The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27
On Our Knees In His Hands

January 2019

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As we enter into 2019, many of us have already decided on our new year’s resolution to amend our lives. We believe this is the year of new beginnings. As we have trusted in the Lord and held onto His promises throughout the year, we also believe that 2019 is the year that the Lord is going to give us that breakthrough we have been waiting for through prayer and fasting. Mt 21:22 says “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer”, therefore let us believe that we have already received it and stop asking the Lord but thank Him for the miracles that He is yet to perform within this year. The key to a miracle is thanking the Lord for the miracle even before we see it happen.

In today’s reading St. Paul writes to the Galatians in 4:4 “But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son born of a woman”. As we celebrate the solemnity of Mary Mother of God today, we should also realize that it took quite a while from the beginning till the time of Mother Mary for the time to fully come when God could send His Son into this world. I assume that God was unable to find a person who would totally yield to His will till Mother Mary was born for God to execute His plan.

Now as I read this I realise that if we truly repent and commit ourselves to prayer and do what is right in the eyes of God with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God is able to do mighty things in our lives as He did in Mother Mary’s life. But most of us have this idea that we will commit ourselves to prayer and service after we pass the age of sixty. Till then, we have much to achieve in this world. I believe that as we get older the only thing that will often happen to us when we pray is that we will doze off in less than five minutes if we did not commit to spend time in prayer when we were younger. All of us who have grown older without a life of prayer let us not get disheartened because the Lord can still do mighty things in your lives. Age has not been a factor when we compare with people whom God had used throughout history. Therefore let us dedicate an hour to read scripture and be in prayer. If we are able to do this without fail during this year, 2019 will be the best year so far for us - a year filled with the anointing of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, we ask for the grace to read your word daily so that your will would abide within us all the days of our life. Amen
We believe in One God who is also the Triune God. The Sovereign God we believe is one also three persons. That is why we describe this One God as the “Holy Trinity”. In our creed we profess that we believe in God who is the creator, we believe in the Son who is not made but begotten and we believe in the Holy Spirit (God) who is equally worshiped and glorified with the Father and Son. This is a Divine mystery. We need to be aware that mysteries will always remain as mysteries. The word ‘mystery’ derives from the Latin word ‘mysterium’, which means hidden/secret.

From the beginning the Holy Mother Church scrutinized the Sacred Scriptures carefully along with the experiences and the practices of the Apostles (Sacred Tradition), which is also the Sacred Scripture and presented the correct interpretation as ‘the teaching’ of the Church. We as faithful are called to adhere to these teachings of the Church. St. John who was the beloved disciple of the Lord explained the Father and the Son. He further spoke of the Holy Spirit defining the experience as the Anointing. The One God who is also three persons was explained and he kept saying anyone denying this sacred truth is a liar. Therefore we need to be prudent in our dealing with the different groups who claim to say that they have the truth of the Good News of God and try to preach a heresy to our faithful. St. John further explained through the personal revelation of John the Baptist that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Anointed one of God of Israel. The Jewish people knew about the coming of the Messiah through their Sacred Scripture, which is the first covenant for us Catholics. Therefore when John the Baptist was baptizing people those who were in authority questioned John the Baptist about his identity? This happened because they were fully aware of the Messiah. They knew the YHWH God whom they worshiped had promised them a Messiah.

Today we celebrate the feast of Sts. Basil the great and Gregory Nazianzen. Both were Bishops and Doctors of the Church. They refuted the fourth century Arian heresy in, which said that the Lord Jesus was not God. For thirty years Constantinople were under the rule of this heresy. Both St. Basil and Gregory worked hard to refute this heresy and established the true faith once more.

Prayer: Abba Father, I know that you are the Supreme God and your anointing is upon us. Continue to minister to us of the truth of your Kingdom. Amen.
Thursday 3rd January  The Most Holy Name of Jesus

You are a carrier of light!

This New Year begins with a reading full of hope and with an introduction to the letter where we are reminded that we are the special creations of God’s love. In a real sense we can be called His children. If that is who we already are, what is in store for us in the life that is to come when we will see the God face to face?

What we do know is “that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is”. Whatever true holiness is seen in us is always a reflection of God’s own holiness because He is the one and only source of all that is true and good. If we are faithful now, we are endeavouring to be like the Lord Jesus but, face to face with our God, we will be utterly transformed and united with Him.

The Gospel proclamation also talks about how John the Baptist saw the Lord coming towards him and immediately recognized him. He told his disciples, the gems of his hard labour, to no longer follow him but to follow the Lord. If I saw the Lord Jesus, would I recognize Him? If He came towards me, would I bow down before Him or would I run away from Him or turn my back on Him? It is easily answered by the choices we have made in the difficult times of our lives. Have we chosen God over ourselves? His Will over our will; His selflessness or our selfishness?

This is a question we can all answer. Have I abandoned my spouse, broken my promises or vows, thrown chaos and confusion, darkness and fury over those around me? Yes, I can answer this question too. All I need to do is open my eyes and see what I have done.

This power to become children of God means to rise above the existing confusion of this world and set some order to it! We have been called to bring some light; to open the skies and discover the heavens above. To see life for what it is: an overflow of God’s love.

As we set out on this New Year, let us make a commitment to the Lord and ask for the grace to be faithful to Him. Sometimes it may be difficult to turn to the Lord in the trials of our lives. In those times, let us say: “Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.”

Prayer: Abba Father, may I always remember that I am a drop of love – infinite love – from God! This drop makes all the difference in the world. Amen.
Friday 4th January  

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious

You Lord take away the sin of the world within us

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton was married at the age of 19 to a wealthy man and had a brief married life. But after a few years she was widowed and with a huge burden. She came from an Episcopal background but while in Italy through her friends was drawn to the sacramental life of the church. Back in the states, she started the first free Catholic school in America in the 1800s and her own congregation. She died of TB at the age of 46 but her legacy continues through the religious communities and institutions she founded. If we read her life, with all the suffering she went through, she could have chosen sin and sadness as her companions but instead she put her trust in the Eucharist and the Blessed Mother, making her life a blessing. Every phase in our life is bound to teach us something valuable. And it depends on us whether we understand the lessons or just turn the page.

This is the theme of the readings today where 1 John tells us that we are born of God and we are called to do what is upright. St. John says that the Lord Jesus came to undo the works of the devil. We are quite aware that our natural inclination is to sin and go against our nature. While some of us sin though lust, greed, power others sin simply by not living in love. We cannot assume that if we live a rich sacramental life and attend church every morning that we have a saintly life... we have to consider our relationship with people and those close to us. If we have not been forgiving and loving we are as guilty of sin as a person caught in adultery.

When St. John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus passing by, he declared, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” And truly it is only the Lord Jesus who can take away that stain of worldliness that we carry in our beings. This is evident from the call the Lord made to the first apostles. They were able to immediately let go of the life they were attached to and follow the Lord. Andrew the brother of Peter was able to tell Peter, ‘We have found the Messiah.” Have we ever told ourselves ‘Truly I have found the Saviour of my life? My Jesus is my Saviour from sin and the world. Let us declare this over our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, your Son Jesus is the Saviour of my soul. He is the one who takes away the sin of the world that is lodged deep within my being. I trust the Lord Jesus to open my eyes and rescue me from sin and sadness. Amen
Saturday 5th January

St. John Neumann, bishop

“This is how we know what love is; Jesus laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” 1 John 3: 16

Today’s readings are from the writings of Saint John. In the first letter of St. John he speaks of love and righteousness and what it is not to love. As Wescott has said ‘life reveals the children of God.’ There is no way of telling what a tree is other than by its fruits. And there is no way of telling what we are other than by our conduct. St. John lays it down that anyone who does not practice righteousness is thereby demonstrated as being not of God. To be righteous is to love our brother and sister. To see and know what love is, look at Jesus Christ. He is love.

St. John questions why Cain murdered his brother; and his answer is because his works were evil and his brother was good. Then he drops the remark, “Do not be surprised brothers, if the world hates you.” An evil man will instinctively hate a good man. Righteousness provokes hostility in the minds of those whose actions are evil. This is the challenge we as Christians face in today’s world. But the word of God is full of promises which are real. Love can transform lives and can revolutionize the world if we Christians are of one mind and heart and faithful to the calling, we have received.

In the Gospel proclamation, St. John narrates the episode where Nathanael meets the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus saw he was a true child of Israel. When he spoke and met him, Nathanael was moved and saw the glory of God. The Lord Jesus promises him he would see greater things.

Our focus should not be on this evil, changing world, but on God alone. He is in control of everything. We surrender to His will and He will use us in a powerful way beyond our expectations.

Today is the memorial of St John Neumann, Bishop and saint. Renowned for his charity and apostolic service to the people of America, he was one of the great heroes of our faith and had a passion for Christ. He built 80 churches in his 8 years as a bishop. He had a passion for the people as Christ had, and served the people and was loved and respected for his great commitment.

Prayer: Abba Father, may your Holy Spirit inspire us to love as the Lord Jesus did unconditionally, and serve our brothers and sisters with that same love. Amen.
Today the Church celebrates the feast of the Epiphany. Within this feast is celebrated the light within the Lord Jesus that was shed on the earth that was in darkness. The word “epiphany” comes from the Greek word epiphainen, which means “to shine upon,” “to manifest,” or “to make known.” Each of today’s readings centers on the theme that Christ is the light to a world in darkness.

In the First reading, the prophet Isaiah gives a prophecy of the One that will come into the world as a light. He says “Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth. And deep darkness the peoples; But the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.” The people lived in darkness, oppressed by the powerful and enslaved to their sins. They lived in fear and cried out to God to save them. His answer was to send His one and only son into the world. His Son was the light the people needed to be saved. He was their light at the end of the tunnel. Isaiah also prophecies of the wise men coming to visit the Lord Jesus bring valuable gifts. Verse 5 says, “The wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.” Verse 8 says, “bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.” God had planned each detail thousands of years before the birth of Christ took place.

The Psalm explains that the nations and great people will come to worship the Lord and bring Him great gifts because He is the light to the world. Verses 10 and 11 say, “May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores bring tribute to him. May the kings of Sheba and Seba present him gifts. May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him.” Why do they worship this baby? Verse 12 and 13 answer this question, “For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.” The Lord Jesus will be worshiped because He will hear the cry of His people and save them from death.

In the Second reading, in St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, He tells them God’s grace is not only for the Jews but His grace has been extended to the Gentiles. The light of Christ, which forgives sins, saves us and gives us eternal life is not only open to the Jews but now to every person who believes the Good News. St. Paul says in
verse 6, “Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children.” We are all privileged to share in this mystery of God because of our faith in the light that entered the world that Christmas morning. When we believe in the Lord Jesus we become heirs to the riches of Heaven that God gives to all His children.

Today’s Gospel proclamation taken from the gospel of Matthew tells us about the journey of Magi to the feet of the Lord Jesus. The story begins with “in the time of King Herod”. The reign of King Herod was a dark time. The Son of God was born into this darkness of oppression, injustice and pain. The Epiphany is a story of the birth of God who offers the people a light and a hope in the time of King Herod’s attempt to overpower and oppress them.

The Magi, also known as the three wise men, have studied the stars, the movement of planets and the scriptures and prophecies about a Saviour that is to come. They come to conclusion that the large star in the sky is directing them to the fulfillment of this prophecy and so they decide to follow it. They travel a great distance to kneel at the Saviour’s feet and worship Him. This is the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Isaiah in the first reading. Just as Isaiah had prophesized, the three wise men followed the light to bring gifts of gold and incense to the Christ baby. As Isaiah and the Psalmist say, Christ is not only king of Israel, but he is the king of all nations. The Magi were not Jews who believed in God, but they followed their knowledge and astrology to worship God, bringing with them gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Magi may represent the Gentiles St. Paul speaks about in the second reading. Even though they were not Jews who believed in God, they still presented their gifts and worshiped the baby the star led them to.

Just as in the times of Herod, today many people walk under a cloud of darkness. The Lord Jesus was born into this world to come into that darkness. Instead of walking in darkness and negativity, when we turn to the Lord Jesus and worship Him, we can walk in the light, under the hand and anointing of God. Then even though we may walk in a dark situation, we will carry His light inside us and therefore find peace. To do this we must fit our eyes to God and be connected to Him through praise and worship. We must go against our negativity and negative emotions within us and struggle to worship God. Then we will be able to open a space in the darkness for the glory of God to come through.

**Prayer:** Abba Father, thank You for sending Your Son to be born in my life and for being the light in my darkness. I pray for the grace to be able to hold on to Him through thick or thin and worship Him through it all. Amen.
Before I do something, do I seek God’s will? Or do I decide everything and then simply say, “God’s will”? This is the message running across both the readings today. In the first reading, the author of the first letter of John says that we should ‘test the spirits.’ This is especially true when it comes to spiritual matters. How do I seek God’s mind and will in spiritual matters? As a mother with a one month old baby what would the Lord require of me? It is definitely different to what the Lord would ask from a retired man. Spiritual matters need to be discerned. For example, as we have began this New Year how can I decide on my prayer life? According to our state of life, the Lord will show us what He is expecting of us. As an unmarried young person, He might invite me to spend some time in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament at least twice a week. On the other hand, He might invite a house-bound sick person to spend a few minutes of their morning in silence and gratitude.

The Gospel says that the Lord Jesus Himself discerned before He began His public ministry. When Jesus heard that John the Baptist was arrested He did not begin His ministry immediately, instead He withdrew into Galilee to seek His Father’s intentions regarding the future ministry. A beautiful and humble example is given by the Lord in His own life. Also it is interesting to note that Galilee was one of the least expected places for a Messiah to work. However, Jesus humbled Himself and started His ministry there and not in the bustling city of Jerusalem.

The Lord Jesus continues the message of John the Baptist; “Change your ways for the Kingdom is near.” But, what is more beautiful is that He showed us that the Kingdom of God was not near but now. As He preached, people were healed, delivered and restored. While John the Baptist’s message was harsh and strict, Jesus brings in the element of love and healing.

We belong to the Lord and not to the world or the flesh. Therefore, let us ask the Lord for His grace and mercy to be able to seek His heart and will in everything we do, no matter how small or insignificant. Let us allow His healing love to change our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, You know what’s best for my life, help me to live a surrendered life knowing that You are stronger and more loving than all else. Amen.
Tuesday 8th January

Tuesday After Epiphany

A call to compassion for others

Today the Lord tells us how we must treat the people we meet. He asks us to love one another. We can all say we love the people close to us. But can we say we love the person we stood behind in line at the café; The person travelling next to us in the bus? The love God is asking us to have for others is the love He has for people. We need not be religious or know God to love those closest to us. We need God to love people they way He loves them. To feel for them the way He feels for them. 1 Corinthians 13 tell us how God’s love differs from the way we love others. God’s love is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud. How can we have this kind of love for others? Today’s first reading tells us real love is the love God had for us when He sent His only Son to die for our sins. We cannot love others without knowing God’s love for us. First we must find out how God loves us and experience His love for us. Once we have experienced this love we will be able to love others in the same way.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus had this love for the people. Mark 6:34 says, “When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.” The word compassion means the Lord had a strong desire to alleviate their suffering. He did not want the people to come to Him, hear His message and leave the same way they came. He wanted to make a difference in their lives by lifting them up from the despair and suffering they faced. He wanted them to go away from their encounter with Him as changed people. This was the love He had for them.

This is why He did not want to send the people away hungry. He called down the power of God and blessed the food. But instead of giving the food to the people Himself, He gave it to His disciples to distribute. The disciples had known the love of the Lord Jesus. He wanted them to take that love they had received from Him and love the people by giving them to eat. In the same way, the Lord is calling us to experience His love and then go out and share this love with others. Not to get something in return, but to make a difference in other peoples’ lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray I may experience Your love in the depths of my heart and be able to take this love and show Your love to other. Amen.
Today’s first reading speaks about God’s love: Where human love is limited, His love is unlimited. Where human love is selfish, His love is selfless. Where human love rejects us in our weaknesses and our sinfulness, God loves us as we are. As Christians, we need to experience this love. His love is holy, and has no ulterior motives. His love is not discriminatory based on wealth, race, religion or caste. His love is a love that seeks and runs after us. His love does not leave us when we fall or give up or forget or doubt. Anyone who enters into this experience of love is transformed.

Since my childhood, I looked for love. I looked for love in my youth, my marriage and in anyone I got close to. I expected that they would appreciate me, validate me, respect me, protect me and provide for my needs. But they failed to give me that love. When I had fallen on all sides and even doubted God, He came in search of me. I entered into this experience of love at a CRL Prayer Meeting. His pure love gave me a value and a worth. My inner thirst for love was satisfied. His love calmed my internal storms and drove out my ears. In today’s Gospel, isn’t it this experience that the Lord gave to the fearful disciples who were caught in the storm? “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18)

A mother of two children shared this experience. Her husband is a three-wheel driver. They faced many financial difficulties. The elder child was selected to study at a good school, but she decided not to send him there due to her financial difficulties. The second child also got selected into a good school. When she was struggling to decide whether to admit or not, she participated at a CRL meeting. The message was ‘With Christ and in Christ’. The message taught her how to go forward in life in Christ while receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. She surrendered her struggle to the Lord Jesus. Then the Lord took away her fears and gave her an experience of His love. Now she believes and knows that the Lord will look after them. So she decided to admit both her children to that school.

Today let us also surrender the storms in our lives to the Lord. He is waiting to calm our storms through His limitless love.

Prayer: Abba Father, I surrender into your hands the fears that envelop me. Give me the grace to believe in Your love. Amen.
May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun... they will call him blessed.

When we do something wrong, we feel ashamed to have let down the Lord, so we try a little harder to do the right things. Eventually, other sins crop up. Then we decide to redouble our efforts. Even so, our shortcomings continue to be revealed, and going to church becomes less appealing. The scenario is common to many who walk with Christ. How many of us feel oppressed by the many demands of Christianity? Didn’t Jesus come to remove our burdens? Yet, rather than judging God’s word by our experience, we can instead re-evaluate our experience in the light of God’s word. Do you feel burdened? It does not come from God. Do you feel that you never measure up? That is not the Holy Spirit speaking to you. He is the Comforter, not the accuser. Even when He points to sin in our lives, the Holy Spirit does so gently, prompting us to rely even more on His power and grace – not our own strength.

Through God’s grace, let us claim the promise of the Gospel: “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). By His resurrection, Jesus has given us a wonderful inheritance. Let us claim our inheritance as God’s children. Let us seek to do the good works He has called us to by His power, not by our own strength.

We see in the Gospel today how the Lord’s religious beliefs grew on the word of God. Through boyhood and family life, visits to the synagogue and prayer, he heard the word of God. Gradually it was his time to speak that word, and to begin his ministry. For Mary and Joseph this was a proud moment. What they had given their time and love to now was bearing fruit. Today parents worry about the faith of their children. They see a different attitude to religion, prayer, morality and many other aspects of life. They wonder did they do their job well. Much of the culture today goes against God and religion. Parents cannot fight the culture. But they can hand on the best of the Gospel by their own faith and by the way they live their lives, by their love and by speaking the truth as they see it. What is handed on in faith is beyond words. We are all part of the faith ministry of Jesus. By our own prayer we can help a new generation find their way to faith. We hand over worries to the Lord. Prayer gives us the encouragement to support a younger generation and the poor.

Prayer: Abba Father, may my own faith grow deeper by my relationship with you. Help us all to find your love in our lives, Amen.
Friday 11th January

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom and cured every disease among the people.

Having celebrated the Lord Jesus’ manifestation to the world, today’s liturgy continues to build on the theme of Epiphany: the Lord revealing His divine power. The first reading speaks of the eternal life that the Lord offers us. Whoever is in the Lord Jesus, has eternal life.

Today’s Gospel reading reveals the compassionately loving heart of the Lord Jesus. In our own lives there could be situations where we are suffering or going through difficulties. When we cry out to the Lord in complete surrender He declares: “I do will it. Be made clean.” Surrendering is an important element in the reading today. The leper did not ask for a healing, he handed over to the Lord Jesus the choice of healing him or not. It was this faith and surrender that moved the Lord to respond to him.

In our lives, we generally like to say the Lord is in control but prefer to do most things on our own. I am asking the Lord Jesus to take me where he wants, but I often in the driving seat and I want the Lord to be a passenger in my vehicle. Let us ask for the grace to be able to live a surrendered life. Not just by saying it with our lips but practically taking steps to hand over the control totally to the Lord. As we learn beautifully in the 4 steps prayer, when we give over our lives, God’s spirit enters into our lives in a new way. And when the Holy Spirit is in us and we allow Him to lead us, our lives become extraordinary.

In the Gospel proclamation the last line is a factor we tend to overlook. Even though crowds came looking for the Lord, He withdrew to deserted places to pray. For those of us who are involved in any kind of ministry or service, we have to be able to seek His mind and set apart some time where we can be alone with the Lord. One of my friends suffering in the last stages of cancer, did this beautifully. Each time after receiving chemo therapy, he did not allow himself to be run down by self pity, instead He chose to praise and worship the Lord in that pain. He turned all those ‘dull’ moments into personal prayer time. Today, he has been completely cured of cancer and continues to be a testimony to the healing love of the Lord Jesus. Since, he waited on the Lord, the Lord said to him; “I do will it. Be made clean.”

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for the gift of eternal life, help me to surrender myself completely to You. Amen.
The psalmist today speaks of the deep love of the Lord for His people. The Lord takes delight in His people. As people what delights us most? As a mother I would say it is to see my children being good, obedient and living a good Christian life. In the same way, what delights our Lord? I would think it is far beyond what we would look for in our children, for our delight is conditional. However, according to the psalmist today, the Lord delights in His people who praise His name with dancing and music and He sees them as humble and crowns them with victory.

Humility is a virtue that the Lord Jesus Himself demonstrated when He knelt before St. John the Baptist to receive the water baptism. The highest form of worship we can offer the Lord is to practice humility in what we do. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the one, who is humble enough to give praise and glory to God, is a true delight to the Lord.

The first reading speaks of God’s faithfulness. Those who are humble enough to believe that in His name and according to His will that all we ask will be granted will indeed be granted. The warning we see in the first reading to keep away from idols is this truth that we are given the power to understand. That idol worship of other gods, material things or of one’s own skills is a sign of false pride which is the opposite of humility. The first reading also shows us how we resolve issues with people in humility and not pride. We need to pray for one another so that evil does not take possession of our souls.

One of the greatest examples of humility is also shown to us through the gospel proclamation today. St. John the Baptist is one who truly delighted God. The Lord proclaims in Mathew 11:11 “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.” How did St. John the Baptist achieve this by working according to the will of God. He understood his calling to be the one to make a way for the Messiah and did not get carried away by those who thought he was the Messiah. He firmly believed that he must decrease and the Lord increase. This is a profound statement for all preachers and evangelists if they seek to delight the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me a heart of humility so that I may delight you forever. Amen!
Baptism is the rite of initiation to Christianity, whereby pouring water on a person’s forehead or by immersing them in water, symbolizes purification and renewal and thus admission to the Church, the Body of Christ. Today as we reflect on the Baptism of our Lord Jesus, we too are invited to recall our own baptism and the journey thus started into the heart of our Heavenly Father.

As beautifully presented in the First Reading, it is God who is keen to have His people comforted and consoled, and have their sins forgiven. In no other religion can we find this concept, which is also greatly misunderstood and questioned by many who cannot fathom why God is running after His people offering forgiveness of sin and inviting them to a relationship with Him. God seems to have everything planned out – to prepare His way in the wilderness, a straight highway in the desert; to raise valleys up, to make mountains low, to level the rough ground and smooth rugged places. The only way we can understand the Heart of our God is by accepting Him as our Father, whose Heart is overflowing with love and compassion for His wayward children. A parent alone will be able to understand and agree with the prodigality of the Heavenly Father’s actions.

God’s love went to the extent of sending His Only Son to the world, made like us, in every way, except sin. The Son’s sole purpose was to do the will of the Father. Therefore the One who knew no sin came along with other sinners to St. John the Baptist and knelt before him in the river Jordan. There was no argument nor any clarification needed why He had to kneel before a man when He had no sin. Luke 3:21 says that as the Lord Jesus was praying, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove, and the voice of the Father came from heaven. The daily life of our Lord Jesus was transformed to a simple act of seeing and hearing what the Father did and said, and repeating it on earth. His Spirit was fully awakened. This is the Life in the Spirit in its fullest sense.

How does the baptism experience of the Lord relate to us? We too are invited to have the same experience the Lord Jesus had. We receive it through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. For most of us who had been baptized as infants, the Sacrament of Baptism is just a fact, and even the Sacrament of Confirmation is a faint memory of an event.
Prayer: Abba Father, we pray, that You anoint us more with the Holy Spirit, to have the same experience that Your Son enjoyed during His earthly life. Amen.

It is through the Four Steps Retreat that most of us received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the entry point to a Life in the Spirit.

When I received this experience ten years ago, I did not feel anything supernatural at the time, except the feeling of an unexplained ‘high’! Yet a few things changed inside me from that day, making me wake up early to sit in prayer, and also changing the way I prayed. Instead of reading prayer books, I began to pray the Four Steps, having a conversation with the Lord. The Lord started to speak to my heart through the Scriptures, leaving me amazed at the specific way He would minister to my needs of each day. Also, my prayer changed to thanksgiving, praising and worshipping the Lord rather than asking and pleading for favours.

Ten years later, I can look back and see the vital changes that have happened in my life personally, in my family and in my professional life. My outlook has been changed completely, giving the first place to God. The peace and joy that I experience, and the love I receive from the Lord and am empowered to extend to others in my life is amazing. It does not mean that nothing goes wrong in my life or that I never lose my peace. Yet the difference is that as soon as I fall back to my old ways of taking control of my life or fall into self-pity, the Holy Spirit sandpapers my heart. I run to the Lord in spirit as I am, give the truth of my heart and surrender my life back to Him. He fills me with the Holy Spirit, who enables me to have His peace and joy and empowers me to love the unlovable.

The Second Reading tells us about another change that the Holy Spirit’s Baptism does in our lives. He gradually changes our entire way of living, our social activities, relationships and even our recreational activities. He changes the songs we play in the car and the television channels we tune into! The Spirit of God empowers us to say ‘no’ to worldly things that we justified before. Our marriages are renewed as we receive the ability to show each other the same love that we receive from the Heart of the Father. The Holy Spirit even influences the way we bring up and discipline our children, the values and priorities that we teach them, and the way we manage our finances.

We become inclusive, not exclusive, being driven by love and not by the customs or rules and regulations. Life gets better by the day, no matter what the circumstances are. The struggles and sicknesses become a good breeding ground for yet another miracle!

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray, that You anoint us more with the Holy Spirit, to have the same experience that Your Son enjoyed during His earthly life. Amen.
Monday 14th January

1st Week in Ordinary Time

Stop trying to work things out before their time.

Today’s Gospel proclamation is interesting. We see a contrasting act by the Lord Jesus as opposed to the natural way of life. In this passage, St. John the Baptist is being arrested because of his bold statements. If we were in that era and such a thing had taken place, we would definitely have taken a back step and allowed things to settle in the natural way. But it was no halt for the Lord Jesus, He goes to Galilee and starts preaching the Good news of God.

He is inviting everyone to change their ways, to repent and that the Kingdom of God is near. God uses many ways to talk to us, He speaks to us through Creation, our Forefathers, Judges, Kings, Prophets and Angels. But the last revelation He has made is through His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The message in the Gospel today is the message God wanted His Son to convey to us. Though so many things around Him were falling apart, He continued to do the will of the Father. He was able to do this because of the intimate relationship He had with the Father. He did not listen to the things of the world. Rather He believed every word that came from the mouth of God.

“God says, Let all the angels adore Him.” (Heb 1:6) Not only the Angels, but the whole of creation will bow before the Son of God. Because everything came into being because of Him and for Him. In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus is calling his disciples. We see the phrase ‘at once’, they did not hesitate nor did they stop to think about the repercussions of following the Lord Jesus. Rather they left everything they were living on and followed Him. It is said that ‘they abandoned their nets and followed Him’. It is a good day to meditate on what’s holding our hearts from following the Lord sincerely? Is it the same relationships God gave us or the Job, Friends, Family, etc? The Lord wants our fullest commitment. He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Lk 10:27) We may be trying to figure out God’s plan for our lives: Let us relax in the presence of the Lord and continue to seek God and be at the foot of the cross surrendering to Him everything we do and discerning His mind in every step of our lives. When the time comes, he will call us.

Prayer: Abba Father, because you revealed yourself to us through your Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, we are confident to call you our Father. Amen
Tuesday 15th January 1st Week in Ordinary Time

Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters.

Today’s readings offer us a beautiful opportunity to reflect on God’s grace and mercy. Who am I that God should be mindful of me? For my sake, He sent His only Son to suffer and save me. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author says the Lord Jesus was given control over all things. “Yet at present we do not see all things subject to Him.” Isn’t this a question we ask ourselves and one another even today? Where is God in the midst of my suffering? If God has control over everything, why didn’t He prevent that accident or disaster? Remember the Lord does not suppress our free will. Often, it is we ourselves who are directly or indirectly responsible for disasters, calamities and unbearable situations. The Lord does not send it to us but allows it to happen so that something good might come out of seemingly bad situations. Let us make an effort today to look at suffering from a different angle. Suffering helps us grow in our faith in the Lord’s providential care.

In His mercy and wisdom, the Lord chooses and wants to set us free from our afflictions. When we keep fighting the battles with our own strength, we tend to get pulled down more. However, when we choose to fix our eyes on the Lord, He reaches down and sets us free. The Gospel proclamation shows us such a situation. The man with an unclean spirit, is set free by the Lord. Once this deliverance took place, the people around did not believe in God, they were only amazed. When we see the mighty works of the Lord in the lives of our family or friends, we are amazed and it helps us to grow in our faith.

We see two important steps for our faith journey through the readings today. Firstly, the Lord permits suffering to help us grow in our faith. Secondly, in His time, He will choose to set us free from whatever is afflicting us. If the Lord chooses to allow our suffering to continue, let us pray for the grace to see His plan through that. As difficult and painful as it could be, He knows what is best for us, so let us trust in Him, knowing that He has plans to help us and not to harm us.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to fix my eyes on You, knowing that You will set me free from all my afflictions, according to your timing. Amen.
Today we celebrate the feast of the Saint of Sri Lanka; St. Joseph Vaz. When we reflect on St. Joseph Vaz the Sacred Scripture becomes more alive to us and we come to know the truth of God’s words. The eternal love of God becomes more real. God knew ‘Sri Lanka’ by name. How can we say that?

The Portuguese established Catholicism in Sri Lanka. After the Dutch signed the Kandyan treaty they got rid of the Catholic priests in Sri Lanka according to the treaty. The treaty said, “will not allow in his kingdom any priests, friar or ecclesiastic (Roman Catholic) personality, because they foster rebellions and are cause of the ruin of the kingdom, and will expel all those living there at present”. The Dutch became the protectors of Sri Lanka, waged war against the Portuguese and captured their forts. The result was Catholic missionaries and priests were driven out from Sri Lanka and the persecution of the Sri Lankan Catholic Church began. The Dutch decreed the penalty of death against all Catholics who would offer shelter to a priest. With the Catholics deprived of churches, priests and the holy sacraments, the Dutch completely wiped out the practice of the Catholicism in Sri Lanka. There were 415 Churches and Chapels and about 70 thousand faithful in Sri Lanka when the Portuguese left the island. Calvinism became the official religion of the Island of Sri Lanka. It was in this context that God sent the person He appointed to come to Sri Lanka. Therefore we know that God did not want His people to suffer. After thirty years of no Sacraments administered and the absence of the Holy Mass, St. Joseph Vaz stepped in to our Motherland. God indeed knew Sri Lanka by name.

The first reading today perfectly explains the mission of St. Joseph Vaz carried out in Sri Lanka. To the Sri Lankan Catholics who could not live proper sacramental lives St. Joseph Vaz brought glad tidings and he came bearing good news. His mission had its fair share of hurdles. But he never failed to live by the word of God. These words said in the first proclamation were fulfilled by God through St. Joseph Vaz to the Sri Lankan faithful. God’s peace was announced to the restless hearts of the persecuted Catholics in Sri Lanka and
the good news that our God is King was brought back to the hearts of the people. They were crushed and without hope, thus salvation entered the lives of the Catholics once more.

We all know that when a man/woman of God is to be canonized three authentic miracles should be presented. The present day Roman Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is an ongoing miracle of St. Joseph Vaz which has become like the tree of the mustard seed which has grown to be such a huge one where birds come and rest. After the hard work of St. Joseph Vaz the church blossomed, the faithful were looked after and the church grew in numbers.

St. Joseph Vaz fulfilled the request of St. Paul, which he made to the presbyters of the church of Ephesus. St. Paul requested the presbyters to take good care of what he toiled and built. What St. Paul spoke of took place in Sri Lanka during the Dutch regime. Calvinism was a sect that moved away from the Mother Church and their teachings are different from that of the teachings of the Catholic Church. Therefore we need to be vigilant. We should not get carried away by the surface teachings but we need to be well rooted in the truth of God’s message. There is a clear distinction between these teachings, if not God would not have sent St. Joseph Vaz to Sri Lanka and St. Paul would not have requested the people to be vigilant. That is why in the Creed we proclaim that “We believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church”. We all worship one God yet the type of worship and the teachings are different. God knew that the Sri Lankan Catholics needed Sacraments. After thirty years of hardship St. Joseph Vaz reinstated the Sacramental life into the hearts of the people. If we read the signs of God’s actions we could also be wise and prudent to know and follow the real truth of God’s Kingdom.

On his way to Sri Lanka, St. Joseph Vaz had much to suffer but his mission was full of God’s power. There are many miracles recorded that God performed through St. Joseph Vaz true to His words. Today the Catholic Church of Sri Lanka is restored and revived through a man God chose for Himself. On the morning of January 16, 1711, St. Joseph Vaz made his confession and dragged himself for holy mass and went by his routine of his spiritual exercises for the day. Just before midnight of Friday January 16, 1711, he breathed his last.

_Praye_r: Abba Father, thank you for St. Joseph Vaz and thank you for acting powerfully in our Motherland during the difficult times. May we be like St. Joseph Vaz serve you with a zeal that will never be extinguised. Amen._
Thursday 17th January

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

Psalm 95: 6

Today’s gospel proclamation reveals the Lord Jesus’ healing touch on a leper. As I was reflecting on this passage the Lord began to reveal more clearly a few things which we fail to do when we are in the midst of a crisis.

Here, the leper went to the Lord Jesus because he knew the Lord as the only answer for His problem. And as he went to the Lord he says, “If you want to, you can make me clean”. He is saying, if it is your will you may heal me. But what do we do when we go to the Lord Jesus? We go to Him with our own answers and solutions and we demand for Him to solve the problems in the way we want. But here is this leper, surrendering himself to the will of God despite his desperate need for healing. That shows he was a man of great faith. And when he surrendered himself to the Lord, His heart was moved with compassion and mercy and He healed him.

We know God works more powerfully in those lives that are surrendered to Him. The Lord Jesus Himself reveals this beautiful mystery through His life. Every moment of His life was ordained by the Heavenly Father and God was unfolding His plans so beautifully in and through His life.

The Blessed Mother is another person who understands this mystery of total surrender. As a teenager she may have had so many plans and dreams about her life but everything was changed when the angel visited her. Because she submitted herself to the Lord, He moved through her life and fulfilled His purpose through her. God has a purpose for everyone and when we surrender ourselves to Him, He moves through us and fulfills His purpose in us.

Today the Catholic Church celebrates the feast of St. Anthony, abbot. He is a third century saint born in middle Egypt. When he was 18 he heard the words of the Gospel: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor” (Matt. 19:21). He felt God was directly speaking to him and immediately obeyed. He sold all his possessions and went in to a desert to live in perfect solitude. Through this life of prayer he grew and matured greatly to be a servant of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, may I live a life of total surrender to Your will alone. Amen.
When Jesus saw the faith of these people, he said to the paralytic, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven’

Four people who were carrying a paralytic could not get near Jesus because of the crowd. The entrance was blocked and there was no room. They had to make a choice whether they should go back home or reach the Lord Jesus with difficulty. However, they managed to make an opening in the roof above the Lord and lowered the mat the man was lying on. Luke 19 recorded that Zacchaeus who was a very important tax collector wanted to see who Jesus was. Because he was too short he was unable to see Christ Jesus above the crowd. So he managed to run ahead and climbed a sycamore tree so he could see him. The woman with an issue of blood for twelve years who could not heal by any medicine came behind Jesus. Even though there was a multitude thronging him, the woman touched the border of his garment. Immediately she was healed. When blind Bartimaeus shouted at Jesus, many warned him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more.

Jeremiah 29.13, the Lord says ‘You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’ In all these situations, they continue to seek Jesus. They, however, managed to overcome the barriers and reach Jesus. Actually, they sought him with all their hearts. They sought him in faith and their faith was rewarded. The paralytic received forgiveness of sin and healing. He walked out carrying the mat which he was once laid. The Lord walked into the house of Zacchaeus. The Lord ate with him. His life was transformed. He and his family received salvation. The woman received healing from the blood issue. The Lord healed Bartimaeus.

Today, let us seek our Lord Jesus in faith. Let us walk towards him, with all our hearts. It is guaranteed that our faith will be rewarded with gifts from heaven. St. Margaret of Hungary grew into an exquisitely beautiful woman and for that reason she was offered marriage many times. But she was passionate about her consecration to Jesus and devoted all her efforts to His service. She refused any thoughts or inclination towards a marriage life. She defied her father’s will for her to be released from her vows. Despite her extraordinary beauty, she chose to neglect her appearance. Her life provides us an example of the victory we can have over the world.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the faith of the woman with an issue of blood and all those who have put their trust in you. Amen
Today’s message of the Lord Jesus is indeed a radical gospel. It is interesting to think about the people the Lord would spend time with if he lived physically among us today. Would he hang out with saints or sinners? The Lord Jesus surely would not have neglected either group, but it is clear that he came for people who were spiritually desperate.

The word of God speaks of the calling of Levi, a taxi collector. Tax collectors were among the most despised people in Israel. As a tax collector, they would have been isolated from the community. They would not have been allowed to go to the Temple or the synagogues. They were a social outcast, they could only socialize with other tax collectors and rank sinners.

As the Lord Jesus passed by, He says to Levi, “Follow Me!” It is a call for Levi to leave his old life behind and to begin a new life of following the Lord. Why would the Lord have any use for a man like this? The answer is grace! In spite of his occupation, his failures and his sin; the Lord loved Levi and called him to a new life. The Pharisees are judging the Lord because he is failing to respect their distinction between the “the righteous” and “the sinners.” His disrespect for this essential Jewish boundary caused them great offense. The Pharisees thought that God was concerned more about outward appearances than the heart, but their self-righteousness made them blind to their own selfish nature, and they felt they were better than others as they were observing the law.

Many people have abandoned the church and faith because many of us are carrying the attitude of the Pharisees. The Lord presents us with a radical alternative: everyone needs a Saviour because everyone sins, the one who realises he is a sinner is the one who is open to acknowledge his need for a saviour and will receive mercy from our Lord. God is attracted to broken people like you and me and that is the good news of the gospel, no matter what state of sin we are currently in, we just need to turn to Him and acknowledge our need to be healed and set free by our Lord.

Abba Father, we ask for your grace to always recognize our brokenness and come before your throne of mercy, trusting in your love, healing and deliverance. Amen.
The divine manifestation of our Lord!

The theme of manifestation or revelation is evident in the readings today. Did you know that today’s Gospel is also an Epiphany? Epiphany means a divine manifestation. Traditionally the Church in its Liturgy has used the word ‘Epiphany’ in relation to three events in the life of Jesus.

The first epiphany was when the Wise Men visited and adored the infant Jesus at his birth. Secondly, at His baptism in the Jordan where the Father’s voice was heard and the Spirit appeared in a visible form. Today is the third manifestation; the Lord Jesus reveals his divinity by performing the first miracle or ‘sign’ according to John’s Gospel.

The first reading speaks a message of hope to the people of Israel who have been constantly ridiculed and insulted by their neighbors. The Lord promises them that they will now be called by a new name. His love is manifested in the new words that describe Israel: “My delight” and “espoused”. We have a Lord who rejoices in us. He is not a taskmaster waiting to punish us, but a spouse, a lover rejoicing in us and caring for us. Especially for those of us who are facing a rough patch in our lives, this is a beautiful promise from God. No longer will we be put to shame, because He is doing a new thing in our lives to turn every curse into a blessing. However, these blessings may not come in the form we want them, instead we are to accept them in the way and the time that the Lord chooses.

The Psalmist invites us to tell God’s marvelous deeds to everyone. What a beautiful response that we can shout from the depths of our hearts. As the Lord is manifesting His presence in my life, can I keep quiet about it? I am invited to share the Good News with everyone in whatever the way that I can. Take a moment to look at yesterday, how was God protecting me from harm? How was God using people to tell me that He loves me. Let us be grateful for such intimate moments.

Just as the Lord manifested His love for the chosen people of Israel through various signs and symbols, His love is manifested in us and through us by the Spirit living in us. “To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.” It is important to realize that every spiritual gift is given to build up the community. Spiritual gifts are not for personal gain. In our prayer time today, let us take a few minutes to reflect on the gifts listed in this reading, be grateful for
whatever gifts we have and look at how we use these gifts. Am I using this gift or gifts to attract attention, feel superior or do I humbly use it to spread God’s kingdom by building up my brothers and sisters?

In John’s Gospel, there are seven signs (miracles); changing water into wine is the first of the seven. One of the beautiful things about this sign is that it is performed at the request of our Blessed Mother Mary. It is yet another beautiful reminder of Mary’s intercession, and the Lord’s response to her intercession. Mary is present at the performing of the first ‘sign’, just as she was present when the Lord Jesus performed the final act to manifest His divinity: willingly giving up His life for us on the Cross. Mary’s instruction to the servers was “Do whatever He tells you”. This is the same invitation that our Mother gives us even today, Do whatever Jesus tells you. As we learn to listen to the Lord’s voice, we will be able to respond to this invitation and obey His invitation.

It has also been said that the Lord Jesus’ first sign is related to the first sign that Moses publicly performed. Remember that in the Book of Exodus, Moses changed water into blood as a sign of warning against Pharaoh. It was a sign of judgment.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus turns water into wine: wine is a symbol of joy, and the miracle took place in the context of a wedding, indicating the dawn of a new age, where God’s love reigns supreme. Our God delights in us and as He has promised, we will not be put to shame. In each of our lives, there are moments when we are on the edge of life, about to fall into shame or despair. Today’s Gospel proclamation says that precisely at such moments we are to call on the name of the Lord. When we call to Him, He will answer us.

Today’s readings invite us to take two steps: let us be attentive for God’s manifestation in our lives and in the lives of those around us, especially when He performs mighty works and miracles. Secondly, let us become agents and living witnesses of God’s presence in the world today. Most importantly, may our lives bear this witness more than our words. If we choose to do this, we can definitely transform our homes, work places, schools, communities into places where God’s love will be tangibly evident.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for manifesting Your power in my life. Help me to become a mirror manifesting Your presence and Your love for the world. Amen.
In the letter to the Hebrews today, we are told that every petition, every prayer of our Lord Jesus was heard by God because of His reverent submission. Jesus the Son of God, with all of Heaven’s power and wisdom, chose to live His life in obedience to the will of God. It would be nice if it said that God heard the Lord only because He loved Him. The Father was indeed delighted with the Son, the heavens tore and a voice came down affirming this. At the death of His Son, the Father’s heart was so grieved that the earth shook, the sun hid itself and death itself was destroyed forever. But at the heart of this love was the simple obedience of the Lord Jesus, the yes to the will of God in everything. He walked this earth with His eyes firmly on the face of God.

Obeying or submitting to God is perceived by so many of us as a challenge. The greatest gift God gave us was the gift of free will. And to choose to submit this precious gift to His will is a costly thing. And for so long I experienced obedience to God as a battle of wills, a struggle that I often lost. I recently heard it preached that because the Lord Jesus walked in obedience and died on the cross in obedience, we are now living in the resurrected life past that cross. So my struggle to obey God has already been defeated and instead I now have a grace over my life to obey God. The cross has won victory over every struggle of my life.

I recently lived the fruit of this – I woke up one morning feeling out of reason irritated. My mind was a chaotic mess that relentlessly attacked me with all the undone chores, petty thoughts and a sense of no control. I wanted to run in a hundred directions doing everything at the same time. But because I knew His will was that I sit down to pray, I sat in my usual place and I just started praising Him. I listened to worship songs and kept affirming His goodness and peace. And before I knew it, He had walked me out of the chaos of my mind and restored a deep peace and joy in my heart. It was not the struggle it could have been if I tried to obtain peace of my own accord. But the grace poised over me to overcome enabled me obey God regardless of my mind restored His peace and joy to me effortlessly.

Prayer: Abba Father I acknowledge that You are good and Your ways are perfect. I embrace the grace won for me by the cross and resurrection of Jesus. And I submit to Your will. Amen
In today’s psalm, the Psalmist proclaims in Chapter 111, that he ‘gives thanks to the Lord with all his heart’, because great are His works, full of honour and majesty. He provides for those who fear Him and verse 5 further mentions; ‘He is ever mindful of His covenant.’ The Lord Jesus came to this earth to seal that covenant, which is why the author of Hebrews writes in chapter 6:17-18, ‘God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind.

So God has given both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable, because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.’ This is the unfailing trust we have in the goodness of God.

Hebrews 6:10, explicitly explains the nature of God in fulfilling His purpose through our suffering, “for God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for Him and how you have shown your love to Him by caring for other believers, as you still do.”

Today you might perhaps be feeling misunderstood, downcast or weary in doing good. As it is written, it is through our suffering that we are transformed as imitators of those who through faith and endurance inherit the promises of God through Hope. God desires that we grow through endurance to realize and enjoy the full assurance of hope in Him.

The Gospel proclamation reflects on our Lord Jesus’ declaration of the Sabbath as mentioned in verse 27. The Lord says, ‘The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath.’ We are reminded by our Lord that we have a responsibility to carry hope to others through acts of charity and kindness to the sick and the lost.

How else could they come to know this ‘God of Hope’ unless they see Him in action through each one of us? Often such kindness may be scorned at or even judged, we need to press on if we are to bring the Gospel of salvation to a lost world.

**Prayer:** Abba Father, we thank you for the difficulties we endure. We pray we encounter you through them. Amen.
We see in today’s first reading the author of the letter to the Hebrews writing to the Jewish Christians of the early church who were tempted to abandon their Christian faith and return to Judaism under severe persecution. Reminding them of Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High in the Old Testament, the author is trying to convince the Jewish people with the coming of the second Melchizedek - our Lord Jesus Christ, the old religious systems, rituals and rules are now being replaced by the Gospel of life, love and freedom. The Lord is our great high priest and the fulfillment of all the ancient prophecies given by Moses and the other Jewish prophets.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus comes to the synagogue to celebrate the Sabbath and heals the man with the withered hand bringing the love and freedom of God the Father’s heart. Stressing that God does not want to make our lives more difficult and does not impose arbitrary rules but the greater commandment is the law of love “is it lawful to do good or to do harm on Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” (Mk 3:4).

As I ponder today’s readings I see the Lord Jesus celebrating the law of love in the midst of all the controversy of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. I ask myself - would the people who know me be able to say that I follow the law of love? Is there hardness of heart in me that I am unable to see and feel the pain of the other and ask for forgiveness and to forgive the other? Have I grieved the Lord by my unwillingness to bear witness to the truths of the Gospel? Do I have an open heart to faith and humility like the man with the withered hand to bring my sickness, addictions and brokenness before the Lord for healing?

Let us bring the truth to the Lord as we sit at His feet morning by morning to be ministered by Him. If we have not been able to live this law of love, let us look to the Lord and ask Him to make it real in our lives, that we may be able to love every person we meet.

*Prayer:* Abba Father, I repent for the times I could not live the law of love and freedom You gave me through my baptism. Give me the grace to live my royal sonship/daughterhood once again. Amen.
Today, we celebrate the feast of St. Francis de Sales who is the patron saint of writers and journalists. His life results God’s ability to save us not just from sin but the good intentions of even our loved ones. St. Francis was born into a noble family in Sales, France. From the time of his birth, his father had great plans for him to become a Magistrate of great standing. However Francis was drawn towards God and a deeper religious life. Three episodes from his life show us how God was saving St. Francis from the will and dreams of his earthly father. When St. Francis heard a discourse on Salvation, it was overcome with fear for his own salvation and was fearful of not attaining eternal life, but the Memorare prayer and devotion to the Black Madonna lifted him out the this desperation. A second time while pursuing higher studies, St. France fell from his horse and his swords emerged from their sheaths forming a cross on the ground. This spoke to him as a call to priesthood. The last episode was when St. Francis of Assisi appeared to him and clarified that though he wanted to die as a martyr his call was to become a martyr by his writings and tiring himself out. In an actual sense it was St. Francis who preached extensively and wrote letters defending the Catholic faith against Calvinism that saved many souls.

This was the life of the Lord Jesus, whose power and authority was able to save multitudes from sin and their various ailments. The Gospel proclamation tells us that hundreds touched him and received a healing while those with evil spirits cried out the moment they saw the Lord passing by. They declared, ‘You are the Son of God.’ and the Lord Jesus silenced them. Such was the Lord’s following that there were moments when he was almost crushed by the surge of the crowds thirsting for healing and for answers.

When the Lord begins to speak and reveal himself in such ways we are able to respond like the psalmist, “Here I am Lord, I come to do your will.” The Lord has a different will and future for every person. Not all are called to stand in a pulpit of travel to faraway lands but all are called to share the love of the Lord in whatever they do.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank you for the calling you have given each of us. You continue to guide us and save us even from the good intentions of our loved ones because you and you alone know the wonderful plans you have for us. Amen
Today's Gospel proclamation is taken from the St. Mark's account of the great commission where the Lord Jesus stresses that the apostles must spread the Christian faith by evangelization and administration of the Sacraments. This is exactly the mission that is carried out by the Catholic Church today. The Church dispenses the blessings of the New Covenant through the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Also we see that the apostles’ mission is to the whole creation and this includes all the nations of the world.

We see this commission of Jesus being fulfilled in the first reading today in the life of St.Paul. In chapter 22 of the Acts of the Apostles, Paul gives his own account of his Damascus experience. As we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of St.Paul today, we need to remind ourselves of his conversion where he encountered Jesus on His way to Damascus. Paul had been blinded by the brightness of the light which shone around him. A disciple called Ananias had a vision in which he was told to go to meet Saul. Ananias was reluctant, because he knew Saul as a persecutor of Christians. Saul thought he was doing the right thing, he was actually not. But ‘The Lord replied to Ananias and said, “You must go all the same, because this man is my chosen instrument to bring my name before pagans and pagan kings and before the people of Israel.”’ So Saul, now known as Paul, became the apostle to the gentiles. He was lost and was found, was blind, but was given sight by Jesus Christ. We see that his whole life, after this encounter was based on Jesus’ revelation to him: where the Lord Jesus says, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting”. To attack the members of Christ’s body is to attack Christ Himself. This mystery of baptismal union between the Lord Jesus and His followers occupied Paul’s mind for years to come. This was the gist of Paul’s teachings later on. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.....” (1 Cor 12:12-26)

On his feast day today, may his passionate love of Christ deepen our own faith and appreciation of God’s presence in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, Praise be to you, our God and Father, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles. Amen
St. Paul’s letter to Timothy shows us on two occasions, the importance of passing on faith through generations. St. Paul himself remembers his ancestors who served God just as he did, and he goes on to remind Timothy of his simple faith that was carried through the generations from his grandmother, to his mother and then to Timothy himself.

It is this faith that fuels the fire in Timothy’s heart, and it would not exist had not his relatives encouraged him to believe. This faith however, does not affect everyone. For we know in all our lives, we encounter countless people who doubt the existence of God, or worse, know He exists yet act like He doesn’t. It is here that the Spirit God has given each of us at baptism needs to come into play. We were not called in to the body of Christ to be timid, but roaring lions and defenders of our faith – ready to witness to anyone about the love and goodness of God.

St. Paul reminds us, “Do not be afraid of your testimony to our Lord…” We are often ready to share the goodness of God with those who are likeminded, but fear when we have to speak of the good things God has done to those who are skeptical.

The Lord Jesus faced this crisis in his life on earth. There were thousands of people who gathered around him who did not know him personally, and it was easy for them to accept what he said. The real challenge for the Lord is seen in the Gospel Proclamation of today. A crowd had gathered in a house that the Lord was in, and it was impossible for them to even sit and have a meal. When the relatives of our Lord Jesus heard this, instead of being amazed at the wonder of God, they ridiculed him, said he was out of his mind and set out to seize him. If our Lord was perturbed by the reaction of his family, his mission would not have extended past his hometown.

However, his trust was in his Father, and the Spirit God had anointed him with. Therefore he was able to make bold proclamations of his faith wherever he went and thousands reaped the benefit of this.

_Prayer: Abba Father, help me be bold in my faith just like your Spirit intended it to be. Use me to proclaim your good news to all those around me. Amen._
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. Psalm 19: 8

Today’s first reading is taken from the book of the prophet Nehemiah. It can be placed in history around 400 BC, right after the priest, Ezra. In today’s reading, we see Ezra the priest about to reveal the Book of the Law of Moses to the common people.

It is said that Ezra read from the Book of the Law from daybreak to midday – that amounts to roughly six hours of reading. In today’s context, would we stand in the hot sun, listening to the word of God for six hours? In reality, some of us find it difficult to even sit through a ten minute homily in the comfort of our own churches.

The only way this supernatural interest could have been derived is if the Spirit of God was moving among the people. There is further proof of this move, for as the Word of God was being read, a strange event began taking place – people began to weep. They were convicted of their sinfulness; they knew they had been living a life that was displeasing to their Creator. They wept for their ignorance, they wept for their selfishness – but some wept out of fear. Fear of what would happen to them because they had done wrong. This fear was born out of a misunderstanding of the goodness of God. They failed to see the loving nature of our Father, and instead saw a punishing tyrant who would banish them because of their faults.

I faced this same situation in my own life. Though I had experienced the love of God in a tangible way years ago, when I was faced with a serious crisis I had no escape from, I thought one way that I could make my problem disappear was to go for confession. As I confessed, incessant tears rolled down my face, but what was I crying for – repentance or fear? One cannot truly experience a change of heart if we are ruled by the fear of the consequence of our sin.

As time progressed, I realized the error of my ways and that the reason I cried that day in confession was solely due to the fear of what would happen if I did not confess – I ran back to the arms of the Father. This time, I was truly repentant of all that had taken place due to the situation in my life, and after an honest confession, that seemingly impossible situation simply disappeared before my eyes.
Nehemiah reminded the people of an important truth that is still applicable today. He said, “Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” How often do we remember these words in times of trial? When we are struck down by sin, illness or financial burden, we try to draw strength from within ourselves, not realizing that the joy of God can strengthen us in a way we could never imagine.

The Psalmist reiterates this in his psalm. He delights in the laws, precepts, statutes and commands of the law. Has he discovered a secret that we are yet to unfold? How does he find joy through rules and decrees? Our natural tendency is to do the opposite of what we are asked. So how does this Psalmist find joy in this situation?

His sole desire is to please the Lord. His life depends on doing the will of the Lord. How do we know? He prays to the Lord and says, “May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” If he did not yearn to do the will of God, would he have made this prayer?

When our desire is taken over by the will of God, we too will be able to find joy in the law of the Lord. Until then, we will be like the people in the time of Nehemiah – weeping when they heard the reality, and not understanding all that awaits us if we simply adhere to the Law.

In the Gospel Proclamation, the Lord Jesus announces to all at the synagogue that he is the fulfillment of the Law. He is the Messiah that everyone has been waiting for, he has been sent to proclaim the good news and to bring sight to the blind. The same Spirit that worked in the hearts of the people of Nehemiah’s time was present here, for those in the synagogue were amazed by the words spoken by our Lord. Had the Spirit not been present, with a statement as bold as that, it is hard to imagine our Lord even being able to leave the synagogue peacefully.

The people of old wept for they knew of their sinfulness, yet did not know how to atone for it completely. Today we have the answer in the person of the Lord Jesus. He is the atonement for our sins, and it is vital that our knowledge of our sinfulness never outweighs the knowledge of the love God has for us – for His love can bring us out of even the deepest pit.

Prayer: Abba Father, my sin is great but your love is greater. Help me make your word my home so I may never stray from you. Amen.
Monday 28th January  

"No one can break into the house of a strong man..unless he first ties up the strong man; then indeed he can plunder the house”  

Mark 3: 27

The gospel proclamation of today never fails to amaze me. The Lord Jesus is being accused to His face of using higher powers of darkness to perform miracles. These miracles bring salvation to people. They set people free from oppression and even bring healing to them. Yet He does not rebuke them. Instead the word of God says He summoned them to the side and spoke to them in parables. Clearly He knew something that the people and the scribes who had been looking into the word of God all their lives could not see. That is the intimacy the Lord Jesus had with His Father and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring down from the heaven, the kingdom of God.

Even today we hear so many people talk ill of the works of the Holy Spirit and some even negate the very miracles that are done by the Holy Spirit. How many miracles do we see, hear and experience in our meetings? Have they not become so ordinary to all of us that we most often pass them by as too ordinary? By doing so we too are creating division between in our hearts to belief and unbelief, faith and doubt. The more we let it divide us within, the more we are tied down by the thief to plunder our hearts, minds and spirit of peace, joy and love. The worker in the Holy Trinity is the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus warns us not to blaspheme or grieve the Holy Spirit that the Father poured out on us by the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus’ life. The great High priest who carried His own blood in atonement for the sins of all humankind has set us free from this dubious and faltering life and lies that robbed us of our inheritance. As the Lord Jesus laid His life down for us, the Father poured His mighty Spirit upon the earth, renewing it with love and mercy.

In this renewed state the psalmist invites us to break into praise and worship in thanksgiving for this marvelous gift of redemption and the gift of the Holy Spirit - to praise Him for the victory over death and darkness from which He has won us over, because of His unending, unfailing love.

Prayer: Abba Father, let me constantly be reminded that the greatest gift you gave me is your Holy Spirit who is by my side till end of time. Amen.
“Here I am, I have come to do your will O God!”

Psalm 40:6

Hebrews 10: 1-10
Psalm 40: 2, 4ab, 7-8a, 10-11
Mark 3: 31-35

At this time, Jews were followers of the Lord Jesus were under severe pressure, some being thrown out of Jewish temples, tossed into jail and even tortured. They had to deal with the issues of priesthood and sacrifices of bulls and goats on the altar. Hence the author is emphasizing that though the law is holy and good it had many limitations. Animal sacrifices were only a reminder of sin and whenever an animal was offered on the altar, instead of removing the sin completely, it could only cover the sins. Rituals were performed yet internally no transformation had taken place. Their hearts were empty, burdened, heavy and sad. It was a human effort to stay away from sin and people failed miserably.

When the Lord Jesus came to this world, he offered himself to the Father, quoting from Psalm 40 – “Here I am, I have come to do your will O God!” The body He received from the Father, He laid down willingly sacrificing every drop of blood because the Old Testament sacrifices would never take away the sins of the world. The sacrifice took place only once and will never need to be repeated hence the Lord Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished.” The Lord Jesus saved the world through His blood on the cross. A mother shared a testimony of how her son was addicted to liquor and as a result had seriously damaged his liver. One day she was praying that one drop of Jesus’ blood would fall on her son’s head. While praying she was not aware that her son, who was living in another town, had taken ill and was unconscious. He had been rushed to the hospital. The Lord Jesus touched him and he recovered from his sickness as well as his addiction to liquor.

The Gospel proclamation is very clear – if we choose to do the will of God, we enter into the Holy Family. The Lord Jesus tells us, “You are in this world but not of this world.” Our real identity, origin and destiny lies with the family of the Lord Jesus and He wants to empower us to continue to do the work in this world but we first need to belong to His family.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to choose to do your will always. Wash me with the blood of the Lord Jesus so that I may be connected to you. Amen.
Wednesday 30th January 3rd Week in Ordinary Time

“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

Psalm 110: 1

The gospel proclamation today speaks of the parable of the sower. This is a popular and frequently used parable today. It is proclaimed in three synoptic gospels showing us the importance of this great teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The meaning of this parable can be understood through the psalm and today’s first reading as well as the gospel proclamation. How do we receive the word of God and what do we do with it? Are the words we hear falling on the path, the rocky ground, in the thorn bush, or has it fallen on fertile ground? What is the lesson we can taken from readings today? Are they just words or are they speaking life to us as the Lord explains in the gospel proclamation?

Both the psalmist and the first reading speak of a common fact, which is making the enemy a footstool. In the context of the psalmist it was at a time of grave battles that this word became alive in King David’s heart. The heart of David became the fertile soil which received the word and nurtured it until it bore fruit.

In the first reading we are told about the single sacrifice made for the forgiveness of sins. This is the base of the gospel teachings - that our Lord Jesus once and for all died on the cross in atonement of all our sins so that we will have eternal life and through His resurrection He sits at the Right hand of God and has made the enemy, the author of sin, His footstool, trampled and never to raise his head again.

Our hearts need to become fertile ground in order to make this amazing truth take root and nourish our souls. Especially at times we are faced with temptations we need to recall to mind that the Lord Jesus has conquered the enemy and in Him we are children of God with the same power to make the enemy our footstool, that in and through His name we can cast a mountain to the sea. Such faith comes only by making our hearts a fertile ground for the word of God to grow. If we don’t do this, we become like those seed that fell on the path, the thorn bush and the rocky ground, useless and dead in no time.

Prayer: Abba Father, may we seek you each morning so that when the enemy comes to steal us from you, we will stand firm in and through your word. Amen.
Preach all the time but use words only when essential.

In today’s gospel proclamation, the parable of the lamp, the Lord Jesus gives us some important lessons which need to be lived so that we could bear a rich harvest for the Lord. The concept of contextual theology is also vital because if we just take one verse we could get a wrong understanding or a distorted view which could be dangerous. For instance in Mark 4:25 the Lord says “To those who have more will be given and from those who do not have, even the little they have will be taken away”. This is the translation in some Bibles but we need to know that the Bibles were originally written in Hebrew, Aramic and Greek. They were later translated into Latin and many centuries later into other languages including English. In the translation process what the Lord said could be misquoted.

That is why today’s reading Mark 4:21-25 needs to be understood in the context of the preceding ‘Parable of the Sower’ (Mark 4:4-20). In this parable there are four stages. The farmer went out to sow and some fell on the wayside. So they did not bear fruit. Other seeds fell on rocky ground and grew for a little while but dried up because they had no depth. Other seeds fell among thorns and thistles. They grew for sometime but when trial and tribulation came, they were crushed and bore no fruits. The other seeds fell on good ground and bore a rich harvest—thirty, sixty or hundred times as much as had been sown.

Later the disciples told the Lord they could not understand the parable. He responded that if they did not understand and live this parable they could not be his disciples. Subsequently the Lord explained what he meant. In the first stage are those who listen to the word but just keep it in the head. So when they go out so does the seed go out of their heads. The second represents those who hear the word and try to live it but since they have no depth or do not take it to heart, the seed does not bear fruit. The third stage represents those who try to live it but when problems come, they falter and fail. The fourth stage represents those who hear the word, claim it as their own, possess it and most importantly live the word.

*Prayer: Abba Father, give us the power of the Holy Spirit to live the word of God. Amen.*
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