



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

January 2017

**As soon as Jesus was baptized,
he went up out of the water. At that
moment heaven was opened, and he
saw the Spirit of God descending like
a dove and alighting on him. And a
voice from heaven said, "This is my
Son, whom I love; with him I am well
pleased."**

Matthew 3:16-17

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January 2017

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Sunday 1st January

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

“The Lord bless you and keep you;

the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you

Numbers 6:22-27 |

Numbers 6:22-27

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

Galatians 4: 4-7

Luke 2:16-21

The Aaronic Blessing that is read every year on the on January 1, was given by God Himself to bless His people. Thus we begin every year with God's words, imparting a blessing on those who choose to belong to Him. As I reflect on today's readings, it is clear that God had been waiting for an opportunity from the first moment that sin entered the human heart, to reclaim those who were lost. To me the Aaronic Blessing is God's heart cry that says; "I want to bless you and keep you; to let my face shine on you and be gracious to you; I want to turn my face toward you and give you peace..." God's word is alive and powerful. It does not return to Him without fulfilling its purpose and echoes throughout the universal church drawing us back to His heart.

Last year, when celebrating the Solemnity of Mary Most Holy, the Holy Mother of God, Pope Francis said, "the Church reminds us that Mary, more than anyone else, received this blessing. In her the blessing finds fulfilment, for no other person has ever seen God's face shine upon it, as did Mary".

Around the birth of Christ are the heavenly hosts, the star, the magi, the shepherds and even the appropriateness of the gifts they brought. Then there is a sense of helplessness in a strange land with no human assistance and with the very event that is at the centre of it all; the childbirth. The shepherds would have been confused in the contradiction of what they heard and saw; their Saviour, the Messiah, is lying in a manger in an abandoned cattle shed, instead of in a golden crib in a mansion. Today's Gospel proclamation summarizes the inner journey of the Blessed Mother in just one sentence: "she treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart". It was just a few hours ago that they were desperately looking for a place to give birth to the Saviour of the world and being turned away by those who did not have room in their hearts. Yet, there she was, holding everything she saw, heard and experienced in her heart as treasures. Pope Francis' words make more sense; "In her, the blessing finds fulfilment".

It is as though God had given her an invisible filter; to filter out everything else except the divine plan of God unfolding through it. As I reflect on the Aaronic Blessing in the light of the events that took place around the birth of Christ, I see it clearly-- The Lord blessed her

and kept her not in a cattle shed, but in His heart, He made His face shine on her and was gracious to her. Therefore, it did not matter to her that people did not have room in their homes or in their hearts. God turned His face towards her and gave her peace in the midst of what humanly seemed to have gone wrong. The crisis had become an opportunity to witness God entering the cold and dark human hearts that have no room for Him; yet He chose to come anyway.

Pope Francis in his message continued, “Jesus Christ is the blessing for every man and woman and for all of humanity. The Church, in giving us the Lord Jesus, offers us the fullness of the Lord’s blessing. This is precisely the mission of the people of God: to spread to all peoples God’s blessing made flesh in Jesus Christ. And Mary, the first and most perfect disciple of the Lord Jesus, the first and most perfect believer and the model of the pilgrim Church, is the one who opens the way to the Church’s motherhood and constantly sustains her maternal mission to all people. Mary’s tactful maternal witness has accompanied the Church from the beginning. She, the Mother of God, is also the Mother of the Church, and through the Church, the mother of all people”.

St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians says, “God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship”. In Mary’s agreement to God’s will, God found the opportunity he was waiting for from the first moment sin entered the world, to redeem the fallen people. God is reminding us that today is a new day, a new year and a new beginning. He wants to share with us the cry of His heart, so that we will respond “Abba, Father”. He is reminding us through His words in the letter to the Galatians; “you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir”. He is prepared to enter our cold, dark hearts where sin rules to break the bondage of sin and give us our rightful inheritance as His sons and daughters.

Today, God is calling us in this new year, to return to Him. His mission for our lives is two-fold. First, He wants to redeem us from our sin-- big or small. All He asks in return is that we turn to Him. That we allow Him inside our bodies and hearts. Secondly, once we receive His redemption, we are called to change another person’s new year-- to lead them to the redemption of the Lord and to bring God into their lives. This is the mission God calls us to this New Year. When we agree to the plan of God, just as Mary did, we are fulfilling the mission of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, as we begin 2017 keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me in the shadow of Your wings throughout this year and all the days of my life. Amen.

You have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit**1 John2:20**

1 John 2:22-28

Ps.98:1-4

Jn.1:19-28

In the first reading St. John writes with great eloquence to counteract the various heresies that were rampant at that time. Some questioned the divinity of Christ, and others His humanity. But to deny one or the other was for John to belong to the Anti-Christ. He reminds them of the knowledge of the truth which they already know.

They only need to bring into action the truth they already possessed instead of being drawn into the trap of fake preachers. It was the truth preached and handed down by tradition. It was a tradition that grew from where the Old Testament ended and the New Testament began. In the Old Testament, only kings and priests were thought to be anointed. But St. John revealed the truth that the anointing rests on every authentic Christian according to the promise of the Lord Jesus (John 16:7). When the Spirit of truth comes He will guide you into the whole truth. St. John uses the word “remains” several times to stress the part that it is by remaining in Him and His word. He preached that we can obtain eternal life. Scripture combined with the witnessing of the Holy Spirit in our hearts helps us to be committed to Him- making it a great joy to do His will.

In the Gospel proclamation St. John begins with the first week of St. John the Baptist’s public ministry. The Pharisees had sent priests and Levites to question St. John – how suspicious orthodoxy was of anything unusual. Some Jews expected the Messiah to bring peace to the whole world. Some believed that He would usher in the reign of righteousness. Some thought that He would be a great champion leading Jewish armies as conquerors of the whole world and some a prince of the line of David. Some expected Elijah would come ahead to anoint the Messiah according to the prophecy in Malachi (4:5). So they questioned St. John about his identity—whether he was the one to come. But he responded to every claim saying simply that he was only the voice crying in the wilderness (Isaiah 40:3). Every preacher should be a voice and a pointer to the king.

The modern church faced a crisis when orthodoxy was challenged by an adventurous move of the Holy Spirit. St. Peter said that no scripture should be handed down to private interpretation, but many have broken it into pieces and formed their own churches according to their interpretation of scripture.

Prayer :Abba Father, I pray that I may be like St. John, a voice in the wilderness, preparing the path for others to come to You. Amen.

“...Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”

John 1:29

1 John 2:29 - 3:6

Ps.98:1, 3-6

Jn.1:29-34

Today's first reading reveals to us the greatest privilege we could ever have; that is to be called the children of God. I remind myself that I am a child of the Lord Most High and He is my Father. It not only brings me an immense assurance and a sense of security but I also realise how much I am loved, cherished and valued by my Father. In my life, the privilege to call Him 'Abba' is the greatest blessing I have ever received; especially after losing my biological father. As I was struggling with the emptiness and void in my heart, I encountered the love of my Heavenly Father. A kind of love that I had never experienced. He called me His own. Ever since, I have an intimate relationship with my Heavenly Father and I experience His love in the most amazing ways.

We belong to God and because of this we should reflect our Heavenly Father. Our words, actions and behavior should reflect His characteristics. The world around us should see our Father's face in us. I know it is not as easy because we are mere human beings with weaknesses and sinfulness and we live in a world filled with sin. But that is the reason why our Father sent His only Son into this world.

St. John's Gospel proclamation says, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". The Lord was sent to this world to take away our sins. I recently read the following -; "we all know that the Cross gave us a lot. It gave us the salvation, eternity, abundant life and the list goes on. But rarely do we think what the Cross gave to God, the Father. It brought us back to Him. God created us in His image; to fellowship with and to call us His own. But that level of intimacy vanished when sin entered and separated God from His beloved creation. He still loved us because He is unchanging in His love—but His fellowship with us was compromised. Until the Lord Jesus died on the cross and gave the Father back His dream." Because of the Lord Jesus all people were saved. Therefore, whoever believes in Him shall not perish but will have eternal life. Today we celebrate the Most Holy Name of Jesus; the name above all. In the Letter to the Philippians St. Paul writes, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phi 2:9). Before His name, every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Christ is the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for calling us as Your beloved children and out of that love sending Your only Son to die for us so that we could have life. Amen.

**“Those who do what is right is righteous
just as Jesus Christ is righteous”**

1 John 3:7

1 John 3:7-10

Psalm 98:1,7-9

John1:35-42

In today’s first reading, St. John reminds us of our origin, the likeness in which we are created, which is in the likeness of our God. We fall and fail to live as we are required to because of our mortal and meek humanness. But as Christians and as true believers of the Lord Jesus we are given the great gift of free will to choose God and to reject and refuse to lead lives dominated by sin. Yet, there are so many who strive to live with godless habits, addictions, practices and ways of living instead of trying to break free and seek the mercy and forgiveness of our God through frequent confession.

We ourselves are good at identifying people who live such lives and are quick to point them out to others as a warning. We judge others most of the time. Yet our own godless ways of living, habits and practices are buried deep within us and come out at times. We struggle to live in the likeness of our creator. At times we are tired of the way we live and conduct ourselves. St. John affectionately calls us “Little Children” and tells us to remember our likeness every time we fail and fall short of our mark. We are not saints, we are not sinless and if we claim innocence then we only deceive ourselves. Only an intimate relationship with our God can fulfill us and make us righteous.

St. John the Baptist in today’s Gospel proclamation, leads us straight to the Lord Jesus and tells us “Look, the Lamb of God” and encourages us to follow Him even more closely. For those who hear these words and take time to “Look”, our Lord Jesus invites us to “Come” and assures us that we will see where He dwells and that we will be with Him.

When we spend our time with the Lord in praise and worship and in prayer and meditation as the Psalm says we come under His arm which brought salvation to mankind. In that salvation, in that perfect place, we are made righteous and we become more like our God who created us and like our Lord who saved us. As we continue to live this way He who created us, in His likeness, He will call us by a new name. It will be a name that resembles a characteristic of Himself as He did for Peter who was called by the Lord Jesus as “Cephas” which means rock.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to identify Your Son as the Lamb of God who takes away my sins so that I may be more like You. Amen.

*"For this is the message you heard from the beginning:
We should love one another."*

1 John 3:11

1 John 3:11-21

Ps.100:1-5

John 1:43-51

The primary message of the Holy Trinity is love. The Lord came into this world because of the love He had for people. Everything He did on earth stemmed from the love He had for His Father and for every human being. Every rejection He received, every hurt He went through, He endured for the sake of love. As Christians, His followers, our primary motivation in life should also be love.

If we examine just one day of our lives, can we say love played a major part in our activities?

1 John 3:12 warns us not to be like Cain who murdered his brother. Most of us may not be guilty of committing murder physically, but I believe many of us would be guilty of some form of gossip or slander. This "murders" a person's character, even if the events that took place may be true. Murdering someone means there is an absence of love. If love is not present, that means God is not part of that situation or action. The first part of verse 15 reminds us that if anyone hates a brother or sister he or she is a murderer. Do we hate or dislike anyone? If the answer is yes, this also means an absence of love. Verse 14 states that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Yet if love is missing, that means we are still living a life of death. The second part of verse 15 warns us that no murderer has eternal life.. Not being able to share eternity with the Lord is a very scary thought.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. John Neumann, Bishop. He was born in Bohemia and knew the Lord had called him to priesthood. Since Europe had an abundance of priests at that time and it was difficult to be ordained in Bohemia, he sailed to America and was ordained in 1836. He travelled from village to village, climbing mountains to visit the sick and even celebrated Mass at kitchen tables. He learned to speak Spanish, French, Italian, and Dutch so that he could hear confessions in all these languages. These are some examples of how he practiced the Lord's love in action and in truth.

Our human nature is selfish, but the Divine nature is love. Let us give the truth of our hearts to the Lord and allow the Holy Spirit to make that change in us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I know I should love. My spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak. Help me to experience Your love, so that it may flow through me to others. Amen

"God has testified on behalf of his Son."

1 John 5:9

1 John 5:5-13

Ps.147:12-15, 19-20

Mark 1:7-11 or

Luke 3:23-38

As I reflect on today's readings, two painful situations come to mind. One, of a marital relationship that has hit rock bottom, having lasted for decades. Another is of a family relationship that has been painful with no apparent solution, for a long period of time. Efforts to put things right and intense prayers seem to have had no effect. Friends and relatives suggest harsh responses.

'Where is the Lord?' one may ask, when difficult or broken people are made to come together.

The first reading gives insight. When dark experiences terrify and exhaust us, there is the reality and certainty of truth hidden that gives hope. We are called to know that God has sent His Son into our human predicament. Something is happening in His participation in our miserable situations. Many have found victory over the pathetic human condition. Knowing that the Lord is in control releases supernatural life into our system-- though our mind traverses dark valleys. In the vast play of light fraught with dangers and tribulation, the Lord opens heaven to invade earthly experiences. As we enter a new year, let us be mindful of the Lord's entry into our lives. His reign is upon us though we may not have observed it at most times. As the old year is separated from us, may our separation from God come to an end too. Likewise, our entry into the new year needs to herald his participation in our lives.

St. John the Baptist proclaims the Lord's coming in the Gospel proclamation. The natural world sees the Lord coming out of the waters of baptism and heaven is torn open. The Spirit descending on the Lord is God giving testimony to the uniqueness of His Son. He was able to open heaven's doors and bring the Holy Spirit to invade human hearts. He shed His blood giving us ample proof of His love for us. The Son of God was sent to give life to those who believe in God's testimony. The Lord has come to save humanity plunged into sin since Adam's disobedience.

The Psalmist gives hope to those who are heartbroken and wounded. Now that heaven's gates are open through Christ we can look forward to inner peace and fulfillment

Prayer: Abba Father, I praise You in anticipation and decide to be joyful as you are even when I am challenged. Amen.

"Do whatever he tells you"

John 2:5

1 John 5:14-21

Psalm 149:1-6,9

John 2:1-11

Today's Gospel proclamation takes us back to Cana to a wedding ceremony we know about. It was customary to serve and drink wine throughout such celebrations. However, running out of wine on this occasion is noted to be quite alarming as the hosts would have been at the risk of being terribly ashamed, humiliated and embarrassed. It was the responsibility of the host to ensure that sufficient amounts of food and wine were available. The Gospel reading tells us that the wine they brought was over. There are two ways this could have happened.

The first being an error, a shortcoming, a careless mistake or a miscalculation. The second can be that the guests who arrived drank selfishly without thinking about the other guests. The result of either of these ways was the same-- the host and his family would have been led to shame and humiliation. If we ponder a while we may also see that we too do many things that bring shame and humiliation to our families. How many are made helpless because we do not do our part or because of our irresponsible deeds or simply by neglecting our responsibilities.

When everything was going wrong for the wedding host in Cana one thing was going right and that was the invitation they gave to the Lord Jesus and the Blessed Mother. They were their only hope when their social status was falling apart.

Even in our life, in every helpless situation-- in pain, shame, guilt, anger and frustrating moments-- it is our relationship with the Lord Jesus and the Blessed Mother that will be our lifeline. Our heavenly Mother will intercede on behalf of us to her Son, even before we realise our need just as she did in Cana. She always leads us to her dearly beloved Son and instructs us just as she did in Cana "Do whatever He tells You." When we do this and fill our jars, He will once again turn water into the finest wine. Instead of grumbling, complaining, gossiping and muttering, let us turn to Him and listen to what He tells us to do. Then our curses, sadness, empty and hopeless situations will be turned to a blessing.

Prayer: Abba Father, make me a prophet today; to pave the way for others to prepare their hearts to receive Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You have heard about God's grace that was given to me for you-- the
mystery made known to me by revelation Eph.3:2-3

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ps.72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13

Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Scripture scholars suggest that the section that is taken for today's first reading was written soon after the Babylonian exile had ended. A miracle like the exodus from Egypt had taken place in an unexpected way, at an unexpected time. At a time when the people of God were at their lowest, and there seemed to be no way that they could stand up to their Babylonian masters, King Cyrus, the King of Persia, attacked Babylon and set the Jews free. While many Jews returned home, some opted to stay back in Babylon. The exiles who returned had to undergo much hardship. Jerusalem was a city devastated by war and neglect. Meeting day to day needs was a challenge. What is more, the locals opposed the return of the Jews. The locals said and did many things to discourage and demoralise the exiles. It is to this disheartened group that Isaiah speaks today.

Isaiah invites them to "lift your eyes and look around you." If it was me, all I would have seen would be obstacles, discomfort, pain, discouragement and hopelessness. Isaiah says "Your light has come." This light will reveal things that are otherwise hidden in darkness. He continues "See darkness covers the earth. Thick darkness is over the peoples." To the people in darkness their future is restricted to what they can achieve by their own ability and the resources they have access to. The light that has come reveals that here is something more, the glory of God is appearing over them. That which looked like a curse to those in darkness, now appears to be a blessing, because their hopeless situation seems to be able to draw God's attention and pull down the glory of God into their situation. Therefore, Isaiah invites them to shed their demoralised state of mind and arise and shine.

If you, like the returning exiles, are one who has, at one time or the other, experienced the saving hand of God, and you have decided to walk in His ways, but for some reason or the other, the going has got tough for you, Isaiah is reminding you, do not be downhearted, relax, He is involved in your situation.

Isaiah goes on to provide details of how God is going to fulfil His promise. Princes and kings from faraway places are coming to Zion. Yet, instead of invading and inflicting pain upon the returning exiles, they would join them to rebuild Zion. More and more exiles are going to return and there is going to be much joy. The books of Nehemiah

and Ezra give us an account of how God fulfilled these promises.

We too are invited to look to the future, not through the limited knowledge of our intellect and resources, but through the light of revelation found in the promises of God. We are invited to look to Him and be radiant.

As much as God's promises have a meaning in their historical context, they also have a meaning in an eternal context. In the eternal context, the promises of today's first reading are fulfilled in the Gospel reading.

If God wanted to keep His incarnation a secret, He could not have found a better way of doing it. There is nothing to suggest that an event of such significance was happening right under the noses of the people. The hand of God remains hidden to the learned and the powerful. Yet His light reveals His secrets to those who by human standards are inconsequential. The Magi, in today's Gospel proclamation, are Gentiles. To the Jews, Gentiles had no part in their Messiah. But the ways of God are Holy and beyond those of men.

God strategically placed stars in the sky to reveal the birth of the Messiah. The Magi, who were studying the stars, read the message that God left for them in the skies and discovered that the King of Kings was born. They let the stars (the light of revelation) lead them, but fell back on human logic when they thought they had it in the bag. Much to their surprise they do not find the king they sought in Herod's palace. It is only when the Magi return to follow the light of revelation do they find the Lord Jesus.

King Herod was a smart pragmatic man. He gets his experts to study scripture, but merely studying scripture is of little use. They needed, but did not have the light of revelation the Magi had. Herod tries to sweet talk and trick the Magi. However, they are led by the light of revelation. God thwarts Herod's plans.

If Herod could logically deduce the details of the Messiah's birth, he would have killed the Messiah. God hides things from the naked eye, not to keep us in the dark, but rather, to protect us and reveal them when our hearts are ready.

St. Paul in today's second reading reveals that the Messiah is not just for the Jews. This was unthinkable for the Jews as they believed that the Messiah was coming to save them from the Gentiles. This revelation challenged their understanding and turned it upside down.

Prayer: Abba Father, just as you spoke to the early church and changed their understanding of how You worked, bless me with a living relationship with You, so that I may hear Your voice and allow Your light to change the way I think. Amen.

“This is My Son, Whom I love”**Matthew 3:17**

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10

Matthew 3:13-17

Isaiah's prophecy, "The divine servant who delighted in God's sight, empowered with God's spirit to bring forth justice throughout the earth" was fulfilled at the moment of the baptism of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus began life by emptying Himself of His heavenly glory to be born in human form. He lived a sinless life for thirty years as the son of St. Joseph and the Blessed

Virgin Mary and came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by St. John the Baptist.

This was the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. This was the One coming who was greater than St. John, whose shoe laces he felt unworthy to untie. Yet the Lord humbled Himself before St. John the Baptist. The one who was sinless went down into the water that was the portion of the sinner. The moment He humbled Himself five things happened in His life. 1. Heaven opened. 2. The Holy Spirit anointed Him. 3. He heard the voice of the Father. 4. He experienced Divine Sonship 5. The Holy Spirit led Him to live the will of the Father to the end. In John 4:34 the Lord Jesus said "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work."

Often, we feel that God deals harshly with our weaknesses and failures. Yet the opposite is the truth. He deals with us gently and tenderly; nursing us along until the bruised reed is strong and whole and the spluttering wick is in full flame. In Catechism, we are being taught, in baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as children of God. Has this become your experience?

As we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord today, He invites us into the same experience with Him in the Jordan. Let us repent, confess our sin, surrender our lives to the Lord and be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Then we can hear God the Father speaking our names and saying "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter I love you. I am well pleased with you. You are precious to me, you are mine."

Let us be conscious of the Holy Spirit, speak to the Spirit, allow Him to reveal the Father's mind to us and live by His power. Then where ever we go we will be able to bring heaven down to earth.

Prayer: Abba Father. create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Amen.

“What is this? A new teaching with authority”

Mark 1:27

Hebrews 2: 5 – 12

Psalms 8:2, 5 – 9

Mark 1: 21 – 28

Human beings were created in the image and likeness of God. Authority over other created beings and the world was given to human beings. The letter to the Hebrews says that authority over the world was not given to angels but to these creatures created a little less than God.

God gave honor to humankind. Moreover, the dignity of a human person was enhanced to an immeasurable state with the coming of the Messiah. Over centuries, God spoke to His people of this Messiah. Finally the Messiah came to the world in human form. God became man through supernatural conception and was born in the natural form.

We are awestruck with the unfathomable actions of God. The Lord who ‘was’ from the beginning became man and bridged the gap between the Creator and us restoring our dignity. He earned back the dignity which was lost due to our pride, greed and disobedience. The Lord Jesus restored us to our position through His Passion, Death and Resurrection.

The Lord Jesus is our High Priest who stands on our behalf in the throne room of God. Through His obedience to the will of God, He restored humanity back to its original state. To do so, He left His divine state (as second member of the Holy Trinity) behind and became lower than a slave and submitted Himself to a death on the cross. He never lost His divinity. He lived in this world exercising His power and authority as God. His divine power and authority is His love. He continued to exercise it while he was in human form.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, light and darkness come face to face in the synagogue. Amazingly, most learned and wise men of the time could not recognize the Lord as the Messiah but the evil one could. The Lord restored man’s dignity. The same thing happened at Golgotha. Ideally, we should have been crucified for our sins. The Lord took that position and He restored us to our original position. The question is; are we human persons living in that awareness? We are called to live with dignity under the Lordship of Christ. Instead we are too busy and caught up in our own small worlds and have lost our actual purpose of life.

Prayer: *Abba Father, please awaken my inner being to live in dignity under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

“People brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had evil spirits”

Mark 1:32

Hebrew 2:14-18

Psalms 105:1-4, 6-9

Mk. 1:29-39

In today's Gospel proclamation, St. Mark writes to remind us about the first healing the Lord did soon after calling His first disciples. They are to witness great healings and testify to what they see later on. But one of the first miracles happens right in their home. It is an amazing eye opener for us. How many miracles have happened within our homes, right before us? How many

more are needed to change our lives from self-centered, self-pitying and dormant living to a life of a vibrant follower, a firm believer and a true disciple? So many of us are also called into discipleship and to journey this life closer to God and have the unique opportunity to testify. We see from today's Gospel reading that Simon's mother-in-law is sick with fever. But as soon as the Lord is told about it, he immediately reaches for her, takes her by the hand. She is healed and she serves them.

In our lives we lie sick. In these days the slightest change in the weather is enough for us to get sick. But more than a physical sickness, today we are sick spiritually, with ego, lust, greed, hatred, anger and self-pity. Sadly, we do not realize that unless we invite the Lord Jesus to come into our homes, hearts and lives we will not be healed. We must allow Him to reach out to us and lift us up. When we testify and bear witness to the great miracles in our homes, our communities and work places we give glory to God.

The Gospel cautions us that with all these healings and miracles in our homes, lives and the community, not to forget to stay connected to the Lord and the Father through constant prayer, praise and worship and meditation.

Through the first reading, the letter to the Hebrews reminds all of us who struggle with our humanness and are lying around, that our Lord Jesus came down from heaven for us. He came in the form of a human being to become a merciful and faithful high priest, that we may have mercy and compassion to heal and secure our future and the lives of others around us. The healing restoration and salvation is assured to those who love God, as the Psalmist says in Psalm 105, let us confidently thank and praise Him for His mercy and love.

Prayer: *Abba Father help me to remember that you are waiting to raise me to my feet every day. Let me hold on to your hand and call out to you when crisis threatens me. Amen*

“If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts”

Hebrews 3:7

Hebrews 3:7-14

Psalms 95:6-11

Mark 1:40-45

It says in the book of Elijah that when the prophet was waiting to hear the Lord, he could not meet the Lord in the loud earthquake that tore through the hills and the rocks. Nor was the Lord to be found in the great and strong wind or the mighty fire. But the Lord was heard in the quiet whisper. In today's readings we are urged to listen to the voice of God and not to harden our hearts against

His voice. We, like Elijah, expect to hear God in the great and mighty things. We wait for a huge miracle, a booming voice or a vision from heaven and when we don't hear it we give up and move on. Sometimes we are so busy talking to God that we forget to pause for God to speak to us. Often in my prayer life, especially my morning prayers, I find that I am in such a rush to get it done and get on with my day that I say my prayers to God, I mention my requests and needs and then I am done with it, often not pausing to hear back from God. It is not a dialogue but rather a monologue I have with God.

In today's readings we are challenged to wait, to pause and to hear the voice of God. To keep our hearts open to Him rather than hardening it against Him. To bow down low in worship before Him and kneel before our maker, to realise that He is our God and that we are His people and His responsibility. So we do not have to rush away from His presence, we do not have to harden our hearts in fear that He will ask of us something we cannot give or refuse our prayers.

In the Gospel proclamation we see that when the Lord Jesus was asked to heal the man with leprosy, He was indignant. “If you are willing” the man begs the Lord Jesus. This man was rejected from society, no one was willing to come near him or help him. The Lord Jesus gives him an emotional response – “I am willing – be clean”. The man is healed immediately. How often do we ask God for a healing, for an answer to an impossible situation or for a solution to our brokenness that keeps tormenting us but the moment we ask Him, we also turn away, looking for our own answers because we are impatient. Sometimes our hearts are hardened and perhaps because we are scared that God will let us down or not answer. Just as He spoke to that man, He is reaching down to us “of course I am willing – be healed”. We just need to quieten our hearts and sit at His feet.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant me a heart of love that waits to hear your voice. Amen

But that you may know that the Son of Man
has authority on the earth to forgive sins.

Mark 2:10

Heb.4:1-5,11

Ps.78:3-4,6-8

Mk.2:1-12

The people probably had never seen anything like this before. They had suffered hardships, and often, when they prayed, God appeared to be reluctant to intervene. This is not so with our Lord Jesus. There was supernatural power at work in His ministry. When He was around God appeared to be eager to intervene in the troubles of His people. It is no surprise that many came in

search of Him when He returned home to Capernaum.

We see three types of people who came to see and hear our Lord Jesus. Firstly, those who were in crisis and attracted to the God that our Lord Jesus reveals. Then there were people like the friends of the paralytic, who came to Him for the sake of another. And finally there were the ones who studied and knew religion. They took exception to our Lord Jesus, because He did not fit the picture of a man of God as per their interpretation of who God was. As I look within myself I find that I started my journey as one in crisis, graduated to being like the friend of the paralytic, and then, rather than become like our Lord Jesus, I set limits to what God could do and became judgmental. Thus, I became like the paralytic who is unable to help himself, let alone others.

The second reading tells us that hearing the Word has no value, unless it is combined with faith. The friends of the paralytic demonstrated just this. They believed that if the Lord Jesus could see their friend, he would be healed. Their act of faith was persevering to bring their friend to the Lord despite the odds that were stacked up against them.

Today, if I am like the paralytic, the words of our Lord speak to me. The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins. Just like for the paralytic, it is a power that goes into my past and mends things as though they never happened. So, let us give the truth of our hearts to our Lord and as an act of faith, thank Him for He is already at work in my past. The odds that are stacked up against us are our past failures, which whisper "It is of no use. Nothing new is going to happen to you." But as we persevere in thanking Him (our act of faith), that which the second reading refers to as "rest", will fill our hearts, and the paralytic will walk.

Prayer: Abba Father, awaken my spirit so that I may be an agent of your intervention in my environment, like your son Jesus was. Amen

"Son, your sins are forgiven"

Mark 2:5

Hebrews 4:12-16

Psalm 19:8-10,15

Mark: 2:1-12

I have come to realize that my greatest temptation is that God may not look after me. My greatest sin is acting on that doubt. My actions are based on a self-preservation program that runs through my brain; if I want to be really happy, I have to meet my own needs and I have to protect myself. We know sin is wrong and destructive, yet we give into sinful ways because we doubt that God will give us what we really need. When an opportunity arises or when we feel threatened, a switch inside us is turned on and releases sinful behavior that catches us off-guard.

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews says that the Lord "has been tempted in every way, just as we are". In the desert, the three temptations were about the Lord's identity as the Son of God and about self-preservation-- look after yourself, because God may not. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the temptation was to protect Himself from the crucifixion. Finally on the cross, fearing His worst fears had come true, He cried out; "Why have you forsaken me?" The author of the letter to the Hebrews concludes; "yet he did not sin". The Lord addressed His every fear and every doubt with the Word of God. Therefore, right when most of us would have stopped believing in God, the Lord entrusted His spirit into the hands of His Father.

The paralytic in today's Gospel proclamation was brought before the Lord to receive physical healing, but was given a second chance in life. The Lord forgave his sins and gave him a clean slate. As a result, he received physical healing. This is such good news to those of us who come to the Lord for an answer to our problems so that we can continue to live the way we did. We ignore the fact that it is the way we continue to live that gets us into trouble over and over again.

So the Lord speaks to us today; "My children, your sins are forgiven". As I allow His words to penetrate my mind, my heart and my soul, it separates the lies from the truth that I have been blinded to. The Lord continues; "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home". He is sending us back "home", the place where we came from, but now as a transformed person, healed, made strong and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: *Abba Father, today I choose to believe in the miracle of breaking the chains of sin that have left me paralyzed for so long. I thank you for your word that will continue to guide me through life. Amen.*

“I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

John 1:34

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

Psalms 40:3,4,7-10

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

John 1:29-34

Last Sunday we reflected on the Kingship of the Lord Jesus, when three wise men paid homage to the baby in the manger. Today the Church invites us to have an insight into the nature of this King who is different to the world’s kings and leaders.

In the First Reading Prophet Isaiah reveals God’s desire and plan for His Messiah. God desires to display His splendor in and through His obedient servant. He repeats the same words in Isaiah 49:6 to every child of God, desiring to submit to His will through obedience. “It is too small a thing for you to be My servant.... I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” When I am trustworthy in the small tasks that the Lord gives me, He plans great things for me and through me, beyond my wildest dreams.

The life of St. Faustina Kowalska is an ideal example of God’s greater plan for His servants, who serve Him in obedience and submission for His people. She had only two years of education and when she said ‘yes’ to the call of love of her Lord, and became a nun, she was entrusted with menial tasks like a kitchen help, gardening and answering the door-bell of the convent. She fulfilled those duties with dedication and joy as she would serve her Divine Master. Yet, God had a greater plan of the Devotion of Divine Mercy to be brought into this world through this simple nun in the convent of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Poland.

The Gospel Reading confirms this truth. St. John the Baptist received a revelation about the Messiah from none other than the One who sent him. He had the simplicity to perform his duty promptly and obediently. His mission was to reveal the Messiah to Israel (cf. John 1:31). He had the revelation that the One who was to come after him existed before him and he had also received clear instructions from the One who sent Him, as to how to recognise the Messiah. He was to baptize people with water (repentance) and prepare them to receive from the Messiah, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit (life in the Spirit). St John the Baptist did not bask in the temporary glory he received from the people who flocked to him to be baptized. He put the record straight right from the start, so as not to allow the people to mistake him for the Messiah.

How different to the way I am often tempted to behave. St. John the Baptist had his eyes fixed on the One whose arrival he was to herald and his ears open only to the One who chose and sent him. The Lord is teaching me an important lesson today. When I am called to serve Him, I do not have to be seen as the one who knows it all and does it all-- the seemingly indispensable one. There is only one person whom people should see and hear through me-- the Risen Lord. I am only called to be a little pencil in His hands, writing His love story to His beloved children around me. I learn not to take my opinions and feelings too seriously and instead depend only on the Word of God as my truth, love of God as my fulfilment and the Holy Spirit as my guidance.

This new perception of my own life and ministry gives me a new freedom and lightness in heart, as said in today's Psalm. "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (Ps 40:3). God our Father created me and sent me to this world with only one purpose. He did not expect me to perform great things for Him, but through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit He put His Spirit in me to awaken my spirit. "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire – but my ears You have opened" Psalm 40:6. Also to empower me to say 'yes' to His Will, "Here I am, I have come" Psalm 40:7. The Holy Spirit fills me with His fruit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (cf. Galatians 5:22,23), so that it becomes effortless for me to desire God's law rather than pleasing myself and the world. "I desire to do Your will, my God; Your law is within my heart." Psalm 40:8.

In today's Second Reading, St. Paul beautifully outlines the call of every Christian. I have received my calling from God and not from any human being. The Father has called me, the Son has sanctified me and called me to holiness. This call is not only for my personal holiness but also to lead those in my family, workplace, my parish and my community to be holy. Furthermore, this is not achievable by my own strength but only through the grace of God and the power of His Spirit who fills me with His peace, no matter what comes my way. So there is no room for frustration and tiredness and weariness in my life. My heavenly Father has planned a very simple and a joyful life for me. How foolish of me, if I choose not to heed His call.

Today, the Lord is calling us, to answer His call. We can respond to Him through the four steps. We come as we are to the feet of the Lord. Give Him the truth of our hearts and surrender our lives to Him. In response He will pour His Holy Spirit upon us to do His will.

Prayer: *Abba Father, Your ways are marvelous. Grant me I pray, the grace to always choose Your will over my will. Amen*

Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all peoples. **Psalm 96:3**

Isaiah 52:7-10

Ps.96:1-3,6-8,10

Acts 20:17-18,28-32,36

Mark.16:15-20

Isaiah declares, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation. While the feet refer to the Lord Jesus' they also to refer to all those who followed in His footsteps and declared His word.

One such person was St. Joseph Vaz, the Apostle of Sri Lanka who strove tirelessly to touch the lives of Sri Lanka's people who were repressed by the Dutch invaders. While the reading speaks about beautiful feet of the person who brings the Good News, both the Lord Jesus and St. Joseph Vaz had far from beautiful or clean feet because both traversed miles and miles of forests and deserts to spread the Gospel. In fact, St Joseph Vaz walked along the entire length and breadth of Sri Lanka to minister to the pockets of neglected Catholics.

He was taking the good news, proclaiming peace in a time of death, he was taking good tidings of hope and he was proclaiming salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. After being starved of Catholic clergy for more than 50 years, the people now had not an ordinary priest but one who was completely surrendered and open to the will of God, unafraid of the consequences and constantly in prayer.

In the reading from Acts 20, St. Paul is cautioning the leaders and believers saying, 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. This was the love and concern that St. Joseph Vaz exhibited when he cared for the Church in Sri Lanka. He chose to shun position, power and accolades. Mark 16 speaks of the great commission the Lord Jesus gave when He said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." Let us take this commission seriously and pray it everyday. It will help us turn our gaze from our selfishness and sinfulness to the needs of the people around us and we will be plucked out of living ordinary lives. We will be propelled into living for the Lord Jesus in the way that He wants us to live following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ and St. Joseph Vaz.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for the call we have received from your Son, our Lord Jesus. May we fulfill it just as St. Joseph Vaz answered it. Amen.

**God is not unjust, he will not forget the...
love you have shown him**

Hebrews 6:10

Heb 6:10-20

Ps 111:1-2, 2, 4, 5,
9-10

Mark 2:23-28

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Anthony the Abbot. He was known for his reverence towards God and monastic life. It is said that as a young man during holy mass Anthony heard the reading from the Gospel of Matthew 19:2 'If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor and you will have treasures in heaven, then come follow me'. On hearing this

word of God, Anthony at once walked out of the Church, sold all his property and gave everything to the poor except what was needed for him and his sister to survive.

On hearing Matthew 6:34 'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today; at this he gave away the little money he had left to survive and entrusted his sister to a convent and left the village to live a life of prayer, fasting and manual labour. His only goal in life was to imitate Jesus Christ. The life of this great man who lived 1700 years ago in the desert of Egypt needs to ring an alarm in our own lives. How seriously have we taken the word of God? Do we apply it to our daily life?

The first reading talks about how the Lord will not forget the work and love you have shown Him as you have helped His people which in other words is your neighbor. He wants us to keep on doing so till the end so that we can inherit what He promised. Every single act done to our neighbor with love whether big or small will always be remembered by God and rewarded lavishly.

One simple act of love such as a smile or thank you to a neighbor is noticed by the Lord even if the particular person does not appreciate it. The Lord rewards us for every kind act as He has promised. In the book of Genesis we see how the Lord blesses Abraham and his descendants for the small act that Abraham did by obeying God's word. So if you are old like Abraham or as young as David when God anointed him, do not worry because the Lord is waiting to bless you abundantly and use you as a vital weapon to spread His light to the world because age is just a number to the Lord. We just need to obey His word and live life accordingly.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray that as we read your word, you will guide us and instruct us on how we need to live our life, and give us the grace to see you in people we meet during our life on earth. Amen

“Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother”

Hebrews 7:1-3,15-17

Psalms 110:1-4

Mark.3:1-6

In today's Gospel proclamation we see the Lord Jesus openly and blatantly breaking some Sabbath laws which Jewish religious leaders had twisted and turned. Through these and similar events the Lord Jesus proclaims that He came to fulfil the law. In other words we could say that the Lord Jesus is the Old Testament or the Old Covenant. In Him all the laws are fulfilled. That is why he repeatedly said that He is leaving us with one commandment—“Love one another as I love you” (John 15:12).

Today's proclamation tells us that the Lord Jesus was angry when He saw how stubborn and self-centred the religious leaders were. For them observing the letter of the law was more important than the welfare and well-being of people. As we sing often at Christmas time in the inspiring carol 'O Holy Night' -- “Truly He taught us to love one another, His law is love and, His gospel is peace; Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother, And in His name all oppression shall cease,”

Indeed the Lord Jesus broke all chains that some Jewish leaders had made. There are no slaves or servants. In Christ we all are brothers and sisters. All oppression must cease. In Sri Lanka today, as it is all over the world, a majority of the people are oppressed or in enslaved poverty. The Lord Jesus came to break these chains and we need to cooperate with Him in breaking the chains that bind people in poverty.

The national government has declared 2017 as the year of poverty alleviation. Statistics show that about 40 percent of our people survive on or below the poverty line. That means they earn less than Rs. 300 a day for food, shelter and clothing, healthcare, education and other needs of the family. These oppressed and impoverished people suffer from a lack of these essential needs such as food, shelter, clothing healthcare, education and job opportunities. The deepest wounds they suffer from are humiliation and rejection from the mainstream of society and decision making. Today the Lord Jesus calls upon all Christians to come follow Him in breaking the chains that bind these oppressed people. Those who follow Him must do what He did otherwise we may be in danger of only carrying the Christian label.

Prayer: Abba Father on judgment day you will ask us “I was hungry did you feed me”. May we be able to say “Yes”. Amen.

"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart,"

Psalm 40: 8

Hebrews 7:25-8,6

Psalm 40:7-10, 17

Mark 3:7-12

In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus reveals the love and mercy of God the Father by healing many people. The people who came looking for the Lord Jesus, expected an outward healing or miracle. But the evil spirits recognised the Lord Jesus as the Son of God and fell in worship before Him. Today as we look into ourselves do we also approach God in a similar way, seeking only material wealth, seeking only physical healing, seeking only worldly solutions for the issues and problems that we face in our life or do we recognise Him as God the Lord of our lives?

The Lord Jesus is not only the son of man, He is also the Son of God. He is the Lamb of God who can take away our sin and give us eternal life. Because in obedience to the will of the Father he suffered and died on the cross and God resurrected from Him death, not only can He heal us physically, He can transform us internally, He can heal our inner wounds, fill us with His Holy Spirit and make us a new creation. St. Paul says in Romans 8: 13-14, 'For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.'

Today let us turn to our Lord Jesus, not just for a physical healing or for a temporary material benefit but to be saved completely and inherit eternal life. Let us repent for rejecting God's perfect plan for our lives and for following our own desires and ambitions according to our sinful nature that will end in eternal hell. Let us surrender our lives once again to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to fill us with His Holy Spirit. Let us hold on to the beautiful promise in today's first reading, that the Lord Jesus is able to save completely all those who come to God through Him because He lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25) Loved and forgiven by Him and completely being saved by Him as the Psalmist cries out let us also cry out to the Lord with love and gratitude in our hearts, "I desire to do your will O my God; your law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8) And let us not to hide His righteousness in our hearts, let us forever speak of His faithfulness and salvation and not conceal His love and His truth from the great assembly. (Psalm 40:10)

Prayer : Abba Father, I pray, let your kingdom come, let your will be done in my life. Amen

Jesus went up a mountain**Mark 3:13**

Heb.8:6-13

Ps.85:8,10-13

Mk.3:13-19

In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with the people of Israel and led them out of Egypt to the promised Land. However, the people broke this covenant over and over again because of their sin.

In the first reading the letter to the Hebrews, the author relates that God wanted to establish a lasting covenant with his people that would abolish sin from their lives. This new covenant was established through our Lord Jesus Christ. He became the bridge between God and His people. This new covenant was not formed through the strength and might of people, but by the shedding of the Lord Jesus' blood on the cross. God has made this covenant so strong that people would not be able to break it through sin. Instead, within this new covenant, when we accept the Lord Jesus into our hearts, He will irradiate sin from our lives and put the law of God into our minds and hearts. Then we will no longer want to sin, but instead continue a lasting relationship with the Lord.

God calls us individually to a relationship with Him. It is in this continued relationship that we are able to continually be faithful to Him and abstain from sin. The Psalmist tells us that if we listen, God will speak to us. When we hear the voice of the Lord on a daily basis, we will no longer want to go back to our sinful ways of living. We know, that if sin re-enters our lives we will not hear the voice of God. When God speaks to us, He will bring together unfailing love and truth; and righteousness and peace into our lives and sin will have no place inside us. God will enter our hearts and make us His dwelling place.

In today's Gospel Proclamation the Lord is leading us with example. He is teaching us to pray to God about every decision in our lives. Before choosing His apostles, He climbed the mountain to God and sat in prayer. It is there that He heard the voice of God telling Him whom he should choose as His apostles. The Lord Jesus did nothing without consulting the Father and this was no different. He climbed the mountain and prayed to God. He waited until God told Him whom he should appoint as His apostles. In the same way, we are called to sit before the Lord and seek His mind in every decision.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I pray for the grace to be able to sit at Your feet everyday to hear Your voice concerning each part of my life. Lord, I pray that it is only when I hear Your voice that I will act. Amen.*

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ...
cleanse our consciences”

Hebrews 9:14

Hebrews 9:2-3, 11-14

Psalms 47:2-3, 6-9

Mark 3:20-21

St. Agnes of Rome was born in 291 AD and raised in a Christian family. Agnes was very beautiful and belonged to a wealthy family. Her hand in marriage was highly sought after. However, Agnes made a promise to God never to stain her purity. Her love for the Lord was great and she hated sin even more than death!

Whenever a man wished to marry Agnes, she would always say, “Jesus Christ is my only Spouse.” St. Agnes is widely known as the patron saint of young girls. She is also the patron saint of chastity, rape survivors and the Children of Mary. She is often represented with a lamb, the symbol of her virgin innocence, and a palm branch, like other martyrs. She is shown as a young girl in robes holding a palm branch with the lamb either at her feet or in her arms. She died a virgin-martyr at a young age, on 21 January 304.

In the Letter to the Hebrews the writer shows the shadow and the reality of how God chose to live with his people. At first in the Old Testament we see that the people had no right of access to him through animal sacrifices. Even though he too was in a tent among them. When Christ became the High Priest, the perfect High Priest, He offered himself as the perfect supreme sacrifice. It was a single offering for sin, valid for all time, removing all barriers and the stain of sin. Through His sacrifice forgiveness and mercy began to flow unceasingly, giving us complete access to His Love and power. The psalmist breaks into songs of praise and glory to an awesome God who reigned over the nations.

While the Gospel proclamation speaks of God among his people, it reveals the unconditional love of the Father, portrayed through His Son. His selfless commitment to liberate people did not permit Him and His disciples to have time even to eat. It is this love that brought Saint Agnes to give up everything in her life to live for the Lord Jesus alone. When we read the lives of saints we are struck by the way they took up this great challenge. Their love of God was so great that they staked their lives to win the battle against evil that surrounded them. Let us allow the power of God to enter our lives through his Holy Spirit that we may overcome sin.

Prayer: Abba Father, let us be purified by your Son's blood and reach that perfection as you are perfect! Amen

The fight between light and darkness

Isaiah 8:23-9:3

Ps. 97:1,4,13-14

1 Cor.1:10-13,17

Matt.4:12-23

There is a constant fight between light and darkness. Today's reading talk about what God intends to do in our lives and what our Lord Jesus intended to do when He called His first disciples. It was an invitation to step out of darkness and their own worlds into the light of Christ.

While this call echoes out to us through the centuries, even good people who experience the Lord's love, tend to lose their way and focus on unnecessary and frivolous issues. As in the days of St. Paul, they were busy comparing speakers and people instead of realising that it was the same Gospel of Christ that was being preached. Even today we are faced with the same distraction as people focus on a preacher or singer and begin comparing them with their contemporaries.

The greater call is to shift from darkness to light. Isaiah 9:2 says, the people walking in darkness, have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. The real problem is we do know when we are walking in deep darkness. The only symptoms are a lack of sleep, nightmares, a few habits and occasional fears. We come across many people who are daily mass goers and do miss a service but there is some sort of disconnection in their relationship with the Lord. What can we attribute this disconnect to? Most often people have a clear line between their relationship and time spent with God and worldly time. But the Lord sees it all as one and zeroes it down to our heart. He looks at our deepest intentions and the real state of our heart.

How can we shift from darkness to light? Though we may be spending time in the church at mass or before the Blessed Sacrament we have to ask ourselves if the time spent is quality time. Firstly, are we in a state of grace. Being in a state of grace opens us up to be able to listen to the leading of the Lord. When we are not in a state of grace we may be having conversations with people in our mind. An old argument, an unresolved hurt, a point of contention may be unfolding in our mind and we assume that we have spent time in prayer. Being in a state of grace allows us to forgive and forget that pain and we are able to set our minds on the Lord Jesus. Till then our minds are set on the issues that we have been facing. Instead of experiencing the love of the Lord, the issues and people and our

own concerns becomes the topic of our meditation and we spend the most of the time in our own darkness. On the other hand, it could be our impurity which takes over and runs our thinking. Therefore it is important to shift our concentration from our world of woes to the word of the Lord.

We can open up the Psalms to pray the prayers that will take us from the city to the mountains. The city is the hustle and bustle of our life to the mountain of the Lord which is a place where we can encounter Him. The psalmist says Sing to the Lord a new song, make His praise known. Let us choose to repeat the psalm that God calls our attention to and in doing so that the negative thoughts will be erased from our mind and the thoughts and will of God will take over.

In the Community of the Risen Lord we have also learnt many way to approach a time of prayer like using the Ten Rememberances, where we are called to remember key truths of our beliefs. For example we remember that our Lord Jesus is seated on His throne in Heaven. How comforting it is to know that the Lord Jesus is still not crucified and powerless on the cross but is seated with the Father in total control of our lives. When we begin to believe through faith that the Lord is in control we feel secure and sure that with the Lord all things are possible and no matter what the earthly circumstances are, the Lord Jesus will respond at a time and in a way He knows best. This truth sets us free from fear and finds us brimming with confidence in the Lord.

Every remembrance takes us closer to the Lord and sets us on the road from darkness to light. Psalm 97 taken from today's set of readings tells us that the Lord reigns and so let the earth be glad. It is an eyeopener specially when we discuss politics, business or world affairs and tend to turn despondent. The Lord encourages us to be glad and not sad.

In the Gospel proclamation, the call extended by the Lord Jesus to the first apostles is a call to us to step out of our world and enter His world. He calls them out of an ordinary life and leads them into an extraordinary life that begins to bless the lives of people around them. Signs and wonders began to take place as the apostles partnered with the Lord Jesus to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The clearest sign that we have stepped out of our world is when our life begins to make a difference in the lives of others. Let us invite the Holy Spirit into our hearts to reveal to us are present state and take us from darkness into the light of Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, may the light of Christ Jesus shine in my life today. Amen.

Sing a new song unto the Lord he has done marvelous deeds.

Psalm 98:1

Heb. 9:15, 24-28

Psalm 98:1-6

Mark 3:22-30

What is the marvelous deed that the Lord has done? During his earthly life, the Lord Jesus as the Bible says did many signs and wonders. He made the blind see, the deaf started to hear again, the mute spoke and the dead were brought back to life. Lord Jesus performed much incredible miracles but above all there was something wonderful that Lord Jesus did, and that beautiful

thing is that He loved me and continues to love me.

If I am faced with a question, 'Why would I choose Jesus?', apart from the miracles, do I have any other reason? In today's context, we hear about miracles and healings everywhere. There are so many theories that are dominant and sometimes they also challenge the spiritual intellect. However it is amazing that not many are able to duplicate one thing that the Lord Jesus did and that is to love someone unconditionally.

He sacrificed His life for me though I am a sinner. The extends his love towards me knowing that I betray Him. He did the same with the disciples washing their feet and even kissing them knowing that they were to betray Him. What changed the world? What changed the hearts of people? Did miracles not happen before the time of Jesus, yet did conversions of hearts take place?

In a short time Christianity has so many followers. The secret is the message of salvation. The first reading gives us a taste of this message of salvation. Our Lord Jesus not only loved us till the end but also through Him there was forgiveness. He sacrificed His life so that we could be liberated, from our sins and receive forgiveness though we did not deserve it. This indeed is the marvelous thing that God has done. Today's first reading says that He appears before God on our behalf? What could be more wonderful than have someone appear on behalf of us before God?

Today is a good time to ponder over the meaning of the message of salvation? Am I self-driven or Christ driven? Do I believe in the Saviour or am I struggling on my own self to save myself.

Prayer: Abba Father ! I am trying to find salvation on my own, I want to surrender my life once again into your hands, I give you all my life, my sin, and open my heart to you. Come into my life, save me and set me free. Amen,

“I have come to do your will, my God.”

Hebrews 10:7

Hebrews 10:1-10

Psalms 40:2, 4, 7-8,
10-11

Mark 3:31-35

In this chapter the apostle writes to the Hebrews who honour the Levitical laws, to help them understand and live the true Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The law was just an image of the good things to come. In the psalm David sings praises to God for his deliverance and speaks of the redemption by Christ and the glory that follows. In the Gospel our Lord Jesus claims His

disciples to be His nearest and dearest relations.

Like the Hebrews we could also be just fulfilling the law of the church which is not a bad thing but we may just be in the shadow, when the living Christ is among us calling us to partake in His redemption. We cannot make offerings or do enough in all our abilities to be redeemed from our sinfulness or to obtain a connection with God. This was done once for all by our Lord Jesus Christ by His life sacrifice. It is only by this sacrifice that our sins are taken away. Christ said “Yes” readily and willingly to the will of God and voluntarily substituted Himself in the place of the sinner ‘Me’.

It's your blood that cleanses me; it's your blood that gives me life It's your blood that took my place; in redeeming sacrifice; My Jesus, God's precious Sacrifice. He was the fit mediator to go between God and man; to reconcile us with God. He established His own priesthood and the everlasting gospel, the covenant of grace. What is the fountain of what Christ has done for us? It is the sovereign grace of God. How do we partake in what Christ has done for us? It is by repenting and building a relationship with God in prayer and by doing God's will, so that we are united to Christ, and so partake in His redemption.

St. Francis de Sales planned on becoming a Lawyer but instead served God. He was made bishop of Geneva, Switzerland where conflicts among Christians were high, his writings and sermons that proclaimed the gentle heart of the love of the Heart of Jesus drew people together. He also said that the test of prayer was a person's actions: He is the patron saint of Journalists. Today as we pray for the church let us pray for Christian unity that we may be baptized as one body in the heart of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for redeeming me to be your own, I believe that you grant me the grace to enter into your love in prayer. Amen

**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners –
of whom I am the worst.**

1 Timothy 1: 15

Acts 22:3-16 or
Acts 9:1-22

Psalm 117:1-2

Mark 16:15-18

Today, we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle. As we reflect on the life and ministry of St. Paul we are reminded of the immense contribution that this great Apostle made to the New Testament in Scripture. Church history teaches us that even before any of the Gospels were written, St. Paul had been used by the Lord to write his letters, which together comprises of more than half of the books which are in the New Testament.

In our reflection on the first reading today, our hearts are opened to the experience of the divine encounter which St. Paul had received, which became the very moment that the “man”, Saul was converted into the “Apostle”, St. Paul. This divine encounter of St. Paul was the same experience which gave birth to the anointed mission and ministry in the life of this Apostle. Up until St. Paul was on the road to Damascus, his inner eyes were closed and all he could see around him was his anger towards the Lord’s disciples. But on this road, he met the Risen Lord and had a divine encounter with Him. At that moment his inner eyes were opened as a result of this divine encounter, and no longer did he see his own anger, but the first thing revealed to him was that he was persecuting none other than the Risen Lord Himself (Acts 1:4). The Lord revealed that even though by then, many years had passed by since His death and resurrection, He was still alive and living in the hearts of His disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As I am read these words today, I too am walking on my own road to Damascus, wanting to carry out my own will to accomplish my unfulfilled desires. I am willing to resort to even take advantage and exploit my own colleagues in order to earn that extra income. The Lord is challenging us today and giving us a desire to thirst and hunger for a divine encounter in our own lives. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of Faith (Hebrews 12:2). When the inner eyes of St. Paul were opened that day on the road to Damascus, he fixed his eyes on the Lord and journeyed along the road that the Lord set before him of being an Apostle of the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for the Divine encounter between St. Paul and your Son which you are revealing to me today. Amen.

“So do not be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord...”**2 Timothy 1: 8**

2 Timothy 1: 1 – 8

Psalm 96:1-3, 7-8, 10

Luke 10: 1-9

We practice and exercise our faith in freedom after two millenniums. Yet we hear and see the difficult persecution some of our fellow Christians face. Will Christianity be defeated? Never! This is a faith which is revolved around a person and it is all about a relationship.

St. Paul encountered the Risen Lord on the way to Damascus. There was a relationship which was started between St. Paul and Christ Jesus. That love relationship could not be stopped. The faith in Lord Jesus Christ means the love relationship that we have with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Timothy a young Christian is encouraged by his spiritual father, St. Paul, never to be ashamed of his testimony. All of us have a past. But when we encounter the Lord Jesus we are ensured to have a new future. That's how this faith is transmitted from one generation to the other.

In the Gospel proclamation we see the mission of the seventy two. The instructions given by Lord Jesus to the seventy two are relevant to us today. Our mission could be distracted if we carry bags and baggage along with us. These heavy loads could bring us into trouble too. Can we bear a message of forgiveness if we have not experienced the authentic forgiveness of Christ Jesus?

Today the church celebrates the feasts of Saints Timothy and Titus. These two young men were the disciples of St. Paul. The three men of God coming from different backgrounds and faiths accepted Lord Jesus as the Lord of their life. St. Paul was a devout Pharisee. St. Timothy's mother and grandmother embraced Christianity. St. Titus was a convert from paganism. They labored tirelessly for the Gospel of Lord Jesus Christ. In 93 AD Timothy was martyred for taking a stand against idol worship in Ephesus. Titus was born to a pagan family. He studied Greek philosophy and poetry. But he pursued a life of virtue and by a prophetic dream was led to read the Hebrew Scripture. Thus he embraced Christianity and is recorded to have overturned the paganism through his preaching and prayer. They both received an Apostolic Ordination through St. Paul.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for calling each of us to be Your message bearers of Your vineyard. Empower us to carry out this work to the end. Amen.

**“Set your heart first in the kingdom of God and
all these things will be given to you”**

Mathew 6:35

Hebrew 10:32-39

Psalms 37:3-6, 23-24,
39-40

Mark 4:26-34

In the Gospel proclamation today, the Lord Jesus is explaining to us a deep truth about the kingdom of God in the most simple way. The Lord compares His Kingdom to a mustard seed. We can compare the earth to our heart.

We must search our heart to see what type of seed we have planted in our heart this year. If we are listening to the sounds of this world and are accepting answers of this world and are believing only the words and promises of this world, then, we can be sure that we have planted lust, hatred, jealousy, addiction and selfishness which are seeds of the flesh. If we allow these seeds to grow in our heart, one day, these seeds of flesh will overgrow and destroy our lives and destroy the lives of those around us.

But, for those who come to the feet of the Lord every morning, listen to His word, hear His voice and believe in His promises, they will have their hearts filled with the kingdom of God and will have spiritual seeds of love, joy, peace, happiness and patience growing in their hearts.

According to the Gospel reading today, just as a mustard seed grows into a large tree and creates a haven for birds to nest and have shelter, the spiritual seeds planted on the earth of our heart starts to grow daily and gives the shelter of love, peace and joy not only to us but to thousands of others and leads others to live lives in the Spirit.

In the first reading today St. Paul says “Do not now throw away your confidence which will be handsomely rewarded”. Godly protection is a result enjoyed by those who hope, love and believe in the Kingdom of God. This is why in the Gospel of Mathew 6:31-33 the Lord Jesus says, “do not worry and say; What shall we eat? What shall we drink? or what shall we wear? Your heavenly Father knows your needs. Set your heart first on the kingdom of God and all these things will be given to you” Many give God the second place. Therefore, the seeds of the flesh destroy them. St. Paul invites us today to remember that “we are not among those who withdraw and perish” Therefore in this year 2017, let us firmly resolve to plant the heavenly seed that comes from the Kingdom of God and nurture and grow for God’s glory.

Prayer: Abba Father, open the Spirit eyes of us sinners and help us see and understand this great truth. Amen!

**They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this?
Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Mark 4:41**

Heb.11:1-2,8-19

Luke.1:69-75

Mark 4:35-41

Today's readings are about "Faith". Today is also the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas one of the Doctors of the Catholic faith. A professor of theology, he established a University. Till today his teachings are some of the foundations of Catholic theology.

After writing all these books and studies something happened to him and as we are looking at faith in today's readings I would like you to look at this excerpt taken from the Catholic online website on the life of St. Thomas Aquinas

In 1273 Thomas was seen by the sacristan Domenic of Caserta to be crying and levitating in prayer before an icon of the crucified Christ at the Dominican convent of Naples, in the Chapel of Saint Nicholas.

During this prayer, Christ is said to have told him, "You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward would you have for your labor?" Thomas replied, "Nothing but you, Lord." Following this exchange, something happened but Thomas never wrote or spoke of it. He abandoned his routine and, when begged to return to work, replied, "I cannot, because all that I have written seems like straw to me."

Everything that He had written and done for the Church seemed like straw to him in the living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately what is faith, Faith is knowing who Jesus is. We can see this from today's reading as the boat that they are travelling in is caught in the storm, the disciples wake Jesus and they are afraid and tell him 'Don't you care for what is going to happen to us.' Then Jesus commands the sea and the wind to be still. They obey him and then the disciples say "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (Mark 4:41) They truly did not know who Jesus was. They did not know that Jesus was & is and is to come, that he is the eternal word of God that was spoken in the beginning of creation, That he is Lord above all things by whom all things have been created this is why Jesus asked them "Have you no faith". The moment we receive a revelation of who the Lord Jesus is faith is born in us and the storms will become still at the sound of his voice in us.

Prayer : Abba Father, I choose to wait on your Son, that I may hear His voice and have his leading in my life. Amen.

Seek righteousness, seek humility

Zephaniah 2:3

Zep.2:3, 3:12-13

Psalm 146:6-10

1 Cor.1:26-31

Matthew 5:1-12

In the first reading through the book of Zephaniah God has sent forth his warning concerning the coming judgment upon the sins of the nation of Judah. He calls the people to take heed of the warning of judgment and seek the Lord. This is God's mercy to give time for repentance, so that through genuine repentance and faith the people can be saved. The Lord is telling them to seek

righteousness and humility.

The Word of God has a local meaning and a universal meaning. It has a meaning both limited to time and a meaning that is eternal. Therefore just as He told the people of Judah to seek righteousness and humility, He tells us the same thing. If we want a relationship with God, we must seek to be righteous and humble. The Lord says in Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." How can we achieve this? How can we become humble and righteous before God?

In the Gospel Proclamation, the Lord is teaching us through the first five Beatitudes, how to seek righteousness and humility.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven- Today many people think that the poverty the Lord Jesus was talking about was being financially poor. However, we can become poor in many things. When someone goes through a relationship problem they become poor. When someone goes through a crisis and has no meaning to life, they become poor. God says in James 2:5, "Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" St. James says that when we become poor in anything, that poverty is an invitation to believe in God. When we become poor in one aspect of our lives, we can become rich in the faith of God. When we seek the Lord in our poverty we become more humble and righteous before God.

2. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted- In our lives we have had moments of pleasure and happiness and times of pain and sorrow. The Bible tells us in the book of Genesis that God created us with a free will and the capacity to choose for ourselves.

But instead of seeking God, we have been looking for happiness in the world around us. The result of this is suffering and pain. But the Lord is telling us today, that this suffering we receive can also be our doorway to finding God. He is calling us to stop seeking happiness from the world and to turn to Him to find an eternal and lasting happiness. Those who mourn will be comforted by the Lord and will find Him through their suffering and pain. Hebrews 12:2 tells us to fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus. When we only look to Him for our happiness we are humbling ourselves before Him and our actions show we do not want the temporary happiness of the world, but instead want His lasting happiness.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. In Mark 9:35 the Lord tells His disciples that anyone who wants to be first must be the very last and the servant of all. The Lord Jesus is telling us to be meek we must be the first to be last. What does this mean? He asks us to be the first to serve others and put their needs ahead of our own. He is asking us to be the first to sacrifice for others. When we do these things we are putting God first in our lives and move from being self-centred to being righteous before God.

4. Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. In Luke 19:1-9, the Lord Jesus meets Zacchaeus. He was a tax collector and had lost many things to gain his wealth and because of this he lost his relationship with family and friends. Zacchaeus was poor in spirit, but he had a hunger to see the Lord Jesus. He was empty in his heart and was looking for something to fill the void. We too sometimes come to a point in our lives where we hunger for God to fill us. I know in my life, there have been many occasions where I have felt a hunger for more and more of God. It is in these times, the Lord has seen my hunger and filled me to the brim. He yearns to do the same for you as well. All we need is a genuine hunger for Him in our hearts.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Matthew 6:14 says "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." When we show mercy to others, the Word tells us that we shall receive mercy. God is our role model. When we come to Him in repentance He forgives all our sins. Just as He forgives our sins, we must be able to forgive others.

I once read a saying-- If you want something you never had, you have to do something you have never done before. Today, let us make a change in our lives and do something we have never done before.
*Prayer : Abba Father, thank You for leading me to You through the beautitudes.
Help me to change my ways and become the person You want me to be. Amen.*

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.
 Psalm 31:24

Hebrews 11:32-40

Psalm 31:21-24

Mark 5:1-20

People tell us often to “Have faith in God” and to “trust in Him”. Sometimes it is so difficult to trust that God has got everything in His Hands and that He has complete control of everything that is happening in our lives. In difficulties, what we are going through appears more real to us than God, which is why we become overwhelmed so easily. In my own life, when I begin to feel weighed down and overwhelmed, it clearly spells out one thing, that I have not spent enough time with the Lord. Faith is to trust in God. It is not possible for us to truly trust someone we don’t know well enough. This is the same way with God. The only way to develop faith in Him is to learn to know Him.

In today’s First reading, St. Paul tells us about some of the heroes of the Bible who went through some gigantic problems. And we think we have it bad. But because of their “faith” in God, He did some humanly impossible things in and through them. They gained what was promised, their weakness was turned to strength and they became powerful in battle. And if we were to read about their lives we would see that they ‘knew’ the Lord God personally. And in knowing Him they discovered for themselves that He is supremely trustworthy. It is absolutely amazing to read about everything they were able to accomplish only because they trusted in the unfailing, unchanging goodness of God. No matter what storm you are facing, God is present with you and He is always good.

In the Gospel proclamation we see the Lord Jesus encountering the man with the unclean spirits. As I read this passage, I was really struck by the words “he begged Jesus again and again..” and “the demons begged Jesus” (Mark 5:10,12). I am also completely awed by the phrases, “he ran and fell on his knees in front of Him” and “He gave them permission” (verses 6, 7 and 13). This is our God. The God we worship and serve is sovereign and almighty and demons recognise His authority and tremble in terror in His Presence. So do everything you are up against. It is a pity that they know Him more than we know Him. Imagine the power, ability and resources of God we would be able to tap into and draw from into our day to day lives. With His presence, nothing will shatter us.

Prayer: *Abba Father, create within us a desire to spend time with you and get to know you more. Amen.*

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. **Mark 5:30**

Hebrews 12:1-4

Psalms 22:26 – 28,
30-32

Mark 5:21-43

Today's Gospel proclamation talks about two people who had faith in the Lord Jesus. The dead girl was brought back to life because of the faith her father Jairus had in the Lord Jesus. The woman with the bleeding too was healed by the immense faith she had in the Lord. Both knew deep within their hearts that the only answer to their problem was the Lord Jesus Christ.

We might wonder how come these people had such faith. The women with the bleeding had the faith to touch the cloak of the Lord Jesus. She was instantly healed even without the Lord Jesus being aware. We see this in Mark 5:30. Every time she heard about the great teaching and miracles that the Lord Jesus was performing throughout Israel her faith increased to such an extent that she was totally convinced that touching the cloak of the Lord Jesus was enough to be healed. This might have been the same scenario that built Jairus' faith too.

When I read today's Gospel, I recalled a book that I had read. It was based on the life story of a man who walked in faith. He did simple and great things in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Once on his way home he noticed a lady and her young son crying on a street corner. He asked the lady if there was anything he could do to make them feel better. The lady replied by saying "You cannot do anything in fact no one can help us, my son and I have this particular sickness and we have been treated by all the best doctors in the country and all of them gave up on us". On hearing this he silently mentioned saying "I have a medicine inside my bag that will surely cure your sickness. It has worked on all kinds of sickness and has been in use for many years. In fact it has never failed. Doctors cannot explain how this medicine works. and he went on talking about the greatness of this medicine till the woman was 100% convinced that if they consume this medicine they will be healed. The man then opened his bag and took his Bible out and started reading it. As the two heard the word of God with faith both were healed instantly. Jairus and the woman with the bleeding were healed because they heard about what the Lord Jesus spoke and the miracles he performed. This mother and son were healed by hearing the word of God.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we pray to give us the grace to read and listen to the word of God and believe every word of it. Amen.*

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