May your life become a garden of opportunities for happiness ... that in Spring may it be a lover of joy. In winter a lover of wisdom. And when you make a mistake, start all over again. For only then will you be in love with Life. You will find that to be happy is not to have a perfect life. Never give up on happiness, for life is an incredible show.*

Pope Francis

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On Our Knees In His Hands

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God chose a person to be His prophet when the people of God went astray and found methods to bring His people back to Him. God's method is to send people as His mouthpiece to speak to His people. When people move away from God, they depend on themselves and this leads them into unknown, destructive ways. Therefore, God brings His people back to Him through prophets.

We are familiar with Jeremiah’s complaint to God. We too feel as if our prayers are not answered and we do go through pain in life and end up cursing ourselves and our families. The key to this miserable state is to repent and turn to God. This was said to Jeremiah - this is also the answer for us too. When we feel that God has neglected us and that our prayers do not reach God, the answer is to repent and receive the Sacrament of reconciliation. The doors in the realm that we cannot fathom will be opened without our knowledge because we have allowed God to act in our lives in and through our repentance.

The Gospel proclamation explains it further. What does it mean to sell everything and buy the land with the treasure in it? It is that we leave our familiar shores. We leave behind our present lifestyle and adhere to the lifestyle God invites us to. Then we could experience the richness of the Kingdom of God within us. The Kingdom of God is not a tangible place but it is experienced in the human heart.

A young lady was faced with a difficult challenge to quit a relationship with her millionaire boyfriend, because it was not the ideal, ethical relationship. Though it was a tough decision, she opted to obey God. Suddenly, she experienced love, peace and joy within her. Unknowingly, she entered the Kingdom of God, encountering the Lord Jesus. Saint Paul too said that he considered what he lost as rubbish to what he gained when he encountered Christ Jesus.

St. Alphonsus Liguori, was a rich and educated man who gave an inner response to God and became a priest. He was an eloquent preacher and a great confessor. His confessional was often crowded. He was the founder of the Redemptorist order. St. Alphonsus found the land with the treasure and sold everything else in life.

Prayer: Abba Father, keep us abiding in you. Make us aware always to return to you in repentance and in confession. Never allow us to go astray from you. Amen.
Today’s first reading tells us God is the Potter and we are the clay - sometimes He has to break our worldly vessels and make us over again. The Lord begins His work in us immediately to make us better for His plan and glory. I’m afraid though, that like Israel, many of God’s children today find themselves often involved with the things of this world, idolizing many things. God took clay and made man, the physical part of man. Gen. 2:7 “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”. God was the Potter.

We see that in this passage the Lord speaks about Israel, but the truth in these verses could be useful to us as individuals and nations. God always accepts us with our old, carnal ways and then He begins to restructure and mold us into a vessel that He can use. Our old self and old nature are still with us even after we are saved, however, God slowly but surely starts a work on each of us for His glory.

He is the Great Potter. Sometimes the clay may need to season a bit to become more workable and useable. The potter may lay that clay aside for a time but he never throws it away.

Today’s Gospel parable points to the end of time. There will come a time for the end of the kingdom on earth and then those who belong and those who do not will be clearly distinguished and separated from each other. Today is a good day to ask ourselves: Are we one of the righteous ones? Or are we one of the wicked ones? And what actions can we take to be righteous and enter the kingdom of God? There is only one answer - a relationship with the Lord Jesus. Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you.

Most of us encountered God when we faced a crisis or brokenness. It was when we had no hope and no answers and waited for quiet some time that the Lord stepped in and began to reveal Himself to us. Till then we would not have been prepared to listen to Him and encounter Him in a personal way.

Prayer: Abba Father, you have said in your word that You are the potter and I am the clay, so today I ask you to shower me with your blessings so that I may be moulded into a vessel for your glory. Amen.
Friday 3rd August

“Prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home.” Matthew 13:57

Today’s Gospel proclamation speaks about the destructive power of unbelief, preconceived opinions and prejudices. The Lord visits His hometown of Nazareth. They let Him speak in the synagogue out of curiosity if nothing else. They had heard about His adventures and some strange tales about miracles and such, so it was interesting to have Him speak and maybe see a miracle or two. But as He spoke, the reading says, they took offense at the Lord (Matt 13: 57). Even though they heard Him speaking, they could not accept the Word of God spoken from the very mouth of God. This was because of the prejudice they carried in their heart about Him.

They had a preconceived notion about who they thought the Lord Jesus was. They had seen Him grow up. They had seen Him at work in His father’s workshop and saw him as a local boy. The people who listened Lord the thought that they knew him. They made the mistake of thinking that they knew everything there was worth knowing about him, they had him summed up and had come to their conclusions. Are we not prone to reducing others to the first impressions they make on us, like for instance old school friends we meet at a school reunion? Do we allow for how they bloomed and grew through the years? We are threatened and challenged by the positive growth in others whom we have not seen for many years. This is especially hard for us to stomach if we ourselves have not grown at all.

This was very likely the problem the Lord faced in Nazareth. Because they were so preoccupied with their prejudices, the words of the Lord could find no fertile soil in their hearts. There was no room for faith to blossom. And without faith, “the Son of God did not do many miracles there” (Matt 13: 58). St. Mark’s Gospel account of this very same incident says that, “He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them” (Mark 6:5). Do we not we disregard what the Lord may be speaking to us through the members of our family, parish or community because of our judgments and negative opinions of them? How often do we reject the ‘message’ because we have a prejudice about the ‘messenger’? Let us repent and remind ourselves that prejudice fosters unbelief and unbelief limits what God can do in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, we don’t want to miss out on what You want to do in our lives. Give us willing ears and a humble and teachable heart. Amen.
Saturday 4th August  

Feast of St. John Mary Vianney, Priest

Now reform your ways and... then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster  

Jeremiah 26:13

Today, the Church celebrates the feast day of St. John Vianney, patron saint of priests. On his first assignment as a parish priest, he immediately began praying and working for the conversion of his parishioners. Although he saw himself as unworthy, he allowed himself to be consumed by the love of God as he served the people. St. John Vianney slowly helped to revive the community’s faith through both his prayers and the witness of his lifestyle. He gave powerful homilies on the mercy and love of God, and it is said that even the worst sinners were converted upon hearing him. In addition, he restored his church, formed an orphanage called “La Providence,” and cared for the poor. His reputation as a confessor grew rapidly, and pilgrims traveled from all over France to come to him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Plagued by many trials and besieged by the devil, St. John Vianney remained firm in his faith. Dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament, he spent much time in prayer and practised much mortification. He lived on little food and sleep, while working without rest in unfailing humility, gentleness, patience and cheerfulness. St. John Vianney died on August 4, 1859. His life was viewed as a model of priestly holiness. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI, commemorating the 150th anniversary of St. John Vianney’s death, declared the Year for Priests.

In today’s readings Jeremiah the straight speaking prophet declares the plain truth about God putting his own life in great danger. He fearlessly proclaimed that it was the Lord who sent him to prophesy against the city. He said - reform your ways and listen to the voice of the Lord your God, so that the Lord may forgive you and save you from the evil threatened. Similarly in the Gospel proclamation we see St. John the Baptist who fearlessly proclaimed the same message heralding the entry of the Lord Jesus. This cost him his life. The Lord Himself proclaims that there never was a prophet greater than John. On another note, Herod’s action was typically that of a weak man. Let us open our hearts in surrender, welcome the triune God and experience the power of peace and freedom in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, may we reflect the resurrection power of your Son in our lives. Amen.
It is in our nature to rebel against God’s nature. We are futile in comparison to God. But the sad story is that they are totally unaware of this truth. The pride of the first prince of darkness has flowed down upon the human generations’ one after the other. This pride and disobedience have blinded the human person from seen the vision God has for this world and human beings.

For that reason the Israelites could not see the bigger picture of the work of God and the hand of God upon them. Their one concern was their daily bread. The fact that God has taken the trouble to bring them out of slavery was not their joy but sorrow that they lost the fleshpots they used to enjoy whilst been in slavery. We too are people of that nature. When God invites us to go beyond our understanding because He certainly has a better plan for us we end up fretting about the perishing things we have lost. By the grace of God for some of us the invitation came as a rushing hurricane that we thought we would get flushed away but God was holding our hands whilst our internal unworthiness got flushed away, we were saved. We never perished. The test of God towards the Israelites is kept in front of us and God will decide whether we follow His instructions. God has to change our internal attitudes and selfish disposition to His compassionate heart and unselfishness.

St. Paul articulated it beautifully in the second proclamation today. “And put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.” (Eph4:24). Knowing Christ Jesus in our limited mindset is not the fullness of knowledge that we can acquire. A change of heart and transformation of mind is what St. Paul spoke of. Every one of us who are baptized into the family of God is called to enter this beautiful relationship with God. Our internal being needs to be transformed.

We have a nature of pride and we are often prejudiced. Or we could be full of shame and guilt. Some of us could be having superiority complex whilst another person an inferiority complex. These are limitations we have within us. For example; a person could be without a job for months, another could be waiting for the due promotion and increment and another could be anticipating a positive breakthrough in life; the unduly delay of receiving these could be that God pruning their lives. In such situations we could become perplexed as to think
that God has abandoned us or that our prayer not been answered due to our sinfulness. We need to be mindful that though we have our internal shifts from depression to vitality, sorrow to joy or anger to patience God will not move from where He is but He makes us to fall in line with Him. This is what God did with the Israelites in the wilderness and this is what St. Paul invited us to accept as God’s way in righteousness and holiness in truth.

The Gospel proclamation is the highlighted theme for today. A never changing God gave a promise at the moment of the fall of humanity. The Messiah would come to the world to save us from the pit holes that we have fallen into. What is it that we need to be saved of? We can define our salvation as to be saved from Satan. Yes, it is true. We will be saved from the clutches of Satan. But the question is who and what permits Satan to rule over our lives? We ourselves are the channels of this unfortunate and deliberate action. God’s Messiah came to save us from this hell that we live in.

God never abandoned or left His people orphan. He was always with them. But God found away to be in His people, because being with the people was insufficient.

Therefore the Messiah came to the world to die on the cross and to be resurrected and not to stop there but to pour His own Spirit into us. God’s Word is both word and action. The highest definition of God’s Word is Christ Jesus. Therefore we say the Word of God is both living and active. Truly it is. Christ Jesus is alive and active to this date. The visible sign of His mighty presence in our midst is the Holy Eucharist. Word of God, who is Christ Jesus. The Lord is not limited only to a ‘NAME’ but He goes beyond a word and is substance as well, which is ‘BODY’.

The Manna of God fulfilled people’s hunger but was limited. Body of Christ quenches our thirst deep within whilst fulfills our hunger too. We need to understand that Messiah has to live in us that’s when the old self goes away and the new comes. When we eat the bread that has come from above our falls nature diminishes and our true nature arises within us. We are invited to eat the flesh of the Messiah to abide in Him. The Word of God or the bread that came down from heaven is Christ Jesus, therefore when we eat His flesh and drink His blood we become one with Him. In and through this transformation the nature of Christ Jesus takes over our falls nature.

Prayer: Abba Father, save me from the sin of denying the Body of Christ. Amen.
In the first reading today, Daniel portrays a vision of the glorious Son of Man coming from divine clouds with apocalyptic images – dazzling whiteness of light and of fire, empowered with majesty and kingship. Our Lord applies the title to Himself, when He came 1000 years later, to bring the Good News of salvation to the world. Daniel’s vision prophesies the glorious coming of the Lord Jesus crowned with dominion, honour, and kingship, as mentioned in Revelations.

This was the glory the apostles witnessed in the Transfiguration. The Transfiguration was the moment of Kairos, revealing something of God the Father, the Lord Jesus, and the apostles, with whom we identify.

The Lord Jesus went with Peter, John and James to receive God’s approval of His mission to the cross. At baptism the Father’s words were personally for the Lord. Now, the disciples also hear it. When they were shattered by the crucifixion, the memories they carried in their hearts would have encouraged the disciples. Moses, the greatest law-giver, and Elijah, the greatest prophet, appeared with the Lord Jesus, who fulfilled the law and the prophecies. Peter was to recapture this experience in his letter to the church. He witnessed the glory of the Lord being “an eyewitness to His majesty.” He uses the transfiguration experience as a foretaste of Jesus’ second coming.

The mountain was closely associated with important scenes in the Lord’s life. He preached the Beatitudes there, showed the glory that lay beyond the cross at the transfiguration, and finally offered Himself to death. During His lifetime, He made constant visits to the mountain to be replenished by the Father’s love. On the cross the Lord lost sight of the Father’s presence for a moment, but because of His intimate relationship with His Father, He immediately surrendered His spirit into God’s hands. On the mountain-top, the Father answers the question of ‘Who is Jesus?’ The Lord came with a mission to fulfil. Always conscious of His origin and His destiny, He was prepared to go back to the Father’s Heart, where He belonged. We need to focus on the commission we received at baptism, to be ambassadors of the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, I long to hear your words spoken to me. May I have a daily in-filling of the Holy Spirit to enable me to do so. Amen
Tuesday 7th August

You will be my people and I will be your God

In today’s first reading we see how God punishes the people of Israel for the sins they had committed. God uses the prophet Jeremiah as his mouthpiece to proclaim the destruction that will fall on the land. In this we could see that God being our Father, wants to discipline His children so that they will live a righteous and mature life in the eyes of God. Hebrews 12:7 says “endure hardship as discipline, God is treating you as His children. For what son is not disciplined by His Father”.

Today are we facing a stressful time? If we have received any news that troubles our hearts, we might be wondering how we will face another day. Of course there is a way, but it is nothing to do with human ability. It has everything to do with God’s sovereign strength.

When the pressures of our world mount we may think we will have to work things out on our own. However while God does want us actively involved in the problem solving process, His great desire is for us to call out to Him and declare our dependence on Him.

In the first reading, God says, “You will be my people and I will be your God”. Psalm 46 says: God is our refuge and strength, a very present helper. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth may shake or the mountains crumble down. Very few of us prepare to handle a sudden sorrow or a trial that continues over a long period of time. Fear, frustration and doubt can give way to a longing to escape, abandon the problems and get away from it.

But how can we write our upside down world in a positive way that builds us up instead of tearing us down? Begin with God. Spend time with Him in prayer. We may think we cannot afford to lose another minute, but neither can we afford to miss the opportunity of allowing the Father to comfort us and provide the help we need.

So let us go to Him and find the strength and wisdom we require to go on. Let us read the word of God daily so that we will have a blessed life. Joshua 1:8 says, “Do not let the word of God depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything it says. Then you will be prosperous and successful”.

Prayer: Abba Father, I need you. I need your strength and wisdom for the pressures I am facing. I trust you to show me what to do. Amen.
Both the first reading and the Gospel proclamation today speak of the grace of God on all people. They also remind us that the greatest experience of grace is while we go through a desert experience and not while we are in the land of plenty.

The first reading pours out the depth of the everlasting love of God on His chosen nation, Israel. He declares that in His time He will become the God of all families and they will be His people. Showcased in the reading today are the deepest dimensions of love of a Father for His children. The Israelites were in the wilderness for forty years and they were yet exiled in Babylonia thereafter, and the Lord God kept His promise of everlasting love to restore and rebuild His beloved nation.

This is the same promise that the Lord God gives us today. We have been called by God. But, many will be the times we will fail Him and backslide. Many will be the times that we will be so caught up in a struggle that we may feel that there is no God and that there is no answer to our problems. Many will be the times that in a moment of lust, anger, greed or jealousy, we may commit grave sins against the love of God and yet, we are assured that His grace is bigger than our sin.

We may have experienced this amazing grace of God many times in our journey, where, when we did not deserve it, we were given it abundantly; where we were saved from shame, calamity and even death when we were still in sin. This is the everlasting love of our God calling us back to His bosom. We should realize this without delay before the evil nature in us takes complete control of our entire being. We must run back to our Father God.

The Gospel proclamation shows the change of attitude of the Lord Jesus to a non-Jewish woman, a Canaanite. The Lord tells the woman that He was sent only to save the lost sheep of Israel. But the woman, in her moment of total wilderness with no solution whatsoever to have her demon possessed daughter delivered, continues to plead and argue her case with the Lord. Even though it was clearly not the mission of Lord Jesus to oblige her request, The Lord acknowledges her great faith and performs a miracle.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to always remember that Your everlasting love and grace are bigger than my biggest desert experience. Amen.
God made a covenant with the Israelites, but they were unable to keep to it. The inclination to sin was more than the desire to obey God. But Yahweh promises that He will make a new covenant with them and that will be written not on a tablet of stone but in the hearts and minds of people. He declares that after that He will be their God and they will be His people. How did God fulfil this promise of His? We see this promise being fulfilled through the Lord Jesus: The Father sent His one and only Son so that all of us would come back to Him and live with Him forever in eternal life.

The Gospel proclamation today draws our attention to the most important question of our lives. “But you, who do you say I AM?” (Mt 16:15) The Word of God is alive. Imagine the Lord Jesus putting us on the spot and asking us the same question today. What will our answer to Him be? Many of us know the continuation of this story and St. Peter’s answer to the Lord. We would repeat the same answer of St. Peter to God today. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” (Mt 16:16). Is He truly the Son of the Living God in our lives? This may be true and so easy to believe when things are going well in our lives. Is it the same when we have no control over the things that take place? When someone mistreats us, bears false witness against us, or drag us down in front of others, what do we do?

How does St. Peter answer the Lord Jesus so accurately? The Lord says to him, “You are right. But it isn’t because you are so brilliant. You can only know this if you are given the inspiration from my Father in heaven.” The Holy Spirit reveals to St. Peter the Lord Jesus’ true identity. The biggest gift to us given by the Lord Jesus is the Holy Spirit. This is the same promise God has given in the first reading. It is the Holy Spirit who will write God’s law in our hearts and make us aware of God’s presence in us. Through this we will be able to recognize the Lord Jesus as the Son of the Living God. Are we open enough for the Holy Spirit to work in us? The church built on St. Peter, the Catholic Church, gives us the sacraments which helps us deepen our relationship with God. Let us truly believe God’s presence in these sacraments and exercise them.

Prayer: Abba Father, Help us to truly believe in your Son’s presence in the Sacraments of the Church. Amen.
St. Paul gives us a reminder in today’s first reading that God loves a cheerful giver. Giving in this sense could refer to material possessions and wealth, but more importantly, time and resources - giving of oneself for the uplifting of a brother or sister.

Verse 6 says, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” We can also sow joy in the midst of sorrow, faith in the midst of unbelief and peace in the midst of trial. The more generous we are with the peace, love and joy we reap, the more we will receive the same from the Lord.

In the gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus says a grain of wheat has to fall to the earth and die for fruit to be produced. A theme at one of our prayer meetings recently was Life Through Death. Grain has to go through ploughing, beating, shattering and burying in the mud - a death experience - that it may bear life after. If we want to experience life, we first have to go through a death experience. Sometimes the giving of peace, love and joy in terrible circumstances can be the death experience we will have to go through to receive life after.

The Lord Jesus continues to say, anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates life in the world will keep it. What is it to hate our lives? It is not to find joy and solace in the things of the world, but only to be satisfied with the treasures of heaven.

God is our Divine Provider and He will meet all our needs. It is not for us to concern ourselves with the manner in which He will meet our needs, but we are to focus on reaping and sowing love, joy and peace - the kingdom of God.

If we are servants of the Most High God, we are to follow Him. Following the Lord requires giving up our own desires and ways, and choosing the path He has set for us. This path will invite us to give without restriction, to sacrifice time and energy for the people around us, but the Lord gives us a promise that gives us hope: “Where I am, my servant also will be.”

_Prayer: Abba Father, take me from death in the world to life in You. Amen._
Saturday 11th August  

St. Clare, virgin

“...the righteous person will live by his faith”

Prophet Habakkuk complains to God about the wickedness of the people in his land, and questions the Lord as to why He tolerates their wrongdoing. He asks God and then says he will look to see what the Lord’s answer will be. God does not remain deaf to Habakkuk’s cry, but answers him and tells him that there is an appointed time for His revelation to be made known; “Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.” For this revelation to come to pass, Habakkuk had to wait. This is faith.

If we have faith, we also receive the grace to wait upon the Lord. However, if faith does not dwell within us, we will not be able to trust in the Lord’s timing, and we will resort to our own plans to have the revelations of God fulfilled in our lives.

In the Gospel proclamation, the theme of faith is continued as our Lord Jesus heals a demon possessed boy, whom the disciples could not cure. When they ask him why they could not do what he did, the Lord answers that it was due to their lack of faith. All that was required was faith the size of a mustard seed, and it seems that the disciples did not even have that. This is another kind of faith – the belief that nothing will be impossible for one who believes.

What about us today? Do we have these different strands of faith working in our lives, or are we also a generation of unbelievers? When the Lord speaks to us, do we have faith that what He says will come to pass – or do we give up when circumstances turn for the worse? When we pray for others, do we have faith that we have the power to heal – or do we pray and not anticipate any change? Faith the size of a mustard seed can move mountains. In the same way, a seed of doubt can cause the mountains to tower over us.

Today we remember Saint Clare of Assisi, who left behind her comfortable life and family to serve and depend on God totally. Had she not had faith in God, she never would have taken this step and the world would not have the Poor Clares today – an order that has more than 20,000 sisters worldwide and meets the needs of others.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the gift of faith to manifest more in our lives with each passing day. Amen.
As we read and reflect on today’s First Reading, we can identify ourselves with Elijah, who whined and complained to God, praying that he ceased to exist. We could be in such a state. If so, I suggest that we read this passage once again, allowing the Lord to speak to our hearts. Elijah’s complaint was not about lack of food, but about the reaction of his people, and the seeming failure of his own ministry. Yet, in response to his complaint, Elijah didn’t receive God’s pity, affirming the wickedness of those around him. Rather he received food and water, to nourish and strengthen his body, to go forth as the Lord was planning to answer his prayer. When we are nourished by heaven’s food, we too can walk forty days and forty nights (denoting a very long period) until we reach our destination, which is our heavenly home. What is this food from heaven we receive for our journey?

Today’s Gospel proclamation explains, challenges and reveals to us what this heavenly food is. This living bread is a person, The Risen Christ. The Eternal One willed to leave heaven and come to earth, becoming a human being like us in every way except sin. He chose the most cruel and cursed form of suffering and death to pay the price for our iniquities. Yet this paved the way for the Lord Jesus to defeat death. God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to raise Him up, with a glorified body that is alive forever, elevated beyond all earthly limitations and natural law. Not only did the Lord release His Spirit to live with us and in us forever, but also He found the best way to come back to us to be with us forever. This is by way of His Word and the Sacraments, especially The Eucharist.

Elijah was nourished by the bread and water for a long journey of forty days and forty nights, but the Risen Christ nourishes us with His Body and Blood, that we receive in the form of bread and wine, for our whole earthly journey and for eternity too. He simply comes to live in us. The Lord insisted that this was not a philosophy or a science that could be understood by human intellect, but a mystery that can only become an experience through faith. Therefore it is important that we do not get embroiled in unnecessary arguments with the world that tries to ignore and reject God. Rather the world needs to witness Christ living inside of us, His Spirit filling us with His peace and joy, so that we receive power to love those who hate us.
St. Paul clearly outlines the way of life that should be seen in those who are fed with the heavenly bread. We have to bid goodbye to bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with all form of malice. (Eph 4:31) Now, this instruction is not conditional. St. Paul does not say to get rid of these behaviours when things go according to plan. He does not say that this rule does not apply if others treat us badly. Further he exhorts us to be kind and compassionate to one another and to forgive others as the Lord forgives us (Eph 4:32). The Lord forgives us repeatedly and totally, erasing all traces of our sins, so that we are as good as having never committed that sin. St. Paul invites us to walk in the way of love and not in the way of reaction and judgment and to offer our lives as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph 5: 2), by giving the inner responses of love to all in our lives.

Is this possible? The honest answer is a definite no. A hundred arguments will rise up in our mind to justify our reactions “without love” to people who cannot love us. ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says The Lord Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6). St. Paul also confirms this when he says that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. (Eph 4:30)

What is the day of redemption? As I understand, each occasion we give an inner response in love, is a day of redemption for us, as the Lord redeems us from our own broken nature in those times. He also says that the Holy Spirit is grieved by our actions in the flesh. His letters are full of words confirming the same. The heavenly bread we receive through the Word of God and in the Eucharist will change our nature and transform us through the Holy Spirit who lives in us and reveals the love of the Father to us, breaking the bonds of sin and flesh in our lives. No amount of striving on our part will be able to make this change.

Many of us have heard about a Community of the Risen Lord member, whose family life was in tatters. After he was baptised in the Holy Spirit, he was empowered by the Spirit to love and serve his wife who was unable to love him back for 12 long years. He certainly received the living bread, bringing life not only to him, but also to his marriage and his whole family, who are all serving.

Prayer: Abba Father, You amaze me with Your Wisdom, that turned my curse to my greatest blessing. You gave Your Son as food for me, whereby He lives inside of me, as You are in Him. I thank You for Your presence. Amen.
Monday 13th August  

St. Pontian, St. Hippolytus

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Psalm 150: 6

In today’s first reading, the prophet Ezekiel encounters the Lord through a vision and is awestruck by His beauty and majesty. Ezekiel is overcome with wonder and falls facedown at the sight of the Lord.

When we envision what Ezekiel saw in his time, it is difficult to imagine how splendid the vision would have been. He was blessed to see the Lord in all His glory, with a fire that enveloped Him and radiated light. If the Lord Jesus appeared with this same glory instead of in the form of mere man, those who found it impossible for him to be the Son of God may have been more easily convinced.

However, there was reason for the Lord to come to earth as a man, as we see in the gospel proclamation of today. Lord Jesus is in Galilee with his disciples and tells them that he is going to be delivered into the hands of men and killed. But - he says he will rise again on the third day. The disciples do not focus on the latter part of his statement, but are filled with grief at the thought of the Lord dying. Had they chosen to tune their hearts to what the Lord was saying, they would have realized that a great miracle was to take place. Instead, they looked at the problem and became grieved.

In our own lives, what do we focus on in a crisis? Is it the situation that seems impossible, or the promise that is available for us in the Word of God that shows us the hand of the Lord is present in that situation? Do we remember the Lord who is glorious, who shines like the sun, who died to set us free, or do we remember the mortals we contend with and the financial burdens we carry?

The psalmist repeats one phrase throughout the psalm of today: ‘Praise the Lord’. All creatures on heaven and earth are required to praise the Lord. The birds of the air praise Him with the songs they sing, the flowers of the field praise Him with the fragrance they emit, the sun, moon and stars praise Him with the light they shine and we praise Him with our thoughts, words and deeds. Let us remember to praise the Lord in all the storms of our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, You are awesome and full of glory. Let my life reflect Your glory through the praise that rises from within me. Amen.
Today’s first reading offers us an insight into Ezekiel’s call to be a prophet. The Lord asks Ezekiel to go out and speak His words to the people of Israel. However, in order for him to speak these words, he had to follow God’s seemingly strange instructions. Prophet Ezekiel sees a vision of a hand containing a scroll, on which were written words of lamentation and mourning. The Lord asks Ezekiel to eat this scroll, and be filled with it.

The first reading is a reminder for us that the Word of God should not just be heard and read, but also consumed and become food for our spiritual bodies. It is not asking us to physically eat the Bible we read, rather, it invites us to keep in our mind and heart the law of God, His immense love for us and the remembrance that this same God died for our salvation.

The psalmist reiterates the love he has for the law of the Lord, and states that he rejoices in following the statutes of God, his longing for the commands of God and that the law is more precious to him than a thousand pieces of silver and gold.

Can we utter the same words today? Do we honour, revere and love the law of the Lord as the psalmist did, or is the law seen as something that must be adhered to in order to save ourselves from punishment? Is our obedience to the Lord generated out of love or fear?

In today’s gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus invites us to be like little children, for if not, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. To be like a child does not require much - simply to obey Him without question, to love all without expecting anything in return and to depend on the Lord for every need of our lives.

St. Maximilian Kolbe was one such man, for he gave his life for a complete stranger when he was imprisoned in Auschwitz. He was able to make this decision because he meditated on the law and the words of the Lord and knew what was required of him - there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

Prayer: Abba Father, let me meditate on Your words day and night that I may seek Your desires for my life. Amen.
The hope for the hopeless and holiness to the doomed humanity is the Messiah of God. Today’s first reading starts with a note of hope, “Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen” (Rev 11:19). The place where God dwelled is the ark of God’s covenant. The ark which was a man-made item in the Old Testament became a human body in the New Testament. The Scripture says when the heaven was opened this ark of God’s covenant was in heaven. We celebrate this today.

The Lord Jesus is God; and where God dwells is the ark of His covenant. Therefore the human body which the Lord Jesus dwelled is the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and it is evident that she was in heaven when the temple in heaven was opened. God has extolled her to the state she truly deserves.

The first fruit of all is the Lord Jesus. St. Paul explained it in the second reading. When death entered through Adam; a human being, life also entered through a human person called Jesus of Nazareth. When one man disobeyed God and fell short of the glory of God, another man who was born through a woman obeyed God and showered grace upon a fallen and doomed human race. When one woman was told to enjoy the freedom of God and live in the grace of God, pride and disobedience of that woman brought forth a curse upon the people. One woman whom God spoke to through His Archangel Gabriel gave her full consent in humility to obey God. Therefore the first fruit of God who was put to death was brought forth back to life never to die again. Thus the hope of eternal life was given to the entire human race.

Blessed Virgin Mary’s journey in haste is proclaimed in the Gospel. She plunged herself to a world of uncertainty with her fiat at the annunciation. She was betrothed to Joseph at the time of the annunciation and left to Elizabeth’s house immediately. When she returned she had a three month old child in her womb. Her parents and Joseph would have had ill thoughts of her, but she knew well what took place. That same response she must have given at the foot of the cross too, because she knew the power of God’s Word.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for impelling Lord Jesus to give His mother to us at the foot of the Cross. Amen.
Thursday 16th August

“Jesus answered, “I tell you, you must forgive not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Matthew 18:22

Today’s Gospel proclamation speaks about forgiveness. When St. Peter asked the Lord how many times he should forgive those who sinned against him, the Lord answers seventy-seven times. It means forgiveness should be a part of our life pattern.

When the Lord Jesus teaches to pray the Lord’s Prayer; He says, “Forgive our sins as we forgive those who trespass against us”. When we ask the Lord to forgive our sins we cannot be holding anything against our brothers and sisters who did wrong to us. As the sons and daughters of the Lord we are here to show His forgiveness to others. Had we not experienced forgiveness from the Lord, we would not be here today. Not only has the Lord forgiven us in the past, but He keeps on doing so because we are weak human beings who keep falling into sin. His forgiveness is a gift - an act of His mercy and love for us.

The Lord is perfect and holy. It is we who fall into sin or sin against others. Yet the Holy One keepson forgiving us even though we do not deserve it. This is the heart of the Father. So how much more we ought to forgive others who sin against us. When we hold on to unforgiveness it will give Satan a foothold in our lives. Our hearts are damaged because we refuse to obey the Lord and to forgive others. Unforgiveness blocks blessings and may lead to physical sickness too as we lose our peace and joy. It is true we struggle to forgive because of the hurt and the damage done to us by others and it may be humanly impossible to forgive them because we are weak. But we need His grace and strength to forgive others. That is why St. Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. For when I am weak, than I am strong.”

Today let us do a soul searching to see if we are holding on to any unforgiveness in our heart. If so, let us quietly lay it down at the feet of the Lord and ask His grace and strength to forgive and pray for those who persecute us so that we can enjoy peace and love.

Prayer: Abba Father, I come before You with my heart open. Lord, I want to lay down every hurt and pain and experience Your mercy and love. Amen.
Friday 17th August  19th Week in Ordinary Time

“Joyfully you will draw water from the springs of salvation”  

Isaiah 12:3

There was a young couple with two daughters. The mother left the family and went abroad. The father remained with his daughters. In the beginning, the father tried relentlessly to bring back the mother. He fought, struggled and even applied for a divorce. Ultimately, the family lost contact with the mother. However, this father’s whole intention was to protect the marriage. Even though the father held majority of the responsibility of losing his wife, he always wanted to remain faithful to his marriage vows. One day, he brought this problem to the Lord and sought God’s guidance. He began to hold onto the promises of the Lord. He started believing that “what God has united, human beings must not divide.” As he waited, God worked inside his heart. He attended two four steps retreats. Finally he held onto God alone. Suddenly, with no notice, the wife decided to come back and he accepted his wife. Both of them started to follow the Lord and seek His will in their marriage. Last week, together they celebrated their daughter’s first Holy Communion.

Isaiah says “Look, He is God of my salvation: I shall have faith and not to be afraid, for Yahweh is my strength and my song, he has been my salvation.” The Lord Jesus is calling us to hold onto what he has promised in His word. He reminds us that we are so hardhearted and therefore we human beings break the word of God. God is always faithful to his promises. In the above testimony the father could finally hold onto the promise of God. Therefore, just as Isaiah says, he could ‘joyfully draw water from the springs of salvation.’ Today, there is an invitation to let the Holy Spirit lead our marriages. To let the Holy Spirit into every area of our lives. When we seek the leading of the Holy Spirit, he becomes our strength and song. His majestic works will be known throughout the world. When our relationship with Lord Jesus grows day by day, our lives will be rooted in him. We build marriages and lives on him. The result would be our lives on earth become fruitful. Our relationship with others become matured.

Today we celebrated the feast of St. Clare of Montefalco who lived 1200 AC. Life of St. Clare reminds us that we are called to a life of prayer and dedication. We are to be satisfied with the simple relationship we have established with God.

Prayer: Abba Father, as I come you today, I am eagerly waiting to draw water from the springs of salvation. Satisfy my thirst. Amen
Saturday 18th August 19th Week in Ordinary Time
“Come back; turn away from your offenses, that you may not deserve punishment.” Ezekiel 18: 30

In today’s first reading, God is reminding us that the choices we make determine whether we live or die. In this event, a man chose to live a righteous life because his heart was set upon obtaining eternal life by pleasing God and following the commands of the Lord, so he gave up temporal gains to save his soul from spiritual death. However, the son chooses to follow his carnal mind and did not deprive himself of the momentary pleasures of life and eventually ended up losing his soul, leading to spiritual death.

There is a popular belief today among people that they are being punished for their ancestor’s sins, but the word of God rejects the idea that punishment is transferred from one generation to the next and emphasizes individual responsibility and accountability. Our choices determine whether we die eternally or live eternally.

God is pleading in is word, “Free yourself from all offenses you have committed and get a new heart and a new spirit.” Our God is a God of second chances and He constantly nudges us to come back to Him so that we might receive grace and mercy to overcome our weakness and live a life pleasing to Him and thereby have eternal life.

The Psalmist in his reflection reminds us that God is pleased with a broken spirit and a contrite heart, a heart that repents for the evil actions and offers it as a humble sacrifice unto God. The word of God reminds us “what will one gain by winning the whole world, if he destroys his soul?”

The Mother Church offers us the great sacrament of reconciliation for us to free ourselves from the guilt and shame that we experience when we commit sin, so that we can come back into the warm embrace of the Heavenly Father. I have experienced the power of the sacrament of reconciliation when I have been carrying the load of guilt and shame on my shoulders. The power of the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross of Calvary has set me free.

The Lord is inviting us through the Gospel proclamation today to become like little children, who are humble and meek.

Prayer: Abba Father, awaken my spirit to know that you are pleased with a humble and a contrite heart and that is a pleasing sacrifice we can offer unto you. Amen.
For the past few Sundays we have been reflecting on the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. It all started with our Lord Jesus feeding the five thousand. Everyone acknowledged that a ‘great prophet of God’ had appeared among them and were trying to take him by force and make him their king. A lesser person might have been inclined to think that this was the fulfilment of the promise: “He will sit on the throne of David” and gone with the flow - but not Jesus.

He was the faithful servant who would not snuff a smouldering wick. He runs up to the mountain to consult his Father. His Father must have revealed to him that the people were coming after him because they saw the miracles that happened at his hands, and not because there was conversion of heart. From then on Jesus changes his tune. He tries to tell the people that they are missing the point. He tries to tell them that it is not the physical bread that he provided they must seek, but instead to seek him, the living bread sent from heaven. But they do not understand.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, our Lord Jesus addresses the people who have come looking for ‘miraculous bread’, which they ate when our Lord fed the five thousand.

Miraculous bread could represent all the material needs we seek God’s intervention for. It could be healing from a sickness. It could be for divine provision when we are unable to meet our financial obligations. It could be for deliverance from an abusive person in authority, or to be spared of the repercussions of a foolish decision we made. The Lord speaks to us and is telling us He is the real answer that we should be seeking, and not solutions to our problems and needs.

The gospel proclamation continues to tell us that the Jews quarrelled among themselves saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” We too may ask the same question. When we seek Him instead of the solution to our problem or need, how will our situation be addressed?” It doesn’t seem logical or sound acceptable. Yet our Lord Jesus assures us, “My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” Seeking Him will answer the pressing need in our lives.
Our Lord speaks of a few things that will happen to us if we seek Him instead of seeking solutions to our problems.

First, we will have eternal life. He promises to give us a life beyond death. Those who have had to deal with the death of a loved one knows how final death is. There is no coming back. The Lord promises that if we seek Him, He will carry us beyond death. Death not only means physical death, but it could mean any disaster from which there is no coming back. Our Lord Jesus promises that He will carry us beyond death. The death experience will only be a stepping stone and life will continue.

Next, He promises He will raise us up on the last day. This means there may be a gap between the time of the death experience and the breakthrough. It may even feel like God is not doing anything, during this time, just like the three days he was in the tomb. But then, Our Lord Jesus assures us that day of breakthrough will surely come.

He also promises that if we seek Him, He will live in us and we in Him. We will receive a new and intimate relationship. There will be conversion in our heart, and we will live for Him just like He lived for His Father. Also, just as His Father sent Him, He is sending us to be a blessing and a gateway to heaven for those who live among us. We will find a new meaning to our lives, and we are blessed to live for a cause that is bigger than us.

Today's first reading talks about Wisdom. There is human wisdom and divine wisdom. Divine wisdom is based on a revelation of God that inspires man to act beyond human logic. The reading urges us to “Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight” The simple way is to seek solutions to our needs and problems. The Way of Insight is to seek Him first.

Yet, we are only human, and it is the things of this world that dominate our hearts and minds. The second reading teaches us how to deal with this. Seek the will of the Lord and be filled with the Holy Spirit. In our conversations, focus on the great things God has done, share Spirit inspired thoughts, and have a song in our heart, always giving thanks for everything, including our death experiences.

*Prayer: Abba Father, I come to you just as I am. I acknowledge that my heart is dominated by worldly concerns. Today, I surrender my life to you, so that you can fill me with your Holy Spirit, and I will be able to seek you.*
Monday 20th August

"If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven...” Matthew 19: 21

St. Bernard of Clairvaux

"Son of Man, I am about to take from you the delight of your eyes”. What frightful words to hear for Ezekiel. His wife whom he loved dearly, taken from him so suddenly as a sign for sinful Israel. He was not to mourn her loss but rather to carry on with God’s work with his head held high.

In the gospel proclamation today, we see the Lord Jesus encouraging the young man to leave behind the delight of his heart - his wealth. But that young man, unlike Ezekiel, could not let go of his possessions. He decided to keep his material wealth but lost God in the process.

Both men were asked to make sacrifices that hurt. Ezekiel lost his beloved wife, the young man was asked to let go of something he might have spent much time and effort building up. Both losses are terrible. When God invites us to let go, be it our possessions, our relationships or simply our way of life, it will hurt. The only way we can let go and be at peace is if we recognize the voice that speaks to us as the voice of God. The only way we can remain at peace and retain our joy is if we truly understand that what we gain is much more than what we lost.

It is a truth that I am slowly learning in my journey with God. Early in the journey as a server, I had bitterness inside me for the time I was asked to sacrifice and the duty I felt like I had to perform. In time, God taught me that what I did, I did to please others. My inherent need to please people and be thought of as a good person compelled me to do things that I regretted secretly. It was only when I truly began to know God, when I settled long enough to hear His voice and experience His love, I learned that it is impossible to be bitter about anything truly done for God because His love is so much better than anything I can give up.

That young man walked away sad and we can never know what God could have achieved through that man if he said yes. It is a terrifying thought that we could miss out on the greater calling that God has for us because we are too scared to let go.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to hear Your voice clearer today, help me to recognize who You are in my life. Let my eyes be on You as you give me the grace to let go what I am holding on to today. Amen.
Tuesday 21st August

My food is to do the will of the Father who sent me to accomplish His works

John 4:34

In today’s Gospel proclamation, St. Peter asks the Lord Jesus in Mt 19:37 “We have left everything to follow you, what then will there be for us?” JThe Lord Jesus tells us that those who have left everything for the sake of Him will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

As believers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we serve an eternal God. Because of this our lives can and should have an everlasting impact on others. We have the privilege of investing the time, talent and skills the Lord has given us for the sake of His kingdom, knowing whatever we accomplish in obedience to Him will endure forever.

When we study world church history we see that during the medieval period, many Catholic monks spent years in isolation and prayer within monasteries to copy the bible on papyrus which is a kind of parchment. They sacrificed their valuable years to translate the Bible for the people to read the word of God in the future and to ensure that the Bible will be spread throughout the world. By the world standards they did not achieve wealth, status or power. But they produced fruit of great value leading souls into a relationship with Christ. There are people who have eternal life because those monks allowed God to work through them. There is no greater reward than that. We too are able to read the word and know the plans God has for us because those monks made a sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

The Lord Jesus says, “My food is to do the will of the Father who sent me to accomplish His works. He who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal, so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together (John 4:34-36).

If we spend our energy to gain earthly ambitions they will pass away. But when we obey God, accomplishing His assignments for us, we are assured that they will continue to produce fruit and joy even when time is no more. Therefore from today let us not waste our time. Work for fruit that will last forever. It is time to start our investment in Heaven today.

Prayer: Abba Father, I want my life to count for eternity. Show me how and where to serve you. Amen
Shepherds and sheep have been a part of Jewish society and history. Key leaders evolved from being humble shepherds. They were called from their quiet, pastoral roles to govern nations.

Today’s first reading likens the roles of the leaders of Israel to that of shepherds of the people. Yahweh is dismayed with the shepherds because instead of overseeing the needs of the people they have filled their pockets and settled into lives of ease and greed.

This is generally the attitude of most leaders in every sphere of life, from politics to the corporate world. When shepherds are at ease, the sheep easily fall prey to the threats in the world at large.

The shepherd or the owner of the vineyard displays an entirely different attitude. He searches the streets for people who are idling and offers them opportunities to work in his vineyard. Ultimately he pays all the same wage and not in accordance with the hours they have put in.

This is the immeasurable, unparalled, incomprehensible love of God, which looks for the most despised person and lifts that person out of his or her hell hole. Most often it is people who the world and their own families have given up on.

In these times we rarely encounter ‘born saints’ but rather ‘made saints’, people who went down the wrong roads in life and messed up their lives only to encounter the love of the Lord and be changed.

We are face-to-face with a desperate God, a God who is dying to save the lost and despised. The wages or the love He lavishes upon these redeemed souls is beyond comprehension. It upsets people who have lived normal, good lives - like the brother of the prodigal son.

Today, let us discover a shepherd in the Lord Jesus. When we have tasted His love, we have all we want. This is echoed in the cry of the Psalmist who declares - ‘The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.’ Let us allow the Lord to look over us, protect us and shepherd us so that our lives may slip into a life of security in the Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, in your love you sent the Lord Jesus to seek me and save me. I thank you and praise you for the gift of salvation. Amen.
Thursday 23rd August

St. Rose of Lima, virgin

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.”

Ezekiel 36:26

In today’s readings we are given a glimpse of the works of the Holy Spirit. Psalm 51 shows the humble petition of King David following the conviction of his sins the Lord brought upon his heart. Above all, King David longed for restoration of the presence of God which had given him joy and sustained him through his trials and challenges. Weakened in spirit as a result of sin and feeling separated from God, his petition was however beyond forgiveness of sins, he longed once again for the “nearness” with God; the presence that would equip & qualify him for his royal office and so he pleads in verse 12 “restore to me the joy of your salvation and a willing spirit to sustain me.”

The Spirit of God brings joy and sustains but also has the power to grant us a new heart and a new Spirit as revealed in Ezekiel 36. A Spirit that would long for intimacy with Jesus Christ and the Father. This was God’s salvific plan when He revealed “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.” A heart of flesh more pliable and teachable and a Spirit that would reside in us forever. No longer needing to be good and holy through self-effort. Jesus Christ Himself would come to aid us in our deepest needs and share in our deepest joys and sorrows. I recall my own life how futile my efforts were in trying to be good when all I gained were bondage and addictions. How wonderful the day when Jesus Christ saved me through grace! I no longer feel alone, His presence inside of me leading, upholding and showing me the way. Now I need only rest in His presence and trust Him to sustain me.

In the Gospel proclamation the Lord teaches us the importance of staying prepared and responding appropriately to His call. In Verse 14 Jesus says “For many are called but a few are chosen” Could we too have heard His invitation today yet overlooked or accepted His invitation yet fallen short due to sin and perhaps lost the joy salvation?

Let’s turn to God today through confession and allow the Holy Spirit to fill and restore us so that we may be equipped and qualified for His works.

Prayer: Abba Father, restore the joy of your salvation and grant us a willing spirit to sustain us. Amen
Often we meet people who have encountered the saving love of the Lord Jesus and all they speak about is the beauty and awe of God that rests within them. There was a gentleman who used to drive me to various places for programmes and all he would speak about was, what would happen if God suddenly chose to call us home. In his presence I never had a chance to criticise anyone or anything and I could never steer the conversation to my sad stories.

This is the transformation that we should look for as Nathanael was seeking. Nathanael was sincere in his search for the Kingdom and the Messiah. When told about the Lord he bluntly asked about what good could come from Nazareth. It was not that he was biased about a small town but that he was frank in expressing his views. Through his example we are not called to question our faith but rather engage the Lord in a sincere conversation expressing our concerns and doubts and receiving His answers and strength as we face life’s issues.

We are fully convinced and trusting when we hold in our heart our future salvation. Are we convinced that as we live pleasing to the Lord we can have a strong hope? Our hope is that we have been accepted and loved by the Lord and one day sooner or later He will come to take us to our home in Heaven. To some this thought is unsettling and to others it is comforting.

Some of our lives are so entrenched here that any thought of death and the future shakes us up. There are others who are looking forward to death as a means of escape from the present circumstances. They have experienced enough pain and heart break that all they can think of is death and closure. But there are some who are living here, totally engrossed in life and yet experiencing a freedom in their hearts. They long for their home in Heaven and to be in the arms of the Father who won’t let go.

The first reading give us that vision of the new heaven. Not just a place of splendour but a place of immense comfort. Nathanael never imagined that one day his name would be written on the walls of the new Jerusalem. We can be assured that if live as the Lord wills, our names are already carved on the hands of our saviour, our Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, you are my refuge and you are my song. I choose to trust in you and give my future & fears into your hands. Amen
Prayer: Abba Father, let me humble myself with your strength. Amen.

Saturday 25th August

It is easy to humble oneself before a figure of authority. However, today’s gospel proclamation points in a different direction. Our Lord Jesus is speaking to the crowd and his disciples, and warns them about hypocrisy. The Lord tells them that it is important to listen to what the Pharisees say, but not to do what they do – for they are hypocrites and do not practice what they preach.

The Pharisees yearned for places of honour and titles of recognition, they demanded respect and what they did was done for the people to see, so that they could receive appreciation. The Lord issues a strong statement and says: “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

In my own life, I have no struggle when I have to humble myself before God – for I know He is holy and knows what is best for me. The struggle arises when I have to humble myself before others, especially if I am in the wrong. Humbling myself can be in the form of apologizing first in an argument, refraining from saying something rude, facing rejection with no retaliation or any other form of right inner response to a negative situation. If we succeed in responding in this way to the people in our lives, we humble ourselves before others and our reward is we are exalted – not in the eyes of the world, but in the kingdom of heaven.

The greatest example of this humility is our Lord Jesus himself, who humbled himself unto death on a cross. As a result he was glorified and given the name that is above every other name. We are asked to practice this same humility in our families and community. However, it is important to remember that if we strive to achieve this humility by our own strength, we will fail. That is why the Holy Spirit lives inside us. He will empower us to be like the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, let me humble myself with your strength. Amen.
Everyone was anxious when my mother was expecting me, as she had already lost two babies in childbirth. Doctors took extra precautions to make sure she had a safe delivery. My god parents went the extra mile and consulted an astrologer to make sure they were ready if bad luck struck. He told them if I wore the precious stones according to the time of my birth, they would ward off bad luck. So they made a cross with the precious stones embedded and made sure I wore it all the time. I too wore it faithfully, and I must confess that I had more faith in the stones than the cross back then.

In today’s first reading Joshua addresses the Hebrew people; choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. God had brought them to the Promised Land, yet they were holding on to the gods of their past. Externally they worshipped the God of Israel, but secretly they held on to the gods that they had picked up on the way.

The “gods of the land” are worshipped by everyone, including atheists. We are enticed by the gods that promise success, prestige, wealth and we offer to them our families, loved ones or even our journey with the Lord as sacrifices. We put in more hours at work, we add more degrees to our qualifications and we accumulate wealth sufficient for generations. In the end we find we have more enemies than friends, and among them are our own children!

Joshua too must have been pressured to worship the gods of the land they lived in. He made a firm choice and he proclaimed; “as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord”. The promise was not just for himself, but for his entire household. Whoever lived under his roof had to serve the Lord. By making that choice, Joshua protected himself and his household. Today is a good day to allow the choice that Joshua made challenge us, convict us and bring us back if we have lost our way.

We have heard today’s second reading in many weddings. “Submit, love, serve.” I have seen many people roll their eyes when they hear these words. As husbands and wives, we see the best and the worst of each other. Sometimes we see the worst more than we see the
best of the other person. Whether we like it or not, these words are read and preached at many Catholic weddings as the foundation for the new couple to build their lives on. Yet, we see these qualities rarely in many families. Instead, we see bitterness, resentment, or even unfaithfulness. Instead of submitting, loving and serving each other, they have taken the easy way out, and obeyed the gods of the land they live in. Years later, we see the results in the lives of the children of these marriages; damaged and broken, re-living the mistakes of the parents.

What exactly did St. Paul mean by “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”? Does it mean allowing yourself to be dominated by your spouse? I believe it means to love and serve your spouse knowing he/she is flawed.

I believe it means that your relationship with the Lord is reflected in the way you relate to your spouse. I believe it means you become Jesus to your spouse out of reverence for Christ. Every morning I wake up to the same sight beside me; my husband sitting up in prayer. His personal relationship with the Lord has always reflected in his relationship with me. In turn, it has brought healing, restoration and salvation to our entire family.

Today’s Gospel proclamation tells us that some disciples of the Lord left Him because what He said was too much for them to handle. The Lord asked the others if they too were leaving Him, and St. Peter answered; “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Often, I too find that the teachings of the Lord are too much to handle. They are the complete opposite to how I want to live my life.

They are too difficult, too demanding and it costs me my ego, my pride, my comforts, my strength, my time, my money - yet, I am here. It is nothing but the grace of God that has taken me through. It is also because I agree with St. Peter when he said “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”.

His words give me hope beyond death, they bring me comfort beyond disappointment, and they create a hunger in me for more of His words, more of His presence. His words reveal to me the lies of my heart and the gods that I am enticed by. His words give me the power to remain faithful, submissive and on the path He has chosen for me.

Prayer: Abba Father, may the words of the Lord give me the grace to choose every day to love and serve you and to remain faithful to you all the days of my life. Amen.
Monday 27th August

“Woe to you, teachers... you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces”.

Matthew 23:13

In today’s readings we see two contrasting groups of people. In the first reading we are introduced to the Church of the Thessalonians. In the Gospel we meet the Pharisees and Scribes. Our Lord Jesus rebukes them. What made the Pharisees and scribes displeasing to God, and made the Thessalonians pleasing to God?

The Thessalonians were of a persecuted church. They lived in difficult times paying a heavy price for deciding to follow Jesus. But instead of growing in resentment and self pity, they grew in love for one another. As I look at myself, I find that when things go wrong and difficult, I become irritable and short with others. Not so for the Church of the Thessalonians. They are behaving like people for whom everything is going right. St. Paul says, that they are growing in faith. Something strange is happening. Usually when things go wrong our faith begins to fail. Their faith seems to give them a perspective that despite the current situation, God is still seated on the throne. It is as though the issues that they are currently facing are their biggest source of blessing.

The Pharisees and Scribes were no ordinary Jews. They were people, who were in their desire to serve God better, had joined a religious movement. Yet, our Lord Jesus tells the Pharisees and the Scribes that they lock the Kingdom of heaven before men. This means that there is no divine intervention or supernatural element in their ministry. Only religious observations and rituals. As such, when issues arise, they had to act on their own, without God’s perspective. Perhaps this was why they reacted with anger, jealousy, and wickedness to those who did not see eye to eye with them (our Lord Jesus and his followers). Do I also act only on my own wisdom, without the divine perspective? Have I too become like a Pharisee? Does today’s Gospel reveal why they ended up this way?

Our Lord Jesus calls the Pharisees and Scribes hypocrites, implying that they perform religious acts for others to see, but in their hearts, they are worldly. The look for appreciation, swear by the Gold of the Temple, are pragmatic people and don’t depend on God. Contrast this with the Thessalonians. They gave inner responses in faith. Hence, divine intervention and supernatural element was their experience.

Prayer: Abba Father, I desire to experience your divine intervention even in the mundane things of my life. Grant me obedience to you at all times. Amen.
Tuesday 28th August

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to remember that you and your Word are the absolute truth. You will always be God, and are sovereign over everything. Amen.
Wednesday 29th August

The Passion of John the Baptist

For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.

Psalm 71:5

In the first reading, the Lord speaks a powerful promise that is relevant even today. He says in Verse 18, “Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall…”

In the olden days, cities were heavily guarded so that invaders could not capture them. The Lord is reminding us today, that when we are focused on Him and attuned to His love, our hearts and minds will be like this fortified city, and the enemy will not be able to invade it.

An iron pillar is rooted into the ground and cannot be easily removed. When we are rooted in Christ, no matter what the external circumstances may be, no negative thought or situation can uproot us from the reality that is in the Lord.

Bronze walls were used as protection so that they could not be broken down by weapons. In the same way, the Lord promises He will make us a bronze wall, unable to be put down by the weapons of the evil one.

A great example of a person who possessed these three traits is St. John the Baptist. Today we remember his passion, yet there is much to learn from his life. From the time he was in his mother’s womb, he was set apart by God and for God. Like the Psalmist of today says, “From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother’s womb.”

St. John the Baptist was a man who was not afraid to speak the truth and stand up for what is right. It is this integrity that led him to his death, for the truth he spoke could not be handled, as we see in the gospel proclamation of today.

In our own lives, when we struggle to stand up for the truth, let us remember the promise of the Lord and how He is empowering us. Let us also believe that we are called to be John the Baptists of this current age; leading people to the Lord and humbling ourselves before Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, may I never forget that you have empowered me to be strong in Your power to speak the truth at all times. Amen.
Thursday 30th August

They tell of the power of your awesome works
and I will proclaim your great deeds.

Psalm 145: 6

The first reading is based on the theme of thanksgiving. This reminds us of how we should start our day - with thanksgiving for everything that is happening around us. Why does giving thanks to God matter? “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thes 5:16-18) God is good, merciful and kind. Our response to this great pursuit of love should be thankfulness. Giving thanks to God helps us go against bitterness, anger and other harmful attitudes. Even when our circumstances are difficult and demoralizing, thankfulness can help. We can give thanks for God’s presence in the midst of this and what He promises to do through it. This will bring joy and peace to our hearts.

We see a prominent theme in the Lord’s teaching today. Mt 24:42 says ‘watch therefore’. It addresses the glorious coming of the Lord at three levels. (1)Past historical- the disciples were to look vigilantly for God’s judgement on Jerusalem A.D. 70, lest they fail to heed his words and evacuated the city before its demise (2)Present liturgical- Disciples must look with faith to see the coming of the Lord in the Eucharist. (3)Future eschatalogical- Disciples must watch for the Lord’s second coming in glory at the end of history. Being vigilant in faith and good works is necessary to inherit eternal life with the Lord.

The Gospel proclamation speaks of the faithful servant and the unfaithful servant. The most important lesson in this parable is that we must consider ourselves as servants. We are servants of God, not just in a metaphorical sense, but in a literal sense as well. The Lord Jesus took on the form of a servant, and was willing to wash the feet of His disciples. The Lord was faithful in doing all things which God required of Him; He went not beyond His commission, nor did He neglect any part of His appointed work. Lord Jesus laid aside His majesty to serve humanity. His death is the supreme example of His servanthood: the fulfilling of the will of God His Father. Are we willing to take that extra step that God is calling us to take today?

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to be wise and faithful servants through our lifestyle and choices. Help us to watch and pray. Amen.
Friday 31st August

For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

In the first reading today St. Paul proclaims the power of Christ crucified and tells us that though a selfish, self-centred and wicked world considers the crucifixion as foolish, the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

On the day of the crucifixion there was an important conversation between the Lord Jesus and the Roman governor, Pilate. The first reading calls us to reflect on how the governor was aware the Lord Jesus was innocent and Jewish religious leaders had held him up for trial and crucifixion because they were jealous of Him. Pilate asked the Lord whether he was a king and what his mission was. The Lord replied that He was a king but his kingdom was not of this world. The governor was curious and asked Him again what his mission was. The Lord replied that it was to bear witness to the truth and all those who believed in the truth would believe and follow Him.

Pilate then asked, “what is the truth?” But the Lord did not reply. Most Bible scholars believe that in his heart the Lord would have told Pilate, “Wait a little while and I will show you what truth is”.

On the cross, the Lord shows us that truth is total self-donation, living for God and for others. For generations God had made more than 10,000 promises to the people, mainly about His unconditional love, mercy and compassion. But most did not believe Him and did not act according to God’s will. So God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit decided that the son would become a human being, go in the world, and show the people how much He loves them. The message from the Lord Jesus on the cross is, even if you betray, deny or desert me, even if you whip me, strip me and crucify me like a criminal of criminals, I will still love you because God is love.

When we accept this love and do God’s will which is the best plan for us, God gives us the power to climb the highest mountains, walk on stormy seas and raises us up more than we could be.

Prayer: Abba Father by the power of the Holy Spirit may I give myself totally to you and to others. May I remember St Mother Theresa’s words that when we love till it hurts, eventually love remains and the hurts go away. Amen.
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