



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

February 2017

**Our Lady's message to
St. Bernadette at Lourdes was,
"Penance, penance, penance
and pray for sinners"!**

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On Our Knees In His Hands

February 2017

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**“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord
has compassion on the faithful” Psalm 103:13**

Hebrews 12:4-7, 11-15

Psalm 103:1-2, 13-14,
17-18

Mark 6:1-6

The author of the book of Hebrew reminds us of the importance of the chastisement. We are disciplined by God, though we see the human persons who are involved in the event. Our journey is not to settle here on earth but to move towards our true destiny, which is our heavenly Jerusalem.

Journeying with the Lord Jesus is a mystery.

Those of us who truly let go our plans and desires of ‘a kind of life’ which we had in mind to live and enter into the ‘way of the Lord’ kind of life is disciplined in a mysterious way. In our small world the centre of attraction would always be ‘self’. Therefore we strive to fulfill ourselves. God in His goodness intervenes and breaks this selfish attitude. But the truth is when the correction comes it is painful. It is a painful experience to give up pleasure.

A certain person out of compassion fed the hungry and clothed the naked. Isn’t this the commandment of God? This kind deed was misinterpreted and the person was chastised. We may wonder why it had to happen this way. The scripture is clear; it is for the holiness of the person that such a thing happened. We are advised not to allow our weakness to weaken us more but arise from the situation to move towards holiness to glorify God.

We are called to be vigilant. Our journey on earth is temporary. God in His goodness is taking us towards our true destiny. The Lord Jesus’ experience was similar. The kind deeds and acts of love were misinterpreted as pretentious. The Gospel clearly says that Lord Jesus could not perform many miracles in His own town. People did not see Him as the Father would want them to.

For our holiness God in His goodness placed us in a family, community and society. We are not hermits living in isolation. Therefore our chastisement and discipline will come to us from people whom we live with. We need to see beyond. We should not be like the Nazarenes in the Gospel who judged the Lord Jesus according to His family background. We should be aware that God is moving us towards holiness. Our call is to have a different attitude in our challenges and remember that every challenge, sickness and struggle is for our holiness.

Prayer: Abba Father, may you lavishly shower upon us your divine wisdom for us to move from the dimension we live to the heavenly dimension. Amen.

For my eyes have seen your salvation.

Luke 2:30

Malachi 3:1-4

Hebrews 2:14-18

Psalms 24:7-10

Luke 2:22-32

For many of us Christians, religion is a set of rules, a set of Do's and Don't's, a philosophy, a doctrine or a set of teachings that we follow. For others religion seems to be a place where we think we can do something and get favours and blessings from God. God does want to bless us more than we can think or imagine but much more than showering us with material things.

As it is said in today's Gospel proclamation, salvation is not just a doctrine, it's not just a philosophy or a creed that we profess. Salvation is a person. The salvation that comes from God is the Lord Jesus himself. The Lord Jesus is our salvation. That is why the prophet Simeon tells us today in the Gospel as he holds the baby in his hands "My eyes have seen your salvation". So Christianity is not just a religion and knowing what is right and wrong but it is having a relationship with the Lord Jesus who is our salvation.

I would like to share with you this beautiful experience. There was once a man in China who was arrested by the authorities for preaching. He was put into prison and tortured. He prayed to the Lord wanting to die as a martyr but the Lord said 'I have a mission for you in this prison.' One evening, as the inmates got together they invited him to sing. As he sang the Holy Spirit came to that place and all of them began to weep. Due to this transformation of the prisoners in that place the Prison Warden transferred him to a ward with the worst criminals hoping he could influence them to change. In that place there was a serial killer, badly injured by other prisoners and he could not eat because of this. The Lord spoke to and challenged the good prisoner to feed his meal to the serial killer. While he was being fed the serial killer broke down and cried and said "Do you know who I am and what I have done to show me such mercy?" Then he said that it is not I but it is my Lord Jesus who loves you like this. That man's life was transformed forever and on the day of his execution he wrote a letter to his mother says "Mama today is the day they execute me for my crimes but Don't be afraid I am not going to Hell Jesus has saved me" This Jesus is our salvation sent by God the light that will enlighten us from within through whom the Glory of God will shine through us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to share your mercy and love with the world around me so that people may experience you. Amen

Loving with the Lord's strength

the

Hebrews 13:1-8

Psalm 27:1, 3, 5 8-9

Mark 6:14-29

Throughout both the first reading and Gospel proclamation of today, the resounding theme of what a marriage should and should not be. Needless to say, marriage has lost all of most of its sacredness and seriousness in today's society. Movies, television series and romance novels, paint a warped, nonexistent, untruthful picture of love and marriage promoting a picture that gives prominence to feelings. Most people nowadays, get married because they have "fallen in love" and get divorced or have an affair because they have "fallen out of love". People enter into marriage with unreasonable and unattainable expectations and wanting simply to have their own needs met. There is nothing "fairytale-like" about love and marriage. This "happily ever after" idea is put into the heads of us girls from our littlest days. These girls grow up and get married with the idea of their husband being a Prince Charming. But sooner or later that bubble bursts and the rest is history.

Contrary to popular beliefs, how one feels for their spouse is irrelevant. What matters is that in the sight of God we are one with our spouse. And anything else, a divorce or an extra-marital affair, is an abomination in His eyes. It is a ripping apart of a body that has been merged together by our Maker.

St. Paul, in the first reading, stresses on the importance of a husband and wife being faithful to each other. Being faithful means being loyal and resolutely and dutifully being firm and unwavering in one's commitment to stick with and love one's spouse. Loving with the 1 Corinthians 4-8 meaning of love which defines love as an action, a verb. Marital love is a commitment, it is a covenant which carries no expiration date.

When we don't feel love for our spouse or when they don't love us back or worse, when they hurt us let us go to the Lord Jesus. He is the Fount of Love. This is not just a beautiful idea, no. Just taste and see how sweet and beautiful and authentic His love is. If you're going through the struggle of being unable to love your spouse ask the precious Holy Spirit to assist you and make things right. Remember that nothing is beyond the Lord's ability to heal and restore.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to accept our spouses from your hands and from your heart. Amen.

“ Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything
good for doing his will”

Hebrews 13:20

Isaiah 43:1-3, 5, 10-13

Psalms 95:1-3, 7-10

Acts 1:12-13, 2:1-2,
4-8, 11

Matthew 2:1-2, 7-12

In the first reading in Saint Paul's letter to the Hebrews we see how the Lord is concerned with the whole of life - how we use our homes, how we respond to the needs of others; with marriage with our use of money. We grow strong as Christians, not by a code of religious observance, but by obeying God. It is a straight choice- Christ offers salvation to all, but there is an exclusiveness at

the heart of Christianity which we have always found hard: sacrifice for sin. He calls us to identify ourselves unashamedly with him. St Paul ends it with a beautiful blessing we all need in verse 20.

Psalms 23 the best known best loved of all psalms, pictures God as the good shepherd. He provides all that his people need. He leads them through life. He secures them from all harm. Verse five introduces a second picture: God the perfect host, feasting his people with good things. That is because this is God's nature. God's love and care are wholly in keeping with his character. A shepherd leads his sheep to find green pastures. 'Even though I walk through a valley dark as death I fear no evil.

The Gospel reading shows us the compassionate heart of our Lord. He advised the Apostles, after an eventful day of ministering, to seek rest in a remote place, where they would encounter the Father and experience His peace, rest and rejuvenation. He then sees the crowd relentlessly following them like sheep without a shepherd, has compassion and sets out to minister to the crowds. Such is the love of our God.

It is this same Good Shepherd who lives among us today. He is waiting to minister to us again as we struggle with your own attitudes in a world steeped in materialism and egoism. His call is to 'come away'. It is in direct conflict with our fallen nature, inordinate self-love, marring if not destroying the soul's supernatural goodness. In the 'Dialogues' the eternal Father says to Saint Catherine of Siena, 'it has poisoned the world and the mystical body of the Holy Church and through it the garden of my spouse has run to seed and given birth to putrid flowers.' Awaken your spirit and be led, God can do great and mighty things through you while you experience His constant love and care

Prayer: Abba Father thank you for the Good Shepherd Our Lord Jesus who relentlessly leads us to your rest. Amen

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

Isaiah 58:7-10

1 Cor. 2:1-5

Matthew 5:13-16

Today's readings show us the value of following the commands of God and carrying Christ within our hearts. God wants us to make a difference in the sinful world we live in and to people who do not know the love of God.

In the first reading from Isaiah, the Lord is telling us the true meaning of fasting. To fast is not just to abstain from food, whilst still continuing to live the same way as we always do. The Lord is saying that when we fast we should also change our behavior. He says in verse 10 "If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech; if you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday." When we change our behavior by doing these things, the light that will rise from us is not a light that we would have generated ourselves but it is the light of Christ. When we start following the commands of God, people will start seeing Him living within us.

St. John once said 'I must become less while He must become more.' When we start following the commands of Christ that St. John speaks of, God will become real inside us and we will no longer want to project ourselves, but instead our desire will only be to bring glory to God.

The psalm speaks of a person who has this light of Christ shining from within them. The Psalmist says that a person, who carries Christ in their words and deeds, will always be a light to people who are living in darkness. They will be an example to others.

Even when he has problems and struggles the light of Christ will give him strength. This is because he trusts in God. He has surrendered his life to God and therefore he knows that God will take control of everything and resolve every struggle in his time. He has no fear and his heart is secure. Therefore He is able to look beyond His struggles and help others and show them the love of Christ.

This word is not only for you, but it strikes me. It is in my nature to over analyze situations and problems that I have faced in the past. Instead of surrendering to God, I have always made the problem the centre of my world. Many times I have made other people's lives as miserable because of a problem I was facing. Today, God is speaking

to me and showing me my sinfulness. Instead of bringing everyone around me down and into darkness, He is asking me to trust Him and surrender to Him. Instead of focusing on the problem, He is asking me to focus on Him and be a light to others.

In the second reading, we can see that St. Paul is a model of the kind of person who trusts God completely. He has humbled himself before Christ and has surrendered his life to God. He devoted himself to knowing only about Christ and gave up everything else.

God gives us a command in the first reading-- stop sinning and start doing good. Then the light of God will be seen within us. St. Paul followed this command that God gave him. He stopped persecuting believers, he stopped speaking badly and engaging in sinful acts and concentrated on God only. He says in verses 4-5 "My message and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of Spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God." He wanted people to see the light of God within him therefore he focused on God and showed people the love of God through his behavior and deeds.

The Gospel proclamation tells us that as followers of Christ we are the salt of the earth and a light to the world. When we make food, salt gives flavour to it. Salt in a dish makes a big difference to how the dish tastes. In the same way the Lord Jesus is saying as Christians we must make a difference in the world. The way we behave and live must make a difference in the lives of others so that they will see Christ within us and be drawn to follow Him as well. The Lord also says in the darkness we can do nothing. But when a light is put we can do much more. In the same way we are called to be the light of the world. The world is living in sin and darkness. They have no answers to the problems of their lives. But when we follow the commands of God and start helping people they will start seeing that there can be a light in their dark lives. This light is Christ.

The Lord is calling each of us to let go of our problems and focus on helping others. How can we practically do this? We must first know God ourselves. To know Him we must start our personal prayers and begin a friendship with Him. As we nurture this friendship with God it becomes love and slowly blossoms into intimacy. In this intimacy the secrets of God will be revealed to us and sacrifice and giving does not become a burden. Instead sacrifice and doing things for others becomes a joy.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that my relationship with you will blossom into an intimate relationship and that I may become the salt of the earth and a light to others in darkness. Amen.

The steadfast love of the Lord is from eternity to eternity**Psalm 103:17**

Genesis 1:1-19

Psalm 104:1-2, 5-6, 10,
12, 24, 35

Mark 6:53-56

There is a lyrical quality in the record of the dawn of creation in the Gospel of John. St. John speaks of the “beginning” of the “Word” - the Lord Jesus existing from eternity. We saw Him as “the light that darkness could not overcome.” When God created the world. He saw that “it was good”. What makes it bad or good is how creation is used. Any evil we see, is either from an extraneous source or something that human beings themselves have created. This account is set in the 9th and 5th Century before Christ. It is written against the background of the culture and belief of that time. It is not meant to confirm to scientific belief. Phrases like “the first day” are not to be taken literally. Sacred scriptures were given to fortify our faith. What is vital for us to know is that God was before everything - even time and space and that He created a perfect world out of love. Even when human beings betrayed Him repeatedly, His forgiving love would always draw them back. He desires intimate fellowship with his created beings. Knowing that this intimacy was the only saving hope for all humanity, He sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself.

In the person of the Lord Jesus, we see the unconditional love of God amply demonstrated. The Lord Jesus knew that the only reason the crowds flocked to Him, was to receive physical healing. But He did not rebuke them since the reason He came to this world was to do good and minister to human needs.

We too come to the Lord Jesus for what we can get from Him and not to satisfy the need in the heart of God for intimate fellowship . Problems of need prompt us to approach Him, forgetting the greater need for our inner being to be transformed. Our selfishness, unforgiveness, our brokenness and our lack of authentic love for our fellow human beings are what we should seek His healing for. We need to be aware that God loves us and nothing can separate us from His love. By spending time in this awareness, we can come to Him with the truth in our hearts and let the Holy Spirit anoint us to make us whole. Before I came to the experience of the renewal I had no idea of how important the reading and meditation of the scriptures was. I was content to be a Sunday Catholic “saying” prayers. Today through times of prayer I have experienced His deep love and presence.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I thank you for inviting me to a close relationship and fellowship with you. Amen*

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man
that you care for him?

Psalm 8:4

Genesis 1:20-2:4

Psalm 8:4-9

Mark 7:1-13

The first reading talks about the creation of man in God's own image and likeness. God created man to be fruitful and increase in number so that he could rule over the earth and take good care of all God's creation (Genesis 1:26).

While we read the first reading and understand that Almighty God after creating everything gives man authority over all creation, we might wonder why on earth did God make man in his own image and give him so much authority? The same question is being asked by the Psalmist in Psalm 8:4, "what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

When we mere humans have great plans for our future and work hard to achieve them, we know the God who created us must have greater plans for each of us. Personally before I had a God experience, I use to ask this particular question to myself, especially when I use to be in high spirits. The question was "what is the purpose of my own life and why on earth am I on this planet". I remember once this was a hot topic among my friends during a drink and all of us came up with various answers that I recall which were very worldly. Even though I was living a comfortable life I knew deep within, that something was just not right somewhere in my life. I could not figure it out.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, God has planted eternity in the human heart. This is the reason that the Lord Jesus Christ came down and gave His life so that our sins could be forgiven and God's purpose in our life could be fulfilled. God created man for an eternal purpose and not just to live for a few years on earth. This privilege has been given only to humans and that is why He gave us authority over all things on earth. When I understood this great plan of God, it gave me a new purpose to live and that is to live for God so that He could smoothly execute His eternal plan in my life on earth and in the next.

If we are able to understand the beautiful plan God has for each of us, life would be much joyful and very much interesting because God promises in (Romans 8:28) God works for good with those who love Him, and those whom He has called according to His purpose.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we pray to give us the grace and wisdom to understand the great plan you have for us and be open to your will. Amen.*

“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean’.”**Mark 7:20**

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17

Psalm 104:1-2, 27-30

Mark 7:14-23

Today's Psalm proclaims to us the greatness, might and glory of God. The first reading tells us that this mighty, great God made the heavens and the earth and out of dust made man, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Also, Genesis 1:27 say that God created man in His own image. Thus people too, should have had the goodness, greatness and holiness of God. Then how have people become unclean? As it is said in Mark 7:21-22 how is that people have become filled with evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly? How is it that what is not in God has entered into people who were created by God in the image of God?

The main reason for this is our 'free will'. God gave people the freedom to choose between good and evil. This freedom is not from outside us. It is from inside us. We have the freedom to say 'yes' or 'no' to sin from inside of us. We have the freedom to say 'yes' or 'no' to bribery, corruption, theft, arrogance. We have the freedom to choose God and His way or otherwise we have the freedom to choose satan and his way. God will never interfere with this freedom. Using our freedom, if we make the wrong choices and entertain lustful desires, feelings inside us, we ourselves make our inner being 'unclean'. From that 'unclean' inner being what comes out is unclean and sinful. Thus the Lord Jesus says in Mark 7: 20, "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'". He also say in Mk 27:15 that nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him.

The life of St. Josephine Bakhita whom we commemorate today is a good example for this. Born in 1869 in Sudan, she was kidnapped for slavery when she was a child. Physically and mentally shamed and disgraced by society, she encountered God, between 1889-1890. Since then she lived her life for God. Without permitting to be influenced by wickedness, abuse, enslavement, shame thrown at her by the society, using her free will, she accepted in her heart, the goodness, love, kindness and mercy of God. Therefore from her life flowed love, kindness, mercy, peace and freedom instead of wickedness, arrogance and vengeance. Today the Lord Jesus is calling us to live such a blessed life.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to look at your goodness and to have that goodness in our lives. Amen.

Blessed are all who fear the LORD...
blessings and prosperity will be yours.

Psalm 128:2

Genesis 2:18-25

Psalm 128:1-5

Mark 7:24-30

God knows that Adam needed a helper and He knows how the helper should be. But Adam does not know this. God enables Adam to learn about his need by giving him the responsibility and the authority to name the animals and the birds. Adam uses the wisdom that God gives him but Adam realises that he is above. No animal is like him, no animal can help Adam fulfill the responsibility

that God gave to him. When Adam realises that he is above and in need of a helper, then Adam is ready to meet the woman that God has for him.

God creates the woman from Adam's rib and He brought the woman to the man – Marriage is God's Plan and God created marriage before sin came into the world. Marriage is good, pure and holy. Marriage is God's plan and Adam did nothing to create it. God made and gave him his wife. Adam is happy and he gives his helper the name 'woman'. With the woman the man is complete and ready to fulfill his responsibility God gave him and to obey God's word.

Before sin there was no conflict in marriage, there was no fear or worry. There were no wounds from each other. The husband and wife were at rest in each other's presence and had no shame, there was no reason to hide to be afraid or to mistrust. There was love and respect in marriage. In this first reading, God teaches us all about marriage and family, that God gave a wife to the husband so that they can complete the responsibility God gave them and receive the blessing and joy.

The Gospel proclamation reminds us of how we run to people in a crisis. We are not satisfied until we worldly answers. But we must learn from the Gospel passage today how this gentile woman by birth a Syro-Phoenician, only believed that it was none other than the Lord Jesus, who could drive out the demon from her daughter. She spoke up to our Father and replied to the parable of the children should be fed first as it is not fair for it to be thrown to the dogs, Her faith was so strong and she believed only He can save her daughter. We can do the same today. All we need to do is to sit at the feet of the living God and surrender our problems, to Him.

Prayer: *Abba Father, like the woman who believed and went home to see her child healed, let us too believe that anything is impossible for You. Amen.*

“I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.”

Psalms 32: 5

Genesis 3:1-8

Psalm 32:1-2, 5-7

Mark 7:31-37

Adam and Eve were the creation of God and He knew what was best for them. Thus God said to them not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Was it not God asking them not to take their lives into their own hands? In today's first reading satan' firstly creates a doubt in the mind of Eve. (...Did God really say..") Gradually Eve's attention is completely diverted to the tree of knowledge of good and evil. She forgets the whole garden full of goodness, the gracious fellowship they have with God and falls into the trap of satan. Using the beautiful gift of free will given by God, they make the choice to disobey God and thus choose to live their lives by themselves. With this the beautiful relationship between God and man is broken by man and sin enters in to the world.

Today's first reading reminds me of the many years of my life, that I lived a Godless life. I was a baptized Catholic going for Sunday mass but sadly following the footsteps of Adam and Eve and doing whatever I wanted in my life. I too, conveniently forgot who I was; that my life belongs to God and all that I have was from God. Time and again there were the warning signals from God but still I went along by myself until the day my whole world collapsed. Then, I did not have an answer to my life. The world could not give an answer to my life.

It was at this juncture of my life broken and shattered 11 years ago that the Lord Jesus drew me into a Wednesday Prayer Meeting. I experienced the love and mercy of the Lord Jesus and just as He healed the deaf and mute man in today's Gospel, the Lord Jesus forgave my sins, healed me and came into my life.

It is God who created us and He has a beautiful plan for all of us. (Jer.29,11) The Lord Jesus Christ by His life, death and resurrection took away the sin of the world and thus reconciled all to the Father. In baptism all our sins are washed away and make us all adopted children of the Father and members of the body of Christ. Our lives belong to God the Father and to the Lord Jesus Christ. Today let us repent for all the years of our lives that we lived by ourselves. Let us surrender our lives to the Lord Jesus and invite the Holy Spirit fill our lives, to live a life of total submission to God.

Prayer: *Abba Father, You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Amen.*

“I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid”

Genesis 3:10

Genesis 3:9-24

Psalms 90: 3-13

Mark 8:1-10

The first reading today is profound in that we remember the historical Jerusalem visit of Pope Francis at the Jewish Holocaust Memorial in 2014 and the soul searching words spoken. “Adam, where are you? Who are you?”... Can you hear it? The sound of a distraught Father searching, hungering for his lost child. At times, it is not Adam’s name he is calling. It is mine. And, per-

haps, yours” Where are you? Who are you?

I can surely relate to many times in my life I have fallen to the depths and was in deep shame, afraid to hear my father’s question “Where are you? What have you done?”. Before I came into the journey I felt my life was a secret closet where no one knew who the real me was. Since coming to the journey many years ago, God the Father started revealing His true nature of love and not punishment, through His Son our Lord Jesus, just as we are taught in the ten remembering teaching of CRL.

When we were in sin we failed to see our nakedness and we paraded with foolish pride but by the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit our spiritual blindness has been removed and we have been shown our nakedness not to be condemned but to bring us to repentance and back into the arms of the once distraught Father.

Are we not blessed today, for our Lord God became man through the Virgin Mary and died on the cross to bring us the lost salvation when God the Father banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to toil and suffer?

Today is the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. At Lourdes, on the feast of the Annunciation [March 25th] the Blessed Virgin acknowledged explicitly the Church declaration of 1854 that had, at last, proclaimed Her Immaculate Conception to be an article of Faith. This unprecedented happening reveals how important the understanding of the Immaculate Conception is; that She is pure; without sin, as befits the Mother of God, that She is all powerful in defeating the evil one, She is the Woman of the Book of Revelation, She is the Woman of Genesis. She is our Advocate, Mediator and Mother.

Prayer: Abba Father, Thank you for the gift of the Blessed Mother, who constantly intercedes for us when we hide in shame and naked, and brings us closer to her Son so that through Him we come into your arms again. Amen!

**“..unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees...
you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of heaven.”Matthew 5:20**

Sirach 15:15-20
Psalm 119: 1-5, 17-34
1 Corinthians 2:6-10
Matthew 5:17-37

Today the Church presents to us the recipe for a peaceful and joyful life. Just a few weeks ago a speaker at the CRL Prayer Day program mentioned that the human life is between a 'B' (birth) and a 'D' (death), both beyond our control. Yet, what lies between these two is within our control and is full of 'C's - choices. As I reflect on the First Reading, I have to agree fully, that the life is a series of choices, and I need to face consequences of my own choices or those of others that can influence my life positively or negatively. If I stretch my hand to touch the fire, I will burn my hand. Then, can I blame God for making the fire very hot?

Also, I am reminded today that my choices or for that matter, anyone's choices are known to God very clearly, sometimes more clearer than to the one who makes those choices. This relieves me from the need to defend myself. The Almighty, all-seeing God notices not only my actions, but also my thoughts. He makes it very clear that I cannot give any excuse for my wrong choices. The responsibility lies only with me because God's commandments are written in my heart. (cf. Sirach 15:20)

Yet, someone could argue that one does not need God actively in their life, in order to live a good life, knowing right and wrong. Actually I have come across so many non-Christians and even atheists and agnostics who are more fair, just and selfless in their choices than many Christians.

As I pray with the Gospel Reading, I understand that, while the Lord Jesus re-affirms the message in the First Reading, He also gives us a new reality ... a new basis for my choices. The Lord says that my righteousness should surpass that of the average law-abiding person. God's law does not give me any excuse to get angry with another human being even if the other person is unfair to me, because all of us are children of One Heavenly Father. It does not permit me to look down upon anyone. Notwithstanding, The Lord goes an extra mile and tells me that even if another person has something against me, despite the fact that I had not wronged them at all, it is still my duty as God's child, to take the first step to reconcile with them, before I approach God in worship and prayer.

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An experience shared by a brother of the CRL family comes to my mind. He was managing a catering business in Sri Lanka while living overseas, and eventually found out that his senior staff members were robbing him in style. When it finally came to light, they still had the hard-heartedness to deny and in turn play the role of poor, mistreated staff members who had worked for the boss for so long. This brother had all the right to sack them then and there, but he had God's Law written in his heart and he had a righteousness that surpassed mere social justice or civic rights. He had the humility and the freedom to kneel at the feet of the very people who were destroying him, and assure them of his love and ask them to forgive him if he had done any wrong to them. Even though the hearts of stone, of those employees did not melt at his gesture, the Heart of the Heavenly Father was touched, the result been God taking over the issue to be resolved in His own amazing way, bringing many more blessing to him and his whole family.

This testimony stands to prove what is said in today's Second Reading too. Today's society accepts so many deceptions and lies as innocent, arguing that it does not hurt anyone or it is said or done to safeguard another person's interests. Yet, those of us who have had the grace to renew our Baptism of the Holy Spirit as adults through the Four Steps Retreat, and thereafter continue to be spiritually nourished through the Word of God, teachings of the CRL and receiving the Sacraments frequently, especially Sacrament of Reconciliation and Eucharist, know that lying for any reason whatsoever, is not pleasing to God.

We have experienced the sandpapering feeling inside when we react to a person who is unfair to us or treats us unfairly. We know that we can be silent, even when others misunderstand us and blame us for things we had not even dreamt of doing, simply because we believe that we have a Father who is above all and who will bring truth to light, at His appointed time.

Therefore, when the world looks down on us, we still enjoy the peace and joy and the freedom inside our hearts, knowing that there is One Person who sees it all and knows it all, and that is all that matters.

Not stopping there, we live with joyful anticipation of the perfect goodness of God who promises us what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard and what no human mind has conceived has been reserved for us! (Cf. 1Cor 2:9)

Prayer: Abba Father, awaken my spirit and imprint Your Law of love and mercy in my heart that I will walk blameless in Your sight. Amen.

God sees our heart

Genesis 4:1-15, 25

Psalm 50:

1,8,16,17,20,21

Mark 8:11-13

Today's first reading tells us the story of Cain and Abel. When God asked Cain where Abel was Cain said he did not know. He lied to God. Cain did not realise that God had seen what he had done. God had seen Cain's heart and knew what he had done.

The Gospel reading speaks of the Pharisee's trying to embarrass the Lord Jesus by asking Him for a sign that he was the Messiah. The Pharisees were a group of people who followed the teaching of Moses externally for others to see but internally they lived sinful lives. In Matthew 23 the Lord Jesus says, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness." When the Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus in today's Gospel and asked Him for a sign they wanted to embarrass Him. Even though they had studied the law and the scriptures they did not know God in the flesh.

Both Cain and the Pharisees were playing a game with God. This is because they did not know the true nature of God. They did not know that God could see their true motives for their behavior. Both stories reveal the nature of God. Whilst our God is a just God, He is also merciful. He punishes Cain by banishing him from the land for killing his brother. But when Cain cries out to God for mercy (verse 13), the Lord says that He will protect Cain and will not allow any harm to come of him.

The same is true in our lives as well. Sometimes, like Cain or the Pharisees we can be hiding a sin from God, whilst appearing to be someone else. In my life I came to this stage. I was sinning against God and in my ignorance I thought I could hide it from Him. Finally I could not hold on to my sin any longer and fell at the feet of God. I repented and confessed my sin and received forgiveness and mercy from God. We can remain in our sin and hide from a God who sees all we do or like Cain we can ask for forgiveness and receive the mercy of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, just as you saw Cain's sin, You know my sin. Lord, I pray for the grace to fall at Your feet and receive forgiveness for my sin. Amen.

Have you eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear? Or do you not.

Mark 8:18

Genesis 6:5-8,
7:1-10
Psalm 29: 1-10
Mark 8:14-21

When you read the Gospel proclamation, you probably felt a bit better as compared to the disciples. Here is the Son of God before them, he had performed a miracle and these disciples were witnesses to this, however the moment they were confronted with another challenge they were not able to believe or have faith in the lord.

The following thoughts are probably running in our minds, if this miracle was performed before us, what a transformation of mind we would have? Is it so? Well God has not stopped; He has continued to perform his miracles till date. If we open our hearts and minds we realise that God has indeed performed miracle after miracle, some have been great break through but other times it was his comfort, peace and love which is nothing less than a miracle. However when we have to give an inner response or respond to call of prayer, we choose insignificant things such as watching television, eating, drinking, and worldly relationships. Though we have seen his power seen his hand yet because we let the yeast of the world get into our mind and heart, we have lost sight of God and his truth.

One of the characteristic of yeast is that a little bit of this substance makes a huge impact. It is same with us, a little intellectual arrogance, a craving for power and money leads to a vast distance. Avoiding two to three days of personal prayer makes the flesh strong., because of this, when we are faced with crisis we forget the goodness of God.

We forget that He is the God who heals us, He is the God who forgives us, He is the God who saves us, who feeds us, He is the God who restores us. Though at one point in our lives we have seen and believed in this truth now that we are faced with many challenges we tend to neglect this truth, and somehow it does not make sense to believe the promises of God. The slightest delay in our prayer not being answered shakes our faith a bit. We tend to follow the world order.

Today let us remind ourselves that even all the challenges Lord remains faithful and good. He has never changed. Let us start today.

Prayer: Abba Father! We have drifted away in our minds from you, Lord we pray make us your host. Amen

“Too costly in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful”**Psalm 116: 15**Genesis 8:6-13,
20-22

Psalm 116: 12-19

Mark 8: 22-26

Noah's event gives us a consoling promise of God. "Never again will I doom the earth because of man", said God. The problem with the human heart was evident to God. Human person's desires were evil from the start. From a very young age, people fall into temptation. The sin is embedded in us. We are like that the raven which Noah sent out to check the rain. It went away and was waiting for the water to go down probably to get it's prey. We have lost the purpose of life. We could be like the dove which came back with some news. The purpose for which we have been sent to the world needs to be fulfilled. God in His goodness gave a promise that the world would never be destroyed because of the sin of human beings.

Noah was waiting for the perfect time. This is another lesson we could learn. We do things in haste. In Biblical language seven denotes perfection. Therefore thrice Noah allowed himself to wait for the perfect time to move out. We need to slow down. We need to be vigilant. This world moves so fast and we have the tendency to move with it. Our hasty decisions could destroy us and others too. God invites us to take one step at a time and to follow His leading. If Noah had moved out without checking the situation everything which was preserved could have been destroyed as well. Therefore let us be more open to the move of God and slow down our ways. The gradual cure of the blind man could be symbolic to the gradual awareness of the Apostles of the Messiahship of Lord Jesus. Something to be grasped is when the blind man started to see partially he explained to the Lord Jesus what he saw was people like trees. Had he ever seen trees? Had he ever seen anything moving? When we are partially blind we are bound to misjudge. When the man was fully blind he must have had good sense. But when he gained little sight he misjudged. When the Apostles could not actually understand the true Messiahship of the Lord Jesus they thought that the Messiah could be a political Messiah. God had a better plan.

The Lord Jesus had a purpose of not sending the man back to the village because the village has already labeled the man as blind. We label people. The Lord Jesus comes to save us from this vicious cycle because He knows that sin is embedded in us.

Prayer: Abba Father, open our eyes to behold our Lord Jesus as He is and place a sincere Spirit in us to accept Him as true Messiah. Amen

“...Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”

Mark 8:29

Genesis 9:1-13

Psalm 102: 16-23

Mark 8: 27-33

Today's first reading reflects on God's covenant with Noah and in that God promises that He supplies every need for all His creation. But for most of us this could be merely a saying instead of a promise of God. Isn't it the reason why we worry about tomorrow? Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Again we can hear God's voice through the Gospel of Matthew in 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?". It is His promise that He takes care of our needs. But how do we draw God's providence into our lives? The very first thing we have to do is to seek Him with all our heart. Psalm 34: 10 says, "The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing." We can underline the word 'seek' and pray with it. Most of us live an unsatisfied life because we thrive too hard to satisfy our needs instead seeking Him first. "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt 6:33). As the LORD promised, He is waiting to fulfill all our needs, but the question is do we seek Him? Do we recognise Him in our lives?

We can see this in today's Gospel proclamation too. When the Lord Jesus asked His disciples; "Who do people say that I am?", they came up with different answers except Peter who recognised Him as the Messiah. I think the worst thing that can happen to us is when we fail to recognize our God. How can we recognize Him? It is through having a personal relationship with Him. As sheep knows their shepherd's voice, we will also begin to recognise God and hear His voice as we spend time with Him. I can tell you this through my life. The time I love the most in a day is my personal prayer time. I open my heart to the LORD, surrender myself in His Hands and I wait upon Him to hear His voice and be led by Him. As I started to have a personal prayer time on a daily basis, life became effortless as I begin to see the hand of God in everything even in the events and situations which I do not understand. And even when I am exhausted and overwhelmed by the situations of my life, I know the place I should go; it's to the feet of the LORD who takes care of all my needs.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I thank you for taking care of every single need of my life and blessing me a life with all its fullness as I take delight in you, Amen!*

Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me

John 8:34

Genesis 11: 1-9
 Psalm 33: 10-15
 Mark 8:34-9:1

Advertising copywriters and campaigns love the expressions which say 'One world', One nation or One currency. This was the cry of the people of Babel. Having one powerful city and one language they assumed that the way to heaven would be a tower built with their human wisdom.

While their intention was great, to be on par and able to talk to God, this was not the way God our loving Father intended to communicate with them.

The answer of God's way of working is in the Gospel proclamation. The Lord Jesus presents to us the difficult truth of a deep relationship with God. It is to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow the Lord.

To deny oneself is the opposite of indulging in oneself. Once again, we can think of numerous advertising campaigns that assure us that if we own the car, house, perfume, bank, pen, camera, mobile they are promoting, we will experience heaven. On the other hand, the word is calling us to deny ourselves, simply because we have gone beyond the point of having what is enough and gathering stockpiles of things which are way beyond our needs. The Lord Jesus is not trying to be a wet blanket. He is not urging us to live a boring life. He is just making us aware that there is no stopping to our urges to own and upgrade.

To take up the cross, is to embrace the cross. Often we attend prayer meeting simply to fight off the cross offered to us. We are waiting to be able to drop that cross and be free. But that cross is our salvation and blessing. We fail to recognise this. Let us remember to accept the cross from the hands of our God like the Blessed Mother.

Once we have begun a life of denying ourselves of the unnecessary, embrace the cross that crops up along the way, we have automatically begun to follow the Lord. A new way in life is opened up. The level crossings that were closed to us swing open and automatically lines of communication begin to be activated between us and God. We are no longer ashamed of the Gospel. We begin to value the direction our Lord Jesus is giving us and we will begin to experience the Kingdom of God in our hearts.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to deny myself, take up my cross and follow you. I confess my blindness and hard heartedness. Come into my life. Amen.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance
about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

Hebrews 11:1-7

Psalms 145: 2-11

Mark 9: 2-13

Today's readings talk about faith in God. We have learnt that faith is a gift that is given to freely by God. It is not something that we can increase on our own, however much we may try. Instead, we can ask God to increase our faith in Him.

The first reading from St. Paul's letter to Hebrews tells us what faith is. It is being sure of what we hope for and having confidence in what we do not see. St. Paul gives us some examples of men of faith from the Old Testament: Abel, Enoch and Noah. All three had great faith in God and knew that God would see them through anything, even death itself. Genesis tells us very little about Abel: He brought an offering, and God looked on him with favour (Genesis 4:4). It does not tell us why his offering was better than Cain's. But the author of Hebrews believes that if God was pleased, then Abel must have had faith. Jewish legends said that Enoch was taken into heaven, and that he did not die. God took him because he walked with God by faith. St. Paul is painting a picture, presenting faith not as an unusual demand, but as normal for the people of God. He is saying that even though there may be unpleasant consequences for having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; Abel, faith meant an early death; for Enoch it meant the opposite. Either way, the people of God need faith. Today's Psalm tells us how we can nurture the faith God gives us. Verse 2 says "Every day I will bless you; I will praise your name forever and ever." It is through praising the Lord that we can nurture our faith. When we praise God, we stop thinking about our problems and struggles. Instead we focus on the goodness of God even through a storm.

The Gospel reading from St. Mark tells us about the Transfiguration. We are also called to climb the mountain and seek God. On that mountain, God revealed to St. Peter and St. John the Transcendent Truth of who the Lord Jesus is - and who Sts. Peter, James and John - and each one of us - will become in Him. With that faith we too become sons and daughters of God and enter His family.

Today, the Lord is calling each of us to come to Him and receive the gift of faith. He wants to help us through life and give us the strength we need to run the race to the very end. We can do this only by faith.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that You will increase the faith I have in You. That I too may be able to face life and death by Your strength. Amen.

Answer the true call to holiness

Leviticus 19: 1-2,
17-18

Psalm 103: 1-13

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Matthew 5: 38-48

Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, 'Speak to the entire assembly of the people of Israel and say to them; 'Be holy, for I, Yahweh your God am holy.'

If we follow the words carefully we will notice that the call to holiness was given to the entire assembly. The call was not restricted to Moses, the leadership or the elders. The call to Holiness

went out to the entire assembly.

What 'holiness' was God talking about. When the word holy is mentioned our mind races to purity. We always relate holiness with purity, but the word holy has evolved from the word Kadosh which means set apart.

Before we think of our holiness, let us think of God's holiness. From other sources I was made to understand that in Jewish thinking, 'The Holy One, blessed be He,' is one of the most commonly used descriptions for God. Kadosh or God's holiness implies entirely set apart from the common, habitual and is singular and awe inspiring. Therefore He is worthy of all praise and glory and true worship. God appears to be so sanctified and separated from all worldliness, a world apart and yet He has created us and sustains us. It appears that the Godly realm is an entirely different form of non-physical nature where as we are so marred by a physical, form based, lustre driven life. God is a spirit life whereas we are so trapped in a feeling, touching, hearing sort of life.

In simple words to us a person dressed in pure white is holy whereas to God it is all with regard to the spirit and the unseen. Since we are so immersed in a life on earth, entangled in relationships and monetary transactions, we have so many instances where our holiness is at risk of being eroded. Our eyesight adds to the endangering of our soul since we want to see, stare and behold all that is possible. God who is set apart is calling us to live set apart though we are in this world. In His world, there is no place for possessions, material things, collections of watches, cars, jewelry, antiques, instruments, houses. The problem is not if we have them, it is with regard to how attached we are to them.

The lesser the attachments the greater the presence and holiness of God. What are we doing when we head towards a life of holiness?

We are heeding God's call which is echoed in the reading to the Corinthians, where St. Paul reminds them and us that we are the temple of God. The spark of God's presence is what gives us life. To have life is to have God's presence. By our actions we snuff out this presence and silence the voice of God within us. St. Paul cautions us as he warns us not to destroy the temple of God within us because God will be forced to destroy us.

We are invited not only to see the temple of God's presence within us but to recognise the presence of God in people around us. We encounter so many rapes and sexual based attacks or plain injustice to the poor because people are failing to see the Godliness in people but focusing on the fleshiness, physical attributes or the status of people. Today a majority of the world is exposed to pornography which comes through our email, the internet and is readily available through movies. Constant watching of such content steers us away from seeing the holiness in people to focusing on the flesh and physical aspects of people. We shift from serving the needs of people to fulfilling our needs and desires. God in His wisdom is calling us to holiness for our own sake to save us from such destruction and selfishness.

The Gospel proclamation goes one step further, urging us to not just answer the call to holiness but respond with unrivalled love and restitution even to those who are not able to be like minded. This is a call to holiness which is to be set apart and not attached to our worldly possessions. Today we have grudges against so many people for experience when they would have cheated us or played us out. True holiness is to let go and believe that God is in control and knows the truth. Our Lord challenges us to give always what is ours and forgive the failings of others.

Most saints achieved holiness by giving away what was rightfully theirs. St. Francis of Assisi who gave his coat to a beggar. Saint Giuseppe Moscati who was an Italian doctor, scientific researcher, and university professor was noted both for his pioneering work in biochemistry and for his piety. St. Moscati was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1987. He was bold enough to strip his home bare of furnishings to fund the medicines of his patients. The Lord's invitation is radical, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.' We generally choose to talk about our enemies and prey upon those who we think are persecuting us. Today the Lord is reminding us of our call to holiness is every aspect of our life, in our relationships, work places, home life, financial transactions, religious vocations and in the corporate world. Let us cooperate with the Lord in His mission. ***Prayer: Abba Father, grant me your wisdom to understand the true meaning of holiness. I am set apart for your purpose. Lead me and show me the way. Amen.***

“I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief”

Mark 9:24

Sirach 1:1-10

Psalms 93: 1-5

Mark 9:14-29

In today's the Gospel proclamation we come across a young boy who has been possessed by an evil spirit since his childhood. The parents would have tried many various methods of curing the child but none prevailed. In despair they take the boy to the disciples who are also unable to deliver the child. Into this chaos and disappointment the Lord Jesus walks in. He alone is able to drive the evil spirit away, even though it has been there since the beginning of the child's life. How many of us can relate with this incident? We all have character traits, our broken nature, sicknesses that have been with us for many years. We may have made some half hearted attempts to change, maybe we have gone to every church and priest possible, said a dozen novenas every day only to give up and accept that this is how life is going to be. How many of us carry anger in our hearts, quick reactions, emotional outbursts, self pity, jealousy – only to explain our brokenness away by saying that this is how we are. But Jesus challenges us today. He promises us that everything is possible for one who believes. And we don't even have to have perfect faith – together with the boy's father, we can offer up our imperfect faith to God saying “Lord I believe, help my unbelief”. That's good enough for Jesus, that's all He asks of us. That we believe that He can – despite what we might be able to do. Nothing is impossible to our God.

The book of Sirach praises God for His incomparable wisdom – wisdom was created by God and He alone knows its subtleties. He created wisdom, saw her and took her measure. In the same way, God created us, He sees us – we are never apart from Him, and He knows our measure. He knows what is best for us, perhaps His timing is different, His ways are certainly different from our ways – but His way is wise, is sure and leads to everlasting life.

With the psalmist we can praise God today because our God is mightier than the breaking waters, our God is Lord, who is robed in Majesty. And this God created us, individually and perfectly, He sees us, right now, in this mess, in this life, in this relationship, in this confusion, in this sickness, in this weakness – He sees and He loves us.

Prayer: *Prayer: Abba Father, you know the struggles I face today and always. You know of my failed attempts to overcome this. Father I nearly gave up but today I come to you and lay it all before you. Amen*

**Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you
the desires of your heart**

Psalms 37:4

Sirach 2:1-11

Psalms 37: 3-4, 18-
19, 27-28, 39-40

Mark 9:30-37

As we celebrate the feast of St. Peter Damian, a doctor of the church we are inspired by his life. At a very young age Peter lost both his parents and lived with his elder brother who treated him badly, with much cruelty. But Peter was able to endure everything and accepted it from the hands of the Lord. Later one of his brothers who was a priest had pity on him, took over the young boy

and educated him.

Peter later named himself as Peter Damian after his brother Damian who took good care of him. Following his brother's footsteps Peter became a priest and ended up becoming a famous Cardinal loved by many for his love and affection he had towards the poor and the God-fearing life he lived.

Peter's hunger for God was so great that he resigned from his post as Cardinal and the luxurious life he had, choosing to live an isolated life in a hermitage. St. Peter Damian has contributed immensely to the church through his many books which are in use even today and specially as an example to all followers of Jesus Christ.

The 1st reading talks about the trials that we will have to face when we serve the Lord. Sirach 2:3 says, hold on to the Lord, do not separate yourself from Him so that you may be successful to the end of your days. As I read the 1st reading I remembered about the great man of God, Noah. When God instructed Noah to build a massive ark, Noah immediately obeyed God. He did not say "give me a day God, I will think about it, discern about it and once my family agrees and I come up with a plan I will give you an answer". No he said yes to God without a second thought even though he had no idea on how to build an ark or how he was going to find the resources to accomplish God's plan.

It took him 120 years to build the ark. Imagine the rejection, humiliation and discouraging days. It seemed like Noah had gone crazy and was wasting his entire life making an ark for no reason. We all know what happened at the end. Noah was rewarded for his obedience and trust he had in the Lord. Let us put our trust in the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray to fill us with your love, peace and joy, so that whenever we face trials, we will accept it from your loving hands. Amen

Do not become a Christian Parrot

1 Peter 5: 1-4

Psalm 23: 1-6

Matthew 16: 13-19

As we celebrate the feast of the Chair of St. Peter we can only be amazed about what God has done through the centuries. He has given us good Popes, saintly popes, renegade Popes and inspiring ones. From the time of St. Peter, these Popes occupied this hallowed seat and have exercised authority from the Chair of St. Peter which has affected billions of people.

St. Peter's advice has echoed down the ages and is relevant to Christians in all spheres of life, specially when they have to exercise a role that involves people. He writes, 'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

What is the challenge that we face? Because the crown of glory seems so distant and worldly attractions are within our grasp, it is so easy for us to be less human and make full use of our power and authority. We fall short so easily when it comes to loving people as our Lord Jesus did.

In these times we are blessed with the example of Pope Francis who is exercising his authority from the Chair of St. Peter in such a remarkable way. His way of life has stirred the conscience of the people of the world. His honest admission of his faith struggle warms our heart. This is how he described his present faith experience. "At certain times, I have also encountered moments of darkness in my faith... "We understand that there is darkness, we must respect this darkness of the soul. We don't study to get faith, we receive it like a gift." He said this as he was comforting a husband who had lost his wife. He also gave practical advice to spend more time talking to one's family. "If I say I'm Catholic and every Sunday I go to mass but then I don't talk to my parents, grandparents, or visit the sick, then there's no point," said Francis. "In that way, we're nothing but a Christian parrot: words, words, words." This is our call from the Chair of St. Peter to go beyond words and live a life of action and love.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we pray for our present Pope. We thank you for the wonderful person we see in him. Bless our Holy Father with your presence. Amen.*

Do not rely on your strength in following the desires of your heart.

Sirach 5:2

Sirach 5:1-8

Psalm 1: 1-6

Mark 9:41-50

The first reading reminds us not to rely on ourselves, but on the Lord. Most times we do this even without thinking. Usually during our work, home or even spiritual life, if someone asks us to do something our initial response of yes or no depends on our personal capabilities, weaknesses and strengths. But the Lord reminds us that however good our intentions may be, or how well we can accomplish a task, it is of no use unless we rely on God. On the other hand, our personal skills maybe zero, but if the Lord leads us, there is nothing we cannot do, strengthened by Him. As in Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ, which strengthens me.

This is also confirmed by the Gospel, in Mark 9:41 - Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward - Whatever we do should be in the name of the Lord and because the Lord leads us to do it. Even if it's such a small thing as giving someone a cup of water, if we do it in the name of the Lord, He will reward us.

Saint Polycarp is a great example of a person who relied only on the Lord, and everything he did was God-centered. He was a disciple of Saint John the Evangelist, and was blessed to be guided by a person who saw, touched, lived with and experienced the Lord Jesus. However, there were many challenges. During these trials, as a holy man and bishop of Smyrna, he found there was only one answer - to be true to the life of Jesus and imitate that life. Saint Polycarp faced persecution but did not chase after martyrdom until it was God's will and time - as the Lord Jesus did. When finally captured, he spoke with his captors, fed them a meal and only asked them to give him an hour to pray. His response challenged them so much that many of his captors wondered why they were arresting this holy, eighty-six-year-old bishop. However, that didn't stop them from taking him into the arena on the Sabbath. As the fire was lit, eyewitnesses reported that the fire burst up in an arch around Saint Polycarp, and instead of being burned he seemed to glow. When the captors saw he was not being burned, they stabbed him, and the blood that flowed put the fire out.

Prayer: Abba Father, most of the time I rely on my own strength instead of depending on you. Lord give me the grace for it to be the other way around. Amen

“Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.”

Psalm 119:34

Sirach 6: 5-17

Psalm 119:12-
18,27,34,35

Mark 10: 1-12

The word of God says He disciplines His children. He gives us wisdom and teaches us to do the right things in our lives. Today's first reading is taken from the book of Sirach or commonly called the Wisdom of Sirach which is a work of ethical teachings. Today, the word of God teaches us on friendship. All of us love to have friends and long lasting friendships. But at the same time, the

same friends whom we trust can put us in to trouble or betray us or hurt us. But the word of God says do not be too quick to trust them. We cannot trust everyone and make friends with everyone we come into contact with. Because there are also people who would like to become friends with us for their convenience. Most of the times our decisions go wrong and lead us into trouble when we are emotionally driven. Instead if we ask the Spirit of God to direct us towards making wise decisions and choosing right friends, those true friends can help us to grow and mature in our lives. The word of God gives us wisdom in choosing friends, a person who fears the Lord can make real friendships, because he will treat his friends as he does himself (Proverbs 6:17).

In today's Gospel reading we see that the Pharisees questioned the LORD Jesus on divorce. They came in order to test Him. Notice that the Lord did not simply answer these Pharisees immediately out of his own authority. He sent them back to Moses first asking "What did Moses say". In other words, he upheld the authority of the Scriptures. Even in the Sermon on the Mount he said that he came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, and warned against anyone who attempted to destroy the Law or change what it said. This is why he sent these Pharisees back to Moses for the answer. He went on to clarify the Law saying, "Moses gave this because of the hardness of your heart." In the scripture hardening of the heart means that when you determine to handle something yourself, and not pay any attention to what God reveals about it, you are hardening your heart. What then is the purpose in marriage? It is to become one, as Jesus said. This is what marriages are for. Two people, who are disparate, distinct, and different individuals, with different personalities, different gifts, blending their lives so together that through the process of the years they become one flesh- that is what marriage is.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the wisdom, understanding and a heart to obey your ways, today and always, Amen!

“He settled a fixed time for them and a set number of days”

Sirach 17:14

Sirach 17:1-15

Psalm 103:13-18

Mark 10: 13-16

In the Gospel proclamation today we see one of the rare moments in the life of the Lord Jesus where He became angry. The Lord Jesus did not want the little children to be prevented of having access to Him. He teaches us a lesson of great value through the little children. Hidden in this teaching is our whole purpose of existence in this world, which is one day, to enter the kingdom of

God and live there till eternity. The Lord Jesus clearly shows us that if we do not become like these little children, we shall not enter the kingdom of God.

Therefore, our life on earth is a temporary phase which grants us a preparation time to one day enter the kingdom of God. The book of Sirach says “The Lord created man from the earth and let him return to earth” The reading further says “He settled a fix time for them” and a set number of days”

This reminds me of a wonderful couple in the community where the wife suddenly fell gravely ill and was hospitalized. The hospital became their home for a few months and it was truly a blessing to know and learn from them how they faced this trial in their lives more often than not, with joy and faith. It was said that after months of being ill and in hospital she passed away at the time that the Lord had fixed for her, which was, exactly to the moment of completing fifty-five years of wedded life and after having given glory and praise to God.

We do not know how long we will live, but what we do know is that we are called to maintain the likeness and image of God that we are made of. For their earthly life, people have been given mastery over the animals and birds and the gift of five senses. We have also been given wisdom and knowledge to know good from evil and to understand the greatness of His works and above all to praise His Holy name and proclaim the magnificence of His creation. The reading reminds us to keep ourselves from wrong doing (Sirach 17:14) so that we can remain in the likeness and image of God and live like little children. Are we serious about entering the kingdom of God one day?

Prayer: Abba Father, bless me with a holy fear that my conduct on this earth will always be pleasing to you and I may one day enter Your kingdom. Amen!

True faithfulness to God

Isaiah 49: 14-15

Psalm 62: 2-9

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Matthew 6: 24-34

A true, deep, relationship with God, brings us to our knees. The Lord leads us to a relationship of dependence on Him where at times we are led to believe that He is not around and abandoned us. The truth is He is always there.

It is said that St. Joseph Vaz has a faithful companion who contacted a disease and passed away. St. Joseph Vaz was so broken by that experience that He asked God that he be taken away. So much was his brokenness. But that was God's way of purifying and sanctifying the saint's love for Him. Our Lord went through the same brokenness at Calvary when He cried out asking the Father why He has forsaken Him?

This is our cry. How often have we cried out to God asking Him why's and when's. We are quick to assume that God is not around and is not sensitive to our pain and feelings. God's answer is in Isaiah 49 where He tells us 'Can a mother forget her nursing baby, even if she does, I will not forget you.'

As we flip through the news we find thousands of Mother's who have abandoned their babies, murdered them through abortion or even after they are born, failed to have looked after them. Even fathers are guilty but when a Mother abandons her child it is much more heart-rending since the Mother would have gone through life changing struggles to bear that child. It is generally, addictions, selfishness, greed and blindness which could be the reason for mothers to abandon their children.

The Lord tells us, even if a mother, who would have held the tender form of her defenseless child, forgets her child, He will not forget us. It describes to us the depth and intimacy of God's love, the God who formed us in the womb, loved our unformed beings and cherished our development as we grew for 9 months. Imagine if a mother saw the child in the first month of pregnancy, would she have so cherished the child. Even if she did it would be limited to the physical. But the Lord loves us beyond the physical, He sees the spirit life within us, the potential we hold and the future possibilities and loves us.

When we experience such intimacy from the Lord we are called to respond with faithfulness. This is what St. Paul is dealing with in his letter to the Corinthians. We cannot assume that everything is fine

with the Lord based on our perception of things. Hence we always need the guidance of the Church, a spiritual counselor or a second opinion from a prayer led person to ascertain where we are and where we are heading. He who saw us in the womb, is able to easily see the darkness within us and the secret intentions of our heart. He is able to gauge our real intentions, passions, weaknesses, failures and strengths.

The Gospel proclamation goes further, where the Lord Jesus specifically tells us that we cannot serve two masters. We like to believe that we are not serving two masters. We like to believe that we are clean and clear. We like to believe that we are on the right track. But we can be wrong. We can be blinded by our own insight and hidden intentions. We see it so clearly when people argue about politics. No matter how much proof or facts you may present, some have unshakable faith in the past while some are ardent supporters of the present. Nobody wants to be objective and deal with the truth on both sides.

This is the contradiction we hold within ourselves. We worship and adore our opinion. We seek our own satisfaction. Today the Lord is asking us to change our opinion of how we must go forward. He reveals to us that we have been striving for so many things, dealing with so many inclinations and fighting off so many attractions. We see many things as needs when fulfilling to them could be pure greed. The Lord tells us, 'Seek first the kingdom of heaven and all the rest shall be yours.'

I can only think on St. Theresa or Mother Theresa of Calcutta. In seeking first the kingdom, she chose the slums of Calcutta and the corners of that vast city. The Lord in turn took her to the world. She went where no one else could tread. Romania, China, the palaces of London and the United Nations headquarters. We are teaching our children to aim for Hollywood, the Olympics, T20s where as the Lord is saying give me to them and I will take them places. Gift them with the inner journey, to seek my face and voice and I will look after them.

Let us heed this call to faithfulness. The temptation is to do things our way and create our own pathways before us. In doing this we serve two masters, we firmly believe that God has forsaken us and we have to find our way forward, but the Lord is reminding us that even if a mother should forget her child, He will not abandon us. By worrying we cannot even add one more day to our lives. His love is real. The faithfulness of God can be your experience today.

Prayer : Abba Father, I have been worshiping two masters. Today I come to you in repentance. Change my heart Oh Lord, make it ever new. Amen.

He looks intently at you.. and loves you even in your blindness

Sirach 17: 20-29

Psalm 32: 1-7

Mark 10: 17-27

The word for today reveals to us the nature and intentions of God. As the word says in Isaiah 55:8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways," declares the LORD and so it is.

God's nature is revealed further in the Book of Sirach where He tells us plainly that misdeeds cannot be hidden from Him. A person's almsgiving is priceless to Him while good deeds are cherished like the apple of His eye. We are assured that one day the Lord will rise and reward us for the good that we do. He also gives us a chance to repent and comforts those whose hopes are fading. As we look into all these attributes we can picture the loving nature of a parent looking over us and caring for us. It is so beautiful to realise that the God who made the heavens and the vast spaces of the Earth is the God who is so tender hearted and aware of our situation.

Often, as I travel, as I spend time at airports and watch the thousands of travelers passing through I wonder how the Lord ministers to them. Some may be having a relationship with Him, some might have never known about Him, some are yet to know Him and some may encounter Him in years to come... and yet He allows the billions of hearts on this earth to tick away, breath, live and go on with life. If we pause invite Him into our lives... Oh what a blessing and what a joy.,

In the Gospel proclamation, the rich man goes to the Lord. This man has one concern which is eternal life. Are we even concerned about eternal life? Today the song is eat, drink and make merry because once you are gone, you are gone. The Lord Jesus repeats the whole list of commandments to the young man and man is so satisfied that He has obeyed all of them.

The Lord looks steadily at Him, loves Him and speaks to Him. In our relationship with God, we may feel so certain that we have fulfilled all our obligations and we are living right. From this encounter we are invited to hear what the Lord Jesus wants to reveal to us, He may tell us; My child, for you, one thing is lacking! When we respond to His call he says He will comfort those whose hopes are fading.

Prayer : *Lord Jesus, today your word has revealed your beautiful nature and unfathomable mercy to me. I want more of You and less of me. Amen.*

A new command I give you: Love one another.

John 13:34-35

Sirach 35: 1-12

Psalm 50: 5-8, 14
& 23

Mark 10: 28-31

In the first reading we see that in keeping the commandments of the law and avoiding injustice constitutes a sacrifice pleasing and acceptable to God. Offerings also should be made to him, cheerfully and generously; these He repays sevenfold. There should never be a division between our worship in church and the way we lead our daily lives. Following the teaching of Jesus, we

Christians believe that true love and service of brothers and sisters, especially those in need, is to worship God really present in each one. To give of what we have to God in plenty, to show kindness, to give alms, to abstain from wrongdoing and to give up sinful ways are pleasing offerings to God. There is an intimate relation between what is offered and the kind of person we are. "Going to Mass" is not mere observance of a commandment instead Holy Mass is intimately connected with our everyday living and influences our words, actions and relationships. Our lives along with our material offering should be pleasing to God at the Eucharistic celebration - "leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Matthew 5:24

This Psalm is intended, for us who are big on our external performances of religion, and very poor in prayer, praise and in the life God has called us to lead. We cannot pretend to worship God, but live in disobedience to his commands. We cannot expect our constant sacrifices / offerings to both compensate and excuse our neglect of God's law and our sinful life. There is nothing we can offer that is pleasing enough to God. The greatest sacrifice has already been made for our sins and our salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave us a new law "love one another as I have loved you" – this would be the highest offering we can make that would be pleasing to God.

When we spend time in pray we begin to hear God speak to us just as He did to Jesus and so we have to be willing and ready to give our lives completely into the hands of God in order to fulfill the mission He gives us. It does not start with saving the world but with the ones closest to us - our family, relations, colleagues and friends. This life is the offering we can offer to God in prayer and at Holy Mass.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I thank you for your Son's sacrifice for me on the cross. I believe that you are granting me the grace to take up the cross like your Son for your glory and kingdom. Amen*

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