I sin because I am so blind to your presence. Amen

I would feed you with the finest wheat and satisfy you
with honey from the rock. **Psalm 81:17**

Numbers 11: 4-15

Psalm 81: 12-17

Matthew 14: 13-21

The book of Numbers is called Numbers because it lists the numbers of a census of the Hebrews. The census, the events in the desert and Yahweh's statements to Moses are a way of presenting laws put together by the Priest of Israel, various traditional and memories of the time in the desert too are contained in the book.

In this account we hear the Israelites grumbling about the dullness of the manna God provided. It is interesting to see that Moses has the audacity to confront God. But God's compassion overrides his attitude and in His mercy, provides helpers to share his burden. Actually the manna was not meant to satisfy them. It prefigured the real bread that was to come.

God had a plan not only to release them from bondage but lead them to the Promised Land 'flowing with milk and honey'. The manna was white like milk and tasted like wafers made with honey (Ex 16:31) The mention of oil was a recurrent symbol of the Holy Spirit. Instead of trusting God to fulfill His purpose they grumbled and hankered after the flesh pots of Egypt.

In the Gospel proclamation God's compassion overflows with the crowds through the Lord Jesus. Seeking a time of solitary rest He is besieged by the crowd who followed Him. Moved by compassion, He healed the sick and then asked the disciples to feed the crowds. They reply that they have nothing except for five loaves of bread and two fishes. He asks them to bring it to Him. What follows is a rehearsal of the enactment of the Sacrament which would take place at the Last Supper. As in the manna, we have a foretaste of the Eucharist. He ordered the crowd to sit down - reminiscent of the heavenly banquet that was to be. He looked up, blest, broke and gave - all gestures that remind us of the great miracle that we encounter at every mass.

We see in this miracle a few beautiful lessons. We give Jesus the little we have for He says 'Come as you are - offer the little you have and I will multiply it for the good of many. We the disciples have the great privilege of sharing in His mission. The food multiplies in the hands of disciples. When Christ gives us a task to perform we need to respond to him to fulfil it not with our poverty but with his providence.

Prayer: *Abba Father, you want us to be perfect as you are. Teach us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be like you. Amen.*

“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

Matthew 14:28

Numbers 12:1-3

Ps 51:3-4, 5-6ab,
6cd-7, 12-13

Matthew 14: 22 -36

Today's readings bring out a beautiful characteristic of our God. It has too many spiritual aspects to it, many ways to look at it, but one of the most striking features, to me personally is how God defends his servant. It looks like Moses has in fact failed because he had not played by the books, or by what the society has expected of him, yet in God's eyes he was loved and favoured. Some of us in life run away from God because we depict him by comparing him to the opinions of what people have told us, or we think God is judging us just as everyone else has. God does not give up on us, he sees the time we spend with him. The descriptiveness given to the time Moses spent with God, shows how wonderful and lively prayer could be. Prayers tend to be boring and lifeless because they tend to be a monologue and here Moses was having a two way conversation.

Some of us are so worried about what others may think and, end up making decisions to please everyone, what really matters is what God thinks. To know what is required by Him, we need to spend more time knowing him than knowing the world.

The Gospel is in agreement with this; the Gospel shows us that Lord Jesus would always spend time alone with the Father. Some of us would want to be a part of a group of people, because we want attention, love, and want people to cover our back in crisis, but one point when all else fails the Lord will still defend us, He himself will rise to save us. It is always better when God comes to our help.

Today I would ask this question, whom should I invest my time on? The more time I spend with God, I am made aware of the truth, and not only that I no longer crave attention from the world, or am afraid of being lonely. The more time we spend with the Lord, we are enabled to love the world without expecting. You can see this both in the First reading and the Gospel as well. Though Moses was let down by Aaron and Miriam, when leprosy struck her, Moses cried out "Heal her, O God, I beg of you." Likewise we find the saving hand of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels.

Prayer: Abba Father, too long have I spent time trying to know people, be accepted by them, but today I pray that you bring me closer to your heart and your presence. Amen.

“...Let it be as you wish.”

Matthew.15: 28

Num 13: 1-2, 25
14:1, 26-29, 34-35

Ps106:6-7, 13-14
21-23

Matthew 15: 21-28

Then Jesus said, “Woman, how great is your faith! Let it be as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at that moment. He says a similar phrase to the centurion in Matthew 8:13. Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that very hour.

“Let it be as you wish.” “It will be done just as you believed it would.” In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus clearly states, the consequences of our lives will be according to what we wish for and believe for in our lives. If we believe in darkness, that darkness will destroy our lives. If we believe in sicknesses, one day we will succumb to that sickness. If we believe in problems and struggles of life one day it will end up in depression. But beyond all this if we believe in the promises of God, one day those promises will free us. Today the Lord Jesus is showing us how much power there is in what we wish for and believe in life.

The Canaanite woman’s faith changes the mind of the Lord. She did not give up. She was not discouraged. To receive an answer for her child, she fought with the one who could give an answer until she received an answer. Finally she won. Her victory is a lesson for us. How many of us give up our faith? Beneath our prayers is doubt. Will the Lord give me an answer? Will He not? We believe in God along with doubt. Therefore there is no power in prayer. The Canaanite woman teaches us today that great faith can even change the mind of God.

A mother testified at the Mabole Prayer service saying, “About 1 ½ years ago I claimed a word of knowledge. The Lord promises to give a house to one who does not have one. I was desperate situation, without a proper place to stay. I claimed this promise and thanked the Lord daily. 1 month, 3 months and then 1 year went by. But I did not stop believing. 1 ½ years went by. I did not know how the Lord will do it, but believed it will happen. But the Lord fulfilled His promise. Now I have a house of my own. “It will be done just as you believed it would.” Today are we depressed? Let us repent and turn back. We have a God who is faithful to His promises. He is above all things. Until He answers according to His will and plan, let us wait upon the Lord, like the Canaanite woman.

Prayer: Abba Father, in your kindness, remember us and answer. Amen

The Lord of Nature

2 Cor 9:6-10

Psalm 112: 1-9

John 12: 24-26

There is a lot we can learn from nature and our Lord loved to apply it in His preaching.

The Lord Jesus observed the seasons, noticed the fields and reflected on the most common daily activities of His day: Farming, Fishing, and Carpentry. I believe He watched His neighbors throw the seed and wait patiently for the first buds to sprout and then the harvest.

But today the reason why the children do not learn so well is because they spend way too much time inside rather than outside; in the virtual world as opposed to the real world. When we were children if it was school or home as a punishment we would be sent outside to do some gardening, removing dead weeds, watering plants and grass, digging a hole for a new plant. This helped us to open our minds to the mistakes made and avoid repeating the wrong again.

“Whoever wishes to save his life must lose it” this is the paradox of paradoxes “ Unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains just a grain of wheat but if it dies it produces much fruit” This is the law of life. We were called to be much more than animals, for we were created to be more. We were called to be much more than humans for we were loved to be much more, Saints, the highest form of evolution the highest calling and yearning of man: to lay down his life, for his friend, his neighbor, his enemy.

What greater love has a man, what greater love has God: He leads by example. It is written in our hearts because Christ wrote it with his blood. Read the newspaper look for articles on heroism, read the lives of the saints, the martyrs. What do you see? In all of the stories you will see Christ’s love story. You will feel your heart lifting up, expanding, you will notice immediately the same reaction you felt the first time you saw the movie “Passion of Christ”. Amen, Amen I say to you whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly (2 Corinth 9:6) Blessed the man who is gracious and lends to those in need (Psalm 112 : 5) For God loves the cheerful giver (2 Corinth. 9:7)

Prayer: Abba Father, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Amen.

I remember the deeds of the Lord

Psalm 77: 11

Dt 4: 32-40

Psalm 77: 12-15, 16
& 21

Matthew 16: 24-28

Today we are called to look back on our life and review all that God has done for us. The first reading asks us if there has ever been a God who have been so extraordinary and done such marvelous things. In the lives of the Israelites, He chose to intervene, appeared to people and led them from place to place. He showed them signs and wonders and they saw the blazing fire and heard his voice.

There are many nations who have never heard the voice of God. We learn from the news that in certain islands of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago there are tribes who are still to have contact with other humans and choose to live like in the prehistoric times. The word tells us 'Because of the love He had for your fathers' He did all that He did. Today the Lord has given us a rich inheritance which is the knowledge that we are forgiven and saved and washed in the blood of Jesus. We do not have to live as cursed and forsaken people but a people loved by the Lord. Many people even though they go to church live like orphans with no hope and no peace in their hearts. The reading tells us Try to be convinced - how are you convinced - look back on your life and see all the wonders God has done. it says Be convinced that Yahweh is the only God of Heaven and there is no other. The word directs us to observe the laws and commandments and everything will be well with us.

However, we have a fundamental error in our beliefs. We believe that if we do everything well and right, that God should do the same and life should be smooth. The truth is, we will face difficulties and obstacles. That's why the Lord Jesus says, 'If you want to follow me, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. The moment we are faced with having to deny ourselves, we staunchly believe that God has left us and we have to fend for ourselves. Through hardships the Lord is only purifying our love and zeal. If His love for us He says. 'What will one gain by winning the whole world, if he destroys his soul. St. Clare tells us, 'We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.' We we love the Lord Jesus, we will reflect him in our behaviour and outlook, but if we love power it will manifest in our pride and pomp. Let's look to the Lord!

Prayer: Abba Father, my heart has been hankering after the world and all its attractions. Today I want to turn back to you and have a taste of your love. Amen

Saturday 12th August *St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Religious*

**“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul
and with all your strength.” Deuteronomy:6:5**

Dt 6: 4-13

Psalm 18:2-4, 47-51

Matthew 17:14-20

Today in both the Gospel proclamation and in the first reading we find a profound teaching. It leads the way to the succession of faith from generation to generation. It is the responsibility of parents to live their faith as an example to their children and generations to come.

In the book of Deuteronomy, we are clearly taught the most important law of all. That is to love your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. We are asked to engrave this truth in our hearts and to repeat this over to our children and to speak of it at home or on travel. We must do it when we lie down or when we rise and brand it on our hands as a sign and engrave on door posts. I believe this is the fundamental duty of any Christian parent and the importance of it is highlighted well in the first reading.

Can we all confidently say that we live that Christian calling as parents? I was a single mother with a young daughter when I came to journey with the Lord about eight years ago. My daughter was 14 years old then. Before meeting Christ our lives were full of struggles. After the deep encounter and desiring deeper, to see my daughter in the same journey with the Lord, I lived a life of faith through His strength and I prayed unceasingly for four years for her surrender to the Lord. God in His mercy heard my plea and brought her under His wings when she was 18 and today she lives a life fully committed to Him and serving Him. Yet, my responsibility as a parent is never over and daily I walk the walk of faith to live this commandment to love my God with all my heart, soul and strength.

In the Gospel proclamation we see the faith of a father as he kneels before the Lord Jesus and asks the Lord to heal his son. Here, the Lord rebukes His disciples as they were unable to heal this boy. The reason for the rebuke was the lack of faith of the disciples. How do we increase the measure of faith we have been given? This can happen only, through a deep relationship with God which comes naturally when we give our whole life to God, body, mind and soul and gaze only on Him.

Prayer: Abba father, take control of our whole being and never let us lose sight of the fact that you are our only God. Thank you for our call to Love You above all for a life of fullness. Amen

**“Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.” Psalm 85:11**

1 Kings 19: 9-13

Psalm 85: 9-14

Romans 9:1-5

This Sunday’s liturgy brings us a profound message, which can be summed up by this phrase, “For the Lord is about to pass by.” (1Kings19:11). We are taught how to see, hear and feel the Lord who is about to pass by each of us in different moments in our lives. Those moments are then turned into life transforming experiences that draw us closer to Him.

In the First Reading we see prophet Elijah as a deflated and disillusioned man. This was just a few days after he had performed the great act of bringing fire from heaven to prove that Yahweh God, and not Baal, was the true God. Elijah was so in tune with God that his simple prayer was answered instantly. He received the supernatural strength to annihilate hundreds of false prophets, and then to bring down rain, thereby ending a three year long drought. Having done all that, he then ran all the way from Mount Carmel to Jezreel, overtaking King Ahab who was riding in a chariot. After all these glorious experiences of supernatural power, we see a prophet complaining and whining to God, explaining how bad others were, and how faithful he had been. When we look into our hearts, we see the same happening even now, in and among us, may it be family, workplace or community. We organise retreats and religious and charity functions with much prayer, enthusiasm and commitment, bask in the glory of an anointed retreat or a successful program, only to get hurt by a word from a fellow brother or a sister in the community. Lo and behold, immediately all our commitment and excitement vanishes, leaving us withdrawn, sulking and running away.

Yet our merciful God, follows us into the darkness of our heart and mind, and He asks us, “What are you doing here?” (cf 1Kings19:9). As we begin to complain, the Lord tells us to “go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” (cf 1Kings19:11). In prayer, as we move from the flesh into the spirit, the Holy Spirit unites with our spirit. As our spirit is awakened and we begin to feel the presence of God in our depths and hear His voice in our spirit, we too realise our true brokenness. Just like Elijah “pulled his cloak over his face and went and stood at the mouth of the cave” (cf 1Kings19:13), we too shed our arrogance and self worth before the Lord, ready to listen to His word and follow His instructions. We hear the same words of the Lord again, “what are

you doing here?” (1Kings19:9), but those words now reveal a clear leading with boldness, as the Lord sends us on our way to fulfil His mission again.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus dealt with His disciples very differently. The norm of this world is, the leader being whisked away immediately after a major public event, even of the Church. The Lord Jesus had just fed more than five thousand people with a mere five loaves and two fish. The disciples might have wanted to wait and discuss what had just taken place. Yet the Lord had a different agenda. He was in a hurry to go elsewhere, away from human habitation, to be alone with the Father. So He Himself performed the duty of dismissing the crowd.

Here we see a Christian leader's duty, being very different to that of a political or a civil leader, serving rather than being served. It's only then, can the leader ensure the priorities of the group to be according to the will of God. After being in the company of the Father for several hours, nourished and refreshed in the Spirit, the Lord Jesus went back to the disciples, who by then, were struggling on the way they were sent by the Master. The natural barrier of water did not deter the Lord, and He walked on water to His disciples who needed Him. The Lord teaches us two lessons; that the natural law and limitations do not restrict us when we are in communion with the Father, doing His will, and that nothing stops the Lord from coming to the help of His children, who submit themselves to the will of God.

We also see that the disciples failed to recognise the Lord even in the afterglow of a magnificent miracle. Their natural thinking and fears come out, simply because, unlike their Master, they did not have an intimate relationship with the Father. Just being a passenger of the bandwagon of Christianity or even of a prayer community is not good enough. Miracles and sermons alone won't ensure a strong faith journey. Unless we have a deep intimate personal prayer life, we fall when we hit a crisis.

The treasure chest of today's Gospel proclamation teaches us yet another lesson. St Peter, who dared to jump into the water, waited until the Lord said, 'Come'. Even in our life situations, we need to wait for the command and the timing of our Lord, even when we are convinced that we have the capacity to do so. This applies to ministry too, as enthusiastic as we can be to serve Him, we need to hear His command.

Prayer: Abba Father, You call me out upon the waters, the great unknown, where feet may fail... And as I find You in the mystery, in oceans deep, I pray that my faith will stand. Amen.

The Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords.

Deut 10:17

Dt 10: 12-22

Psalms 147: 12-20

Matthew 17:22-27

In the first reading through Moses God reveals to the Israelites who He is. What His nature is and what the Israelites should do to reach the Promised Land.

Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to God. He is the God of gods and the Lord of lords. He is the great, mighty and awesome God. Yet

His heart is attracted to the most insignificant people like the Israelites, to the fatherless, to widows and to foreigners. God is attracted to the broken, weak and to the lost. God led the Israelites out of slavery and gave them five guidelines to reach the Promised Land. They were to fear Him, to walk with Him, to love Him, to serve Him and to obey His commandments. This is a life of complete surrender to God and God alone. Moses says these instructions are for your own good. But many times, the Israelites were unfaithful to God. Though they came out of Egypt, Egypt had not come out of them. That is why they took forty years to reach the Promised Land. God was still faithful to them to the end.

Today we too are being called by the Lord to journey towards another promised land. What is our promised land? It is the promised land of eternal life. Eternal life is not only life after death but a life that we are called to live and experience even here and now in this life. This is the new life the Lord Jesus promised His disciples, a life full of peace, love and joy internally through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus told His disciples "to remain in Jerusalem till the father's promise is fulfilled". In and through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have received the privilege that the Israelites did not have. Every time we fall into sin we can run to our Saviour the Lord Jesus in repentance and in confession and we can experience salvation. By receiving the Holy Eucharist, we can make Him the center of our lives. By the power of the Holy Spirit we can live the five guidelines that were given to the Israelites, to fear the Lord, to walk with Him, to love Him, to serve Him and to obey His commandments. This becomes impossible with human strength but it becomes effortless by the power of the Holy Spirit. Every one of us can have this privilege to live a new life till we reach our eternal home.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for sending your son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Tuesday 15th August *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

“For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man” (1 Cor 15:21)

1 Cor 15:20-27

Psalm 45:10-12, 16

Luke 1:39-56

The Second reading talks about the initial sin committed by man and because of that all humans were subject to death. But God in his mercy sent His only son Jesus Christ to put an end to death. “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man” (1 Cor 15:21)

This was the reason why God had to come in the form of man and undo what an imperfect man did. Jesus Christ responded and lived as a perfect man, so that all humanity would receive the grace of eternal life through the shedding of the Lord’s precious blood.

God came to this earth to take away death from us and give us an eternal and purposeful life. If God did not come in the form of man and go through whatever he went through and did not die on the cross, our lives would have not made any sense. This is because how much good we do or how much bad we do during our life on earth would have not made any difference because all of us would have ended up in the wrong place after death. There would have not been any kind of purpose towards our life. The existence of humanity wouldn’t have had meaning.

God gave His life not because any of us deserved it but because his love for us was so great. We might wonder why God created humans in the first place if He being God knew that we would disobey Him. God created humans because God himself is love and He wanted to share that love with others and that’s why He created us so that we could share in His love. Let us think of the times when we were in love. We would have wanted to share things with our partner? If we humans being so narrow minded and sinful have so much love within us, we cannot imagine and explain how much the Lord who is the Alpha and Omega and creator of all things would love His own people whom He made in His image and likeness. Even if we were the only humans on the planet He still would have died for us. Many of us have little or no clue of the God we worship. Whenever we sin some of us tend to think that God will not forgive us and we remain in a sinful state. God is never tired of forgiving our sin, but it is we who tire of seeking His forgiveness.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we pray and thank you our Lord Jesus who gave His life as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Amen.*

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I
in the midst of them”

Matthew 18:20

Deut 34: 1 – 12

Psalm 66: 1 – 3a, 5 &
8, 16 – 17

Matthew 18: 15 – 20

From the beginning God chose individuals for Himself, but through Moses He called a nation to be His people. Today we see the end of a great saga and the beginning of a new one.

God does not like isolation. When we read the scriptures it is clear that God called individuals not to remain as individuals, but each one was called to be in a group/nation/community. We are keen on knowing God's will and plan for us. We should be aware that God calls people to be part of a community life.

Moses performed mighty deeds. Yes, they were performed to save a whole nation. Not to highlight an individual. Moses was honoured because he obeyed God until the end. Moses accomplished his task to the utmost and has become a role model today. We are called for such a purpose. Can we say yes to God?

In the Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus is concerned about the harmony and unity of the community. In a community each person is different from the other. That's how God has designed it. Each person is uniquely created by God. But each person is also open to contamination by the enemy. Therefore community life can become a battle field. People find it difficult to accept one another for this reason.

To protect the community life, the Lord Jesus gave us a direction. It is our responsibility to follow His advice in times of conflict. A community is a group of sinful individuals, touched by God's love and who have encountered the Risen Christ. They are brought together to work in the vineyard of God as a community. We should be mindful that people in the Christian Community/church are human beings moving towards saintliness.

Our incorrect judgments and actions can disrupt the work of God. Remember we are called into community life by God and not of our own accord. St. Stephen of Hungary worked tirelessly to build Christian Communities He was a vibrant monarch who led his country to embrace Christianity. He dedicated his entire life to work in God's vineyard. His motto "Be merciful to all who are suffering violence, keeping always in your heart the example of the Lord who said 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'"

Prayer: Abba Father, grant me grace to adhere to your word. Amen.

“Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.” **Joshua 3:7**

Joshua 3:7-10, 11, 13-17

Psalm 114:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Matthew 18:21-19:1

Today’s first reading speaks about Israelites crossing the Jordan River. As Joshua was the leader, crossing the Jordan River was a great challenge on their journey to the Promised Land. The Lord says, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.” The greatest assurance we can have is to know that the Lord is with us even when we are faced with gigantic issues in our lives. The ultimate purpose of being a Christian is to have an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father. And the result of having intimacy with the Lord is to know that we are His; nothing that happens in our lives is out of His notice. He is in total control. We hear His voice and we are guided by Him. The greatest consolation we can have is to know and feel His presence in the middle of our greatest trials, pain and loss. When we know we are guided by His word and walking under His light, what come on our way does not matter. We are more than conquerors to overcome the obstacle. We tend to question ‘where is God’ when we encounter difficulties. But even in the middle of pain, He is with us. It is His promise that He will never leave us or abandon us. It takes great faith to rise above the situation to truly trust God in the middle of pain and hurt knowing that He works everything together for good for those who love Him.

Today’s Gospel proclamation speaks about forgiveness. Forgiveness is the greatest response we can give a person who has wronged us. We can either react or respond to a situation or people when things go wrong. But the Lord Jesus did not react to the devil’s temptation but responded to the Father’s word. Every time He gave inner responses to the Father; He chose to forgive those who hurt Him, ridiculed Him, and rejected Him. The Lord Jesus even went to the extent of forgiving those who crucified Him. It was His inner response that moved the heart of the Father and resulted in His resurrection. The greatest result of forgiving others is healing to ourselves. But when we hold onto unforgiveness, we will be hurt. God has blessed us with a forgiving heart because the Spirit of God lives within us, and it is He who provides the ability to offer forgiveness over and over, just as God forgives us over and over.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for your unconditional forgiveness for me and for blessing me with a heart to forgive others seventy times seven. Amen!

“...what God has joined, let no man separate.”

Matthew 19: 6

Joshua 24: 1-13

Ps 136: 1-3, 16-24

Matthew 19: 3-12

We like to live in freedom. Most of the time when we speak to married people, they talk of having lost their freedom. Today divorces are increasing because of this. People like to speak and associate with those whom they like.

Many look at this statement, 'what God has joined, let no man separate' as a law. Therefore some obey this law with a lot of difficulty. Some others remain in their marriage with dislike while others legally separate.

There was a couple with two children. Daily conflicts rose between their two natures. Both got accustomed to live separate lives under the same roof. After a few years the husband met another lady. He started a relationship with her and later left home to live with her. In the meantime, the wife encountered the Lord Jesus. She accepted her sin, repented and surrendered her life to the Lord Jesus. She entered into a life of praise & worship and listened to the 'Take me Higher' CD daily. Meanwhile the husband decided to get separated legally and began legal proceedings, consulting the best lawyers in Sri Lanka. Her economic stability weakened. People thought this would be the end. But she walked in faith through this battle. At the height of the court case, over an unexpected incident, a conflict arose between the husband and the illegal partner. He himself separated from her and withdrew the court case. Before long, he who decided that he would never come home, returned to his family. The wife lovingly accepted him back. Now they live a beautiful life.

In the first reading Joshua states the mighty deeds that God did among His people. He explains how God frees them from slavery and divides the Red Sea to bring them out of Egypt. Even today, this same God frees us from various enslavements that we are stuck in, performing mighty miracles that we cannot imagine. Today many, identifying as, 'freedom' go after their own desires and in fact live in slavery. Though we see the Word of God as law, through it He wants to give us a beautiful and free life. We cannot attain this life by our own strength and for that we need God's power. Therefore let us place our weaknesses and difficulties at the foot of the cross and surrender our lives, our families to Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us your Holy Spirit and your light in our lives. 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

Jos: 24:14-29

Ps. 16: 1-2, 5, 7-8,11

Mt. 169: 13-15

Looking at him no one would ever know that a childhood sickness had left him brain damaged. It is only when you speak to him that you would realize his intellectual level is that of a small child. He had come a long way, had mastered the skills to live a normal and independent life. He still faces challenges, but he never complains. His mother once said, every day he would kneel down at the altar, look at the crucifix and ask the Lord: “Jesus, are you ok?”

In today’s Gospel the Lord says: “let the little children come to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”. The way the young man greeted the Lord every day shook me. We look at the crucified Jesus, His broken body and we go through our list of needs. We do not stop for a moment to thank Him for His sacrifice on the cross let alone ask Him if He is OK. We have become indifferent to the price He paid for us.

In all of the portraits that depict today’s Gospel we see little children all over the Lord. Some are on His lap, some leaning against Him, some looking into His face, some touching His toes and some examining His garments. They are interested in Him, what He is doing, what He is saying, what He is wearing... They have found a secret that most adults have missed; they are interested in the Lord.

In today’s first reading Joshua tells the Hebrew people; “Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord”. Sometimes we come to God asking for His help to serve the gods of our ancestors; wealth, power, position. Joshua says, make a choice. Throw away the gods of your ancestors and serve the Lord.

The Lord is inviting us to come to Him like little children; be interested in Him and His ways. The young man who had the disadvantage of not having a completely developed brain has found so much more than us with our fully functioning brains. He is genuinely interested in the Lord Jesus. In doing so, he had had opened Himself to an inheritance: “for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the attitude of little children who came to the Lord. Give me the grace to trust you, to seek you and to walk in your ways all the days of my life. Amen.

God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

Romans 11:29

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Rom 11:13-15, 29-32

Mt 15:21-28

In the section preceding today's Gospel proclamation, Our Lord Jesus has had a serious argument with some religious Jews. He has now left this place and has travelled to a Gentile area. Perhaps he wants to get away from the pressure of ministering, to spend some undisturbed time in prayer, listening to the voice of His Father, getting a divine perspective, and realigning himself.

It seems that the Lord is giving me a formula how to handle life when things around me become too hot to handle.

The Jews were a people who had come to an agreement with God to uphold the Torah, and thereby they believed that they were special in the eyes of God. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had made no such commitment, and hence, had no part in the Jewish special status, or the privileges that came with it. What's more all their Gentile neighbours were hostile, and often, violence would erupt between them. The Gentiles were seen as enemies. In today's first reading we see God's heart and wish for the Gentiles. Yet, by looking at past incidents, the Jews came to believe that God was for the Jews and against the Gentiles.

I come to understand that looking at my own life experiences outside the revelations of God could lead me to miss what God desires and wants for my life.

When the Canaanite woman came to Jesus, she was going against accepted perception. Yet her problem was so severe that she decided to brave the prejudices. Sometimes the Lord allows crisis into our life, simply to break the box that we have put Him into.

She addresses Our Lord as "Jesus – Son of David", alluding to the authority and favour of God upon David, which she believes Our Lord has inherited. This is knowledge you would not expect from a Gentile. She seems to have done her homework, spending time learning the ways of God. She must have heard of the mighty things that had happened at the hands of our Lord,. This is why she came looking for him. She had no doubt that He could heal her daughter.

In our crises, if we, like the Canaanite woman, turn to the Lord and learn of his ways, by turning to scripture and listening to powerful tes-

timonies, there will be a breakthrough. Our crises will be our blessing.

When the Canaanite woman approached our Lord, he remained silent. He is moved by the plight of the woman, yet restricted by His perception of God's attitude towards Gentiles. In John chapter 8, a similar incident occurs. The Jews bring a woman caught in adultery and asks Our Lord for His opinion. He remains silent and draws doodles on the ground. I believe He prayed and connected with His Father.

Over time, our Lord Jesus had come to discover the heart of His Father. Often, what he discovered was at odds with the popular understanding of who God is and how He works. In the ensuing discussion with the Canaanite woman, Our Lord discovers the heart of God, His mind expands, and the woman's daughter is delivered.

If the perception of Our Lord Jesus had not changed, the woman would have continued to live a cursed life. I learn that when I do not learn the ways of the Lord in a relationship with Him, my own prejudices and perceptions are an obstacle for the Lord to intervene in the lives of those around me.

We live in a world that believes in science, cause and effect. The scientific paradigm rejects the existence of God. We live in, and are educated in, a Godless world, immersed in Godless thoughts and concepts. We come to believe that we are alone. We come to believe that unless we help ourselves no one else will. Every morning we need to come before the Lord to recalibrate our thoughts and prejudices. If not, the Canaanite women we encounter every day will be condemned to live a cursed life.

In the second reading, St. Paul reveals that it was the Jewish prejudice that brought mercy to the Gentiles. God can bring good out of even the most tragic of situations. The Jews' perception of who the Messiah was made them miss all the action. Sometimes, we could assume that God is not working, because we are looking in the wrong place. St. Paul hopes that the mercy we received because of the unbelief of the Jews, would somehow become the source by which the Jews themselves would receive mercy.

In our lives, if the Lord has turned a crisis into a blessing, we are invited to pray for those whose actions created the crisis in the first place.

Prayer: Abba Father, may your abiding presence in us expand our minds to see your ways and heart, above and beyond the world we perceive. While we thank you for the mercy we have received, we intercede for the Jews, through whom we received this revelation. May they discover your mercy as well. Amen.

Worldliness vs Godliness

Judges 2:11-19

Psalm 106:34-40

Matthew 19:16-22

Today's Gospel proclamation tells the story of the rich young man who loved God but loves his wealth even more than he forsook eternity in heaven for a comfortable life here on earth. This incident always resonates with me because I think this young man is someone we can all relate to, especially those of us who are on this journey to the heart of God.

This young man was honest in his search for God. He recognised in Jesus, a poor carpenter from Galilee, a man of God who can lead him to everlasting life. Though surrounded by earthly wealth, He was hungering for something more. He approached God, asking the way to heaven. He was already better than so many of us because He wanted eternal life from God, not a healing or two or job security. Not only that, He boldly proclaims to the Lord Jesus that he has already done his part, he has kept the commandments since he was a young boy. But then Jesus tells him to sell all that he has, give it to the poor and then follow Him. The poor young man, he was so close. But right at the end, right when he was so close to losing his wealth, earthly wealth won over heavenly glory and he went away sad.

Most of us are living various versions of this? We follow God willingly, honest in our search for that deeper connection with Him. I can honestly say that I often sit down to prayer, not so much to get something from God these days but rather because I do genuinely want that deeper connection. I genuinely desire that personal relationship with God we are taught about so much. So much so that I sit at His feet and rant on and on about how I am ready for something more with Him. Ready to decrease so that He may increase. And then comes His words "you must sell (get rid of, give away) all that you hold dear, and then come follow me". And suddenly my time, my precious time, seems too much to be given away to others in His name. My money seems to be too little to be spent on others. My personal hobbies, my movies, my TV shows seem too much to be sacrificed for more time with God. My sleep seems impossible to be exchanged for a deeper connection with Him. So close yet so so far away.

Prayer: Abba Father I place at Your feet, all that I hold most dear. I surrender to you completely that fact that I cannot let go. Gently untangle me from everything I have ensnared myself in. Lead me in Your everlasting ways. Amen

..though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor...

2 Corinthian 8:9

Judges 6:11-24

Psalm 85:9, 11-12,
13-14

Matthew 19:23-30

In the first reading the story is of distress to Israel and deliverance by Gideon. Gideon was sent a commission by the hand of an angel which was confirmed by a sign. Gideon questions the Lord's favour upon him and feared to take direction from the Lord as he considered himself to be of nothing and a very ordinary person who had no form of honour or status even in his own home. In the

psalm we pray to God both for the church and the earth. As we pray in reverence and expectation, we are encouraged in faith and hope that the grace, mercy and peace of the Lord will be upon the Church and our land. In the Gospel our Lord Jesus speaks to His disciples concerning the difficulty of the salvation of those who are rich in the world, and the reward of those that leave worldly living for Christ.

Today is also the feast of the Queenship of Mary, our mother. She was raised from being an unknown village girl to the Mother of God! Her only qualification was that she was rich with a close relationship with God, preserved herself ever immaculately clean from the slightest taint of sin and led a humble, simple life on earth. She is now our mediator of all graces and the sovereign Mother of Heaven and Earth. She continues to intercede for us in the presence of the Son and the Father. A fullness of innocence and holiness so great it's unthinkable that no one other than God will ever possess.

Am I rich? What is it that defines me as rich? Is it the money in my bank account, my job, friends, status in different social circles, assets, or how much I give to the church? If I am rich by all of this then these should make me very happy and last forever! However these do not satisfy! They make me fearful, anxious, addictive, and not sensitive towards others! I have forgotten that I am headed-back to God! I need to be prepared and if not I will never experience His glory. It was important for me to make a conscious choice if I wanted to make God the priority and surrender my life to Him. When my decision was to put God and His ways first, my life changed I lost worldly richness and pleasures. My values and focus changed but I gained a richness that no one could take away from me no matter what was going on in my life. I found the Lord Jesus and I found peace.

Prayer: *Abba Father through the intercession of our Heavenly Mother, we believe that you are granting us the grace to be rich in you, so that the richness of you will flow into our lives. Amen*

Affliction purifies the soul!

Judges 9: 6-15

Psalm 21: 2-7

Matthew 20: 1-16

The first reading speaks of Jotham's cry for vengeance. Abimelech, had schemed with the people of Shechem to execute all of Jotham's brothers, including Jotham who hardly managed to escape alive. Thereafter from the heights of Mount Gerizim, Jotham calls out his dramatic mystery, which is in fact a curse on his enemies. Its means that the men who viciously seized power will themselves be ruined by violence. The last plant he lists, the bramble, when picked to be king, gives no shade and simply destroys itself and all that is close by.

The speech patterns of the Lord Jesus' own time and place were used when speaking about God's way of dealing with us. In the case of the parable of the vineyard workers it is totally immaterial to speak of the social justice (or injustice) of the owner, who was giving only a denarius, a marginal pay to those who worked all day but more than sufficient for the ones who worked only for an hour during evening time. The important sentence explains that the new arrivals are equivalent to those who have been there for a while longer. The Lord Jesus perhaps was defending the disciples who were new to the journey, against the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes.

Many of us respond impulsively against injustice. We feel especially irritated when we face injustice. It is perhaps that nature in us that leaves us feeling a bit troubled. Those who grumbled were operating out of the classification of fairness, the employer was functioning out of the category of generosity. The Lord Jesus explains that God's generosity does not match with the human perspective of justice. God does not deal with us on the basis of our understanding. There is nothing devious about the generosity of God, he shows his mercy to those who do not deserve it. The parable convinces us that God's generosity will astonish us and leave us humbled.

Today we also celebrate the feast of Saint Rose of Lima. She was a young saint who went through much persecution from the ones closest to her. She says in one of her quotes "Without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. The gift of grace increases as the struggles increase."

Prayer: *Abba father give me the grace to be humble and endure everything in life for your sake for you are a good good Father. Amen*

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree.

You will see greater things than that."

John 1:50

Rev 21:9b-14

Ps 145:10-13, 17-18

John 1:45-51

Have you wondered why we are stuck in some places, feel hopeless and assume God is not acting in areas of our lives? What are these areas? My sickness is not getting better, I cannot come out of my sin, I cannot find a satisfactory job, my family life will never change or, the world is a bad place. The reason is because we have been made to understand from our small days that some things cannot be changed. The whole concept of our lives are built on these principles.

In Revelations it says the Lamb has come down out of heaven from God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. The moment we leave our thoughts behind, believe the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and is acting on our behalf, his plan and words become the most important thing in our life. Then our doubts and fears become null and void; our perspective changes from inside.

In my life when things look bleak and people say negative things, I look back and see what God has done. I was lost and had nothing to look forward to. But after entering this journey I started believing in the Lord and came to know that he is faithful in all his promises. I now know that he is changing my circumstances for the better. Even when I go through crisis his grace carries me through. Reading the word and believing it alone does not change our circumstances. It is by knowing that the Holy Spirit is inside of us, acting on his words and taking a risk according to the word that bring results. How do we know this? St. Bartholomew is believed to be Nathaniel one of the twelve apostles. When St. Phillip spoke to Nathaniel and said "We found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote" Nathaniel said "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" St. Phillip said "Come and see,". At this point Nathaniel made the choice to go and see. He came to Jesus, and his inner eyes were opened. We too will recognise Jesus in most situations when we act on the word. What will happen when we make a choice to go in this direction? Jesus said "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Prayer: *Abba Father, we believe that you live inside of us and you will empower the Father's plan for our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.*

“Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.”

Psalm 146:5

Ruth: 1:1, 3-6,
14b-16,22

Ps 146:5-6ab, 6c-7,
8-9a, 9bc-10

Matthew 22:34-40

Today's first reading is taken from the book of Ruth, one of my personal favorite books in the Holy Bible. We can actually relate the verse Psalm 146:5 with what Ruth did “Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God”. The book tells of Ruth's acceptance of the God of the Israelites as her God and the Israelite people as her own. In

Ruth 1:16-17, Ruth tells Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” She is a foreigner who does not know the God of Israel. Yet she leaves everything behind, accepts the God of Israel as her God and holds on to the Lord. Because she put her complete trust in the Lord, we know how God blessed her life and her marriage with His chosen partner Boaz. It is time to examine ourselves where have we placed our trust? Have we put our complete trust in the Lord alone? Or have we put part of our trust in the Lord and the rest in money, savings, relationships, present situations etc.? Our Lord always wants a complete trust from us. He should be our sole focus in our lives. Our trust on Him cannot be based on the situations, circumstances, or on answered prayers. It is an unwavering faith we place in Him irrespective of what is happening around us, knowing that He is in total control and He works everything together for good. His goodness and faithfulness depend on who He is, not what we see or how we feel. Never let the circumstances or feelings define His unchanging loving nature and who God is for you.

Today's Gospel reading speaks about the greatest commandment; “Love the Lord” and the second commandment “love your neighbour.” We all say yes, of course I love my Lord. But loving the Lord is completely surrendering ourselves to His perfect love and will and saying “Have Your way my King.” It is to make Him the first priority of our lives. And when our hearts are filled by His unconditional love, we will be able to show the same kind of unconditional love to those who are in need, without expecting them to love us back, or expecting anything in return. Today the church celebrates the feast of Feast of St. Louis of France, king. St. Louis showed how a saint would act on the throne of France. He added love and zeal to the practice of piety and the reception of the holy sacraments.

Prayer: *Abba Father, thank you for blessing me with a heart to accept you as my Lord and the Savior of my life. Amen!*

“Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me”

Ruth 2:10

Ruth 2:1-3, 8-11;
4:13-17

Psalm 128:1b-2, 3,4,5

Mathew 23:1-12

In the Gospel proclamation today the Lord Jesus speaks of true humility the humility of having a servant's heart.

In the first reading from the book of Ruth, we are given a different view of a servant's heart and the reward of God for such a heart. Ruth was an epitome of love, gratitude and faithfulness. In this beautiful Old Testament story we see the love of a dutiful daughter-in-law, following her widowed mother-in-law in obedience. In this story, Ruth meets Boaz the owner of the fields and he tells her to be with the rest of the women servants but, he grants her a few favours like protection from the unscrupulous men and water to drink. Ruth questions him as to why she is favoured and Boaz answers that he has been informed of her noble deeds of looking after her mother-in-law and leaving her own needs and people to be with her and do as she says. So we see, there is favour from God to those who live a life of humility and obedience.

This is the same message that the Lord gives to us all in the Gospel proclamation. The Lord clearly speaks of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the law teachers. He says to follow the teachings that comes from Moses but not to follow what they do. As opposed to Boaz who treated his people fairly these men of hypocrisy lay heavy burdens on the people. The Lord Jesus opposed such hypocrisy at every turn and warned that surely those who seek glory will be pushed to the ground at some point and those who are humble will be lifted up to the high places.

The Lord then goes on to tell His people not to revere men with titles such as Master. Leader, Father, and not to look for such titles in high places either. We are all called to be humble servants. Many are such saints that come to my mind. Their servant hood earned them their sainthood. St. Francis of Assisi, St. Padre Pio and more recently St. Mother Teresa, saints who lived and died in Christ as humble servants. Can we heed such a calling from God? Are we willing to live the Gospel truthfully and not run behind the next promotion, vehicle or things of value that gives us recognition in the world? This is the challenge we are called to today a life of humility and obedience.

Payer: Abba Father, remove from our hearts love for the worldly praises and make us pure and humble. Amen!

His mission, his purpose & his will not mine

Isaiah 22: 19-23

Romans 11:33-36

Matthew 16: 13-20

Jerusalem was called the Valley of Vision. It was the seat of divine revelation, a place where prophetic visions were given. Yet, today's first reading is about the "Prophecy against the Valley of Vision". God was disappointed with those who were in authority; specifically Shebna, an official in the Royal Household. Unless a person is anchored in God, power and authority changes them for the worst. It was no different with Shebna, he used his position in the palace for his personal benefit. He worked hard to make his position secure, powerful and his name known even after his death.

God forgives the repentant sinner, lifts up the fallen and binds up the wounded. He goes after those who cannot come to Him. He exchanges nations to ransom His own; He leaves 99 to go after the one who is lost. He is a God of new beginnings and second chances. Yet, God is not someone to play games with. Hence the prophecy against Shebna: "I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position".

As I look into my life, I see Shebna living in me too... I may not have built a prominent tomb for myself, but I have put my interests, my comfort and my ego before His mission. I have felt people should be satisfied with what I do instead of complain when I lower my standards, or shirk my responsibilities. I see the contrast in how I operate where things are personally beneficial to me; the quality of my work is impeccable. I need my deadlines are met on a timely manner. I make sure my work is up to the required standards or even higher. The reason for this contrast is clear; my arrogance that God needs me for His mission more than I need Him! So I give Him the leftovers. I realise God needs an Eliakim not a Shebna for His mission.

The prophecy about Eliakim shows the heart of God concerning those He chooses for His mission: "He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the people of Judah". When God calls us to be part of His mission, He expects total commitment to what He entrusts us with. He expects the commitment of a father for his children. The calling may be to be in-charge of people on a daily basis or just a bunch of chairs once a week; the expectations of God are the same.

Yet, we have "valid" reasons why we cannot perform the way we should. Our reasons are on the external, about others who are not

cooperating. It could be about the resources we do not have. God promises those who take His mission seriously: I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open". God is committed to the person who is completely committed to the mission he or she is entrusted with.

In today's Gospel proclamation we see God's faithfulness to His promises. This time, the prophecy is for Simon who made a royal mess out of any situation. He was the last person who should have been considered to take the place of the Lord Jesus! He never understood a word of what the Lord said, and almost always did the exact opposite of what was expected. Yet, the Lord promised: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven".

Simon Peter loved the Lord, but he also loved his own life. He also had his worldly goals and desires while carrying out the mission of Christ. He had a full blown ego that often got in the way of the mission. He also must have thought that the Lord needed him more than he needed the Lord.

In short, he was just like us! The only good thing that Simon had in his life was the Lord Jesus, who loved him even when he could not love himself. The love of Christ broke through the heart of Simon and transformed him into Peter, the rock upon which the Lord built His church!

In today's second reading the author of the letter to the Romans says: "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" In the movie on the life of St. Padre Pio, there is a scene where a priest tells Padre Pio that the church does not need people like him. Padre Pio replied, "but I need the church"!

The Lord is reminding me today, I need Him more than He needs me. I need the mission He has called me to serve in, more than I could ever give to the mission. I open my heart to the Lord, allow Him to cleanse me of arrogance, pride, personal agendas and transform me to come under complete submission to Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, may your hand rest upon my life and keep me from getting lost in my foolish ways. Cleanse me, transform me and may your work be done through me according to your will. Amen.

Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and deep conviction.

1 Thes 1:5

1 Thes 1:1-5, 8B-10

Ps 149:1b 2, 3-4, 5-6a
& 9b

Matthew 23:13-22

In today's first reading, St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that the "gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction." Thessalonica was a Greek outpost. Western intellectual history has its roots with the ancient Greeks. In many ways Thessalonica resembles the world of science and deduction that we live in today, where the existence of God has been rejected in favor of the logical and scientific. St. Paul's preaching goes beyond intellectual arguments. It is with "Power" and the "Holy Spirit". As St. Paul preached, miracles and signs and wonders would have confirmed the spoken word. The "Holy Spirit" would have made the experience of God come alive in the hearts of the listeners, above and beyond an intellectual argument and an emotional high. The result of this preaching is seen in the words "your faith in God has become known everywhere" and "you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."

Compare these results with that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. "You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are." Our Lord Jesus is very severe on the Pharisees and teachers of the law. The Pharisees were no ordinary people. They were good people who interpreted the law in the context of their times and dedicated their lives to live by the law and protect the Jewish way of life in the face of the growing influence of the liberal life style of the Greeks. It is important for us to see what irked the Lord, so that we may not slip into the same trap.

In today's Gospel proclamation, Our Lord says that the Pharisees have not entered the kingdom of God. This means that they operate at the human level and there is no divine intervention in their ministry. Possibly because of their position of influence, they have prevented others from having divine intervention in their lives. They were practical and pragmatic people. The Gold in the temple had more practical value to them than the presence of God in the temple. They were dead to the realities of the spiritual world. They knew scripture, but did not have a personal relationship with God. If God was dead, their lives and ways would still have continued uninhibited.

Prayer: *Abba Father, save me from the trap of obeying your commands out of habit or as a practice. Become real to me. May I know you as my Father. Amen*

**“On you I depend since birth; from my mother’s womb you are my strength;
my hope in you never wavers Psalm 71: 6**

Jeremiah 1:17-19

Psalm 71: 1-6,15-17

Mark 6: 17-29

Jeremiah was called by God while he was in his mother’s womb. God said this to Jeremiah when he was hesitant to respond to God’s call positively. This truth and realisation can be applied to all of us today. The Word of God is living and active. These words are not limited to Jeremiah only but living and active in our lives as well.

We are encouraged by the word of God. We are chosen by God for a mission. Not a single person born to this world has arrived accidentally, but each has a purpose to live. The mission we are called to is to love like God loves us. It is easy to ‘do’ things for God but it is difficult to ‘love’ people for God.

God promises that He, Our Father will not allow us to be crushed. Jeremiah was a young prophet. He continued to tell God that he’s too young for this mission. Is age a barrier to love God and HIS people? God encouraged Jeremiah to carry out the mission. God turned Jeremiah into a fortified city. How did that happen? It is through persecution, humiliation and trials. These made Jeremiah a fortified city. And so it is with us. We turn into iron pillars and walls of brass through the mud that is thrown on us only if we deal with it, with God. We will slip away if we take this persecution personally.

St. John the Baptist did not fear speaking the truth. He certainly was an iron pillar, a wall of brass and a fortified city. Our fears can shut us and we can become people who indirectly accept the untruth. We can lose our inner journey due to this situation. If we hesitate to be the prophet God expects us to be, eventually we will become Herod and Herodias step by step. Herod became perplexed when the truth was spoken and Herodias became vicious. She harbored the anger and was waiting for an opportune moment. God is keeping these two ends in front of us and inviting us to choose. Will we become John the Baptist and Jeremiah or will we be Herod and Herodias. We are called to love. John tried to tell the couple to love the brother by doing the right thing. When we are moved by the love of God we begin to love God and people. Our ultimate destiny is eternal life. We should not fear to become God’s testimony.

Prayer: Abba Father, you chose us while we were in our mother’s womb to be your prophet in the world. May we love people with the everlasting love that you have loved us with. Amen

Seeking God's approval in our lives

1 Thes 2:9-13

Psalm 139: 7-12

Matthew 23:27-32

In today's Gospel Jesus speaks about the problem of hypocrisy. What did Jesus mean by hypocrisy? And why is Jesus repeatedly seen scorning the Pharisees for their duplicity. Is He concerned about two-faced people who say one thing but do something else? Is he focused on calling them out on their sin? The Lord Jesus' concern is actually far deeper.

The Biblical understanding enunciated by Lord Jesus is rooted in the original meaning of the Greek word *hypokritai* which means "stage actors." At one level it is easy to see how this word has come to mean someone who is phony. For what they claim to be, they really are not, they are just acting a role. But when no one is looking (i.e. the audience is gone) they revert to their true self, which is someone quite different

Hypocrisy in fact is the sad state of a person who reduces himself to being an actor on a stage, because he does not know God the Father. There are many people who live their life in a desperate search for human approval and applause. They discern their dignity and worth, not from God, (who is in effect a stranger to them), but from what other human beings think of them. They are willing to play many roles and wear many masks to give the audience what they want.

Many take this desperate need for approval from others to self destructive extremes. Many young people, due to peer pressure, will engage in dangerous and unhealthy practices to win approval. Adults too will often compromise core principles in order to fit in and be liked, gain promotions or earn access. Christians will hide their faith, playing the role of a secular modern in order to win approval.

At the core of hypocrisy is a heart that does not know God, or of the unconditional love He has for us. When we begin to experience God's love for us, his providence and his good will toward us, we become less concerned with what others think. We begin to get off the stage and be less concerned with the approval of men and more focused on and then satisfied with the approval of God. God wants us to live and enjoy life in its fullness. Let's seek his approval and love.

Prayer: Abba Father, today I see your face and approval in all that I do. Turn my attention away from the world and to your Spirit's promptings. Amen

Everyone and everything belongs to God. Give them your respect

1 Thes 3: 7-13

Ps 90: 3-5, 12-14, 17

Matthew 24: 42-51

In today's gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus calls on us to be faithful and wise servants. In the Genesis stories also we are told that God has made us in His image and likeness not for our self interest but to be just stewards of all creation.

Everyone and everything in creation, all people of all religions and races, all creatures meaning all animals, the sea and the rivers, the tree and the plant, mother earth or the soil are all part of God's creation. In John 1 we are told that the whole universe or cosmos—everyone and everything in it—is part of the universal body of Christ. As Pope Francis has pointed out in his widely acclaimed Encyclical *Laudao Si* and his recent message at the Golden Jubilee Rally of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) what have we done with God's creation or the universal body of Christ. A wicked and selfish world which crucified the Lord Jesus Christ some 2000 years ago is now trying to crucify God's creation. God is calling on us to cooperate with Him in different ways to save creation from the threat of environmental pollution climate change and global warming.

Though the United States which is not only one of the most powerful countries but also one of the biggest environmental polluters, has decided to withdraw from the Paris climate change accord, Sri Lanka has thankfully joined the rest of the world in taking effective measures to win the battle against climate change or global warming. US President Donald Trump has come in for much criticism, in his country and worldwide for what is seen as a selfish and potentially dangerous decision to pull the United States out of the treaty. He described it as part of his policy of putting "America first" but most analysts say he has isolated the US and put 'America alone' while the widely respected new French President Emmanuel Macron has appealed to the US to put 'Planet earth first'.

In Sri Lanka, the CEA will impose the ban on the import, manufacture and sale of many plastic items. As Christians we need to cooperate with this ban on polythene and also in a multitude of other ways such as saving water and electricity through which we will be cooperating with God in saving his creation from a wicked world.

Prayer: Abba Father make us aware that just as Christ Jesus made a total self donation on the cross you are calling us also to be like Him. Amen.

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