For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Psalm 51:16-17

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On Our Knees In His Hands

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Thursday 1st February

Leaning on the Lord!

Today’s Gospel proclamation teaches us how the Lord Jesus tells the disciples to go on their mission without any material preparation—no food, no extra clothing nor money. This meant that His disciples would have to depend on God and the generosity of others to meet their needs. The apostles are to trust in God’s providence. They have power from the Father. He does not ask of them more than he does himself: he already has left family and home and has become a wandering preacher. He lives on the margins of society; he battles against evil, and invites people into a deeper relationship with God.

Our Lord was wise: He sent the disciples out in pairs. He knew as new preachers, they would need support. He also realised that the disciples would be more effective if they had companions in this ministry. The message of the Lord is to travel light in the journey of life. Wealth, desire for recognition and personal pride can stunt our desire for God and our freedom to love and to do good. We are just passing through this world for a short time; the Lord Jesus advises us to make the most of it for ourselves and for others.

The disciples left and began preaching. Remarkably, they also performed miracles. They drove out demons and healed the sick. Imagine what it was like for these disciples to have the gift to perform healings and miracles, to preach and to teach the good news. These men were not educated. They were simple fishermen and workers. Yet, the Lord empowered them to heal others and to nourish them with spiritual food!

Today the Lord Jesus also calls us to preach and teach. We also are His disciples. He calls us to reach out and touch others with our love, care and concern. In our current world when most people are in a hurry or too busy to slow down, we can give the gift of our interest, time and support. This may not really be a gift but however a few minutes of truthfully being available to another person may be the most precious gift they will receive today!

Prayer: Father God, may we trust you fully to take us through the uncertain times of our lives. May you be our only provider in all circumstances and that we may be able to give others the gift of your word and love in this race called life. Amen.
God had been promising the Israelites a redeemer and a king for hundreds of years. Many lived out their lives and died before they saw the fulfilment of that promise. But there was one “devout” man named Simeon, who through his relationship with God, had been told by the Holy Spirit that he would not taste death until he had seen, with his own eyes, the promised Saviour. It was by the Spirit that Simeon came to the temple just at the exact time that the blessed Mother and St. Joseph brought baby Jesus in. This is God’s perfect timing. Simeon took the Holy Infant in his arms. For one awesome moment, Simeon saw the salvation of the whole world in the Person of that infant (Luke 2:30). What a privilege! Then he spoke the words the Holy Spirit inspired him to speak.

Like Simeon, the prophetess Anna, also mentioned in today’s reading, was a Holy and godly person. Hers was a life dedicated to God, through fasting and prayer. Anna’s prayer life was priority because she recognised the need within her. She had no one else but God, so she looked only to Him. As the saying goes, “When you have no one else but God, you realise that God is all you need.” Anna had grown satisfied with God alone to meet her needs and consequently, made spending time with Him in prayer a priority. God had revealed to her also about the child who would bring about the redemption of Jerusalem. And “at that very moment” when the Holy Family walked in to the temple, the Holy Spirit lead her to that same place.

My friends, are we where we need to be at the time we need to be, in order to be a part of what God is doing? Or do we miss out on the activity and the move of the Holy Spirit, simply because His voice and leading are drowned out by all the “noise” we surround ourselves with. We can learn a lesson today from both Simeon and Anna to delight ourselves in the Lord, and He will give us the desires of our heart. The key to a life of being in the centre of all that God is doing is to live a life of intimacy with Him. To silence every other noise and zone in on His voice alone. And when we hear His direction and guidance, we are to obey unquestioningly.

Prayer: Abba Father, so many times in the past You visited my life in insignificant and significant ways. Most often I missed out on encountering you in those moments. I pray that I will come alive to them from today. Amen
King Solomon’s dream is well known. The book of Kings is religious history in which this particular passage describes Solomon’s disposition when he began his reign. A young lad was witness to the many mistakes his father King David made. He saw how much his father loved God and how much he depended on him. Despite his failures God remained faithful.

Ask what you want—this was God’s offer to Solomon and it is His offer to any young person facing responsibilities for the first time. Solomon sought God and wanted only His wisdom and understanding to perform his duties in a manner pleasing to God. God was so pleased that he gave him all he asked for and much more. It is the same invitation God has for us. Unfortunately most often we ask for the wrong things with selfish intentions and ultimately we end up in disappointment, depression, and dissatisfied.

St. Mark’s Gospel passage tells us about the Lord Jesus, requesting his disciples after a long day of ministering to come away and rest with Him, to seek the Father’s presence and find rest. But the crowd is so thirsty for God that they follow them from another side and clamor for more. The Lord Jesus takes pity on them and continues to minister to them. This is the love of the Father for his children. A Good Shepherd for his sheep. That is how much God wants to satisfy us and answer our prayers. The crowd was seeking the right thing and it was granted to them.

The psalmist reaffirms this. Our desire to follow the Lord and live by his word is the only way to stay in the path of purity. Let us seek him with all our hearts. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross has already liberated us from the world we live in, but Satan continues to ravage and create havoc. That is why we need to exercise our God given free will wisely. Pray for wisdom at all times as King Solomon did. The 9th chapter in the Book of Wisdom carries Solomon’s prayer. This should be the prayer of every human being. Only divine wisdom can take us through to the place God wants us to be in. However hopeless we may be today, remember nothing is lost, because God seeks us out like the good shepherd and he wants to heal us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I surrender my will totally as Mother Mary did and open my heart to receive your Holy Spirit. Amen
Sunday 4th February  

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place

Today we celebrate Independence Day. The Church has dedicated this special day to Our Lady of Lanka because of the protection and intercession she provides those who come to her in times of need. She has been our guide from the time she became the Mother of God and was there during the most trying times in the lives of the believers of the early Church and she is with us today.

In the first reading, the Lord speaks through the prophet Isaiah about two types of people— Jacob’s and Israel’s. Jacob’s are people who are of the flesh, fighting to be first and living unhappy lives. While Israel’s are people who are transformed into children of God. God is telling His people that He will change them from being people like Jacob into people like Israel. He will do this transformation by promising to be with His people. The Lord is saying through every trial and tribulation that He will be with them. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (v. 2). The people of God will go through trials and tribulations, just as those who do not know God. But the difference will be that the Hebrew people will have God to lean on through these problems. As the people hold on to Him, God assures them that they will be transformed into Israel’s— people blessed by God.

When we read the Old Testament, we find the people of God could not hold on to God for long. Instead they faded in and out of God’s presence. They were running back and forth from God and sin. Their lives were a mess and God wanted to save them. God planned to fulfill this promise through the death and resurrection of His one and only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Gospel proclamation, we find God and the Holy Spirit were moving in the world to bring about the birth of the Saviour of the world. They guided the Magi who had seen a star and had read the scriptures. They knew a Messiah was to be born and followed the star to the exact location of the child. This can also be seen as the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was God’s plan that they come and worship the infant Lord Jesus. God intervenes once again to bring His plan to fulfillment and warns the Magi in a dream not to go back to Herod.
The Holy Trinity was working from the beginning of the world, to save people from their sins. The same can be said today. They continually work to bring people to salvation. God is calling on us to be a disciple of His-- to be filled with the love of God, the power of Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. How can we become these disciples? It is through a relationship with God and an experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We must prepare ourselves to receive this baptism. Today the Church presents us with the Blessed Mother as a way to prepare ourselves to receive the Holy Spirit.

Today’s Second reading begins from the time the apostles left the Mount of Olives, the place the Lord Jesus had ascended into heaven. Before the Lord had ascended into heaven, He gave the Apostles a command to stay in the city and wait for power on high-- the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:1 says, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” In Acts 1:14 it says, “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” The apostles and the Blessed Mother were gathered together waiting for the Holy Spirit. They were all focused on one thing: knowing who the Lord really was to prepare themselves to receive the Holy Spirit. The Blessed Mother helps them to see who the Lord Jesus really was. She helped them in their prayer and they would have asked her many questions about the Lord Jesus’ life. She helped them to focus on the Lord.

This is the reason why the Catholic Church directs us to look at the Blessed Mother on this day of independence. We can connect with her through the Holy Rosary. When we look at the mysteries of the rosary, we will see that each mystery is a reflection of the life of the Lord Jesus. When we come to Mother Mary, she helps us to focus on Christ. Through the rosary, the Blessed Mother helps us reflect on the passion of Christ through the 5 sorrowful mysteries, the glory of Christ through the 5 glorious mysteries, the inner life of Jesus through the 5 luminous mysteries, etc. Praying the rosary together with the Blessed Mother, we enter into the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we focus on the Lord, just as the apostles did in that upper room, we too will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Then through the power of the Holy Spirit we will be empowered to spread the Gospel all over our Island, pull down God’s power through the gifts of the Holy Spirit and bring God’s Kingdom to earth.

*Prayer:* Abba Father, I pray that I may be able to prepare myself to receive the Holy Spirit just as the apostles did in that upper room. I pray for the grace to be able to pray the Holy Rosary each day and with the help of our Blessed Mother, that I may be able to know the Lord Jesus more intimately. Amen.
Stress, anxiety, tension, helplessness, boredom, fatigue, anger, disappointment-most of us can relate to at least one of these emotions now. If not today, one of these days we would have faced some circumstance that pushed us into a thick cloud of distress. Right now my mind is clogged with the feeling of helplessness, a sense that absolutely nothing is going as planned, as if I’m stuck in a huge pile of dirty laundry. The stench of anger, hatred, bitterness and self-loathing is overwhelming. Then I begin to wonder, how did I end up here in the first place? Well there are quite a number of people or situations I could easily point my finger at. But the truth is there is no escaping in life. Something or someone will always shake our apple cart.

Today’s readings open our eyes to a greater reality. When caught up in a problem, it is our human tendency to find an escape. However, most of the time these little escapes open doors to greater evils. What starts small, ends up being an uncontrollable addiction that would soon consume us in the long run. A single call, a momentary indulgence, a quick fix, a one night stand; all leads to unimaginable disasters.

Today the Lord invites to come into His presence. Spending time with the Lord or entering the presence of the Lord can and will sound extremely boring and fruitless right now. But the Gospel highlights to us the true meaning of spending time with God. Unlike at our times, where we queue up to enter into casinos, night clubs, bargain sales and movie halls; people queued up in hundreds to see the face of our Lord Jesus. They knew of the difference that the presence of God brought into their lives. They were touched, transformed, and healed. Today, visit the Holy Eucharist, attend the morning mass, or go for that prayer meeting you have been postponing. The darkness that has engulfed your life will soon vanish when the presence of the Lord enters your life. And just like any other addiction that starts small, the hunger to spend time with the Lord also starts small. Before you know it you will experience the glorious splendour and the intimate love of the Lord as explained in the first reading.

Prayer: Abba Father. I choose to let go of my ways of living and submit to your life giving leading. With your grace I am confident of success. Amen
As we read today’s Gospel proclamation, we see how the Jewish people were so caught up in their traditions that they had missed the purpose of the mission Moses gave them. He had to give them strict rules and regulations because they were so stiff-necked. As the years passed by God’s chosen people made sure that they followed each rule that was given by Moses the exact way it was given to them from inception. By doing this they were only focused on how to live according to the traditions and show the world that they were living a life that pleased the Lord, Unfortunately within themselves they lived the opposite way.

In my understanding, the most devious people are the ones who show and behave that they are the most God-fearing people and act as if they are holy. However inside they may be carrying anger, hatred and other ungodly characteristics.

The problem that the religious leaders had was they did not even know that they were ungodly from the inside. They thought they were perfect in the eyes of God. This is the same problem that most of us have. We too like the Jewish religious leaders have little or no time to look within ourselves and ask God to show us our true nature, instead we run around just trying to fulfill the traditions that were taught from our youngest days, even though at times we do not know the significance and the purpose of following them.

Once during a retreat the preacher gave us an hour to write down our weaknesses and sinfulness. It took me less than 15 minutes to write what I had in mind. As I sat there, I asked the Lord to show me if I had missed anything and as I kept on asking Him, God started to reveal many weaknesses and my sinfulness specially the sins of my past which I had totally forgotten. There were certain things that I never realised were sinful. As I finished writing I realised that I had written pages. That night I went on my knees and asked God forgiveness for my ignorance. That day my life took a new turn. Let us take some time off from this busy world and ask God to show us whatever we cannot see within ourselves and surrender everything into His hands.

Prayer: Abba Father, show us our brokenness which we are unable to see and give us the grace to repent. Amen
God was gracious to King Solomon when God said that the King could request anything and God would grant it to him. King Solomon was wise enough to ask God for wisdom. The wisdom of King Solomon made him a popular person. His popularity brought the Queen of Sheba to visit him including the riches of the world.

The visitor was flattered to see the pomp and the pageantry of the King of Israel. The quality of life King Solomon lived was granted to him by his God. The Queen of Sheba did not fail to recognize the blessings of God upon the King and the nation.

King Solomon’s greatest achievement was not the riches and the quality of life he was living but what he had within him. Though we see the glorious King Solomon in today’s scripture, eventually he gave into his fleshly desires and performed unpleasing acts towards the God of Israel.

This is our human weakness. We start things beautifully in the Spirit by giving God the first place but eventually we lose it when our flesh starts to rise up with the drives deep within. The lesson St. Paul gave the Galatians is what is relevant to this human situation; never to end in the flesh what we start in the spirit.

The Lord Jesus further explains it beautifully in the today’s Gospel proclamation. Our human sinfulness and weakness are embedded in us. They are rising up from deep within. The Lord Jesus listed the human shortcomings clearly. We are free of the listed human shortcomings. What we need is only a slight trigger and the garbage comes out. We are trapped beings.

We wish to live in our fantasy worlds. We will realise how selfish and self-centered we are when we become conscious of our fantasies. We need not chastise ourselves for this. Let us accept the truth of our life and by prostrating ourselves at the feet of the Lord Jesus and we will be delivered. These are the two opposing worlds that we that shift between from time to time.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant me wisdom to accomplish the mission to the utmost. Let my mouth continue to murmur praises to you until the end of time. Amen.
A mother’s heart is one of the most potent motivations known. She has insight, courage, resistance and initiative.

In the Gospel proclamation today, we see a mother who came to the Lord Jesus with faith crying in desperation. Initially, she did not receive the response she was pleading for, but remained persistent in her faith. This mother was unable to bring about a resolution. She assumed that since she was a pagan she was being rejected by the Lord Jesus. Further she was frightened to approach Him, but her great faith in Him took her to His feet.

While our circumstances may be much different today: we have all faced a great need at some point of our lives. We have been confronted with situations that were beyond our ability to resolve. During these situations, we need to come in faith to the feet of the Lord as the pagan woman did. When we lack the ability and are unsure of what to do, the Lord Jesus can provide for our need, He is more than able to provide for us. Following an encounter with the Pharisees and on the advice of the disciples, the Lord Jesus went into an area of Tyre and Sidon seeking some rest and solitude. Although the Lord desired to remain hidden, it did not take long for the word to spread that He was in that area. He was quickly approached by a desperate mother, whose daughter had an unclean spirit. The mother clearly had no control over this situation and the spirit living inside her daughter. She simply fell at the feet of the Lord Jesus seeking His help.

Often these spirits were difficult to cast out. While Jesus had no problem with them, the disciples faced a difficult time dealing with the unclean spirits. After one such encounter, the disciples were unable to cast the spirit out of a young boy. They questioned the Lord Jesus about the difficulty and the Lord revealed the solution. “This kind can come forth by nothing but by Prayer and Fasting”. Most of us face situations that require the Lord’s power and provision. The woman believed that the Lord Jesus could meet her need. She humbled herself before the Lord in an attitude of worship. This is an important aspect of faith that is often overlooked. We assume that the Lord is waiting to meet our needs. We must remember that every prayer and every request we make of our Creator should be preceded by a time of Worship and Adoration and we will see the power of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for your care and provision in my life. Amen.
In today’s Gospel proclamation, the faith of the Syrophoenician woman and healing of her demon possessed daughter by the Lord Jesus in Mark 7, 24-30 is followed by the healing of the deaf and mute man. The incident in today’s Gospel happens in the region of the Decapolis. This was an area where the pagans lived - people who worshipped other gods and not the God of Israel. The Syrophoenician woman was not a Jew but her faith and insistence enabled her to draw a healing from the Lord Jesus. Similarly in the region of the Decapolis it was the pagans who begged for the healing of the deaf and mute man bringing him before the Lord Jesus and the holy scripture says that the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. (Mark 7,35)

In both instances the healings are received by non-Jews. In the time of the Lord Jesus there were some learned Jews - chosen people of God, well-versed in the Holy Scriptures who criticized the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Though they knew the Scriptures and the Scriptures revealed that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah that they were long waiting for, yet, when He came among them they could not recognise Him and acknowledge Him. Similarly today we encounter many non believers’ experiencing miracles at prayer services, healing services and Catholic shrines whilst there are traditional Catholics/Christians who struggle to believe that miracles can happen. We also have the Catholics who run to soothsayers and to other gods at the slightest problem/ sickness/difficulties in life.

The truth is miracles can happen because the Lord Jesus is risen from the dead. He is seated at the right hand of the Father and at the same time living amongst us and in us. The Psalmist says in today’s Psalm “I am the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Open wide your mouth that I may fill it.” (Psalm 81:11) We do not have to run in circles. Our God is able. He is mighty and today’s Gospel and Psalm once again reminds us no matter what we go through in life - sickness, addiction, struggling to overcome a hidden sin, relationship problem, financial crisis, loneliness or any darkness in our life that the Lord Jesus is the answer. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Today let us turn to Him.

Prayer: Abba Father. We praise and thank you for sending your only Son in to this world to heal us and give us life. Amen.
In the first reading today, we are shown the work that comes out of power and greed and how it leads to sin. Idol worship is sin of the highest kind. In the ancient times people resorted to idol worship. Golden images of calves were common and temples were built and ritual worship and sacrifices were rampant. The Law of Moses which was carved on stone that you shall have one God was completely disregarded.

Today, are we any different from our forefathers? Do we not have our own false gods? They may not be carved in gold and seen but etched in our flesh as day in and day out we continue to worship such false gods. Our jobs, money, positions, relationships, time on social media, need to sleep, and even good habits such as reading or playing a sport have become our gods. Anything that takes precedence over the highest place that we give Our Father God in heaven, His son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is indeed a false god. Anything that demands our time is a false god, specially things that prevent us from deepening our intimacy with God.

Therefore, as the psalmist says today, we have sinned, we and our fathers. This psalm leads us to deep repentance. If we have sinned as our parents, we can be certain the next generation will continue to sin the same way, unless, we return completely to our one true God today! The vicious cycle of worshiping false gods should end with us and end today!

How do we do that? We look to the Gospel proclamation. We see multitudes following our Lord Jesus Christ, with no care for time, food or thirst. They are completely immersed in the power of the life changing teachings of the Lord. His teachings fed their souls and they were fulfilled. Just as the Lord fed them their physical need with fish and loves, their spiritual need was filled by the Word spoken by the author of the Word. The Lord will never leave us hungry if our true worship is to the One True God and not for the material blessings that the Lord can give. As we are about to begin the season of Lent, let us be serious in turning to God in repentance for all the moments we have made our worldly needs our God and be assured that the Lord’s compassion will deliver us.

*Prayer: Abba Father, cleanse my heart of my deep sin and instill in me a heart of true worship only for You. Amen!*
Sunday 11th February

6th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out His Hand and touched him, saying, “I want you to; be clean.” Mark 1:42

Today is the last Sunday before Lent, the season of spring-cleaning of our spiritual life. Today’s liturgy presents God to us as One who continuously brings us the newness of life. Though perceived through history as an aging and grumpy God, reluctant to bless His people, we see Him as a compassionate God who breaks through boundaries to bring comfort and relief to His children.

In today’s readings, the glaring difference between living by the law alone, and living by love and fulfilling the law in love is clearly shown. Is not this the result of “The Baptism of The Holy Spirit”, or being “born again” as Lord Jesus pointed out to Nicodemus in John 3:3?

The First Reading speaks about the law that defines ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’. It further specifies how to exclude ‘unclean’ people and safeguard the ‘clean’. This had been my way of life in the past. I considered myself as ‘clean’ because I lived by the book and the expected norms of the world. It was important that the world saw me as righteous, hence I made sure I moved and associated with ‘clean’ and ‘good’ people, loved and acclaimed by the world. How many people I may have rejected and shunned as ‘unclean’ or ‘unholy’!

In contrast with the Old Testament’s rejection of ‘unclean’, today’s Gospel Reading speaks of the love and compassion of the Heavenly Father revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ. The leper went against the law which required him to avoid people, and he dared to come to the Lord Jesus and beg Him to heal him. Obviously he would have heard about the miracles being performed by the Lord and the leper was convinced that if there was anyone who could help him, it was only The Lord. The Lord could have spoken the word and healed the leper and sent him away happy and healthy. Yet, He did the unthinkable. Filled with compassion, the Lord reached out and touched the ‘unclean’ leper, thus making Himself ‘unclean’ as the law specified. As always, when the Divine Law comes into play, the natural law has to give way. Instead of the Lord Jesus becoming unclean by touching the leper, the opposite happened. The Lord’s purity and love came into contact with the unhealthy skin of the leper, and the leprosy had to flee, in the face of the power of Divine love and compassion.

This action of the Lord challenges me strongly today. The same heal-
ing could have taken place anyway, if the Lord stood far away from the leper and just spoke the words, “I am willing; be clean.” Yet His action spoke volumes of how God’s heart and mind work. God is the greatest lover, the origin of all love. I remember when my children were small how they used to fall and get a bruise which made them cry. I only had to reach out and cuddle them and gently kiss the sore area, and lo and behold, the pain would vanish and the tears would dry up instantly. Similarly, The Lord had to reach out and touch the leper who may not have had a human touch for years. The leper was healed not just in his skin but in his heart and soul too. I am so challenged to love the unlovable and those who are broken and fallen, shunned away by the world as unredeemable!

The love of the Lord did not stop at the healing of the leper but also made sure that the man lived a normal life thereafter. Hence the instructions given to fulfil the conditions in order to be declared as ‘clean’. The words of The Lord in Scripture come to my mind thus; “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17)The Lord Jesus proves that His actions are based only on love and compassion and not on reaction to the law or lawmakers. He was not a radical revolutionist, dishonouring the law and order of His day. The Lord speaks to my heart, that all my actions and responses need to be based on one thing alone; love. Every action of the Lord Jesus was a ‘yes’ response to the will of the Father. Each of His miracles was for one purpose, to glorify the Father. This truth is elaborated and presented beautifully by St Paul in the Second Reading as he writes to the Corinthians, instructing them that the basis of their life was to be for the glory of God. Our best service is futile before the Lord if we cause anyone to stumble because of our actions. St Paul tells us something simple but profound; to follow his example as he followed that of Christ. (cf. 1 Cor 11:1)To me, this encompasses everything. We are called to follow the example of our Lord and Master and listen to the voice of the Father and do His will. This is my yardstick in every choice and decision. As I acknowledge this, and desiring to be utterly obedient to His Law of love, I realise my inability to do so by my strength. I realise that I am that leper in St. Mark’s Gospel who needs to fall at His Feet and beg of the Lord to be healed of my inability to love as He loves. Just then, I hear His gentle and compassionate voice assuring me, saying, “I do want to, be clean.” Not by my strength, but by the Power of His Precious Blood, I am made clean and am empowered to love as He loves me.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank You for revealing Your nature through the reckless love and compassion of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Empower me to love the unlovable and to embrace the untouchable. Amen.
Before I came into an experience of the Risen Lord in 2002, I would go to church on Sundays and other days of obligation. It meant almost nothing to me. Attending mass was just an obligation and therefore I received little or nothing from it. It was not until I came face to face with a crisis that I began to search for an answer. Hence I agreed to attend a CRL youth meeting. Subsequently after that I began attending the Wednesday prayer meetings and began a relationship with the Lord. In the last 15 years, I have fallen more times than I can count. I have strayed away from the Lord, ignored His word, challenged Him, mocked Him, etc. but He has never left my side. Always a step behind, waiting and longing for me to turn back to Him. And in each instance, I would eventually hit a brick wall and cry out to the Lord for help. This may be the case of many people’s journeys with the Lord. We tend to live as we please until we hit a trial or temptation and then we remember God and cry out to Him for mercy and help.

St. James speaks of these trials and temptations we face throughout our lives. They bring us back to God. He says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance” (verse 2-3). It has been my experience that when I go through a crisis and turn to the Lord, I am more open to hearing His voice and to obeying His leadings. It is only through a struggle that we are able to let go of what we have been holding on to and sincerely come to the Lord. Each crisis builds in us a spiritual maturity. We come to know God not as a distant God, but as our Father, provider and creator.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Pharisees ask the Lord Jesus to show them a sign from heaven. The Lord refuses to show them any sign. St. James says that when we ask God for wisdom we must believe that we have received it. The Pharisees wanted to trap Him with their questions. They were like the waves of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. Through each struggle we face if we find the Lord and get closer to Him, we will no longer doubt His power and ability. Instead, we will see His signs and wonders.

Prayer: Abba Father, as I look back on my life, I thank you for every trial and temptation that has come my way. I thank you for always being there for me and picking me up when I fall. Amen.
Tuesday 13th February 6th Week in Ordinary Time

No one should say, “God is tempting me.”
For God does not tempt anyone

James 1:13

In the first reading St. James speaks of the trials and temptations we may face in life. He says that those who endure problems should be happy because they will receive a reward from God for their endurance. Most of the time when we go through a struggle, the first person we lose is God. We assume God has brought about a crisis in our life or that God could have done something to stop the crisis but He did not. So we become angry or disappointed with God. St. James goes on to explain these temptations come to us not because God brought them down on us, but because of the sin conceived in our hearts. It all starts with a desire in our hearts. A man may have a financial crisis and have a desire to be financially stable once again. In his search for financial stability he may cheat a customer or steal money from his employer. His desire has given birth to a sinful act. St. James is asking us to be mindful that these acts do not come from God. He says only good and perfect things come from God and we must be mindful to know the difference between things from God and those that are not from God.

St. Mark’s Gospel proclamation tells us of the yeast of the Pharisees. Prior to this verse in Mark 8 the Lord Jesus had fed the 4,000 and then He gets into the boat with his disciples and goes to the district of Dalmanutha where he meets the Pharisees. The Lord Jesus had already given these religious leaders many signs but they did not want to pay attention to them. Their primary intention was to argue with Him as they sought a way to trap Him. When the Lord was alone with the disciples He warned them to keep watch and to always be on their guard against the attitudes of the Jewish religious leaders. The Lord spoke of the yeast of the Pharisee. What did He mean? The leaven of the Pharisees was bad theology, legalism, and unholy hypocrisy. The Lord told the disciples to beware of the leavening nature of the narrow minded thinking of the leadership without real faith or belief in God.

We must not allow a crisis or a problem to take us further away from God. Instead of blaming God we must bring everything to Him, in prayer and petition. He will find a way to solve every problem and soothe every worry.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to see my problem through Your eyes. That I may come to You to find an answer and peace of mind. Amen.
Ash Wednesday is an important day especially for Catholics. We begin a time of repentance, fasting, prayer and alms giving. What do we repent from? What do we fasting from? Why should we Pray? To whom do we give alms? This is a day when we can start pondering on these questions.

The answer to the first question is already revealed to us in the second reading. St. Paul is calling us to be ambassadors of Christ and to be reconciled to God. If we look back at our life in the past one year, we may find many instances where we might have failed God in the way we may have dealt with people at home, in office, in the community and around. We have also failed God miserably when we have not been able to trust in Him to be the Lord of our lives and all our circumstances. So we are called to repent sincerely from all these sins and reconcile with God. Today is just the preparation for a beautiful journey of forty days of repentance and reconciliation.

What does the Lord want us to fast from? Not just the ritual one meal a day or abstinence from sweets, alcohol, or the favourite TV show. The Lord is seeking our heart today to find out what it is that has taken His place in our life in the past one year. He wants us to identify the thing that has become God in our lives and fast from that thing that does not allow us to give the first place to God in our lives,

What are we asked to pray for? Is it to resolve our problems? Is it for blessings or any material thing? The Lord gives us the answer in the psalm today. We are to pray in deep repentance, to seek the mercy of God for our sins, to take away our paralysing guilt and wash us clean with His precious blood that He shed on the cross for all our salvation. In the book of Joel and in the Gospel proclamation today, we are guided on how to repent, fast and pray. We are to go quiet deep within our hearts and not make a noise to the world. It is a time when no one needs to know how we fast and pray but only the Lord. We are called to give alms in a spirit of the left hand not knowing what the right hand does. This is a time to pray for the grace of God, when we humble ourselves and plead God’s mercy. We are called to live this way throughout the year and not just for the forty days of Lent.

Prayer: Abba Father, We are thankful to you for you grace to come to your throne room and experience your mercy and compassion. Amen!
Thursday 15th February  Thursday after Ash Wednesday

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me…” — Luke 9:23

In today’s first reading, the book of Deuteronomy tells us that obedience to God will bring life. If we choose to obey God and walk in His ways, we will have life. “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.” (Deu 30:15-16) which means the choice is in our hands. God in His unconditional love and mercy, guides us the way we should walk and instructs us in the ways we should walk. “I will instruct you and teach you the ways you should go (Psa 32:8). Yet, He will not force us to do anything. This is the reason why God has given us the gift of free will. In exercising our free will we should choose His ways. However many of us are still living a life of depression, sadness and worries. We cannot experience the fullness of life the Lord wants to give us simply because of our disobedience to God. When we do not obey Him we suffer the consequences and lose the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we hear the Lord’s voice; “if any want to become my followers, take up your cross daily and follow me.” The purpose of being a Christian is to be a disciple of Christ and to grow into being like Christ. That is to say as we follow our Lord Jesus, we shed our inner broken nature, our weaknesses and sinfulness and walk in His holiness. However, most of us wait to change ourselves to get close to God. We wait to become holy to follow Him. But we cannot do it on our own and we waste our entire life trying to change ourselves. The good news is that the daily walk with Him will change us. As we continue our close walk with Him, He becomes real in our lives and He begins to do the transformation in our hearts. That is how we walk towards holiness. Anyone who comes to the Lord Jesus will never be the same. Because when we encounter Him, and His love, it transforms our nature and helps us to grow to be like Him. “Come as you are. I love you. Come and be changed.” This is His invitation. Let us accept His invitation and draw near to Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, I follow your Son carrying my daily cross. Thank you for giving me the strength and transforming me into the person you want me to be. Amen!
Friday 16th February

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear

This Christmas a young man shared his experience. At a prayer service held before Christmas the people were led into a time of worship along with an exercise to identify broken relationships. During this time, the Holy Spirit reminded the man of a few people whom he had forgotten about. For years He did not have contact with some of his father’s sisters. The family was angry with them due to a land dispute that ended unjustly for the family. The Holy Spirit suddenly reminded him of those aunts whom He had forgotten about and with whom he had no connection for a long time. It is only then that he realised that he had been holding a grudge against them for years. He felt that he had to forgive them. The Lord reminded him that He needed to mend these broken relationships. One by one he brought each person to his mind and forgave them. He asked the Lord Jesus to forgive them. With love he interceded on behalf of them. An amazing thing happened. During this Christmas season, the aunts who did not have a relationship with the family for years, called and wished them. Praise the Lord!

In today’s first reading the fast that is pleasing to the Lord is mentioned. This is to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? The result of us doing this is mentioned in Isaiah 58: 8, “Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear;” Verse 9 says, “Then you will call, and the Lord will answer.” Therefore during this Lent, let us enter into this true fast that the scripture is talking about. As stated in Isaiah 58: 7, let us share our food with the hungry, provide the poor wanderer with shelter and clothe the naked.

Today’s Gospel proclamation mentions another shortcoming when we fast. John the Baptist’s disciples came to the Lord Jesus and asked Him a question. “How is that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” Sometimes we may not express our opinions verbally but internally we may judge others. We become proud thinking we are good. We think lowly of others. Therefore as much as we fast on food, let us also fast on our sinful thoughts, unwanted thoughts, proud thoughts and unruly ways of life.

Prayer: Abba Father, I was sinful at birth. Cleanse me with the precious blood of your Son, our Lord Jesus Amen.
I recently invited someone to the weekly prayer meeting. She said, “I will try to come if I am free”. This is not the first time that I experienced a polite “no”. I nursed my bruised ego by saying “these people are too much in the world.” However, the truth remains, it was those “in the world” and the “non-religious” who dropped everything to follow the Lord. It was as though they were waiting for a simple “follow me” call to get close to Him. In today’s Gospel proclamation we find Levi the tax collector leaving everything to follow the Lord.

When the tax collector welcomed the Lord into his house and held a banquet, the Pharisees and the teachers complained. The Pharisees and the teachers were supposed to bring people to God, but their ways did the exact opposite. Sometimes I find that I am no different. Have I not used God as an excuse to put a yoke of oppression on others? Have I not taken my own frustrations out on others, pointing fingers at them and indulging in malicious talk, using God to justify my actions? I cannot help but admit, I am just as guilty as the Pharisees and the other religious leaders in the time of Jesus.

The Lord is inviting me today to admit my guilt and return to Him in repentance. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” We may be taking on responsibilities, and serving the Lord. The truth is, we are wounded healers, Jacob’s in secret, Pharisees at heart.

God is speaking to us through the Prophet Isaiah; do away with the yoke of oppression, pointing fingers and malicious talk. Make time to satisfy the needs of the oppressed, especially those who are at home, those who work and serve with us. As we make a conscious decision to allow His supernatural power to transform our broken nature, He is giving us a promise:

“Then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”.

Prayer: Abba Father, convict me of the things that are displeasing to you. Give me the grace to carry your presence with me as I reach out to others. Amen.
Sunday 18th February  

1st Sunday of Lent

This water symbolizes the baptism that now saves you  

1 Peter 3:21

The desert is a place of lack, where meeting even the barest necessities of life is a challenge. Today’s Gospel proclamation tells us that it is during this time of lack that the devil tempted Our Lord Jesus. The Gospel goes on to say that in the desert there were “wild animals”, implying that our Lord was in a vulnerable position, and perhaps in a life-threatening situation. Yet it was the Holy Spirit who led him into the desert.

The Gospel also tells us that angels ministered to Him while He was in the desert. On one side there is difficulty, lack, and a spiritual struggle. On the other, there is divine intervention and supernatural provision in the midst of the struggle. Mind you, the angels are not fixing the difficulty, but are sustaining our Lord Jesus as He goes through the struggle. In forty days, (which is symbolic of a complete period), when His mission in the desert is fulfilled, He goes into Galilee and begins his Public Ministry. It is as though the time in the desert was the beginning of something new that the Holy Spirit was doing in His life.

First, I realise that allowing the Holy Spirit to lead me does not mean that I am in for a trouble-free life. The leading may get me into a difficult situation that otherwise would not have occurred. I also understand that there will be difficult times where providing for myself and my family will be difficult, and I will be tempted not to be faithful. Yet, if I follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, the time of crisis will be the beginning of something new that the Lord is doing in my life.

During the time of Lent, our Lord invites us to voluntarily enter the desert so that it can become the beginning of something new. Fasting, giving up something that brings me pleasure, waking up early to attend the daily CRL Lenten program are all ways to enter the desert. (I live far away from Colombo. So, I set apart time, daily to follow the Lenten reflection on the Internet. I do not listen while doing something else. I take time off other things, so that the time allocated for listening to the Lenten reflection is sacred).

In today’s first reading we meet Noah and his family at the tail end of a terrible tragedy. For those who did not walk with God like Noah did, the flood was a source of destruction. But for Noah and his family, the same flood was the beginning of a new thing God was doing. So it is with the challenges we face in our life. The crisis that destroys a
person who does not walk in a relationship with God can become the blessing and the beginning of a new thing that God does.

At the beginning of the story of Noah, which is recorded in Genesis Chapter 6, God speaks to Noah. By the time we reach today’s first reading, God is speaking to Noah and his sons. God not only makes a covenant with Noah and his sons, but also with the creatures who were with Noah. When we walk with the Lord, hearing his voice and having a relationship with Him, not only is our family blessed, even our pets are blessed.

God places a rainbow in the sky as a remembrance of what happened in the flood. The takeaway is that the Lord wants us to look back at our time of difficulty and remember how He sustained us, and how He delivered us and learn that He is mighty to save. This act of remembering helps us journey and trust God through the next crisis we face.

The second reading allures to the biggest crisis in the life of our Lord Jesus. It is the crisis that ends in His death. It goes on to say that death was not an end but instead it was a new beginning of a life in the Spirit, where He can reach beyond what He could not while in the flesh. As per the reading, He seems to have transcended time, and is able to reach out to those who lived in the time of Noah – unimaginable to those of us who live within the constraints of time and space.

The Lord reminds me that not only will He turn my curses into blessings and convert my crisis’s into new beginnings, but He will walk with me through the biggest crisis of my life, the crisis of the ending of life as we know it. Throughout His life, Our Lord Jesus would speak a word, or touch a sick person, and God would intervene. Through all the miracles, He learnt to trust His father, to the extent that He would lay down his life voluntarily.

To me, it feels that each crisis we walk through is a preparation to walk through the ultimate crisis. He wants us to be able to trust him enough to know that we will not be alone, but that there will be divine intervention and supernatural provision, just like it was in the desert. The key to trust is the rainbow He gave Noah. Remember how God came through for us in each crisis. Remember that our God is mighty to save.

Prayer: Abba Father, May each desert I go through bring into fulfilment your plan, a new beginning in my life. While in the desert may I never forget that your angels are ministering to me and I am not alone. Amen.
“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of Mine, you did unto Me”

Lev 19: 1-2, 11-18
Ps 19: 8-10, 15
Matt 25: 31-46

It is the first week of Lent and many of us may have already started to give up meat, alcohol or something that we usually give up for Lent as a penance. Often this is done grudgingly. But today in the readings, the Lord challenges us to fast in a different way. This lent, He invites us to be “Holy” for the “Lord your God is Holy”

Through the CRL, we are taught that to be Holy is to be a people set apart for God. It does not depend on our righteousness or on our self-effort but rather on our submission to the will of God. It acknowledges that we are broken sinful people but also that the Lord can do in us what we cannot do by ourselves.

The Lord Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and to love your neighbour as yourself”. In the Gospel proclamation today, we see Him using this commandment to judge us at the end of days. It is easy to love our neighbour who is well off, who is kind, who can repay us back. But so hard to love the one who refuses to acknowledge our love, who is ugly and deformed, in constant need, who is foul and bitter and unlovable. I was recently visiting Sri Lanka and as always, I was challenged by the number of beggars. Whenever the car was stationary in traffic, they would come in multitudes. And no matter how much money I gave or how often I gave, there were more to take the place of the one just gone. At times it was frustrating, I wanted to feel good about doing something but it just did not seem to be enough. But at the back of my mind was a little voice that kept saying “what if he is Jesus in disguise, what if it’s the little girl or that poor woman without any legs”. Sure, people say that beggars are just playing on your sympathy, that most are just con artists but still. What if that was Jesus in disguise? Is that a risk I can take?

So this Lent, let us take the challenge that God offers us. Let us choose to keep loving the least of our brothers. Yes it will be hard and yes it will never be enough. Sure we will fall multiple times. But that is okay. We are invited to be Holy, as our Lord is Holy. He died for us even when He knew how often we would fail Him, how often we would reject Him. But He still chose us anyway.

Prayer: Abba Father, I offer up these Lenten days in to your days. Guide my steps, instruct me in my ways and teach me to love. Amen.
Tuesday 20th February

The word that goes out of my mouth, it will not return empty, but ...achieve the purpose for which I sent it Isaiah 55:11

Today’s first reading is so potent that if you really believe in it, it will blow your mind off. Most of us just read the word of God as if reading a spiritual book. The word of God is alive and active. If we believe it with our heart and soul and if we have faith that God is alive, He will fulfill everything that He has said through the word. Then we need to be ready to expect the unexpected. We are in for a blessing from God.

If we truly believe that all that God has said will come into pass, our lives will never be the same again. The reason we are the same people without a change happening within us and around us is that, somewhere deep within we are not convinced that God can fulfill what He has promised through His word.

The Lord promises in Isaiah 55:11, “The word that goes out of my mouth, it will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it”. Every prayer and cry that proceeds from our mouth to God will never go in vain either. We might have prayed for a certain issue but may not have seen any sign of improvement. But each prayer we raised to the Lord has not gone in vain. The Lord promises us that He has heard all our cries from the moment we cried out to Him and at His time and according to His will He will bring it to pass. Most of the times we expect the solution to come the way we want it to be. But God’s ways are not our ways and they are way above our imagination. We expect temporary answers but He wants to give us permanent solutions. If we feel like God has not opened a door for us let us be glad because if we entered the wrong room it might take many years for us to find our way out of that room. God knows which door to open for us and when. As I read today’s reading, I remember how much my mom prayed for me. It seemed all her prayers were unheard by the Lord because she did not see any change in my life. I remained the same for many years, but God never forgot a single prayer of my moms. At the right time God fulfilled His promise and that is the reason I am writing this spiritual reflection to you today. My mom did not trust in me but she trusted in the Lord and in His word, that sooner or later God would fulfill His promise according to His timing.

Prayer: Abba Father, we prayer to give us the grace to wait upon you in prayer.
Amen.
The ‘amazing grace’ of God is the essence that saves us. God’s grace does not let us remain in the junkyard we desire to be. We are both spiritual and physical beings. Our desires are fashioned mostly to please our five senses. What we forget is that the core of our being is somewhere deep within us and is not limited to our five senses.

Most often we lose this battle within and give way to our passions pushed by our five senses. Our external actions and words are motivated by our internal wounds and passions. Who can save us from this rut? Only the amazing grace of our God can save us.

The love of God pushed Jonah to Nineveh to save His people. The people of Nineveh lived by the drive of their passions, to fulfill the needs of their five senses. But they decided to grab God’s hand that was extended to them and repented. This is a lesson we should learn and put into practice. Every time we fall into our passions, we should take up the hand that God gives us.

The Lord Jesus noticed that the people of His time also were motivated by their internal passions and wounds. The words of our Lord Jesus at that time are appropriate to our generation today. We qualify as an evil generation. We run from place to place, church to church seeking signs and wonders. The Lord Jesus said that no sign would be given but the sign of Jonah. What is the sign of Jonah? Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale and came out on the third day whilst Lord Jesus was in the tomb for three days and was Risen, never to die again. This is the first Sacrament of God. When the Risen Lord is present within us and amongst us in the form of a church and in the Eucharist, we have become wanderers, restlessly running without aim seeking signs and wonders. The channel of grace to the people of Nineveh was Jonah, but for us today the grace flows through the Sacraments. We have become naïve and imperceptive towards this amazing grace which flows into us through the Sacraments and are running behind other signs. Let us be like St. Peter Damian, who stood firm in faith regardless of his childhood traumas. He trusted God. We too can be the reformers of this era.

Prayer: Abba Father, have mercy on me, in your goodness and abundant compassion blot out my offenses as you know well that I cannot live without you. Amen.
Thursday 22nd February  

**Chair of St. Peter the Apostle**

“Who do you say I am?” Matthew 16:15

St. Peter gives direction to the elders—the leaders of the church, to guide and nourish the people by being humble and by depending on God. They are not to look for personal favours and fame, instead they should live to give glory to God through their life example and thereby share God’s great love and mercy with His people.

Today’s psalm is full of God’s great goodness and the need for dependence on Him. Praying it brings a sense of peace, security and joy into our lives no matter what struggles we may face in life. God, is our shepherd. There is no need to get anxious with want, no need to fear evil, God will never leave nor forsake us. It is natural that we should follow God. The shepherd – our Lord Jesus died for us so that we may be blessed with the fullness of God’s grace.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we find the Lord Jesus Christ inquiring from His disciples about Himself. Does He actually not know the answers already? Why does He want to hear the response? Our Lord Jesus is the greatest example we have of how to traverse through life towards God while gathering His flock. It is His plan to appoint His successor – and He wanted to be assured that Peter was ready to take on the role. Simon Peter the fisherman who had the ‘foot-in-the-mouth’ syndrome was slowly evolving into the Rock on which the Lord Jesus decided to build His church.

The Lord Jesus wants to know from me today, “Who do you say I am?”, “Who am I to you?” A ‘money-God’, a ‘healer-God’, a ‘provider-God’, a ‘friend-God’, a ‘Sunday church-God’, a ‘run to when in crisis God’, ‘I have no idea but someone known as God’? We may have a zillion interpretations of God as we turn the relationship that we should be having with God into the relationship that suits our comfort levels, social circles and convenience. However as Catholics who have great life examples of saints such as St. Peter we should not take lightly the knowledge and awareness of our Lord Jesus. He is the great IAM, the beginning and the end, our savior and loving God. It is only when we learn to have an intimate relationship with God like St. Peter that we begin to receive the proper understanding of who He really is. It is only then that God can raise us up from our fallen nature and abilities to be a rock like St. Peter.

*Prayer: Abba Father, make me aware of your holy presence in my life. Amen*
Today, we see in the Gospel proclamation, our Lord Jesus inaugurating a new phase in salvation history by introducing a New Covenant standard of Righteousness that surpasses the righteousness of the Old Testament. The covenant was mainly established to maintain the people of Israel as a nation. It was meant to draw them closer to God by separating them from the sins of Gentiles.

Jesus, the Son of God, implements a new level of righteousness that stretches beyond the boundaries of the Old Law. He wants not only to clean our outward behaviour but also our inward standards. I may seem to be a righteous person to my family, friends and community. But there may be a lot of chaos in my mind and heart. It is better to battle them out with the Lord and keep them at His feet rather than assuming that things are fine and live a life of denial.

Let us reflect on the state of our heart. God is calling us to be true to ourselves. We may not want to take a person’s life but we hold grudges against many people Am I friendly with my brothers and sisters around or am I judging them at every opportunity.

The Lord Jesus invites us to come back to Him today with the truth and we know that He loves us despite our failures. He does not love the person we pretend to be but the real me. He never asks us to do things alone, Let us make this an opportunity to remember that He promised to come and live inside us. Is this true in our lives? Do you truly believe He is living in us?

Pope Francis at a recent event encouraged us to return to our first and only love. The Holy Father also said, “Keep your gaze fixed on Jesus Christ and learn from Him how to love with a truly human heart, to care for the lost and hurting members of His flock, to work for justice and show solidarity with the weak and the poor.”

When our eyes are fixed on Him, we will realise how sinful we are. Then we no longer be judgmental or hold grudges towards others.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to return to you every moment we fall and convert from Jacob to Israel. Transform us Father according to your will. Amen
The psalmist today gives us the key to be blessed! We are to follow the law of the Lord! In the first reading Moses speaks of the commands that the people of Israel were to observe with all their hearts, minds and souls. Moses also instructs his people that should they observe all the decrees and statutes of God, who will raise them high above all nations and they will become a people Sacred to the Lord. Is not this an amazing promise and which fool will reject this highest honour to belong to God? Yet, over and again, generation after generations, the people of God failed to live up to this expectation.

In the Gospel proclamation today, the Lord Jesus sums up all the laws and the statutes into one great command and beyond. He is asking us to love and do good to our enemies and to pray for those who persecute you. For man this is not possible but in and through Christ who lives inside us we are surely able to do it.

About seven or eight years ago, I experienced a very trying time in my career when I had to work for a superior who was the main Director of the company. He was not all that ethical in his ways of going about the business and I was contemplating leaving the job. However, that did not seem to be what the Lord had planned for me and through the regular attending of the Wednesday meeting I was convinced that the leading was there to instead start blessing my boss and my circumstances. I remember the times I used to sit at the feet of the Lord at the blessed Sacrament and give the truth of my heart to the Lord.

I told the Lord that I cannot bear the sight of my superior and that I disliked working for him but asked the Lord to bless him. Not just him but his family and all that he did. I even asked the Lord to bless his domestics. It may have seemed an insane thing to do but as I continued to do it I realised that slowly but surely, the resentment I had for my superior started to go away. Simultaneously, he also had to leave the organisation. God in His mercy did more than what I prayed for but it was not about getting rid of the person but getting rid of the bitterness inside my heart. This is what the Lord Jesus is asking of us today, to love one another, no matter what.

Prayer: Abba Father, I am weak but I can be strong in You. Please help me long to be like you. Amen
Sunday 25th February 2nd Sunday of Lent

“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him”!

Mark 9:2-10

“Take your son, your only son, whom you love… sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you”. As though killing the son was not hard enough, Abraham was asked to offer him as a burnt offering! It sounds barbaric. Surely, God could not have said it… may be Abraham was influenced by a common Canaanite custom at the time… Unfortunately for me, I could not find a single word that confirmed my line of thought.

Isaac was the son through whom God’s promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled. Therefore, sacrificing Isaac did not make sense. If I was Abraham, I would have explained it away; if it does not make sense, it is nonsense! Not to Abraham. Early the next morning he set off quietly with Isaac. No questions asked, no excuses given. In complete obedience and trust, Abraham proceeded to where he was asked to go, and God remained silent through it. He was silent when Abraham prepared the donkeys, silent when Abraham climbed the mountain, silent when Abraham built the altar, bound Isaac and placed him on the altar. He remained silent until Abraham drew the knife to slay Isaac. I believe God brought Abraham to the moment of truth. He had to make a choice between obedience to God vs the promise that God had given him. To hold on to one, Abraham had to sacrifice the other. Abraham chose obedience over the promise!

In their mid-teens, God gave me a promise about my children through Isaiah 59, that His spirit upon us and His words upon our lips will never depart us, our children, their children, or their children’s children. I held on to it. I even tried to help God fulfill His promise in my children’s lives, and I became an obstacle to its fulfillment. My Isaac was taken away from my reach. I was forced to allow God to do what He started.

Years later, I started to see the hand of God, the promise being fulfilled in the secret, in a place hidden from me where I can no longer be an obstacle. When what God is asking of us does not make sense, we are called to do what Abraham did; carry the promise to the feet of God and offer it back to Him in obedience, worship Him till our hearts align with His. We must wait upon Him till the scales of our eyes come off and all our hidden agendas are exposed.
The inability to understand God’s ways continues in today’s Gospel. The Lord had started to talk to the disciples about His death; the Son of Man must suffer, be rejected, and killed. It was nonsense to Peter. Peter loved everything the Lord did and said. He was so enamored with the Lord’s ministry and the miracles that he was slowly becoming an obstacle to the move of God. Today’s Gospel proclamation brings us to the transfiguration of the Lord. God was pleased with the Lord Jesus, and His decision to lay down His own life for the salvation of mankind. The Heavens opened where He stood and God’s glory started to shine on the Lord. With the transfiguration, the disciples saw Elijah and Moses talking to the Lord.

Once again, Peter was caught up; “Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah”. The scripture says, “He did not know what to say, they were so frightened”.

When we are frightened, we too miss the point. We get caught up. Just like Peter, we do and say things to make things “normal” for us. Thereby, we become an obstacle to the move of God. Today, we hear the voice of God that echoed through Mount Tabor, “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!”

Obedience to God does not come naturally to us. Peter could not understand where the Lord was prepared to go in obedience to God. It was the obedience of Abraham that blessed all the nations of the world. It was the obedience of the Lord that saved mankind. Obedience to God is the virtue that most of us struggle with. Today’s second reading gives us hope.

St Paul in his letter to the Romans says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” For the longest time, I used to think that this verse applies to “enemies out there”. The truth is, my flesh, the Jacob nature in me are my worst enemies. They tell me that I cannot really trust God – especially when obedience to God clashes with my plans.

As I struggle with my hidden motives and my broken nature I am comforted by the words of St Paul; “Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us”. My flesh does not stand a chance against the intercession of the Lord on my behalf. So yes, God is for me! My flesh, my broken nature can no longer stand in the ways of God over my life.

Prayer: Abba Father, purify my heart today from the hidden motives and my ways that prevent me from living my inheritance in you. Amen.
Monday 26th February

Be merciful just as your Father is merciful

Daniel receives an insight while reading the scripture. He realises that the desolation of Jerusalem was going to last a long time. Daniel starts fasting, praying and interceding for Jerusalem. The prayer of Intercession, a part of which is taken in today’s first reading, is uncannily similar to Nehemiah’s prayer, which those of us who are part of the Community of the Risen Lord use as a basis for intercession. It looks like the principals behind Nehemiah’s prayer are universal, scriptural, and have been used throughout history to pull down supernatural intervention into situations on the earth.

Today’s first reading quotes the prayer of repentance in Daniel’s prayer of intercession. He prays “We have been wicked, we have rebelled, have turned away, and so on. But is not this the same Daniel who would rather be burnt to death than worship the Gods of the Medes? It looks like Daniel has taken on the sins of the people on to his shoulders and is standing in repentance before God, rather than repenting of his own sinfulness. Perhaps this reveals a principle of pulling down a breakthrough into a problematic situation which is to take on the sins of those who contributed towards the problem, and repent for the sins. Repent as a people, not only as an individual.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we encounter a scripture passage that we use often in another of our prayer methods “The Prayer of the Five Keys”. We think that our openness to God, and pulling down God’s intervention, is done only during the time of intercession. Today’s Gospel says that when we stop judging, when we stop condemning, we pull down God’s intervention. The reading goes on to say that when we forgive, we will receive from above. It is no ordinary receiving, but “a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured on to your lap”.

So today, in our prayer, we will pray for those who caused us harm. Instead of judgment and condemnation, we will pray that they will be blessed. We will give forgiveness instead of resentment. The measure we use will be the measure that will be given to us. The blessing upon us will be too much for us to contain. It has to be pressed down and shaken together, in order to make room for the blessing.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to believe your word and penetrate the cloud, so that we may hold on to what is truly valuable. Amen
In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus warns us about the religious leaders who at that time were preaching the Mosaic law but not practicing it. That is why He often blasted them as hypocrites, white washed sepulchers and sanctimonious humbugs. They preached but did not practice. After His baptism, the Lord Jesus left everything behind and was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert where He fasted and prayed for forty days which in the Jewish understanding meant a complete period. During this fast, He faced three main temptations. The evil one tempted Him to misuse or abuse his authority by turning the stones into bread. The Lord Jesus rejected it and that is why He condemned the religious leaders so sternly when He saw them abusing their authority and heaping heavy burdens on the people.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord also tells us how the religious leaders were seeking popularity and prestige by wearing their robes not only in the Temple but even when they went out. This was the second temptation the Lord Jesus had faced in the desert. The evil one took Him to the top of the temple and told Him to jump from it, quoting a scripture verse that said that he would not be hurt. This was the temptation to seek popularity. As we reflect on this we need to ask ourselves as to what extent we give in to such temptations. Do we practice what we preach and preach only what we practice.

Pope Francis often quotes his favourite saint, St. Francis of Assisi who has told us to preach all the time but use words only when necessary. Our lives must be the sermon we preach. As we freely receive God’s unconditional, unending and unfailling love, we need to freely give it to other and love them sincerely, selflessly and with self-sacrifice. The Lord also tells us not to seek greatness. He says, “The greatest among you must be the servant of all.”

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we need to live in this way, beginning in our families, churches or communities, work places or elsewhere. We need to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, help those who hurt us and pray for those for persecute us. When we do this by the power of the Holy Spirit others will see Christ in us.

|Prayer: Abba Father, keep on filling me with the Holy Spirit, till others can see Christ only always living in me. Amen|
What is your idea of serving?

Serving is an important word in our context. When we experience the love of God our initial response is a thirst to serve tirelessly. Unfortunately we come to the serve with a worldly tinged view of serving. We expect to interact with people who are innocent, good and holy and who are not jealous or selfish. But as we begin to serve we are often shocked by what we encounter, a multitude of broken people in the leadership and among the general crowd.

This was the experience of Jeremiah. He was taking God’s message to the people and he expected them to value his words and leading. He felt that he had something of value to give the people. He had dedicated his life to the spreading of God’s word. Hence he expected people to love him and adhere to his leading. Instead, the reality was that they were plotting to silence or kill him. His reaction was of shock, anger and revenge. It is the same with us.

Different people have different expectations and the mother of James and John also wanted her sons to be the foremost wherein they would get to sit at the right and left hand side of God when in Heaven. If we examine the depths of our heart, even we have expectations. We want to be accepted, loved, honoured and spoken well of. People must acknowledge us and smile at us. They must call us anointed and blessed. They must reciprocate our service with bigger and better gifts. They must make our life a little more comfortable. We begin to see it as our right. We assume we have earned all of this and that they better serve us with gratitude.

However, the Lord Jesus saw his service in a totally different light. He was to provide for the people and offer love and forgiveness. His faced was turned away from the smiles and appreciation of people to the face of God directing Him. Ultimately, He was able to sacrifice His life for us. The real test of our faith is when we are judged and questioned. The real test is when people talk behind our back and plot to block us from succeeding. How do we handle this? Do we leave the church or community? Do we run down the members or do we learn to live in silence and offer love as a sacrifice. When we reach that point of offering love in return, we will be serving as God intends.

Prayer: Abba Father, teach me to serve as your Son our Lord Jesus did. Help me to respond with love when faced with bitterness and anger. Amen
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