



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

July 2016

*“If you love peace,
all will be well.”*

St. Elizabeth of Portugal

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July 2016

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‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call
the righteous, but sinners.’ Matthew 9:13

Amos 8:4–6, 9–12

Psalms 119:2, 10,
20, 30, 40, 131

Matthew 9:9–13

When we look at the men and women that the Lord Jesus chose, it is surprising that He did not go to Rome and preach before Caesar or to Athens and debate philosophy with the scholars of His day. He did not appeal to the rich or famous or popular. Instead He chose men and women that we call the forgotten or cast off of society; Common people with common jobs such as fishermen. Some like St. Matthew, even had careers which

made them despised by all.

I imagine St. Matthew sitting in his tax office that day. Having chased after the god of money for years he found that it offered no lasting hope. He goes to work that day as a man despised by Romans because he is a Jew and despised and rejected by Jews because he is a traitor. He was not allowed to worship God or to present sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. He was considered worse than a Gentile. His life seemed to be without meaning and purpose. Then he hears that the Lord Jesus is passing by. St. Matthew may have wondered if He would rebuke him before the crowd. Instead the Lord Jesus says, “Follow me”. The Lord Jesus responds to all of us the same way. We may be feeling like outcasts, unloved and sinful but the invitation of the Lord Jesus to all of us is still the same. His love for us has no reason, condition or boundaries and because of this love He calls us to follow Him.

The Lord Jesus chooses all of us, including those like St. Matthew, who were social outcasts, because He came as a physician, to heal us of our sickness called “sin”. The Lord Jesus desires to transform us, but He does not do it against our will. John 1:11-12 says “He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet, to all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God.”

With this calling the Lord Jesus expects us to share His Good News. St. Matthew associated with the harlots and criminals. They were the worst but he wanted everyone to know what took place in his life. He immediately invites his friends to celebrate his new life in Christ Jesus. He does not keep the Gospel to himself. We are called to this same mission. We are called to share the Good News that saved us with everyone around us immaterial of their character or social status.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank You loving us unconditionally and for the privilege of following You. Give us the grace to share Your Gospel. Amen.

**“I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins-
and will rebuild it as it used to be..”**

Amos 9:11

Amos 9:11–15

Psalms 85:9, 11–14

Matthew 9:14–17

The excitement in the heart of the Heavenly Father is presented to us in today's proclamation. God, the eternal Event Planner, created the whole world by His Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet the human being, who was created to be loved by God and to love and worship God in return, gave in to the sin of disobedience and pride. The eternal wise Creator came up with an even better plan then, sending His Own begotten

Son to the world to reveal God's love to us and finally to sacrifice

His life for us, winning back the Divine sonship and daughterhood that we lost through sin. The Lord Jesus showed us how to love and restore, not to judge and condemn. Yet, knowing our limitation and natural tendency to fall into sin, the Lord promised to live with us to the very end of the age. (Cf. Matthew 28:20) This, He is doing through the Holy Spirit He sent to each and every child of His, to be our advocate and counsellor.

Today's Gospel proclamation is the testimony of what the Lord Jesus has been doing in my own life. Having been born into a family with a strong Catholic background, I was quite satisfied with my spirituality and my faith life. I thought I kept the Commandments and fulfilled religious and charitable obligations and I was self-righteous enough to look down on those who failed to keep them, or did not have much knowledge about the rules and regulations of the Church. It was in such a state that the Lord broke into my life, bringing in an ocean of love instead of a checklist of righteous living. A bright light was switched on inside me, revealing my own brokenness, which was unseen and unknown to me till then. I who was trying to remove the speck in the eye of the other, while having a beam in my own eye, was broken to pieces in my ego and pride.

Since I was baptised in the Holy Spirit at my First Four Steps Retreat, the fruits of the Holy Spirit have slowly started to replace the fruits of the flesh, which were hiding beneath the "Good Catholic" cover. Over the years, the Lord has replaced old wine of following rituals, with the new wine of an intimate relationship with Him. Each morning the Lord ministers to me and baptises me anew in the Holy Spirit, taking away the old wineskin of judgement and creating the new wineskin of love and mercy inside me. Forgiven unconditionally, I am in turn empowered to forgive others unconditionally.

Prayer: Abba Father, You are the eternal love. Awaken my spirit more to receive Your love and give it to all whom You send my way. Amen.

“Rejoice that your names are written in heaven”.

Luke 10:20

Isaiah 66:10–14
Psalm 66:1–7,
16, 20
Gal 6:14–18
Luke 10:1–12,
17–20

Her husband was unfaithful, she was broken and shattered. She came to the Lord seeking an answer. Soon her husband also came to the Lord and they reconciled. They could not wait to get back to the life they once knew. When they gave into the pressures of the world, they felt growing in the experience they received was time consuming. Unfortunately, the life they went back to was made up of lies, and heartaches. When suspi-

cions started to threaten their lives she argued; I am not interested in a God who has all the power but does not change my husband.

Biblical scholars believe that today's first reading is a prophecy of the rebirth of Israel after the Babylonian exile. Even though we cannot fully grasp the Babylonian exile, we understand rejection, helplessness, persecution, discrimination and loss. Often we end up in an exile created by our own mistakes or by the actions of others. We ask God the question my friend asked, “with all the power You possess, why did You not prevent this”? In fact, what we really mean is “why did You not prevent this so that we could go on living the way we did before?” Never mind, the “life we knew” was more toxic in the long-run. Never mind that it was our sinful ways that caused our “Babylonian exile”. We get angry with God and throw tantrums.

Yet, in that place of exile, when we turn to God in repentance and in complete surrender, He leads us to Jerusalem; the place where He dwells. There, we are nursed, comforted and restored. Our fears are shattered and we are given a new vision to life itself. Today's first reading sums it all; “When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants”.

Most of us accepted Christ as our Lord and Saviour to get out of our Babylonian exile. Yet, some of us end up in similar situations over and again. When God rescues us there is a part that we too need to fulfill; we need to keep moving from Babylon towards Jerusalem. The vicious cycle of returning to our “Babylonian exile” is broken by our inner journey with the Lord.

In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord says; “Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves”. The words of the Lord are somewhat confusing. Lambs are baby sheep, and they do not stand a chance among the wolves. Instead, they would make a nice dinner for the wolves!

I believe when the Lord said “I am sending you like lambs among wolves”, He is speaking about our attitude towards God and not towards the wolves. To go as lambs among wolves is to be vulnerable to God. It is about going where He sends, not because we have the resources, nor the character nor the strength, but simply because we are in obedience and complete surrender to Him. It is when we are completely vulnerable to God that supernatural power works through us in the midst of the wolves. Then, the impossible becomes possible through us; demons submit, sicknesses leave and Satan loses his control. The Lord assures the one who is sent; I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you”.

The Lord says there is more in store for the one who is sent; their names are written in heaven! What does that mean? God knows our names and we have His favour upon our lives. The Lord Jesus brings our names up in the conversations that take place in Heaven. He deploys resources and backup when we need them. The Holy Spirit knows us and He is walking with us on earth and will accompany us to heaven the day we leave this earth. The Elders, Saints and Angels know us by name. Their intercession is available to us. Principalities and powers of darkness know that we are out of bounds for them. Our names are written in Heaven means, when we stand in the mission of God, the hosts of heaven stand with us!

The early Christians wanted the Gentiles to embrace the Jewish traditions; they constantly argued about circumcision and its importance. In today's second reading St. Paul says circumcision or uncircumcision alone is meaningless. What is important is to be a new creation.

How do we become a new creation? The divine exchange takes place every time we sit at His feet allowing the Word of God to penetrate us, every opportunity we take to receive the Sacraments of the Church and every time we choose obedience to God.

St. Paul makes another important statement; “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus”. Some Biblical scholars believe that he refers to marks inflicted by branding, which showed the ownership of slaves or cattle. We belong to Christ and He owns us. He keeps us set apart from the world for the things of heaven to happen through us on earth. We are branded with the fire of the Holy Spirit and set apart to live for the Lord Jesus. We are given the assurance that the Father loves us and that as we journey with Him and the Spirit our names are written in heaven and are on the lips of our Saviour Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you because my name is written in heaven. Give me the grace to remember the magnitude of this truth when I am afraid or discouraged. Amen.

I will espouse you in faithfulness and you will come to know Yahweh

Hosea 2:22

Hosea 2:16-18,
21-22

Psalm 145:2-9

Matthew 9:18-26

The reading from Hosea is reminiscent of Is 54:5-8, Psalm 30:6. In the first part of Hosea we see God's "outburst of anger". Israel has betrayed her lover and worshipped other God's. This brought a moral and spiritual landslide to Israel. Then out of a heart broken with love and anguish for His beloved, with tender passionate entreaty, the Lord of the universe speaks to His people! Relentless and unquenchable is His love! 'For a brief moment I abandoned you' Is 54:4 But His love cannot be withheld for long. He will do whatever it takes to woo back His lost love even if He needs to 'seduce' His lost bride.

In the desert stripped of all else but His generosity and love, they would learn to depend solely on Him. Lacking all material comfort, they would realise it was He who provided for them, sheltering and protecting them, constantly watching over them like a lover over His beloved. He would make a new covenant with them and give them back their land. The relationship will once more be established, received in tenderness and love with a faithful God, who would not let them go even when they betrayed Him. What a beautiful picture of a blessed marriage!

The promised covenant of unconditional love flows into the Gospel. Here two people who were helpless and in need of the Lord Jesus. The President of the Synagogue would have resisted the Lord and even worked against Him as a 'good' Jew but now comes as a last resort. the woman with an issue of blood would have tried all other means to be cured. She comes now in her helplessness to the feet of the Lord Jesus. But to the Lord, nothing matters- only that they come in faith. All one needs to do is to come just as we are. Faith in Him and love which He came to show, works the miracle. The woman ostracised by society dared to approach Him breaking all human obstacles. The President risked rejection by his peers and came. Both found answers in the Saviour.

Faith on the part of the victim and love on his part - triumphed and the miracle happened. We need to fast from what our senses tell us. In times of crisis we are too called to look beyond our natural feelings and depend on the promises of the Word of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to cling to your promises your Son won me, in times of trouble. Amen

... The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

Matthew 9:37

Hosea 8:4–7,
11–13

Psalms 115:3–10

Matthew 9:32–38

The Gospel proclamation reveals to us that the Lord Jesus healed a mute man who was demon possessed. The simple, most probably illiterate crowds were amazed by the Lord's work. Yet the educated Pharisees saw it as something done by the powers of darkness. One group saw light while the other saw darkness from one action. This was because the ordinary people acknowledged their unworthiness and opened their hearts to the Lord, but the hearts of the Pharisees were shut due to their worldly understanding and thinking that they knew it all.

When the Lord saw the large crowds He had compassion on them because they did not have a shepherd to guide them on the correct path. To suit their own convenience, the leaders and high priests imposed rules and obligations on them, they portrayed a strict, unforgiving God and thought this was all that was required of them to carry out their duties. They themselves did not know the loving, compassionate, merciful and forgiving Father; they did not have a relationship with Him – they only knew of Him.

Where do I stand? Maybe I'm not a harsh, blind Pharisee and I do not impose rules on others. Yet am I instrumental in leading people to the Lord? Because of me, has someone experienced the Father's unconditional love and forgiveness? Have I said an encouraging word, which caused a person to journey with the Lord? Or have I judged and condemned?

Some of my close relatives come for the prayer meeting and initially this made me happy. However, over the years, I realised that even though they attended the meetings they still argue and live in the flesh. Suddenly a thought dropped into my mind – I doubt they will ever change, what's the point – The next moment the Lord challenged me. Who am I to judge them? I'm definitely not a perfect person, so how can I condemn another, even if I did not speak it out?

So as I look at myself, though I may not be a 'typical' Pharisee, nevertheless I have many of those traits, which I am not proud of. Though I love to be a shepherd and lead others to the Lord, my nature is the opposite. But the good news is, despite my sinfulness, the Lord still loves me with my imperfections.

Prayer: Abba Father, I come to you as I am. By your grace, may I become the creation you intended me to be. Amen

As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom
of heaven has come near.'

Matthew 10:7

Hosea 10:1-3,
7-8, 12

Psalm 105:2-7

Matthew 10:1-7

From the book of Hosea, today's first reading describes that the prophet Hosea had a real-life situation that God used to illustrate his problem with the nation of Israel. Hosea's adulterous wife had broken his heart, and this is exactly what the people of Israel had done to God when they played the harlot with other gods. Hosea is faithful; he finds her, redeems her and brings her back home to him. This dramatically illustrated Israel's situation for soon they would be conquered by the Assyrians and then sold into slavery because they had forgotten their God. The prophet Hosea spoke about a future blessing in which God would restore Israel. This is the heart of our merciful Father. He is attracted to sinners and broken people and that's the reason why He sent His only Son for us. Because the Lord is the good shepherd, giving His life and seeking His lost sheep. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 9:12-13, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." We need to turn to Him in repentance because He is waiting to embrace us and redeem us so that we can experience the fullness of life that Christ brought for us.

In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus gives authority to His disciples to heal, drive out demons and to preach the good news to the world. We have been called to carry His word to this world and be people through whom the Lord Jesus' characteristics of love, kindness, gentleness and mercy will shine. Therefore, the way we talk, behave, respond to each situation and how we deal with others should reflect the Lord Jesus in us. That is when we truly inherit the treasures of the Kingdom; fullness of joy, love, peace and rest in our hearts.

St. Maria Goretti, an Italian virgin-martyr of the Catholic Church, was one of the youngest canonized saints. She is the patron saint of chastity, rape victims, girls, youth, teenage girls, poverty, purity and forgiveness. She is called a martyr because she fought against her neighbor's attempts at sexual sin as she shouted "No! It is a sin! God does not want it!" and she said she would rather die than submit and was killed by the neighbour. Through her death she glorified God.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we thank you for bringing your Kingdom into our hearts through your Son Jesus Christ, for us to have a life with its fullness. Amen!*

“Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give”

Matthew 10:8

Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9

Psalms 80:2ac, 3b,
15-16

Matthew 10:7-15

Prophet Hosea’s words picture a parent lamenting over children or a lover over the one he loves. The picture that comes to mind is a heartbroken parent running behind children calling them back to his/her arms. These words also image a lover with a huge heartache crying out to the one he/she loves. But this is God who cries out loud, calling His people to come back to Him.

We generally have a wrong attitude about God. We think that God punishes us the moment we sin. But here God comes behind us crying and asking us to come back to Him. God does not lose anything if we abandon Him, but we do. Why does God beg us to return to His embrace?

God is love. God does not know any other language but love. We do punish ourselves when we sin. We chastise ourselves because we know deep down in our hearts that we have a monster within. Often we are not moved by love. But we are moved by our selfish desires and motives. We seldom do anything without gaining something. We are good to people in order for them to be good to us. But God is different. God does not want to give up on us. He says, I am God and not man. We, human beings easily give up on people. Without a second thought we can be nasty. But our God comes crying after us. He never gives up on us.

The Lord Jesus Christ gives us a leading in life. He tells us to give others free of charge what we have received free of charge. Are we doing so? Are we not caught up in our own situations in life? We tire so much to earn, eat, drink and gather riches.

What have we received without charge? Have we ever thought of it? We could name it Salvation. Salvation is a result of love. We have received the love and favour of God free of charge. Do we value it? Are we sharing this? The direction is clear from our Lord Jesus that we should not worry about the external security much. No money, no extra clothes or sandals are fine. But we need to have the internal security, which is God’s love. When we experience God’s love we can give it to others. Until such time we could be playing games. Let us wait on the Lord with the Four Steps and allow His love to minister to us that we may share His love freely.

Prayer: *Abba Father, let me become your child and lover. Amen.*

“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.”

Psalm 51:3

Hosea 14:2–10

Psalm 51:3–4,
8–9, 12–14, 17

Matthew 10:16–
23

A certain person sat through a Four Step retreat for the first time, and was touched by the Lord. He started seeing his whole past unfold like a movie before his very eyes. He was shown his sinful life before him. That was not to condemn him but to cleanse him fully and to give him a new lease of life. If we turn back and look at the life we have lived before having had an encounter with the Risen Lord Jesus, we will certainly see how that encounter brought the power of the Holy Spirit upon us. It showed us our sinfulness and gave us the grace of a true and contrite heart and changed us within.

Today's Psalm is a life giving Psalm to those who choose to fervently repent. I have personally experienced the liberation it brings to my weary soul when prayed with true repentance. This Psalm was prayed in grave repentance by King David once his sin of adultery and murder was shown to him by God through Prophet Nathan. Two mortal sins, adultery and murder, if un-repented, can doom a person to eternal fire. Such is the power of the Psalm today, that God restored King David's heart to salvation.

In the first reading today we are asked a few questions through prophet Hosea. Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand. (Hosea 14:9) He continues, The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

The Gospel proclamation today speaks of the mission of the twelve apostles. Our Lord Jesus warns the disciples of the journey that they were expected to follow. As sheep among wolves. We are called to walk through the same journey today. Thus, the questions of prophet Hosea are relevant to us today. Are we wise? Do we discern?

If we do, we will know and understand that the ways of the Lord are always right. It will prevent us from rebellion and falling into sin and separation from God. Wisdom and discernment come from the Holy Spirit. It is a wisdom to repent, wisdom to surrender, wisdom to choose to carry out the mission that the Lord Jesus has called us to do. Let this wisdom dawn on us all through a true and contrite heart.

Prayer: *Abba Father, make us gradually clean as white as snow as we come in repentance to you every day. Amen!*

“...And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Isaiah 6:8

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalms 93:1-2, 5

Matthew 10:24-33

God has called us with a purpose. If we truly understand this, our lives become meaningful and we can live life to the fullest. Today's first reading reveals to us that the moment Isaiah realised that God called had him with a purpose and when he said 'yes' to the Lord, his life changed. Isaiah was living in the reality of this world and of other people like most of us do; struggling most of the time, competing with each other, fighting and worrying. But one day when he went to the temple, the Lord broke into his life where the frame of his reality was shattered. I would say that must have been a divine moment Isaiah had in his life. The moment he saw the Lord and His realities became real, Isaiah began to see his sinfulness and it also led him to a place of powerlessness and helplessness.

It happens when God breaks our own realities, and through the light of God we see our own sinfulness and brokenness and it humbles us at the feet of the Lord. When God breaks into our lives, He in His mercy gives us the grace and strength to free us from our addictions and sinfulness. He sets us free. What is impossible on our own becomes possible with His strength. Here it was Isaiah, when he cried out “Woe to me! “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips,” the Lord said I will cleanse you now and transform you from within. What happens is when the Lord breaks through into our lives, He cleanses us, forgives us, makes us new and then He sends us for the purpose He has for us. When Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? he said “Here am I. Send me!”. How many of us are willing to say “Here I am Lord”.

We say, ‘if I don't have this problem, I can serve the Lord’, or ‘If I don't have that issue I can find the time to serve the Lord.’ What we are doing is we are trying to solve our problems by ourselves and we think once they are solved then we will be able to serve the Lord. But the Lord reminds us how much He cares for us; every moment of our lives, every need, every concern is being taken care of by Him (And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered- Matt 10:30). When we go on the mission He has for us, He assures us that He will take care of us and meets our needs.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I come in total surrender. Transform me from within to see your realities and use me for the purpose you have for me. Amen.*

The word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

Deut 30:14

Deut 30:10–14

Psalms 69:14, 17,
30–37

Col 1:15–20

Luke 10:25–37

A lawyer stood up and to test him asked, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' This is a question weighing on the minds of human beings across centuries and across the present world. When people are faced with failure they choose to give up life, but when some people are faced with tragedy or success, they begin to think beyond life and death and they wonder what is in store.

That is why some people tend to spend time on religious pilgrimages and on charity in order to save themselves and win a place in eternity while others have genuine reasons. As we look at it a little deeper it appears that the answer seems so complex and distant, but the Lord Jesus has it explained simply and precisely.

The Lord was dealing with a lawyer who was posing a tricky question to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The second reading gives us a background of the Lord. St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians describes to us the eternal nature of the Lord Jesus that all things were created through Him and for Him, in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Through Him (Jesus Christ) God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself.

It was to this Lord that the lawyer was posing the question about eternal life. In classic style, the Lord began to elicit the answer from the man through simple clarifications and a seemingly straight forward parable. First they spoke about love, loving God and one's neighbour. Then the man asked the Lord, "Who is my neighbour".

'Who is my neighbour?' This is a question we are all called to answer. Our neighbour could be the person over the fence who gets into an argument about the throwing of dust or our neighbour could be a refugee fleeing the Middle East for a life in Europe. In the story, the most unlikely person, a Samaritan reached out to the wounded traveler. The priest ignored the wounded man, by totally avoiding the sight of him. The priest chose to take another route. He tried to shut the suffering man out of his sight and senses and would have felt it was not time for such help to be given since other things would have been more important.

Then along came a Levite who was from the priestly tribe and even he chose to take a different route and ignore the wounded man. Fi-

nally, the Samaritan came along and he would have been considered inferior to the Jews because of his religious beliefs. Even today for a Samaritan to be employed in the Israeli government, he has to convert to Judaism to be accepted. It was such a low caste or Dalit person in the Asian context, who chose to show pity and generosity to the wounded traveller.

Let us focus on ourselves. Do we think twice or thrice before we extend help to people. Do we extend help based on the background, caste, ethnicity or religious affiliation? Even we surpass all those are we offering help for the sake of publicity, gain or because we love our Lord Jesus.

That's where the first reading comes to play with such a beautiful timeless message. Moses when speaking to the people about obedience and the laws gives them this gem of a word which says; the word is very near to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to put into practice.

Coming back to our question of eternal life and who are neighbour is... it is all simplified by the word from Moses. He tells us as we journey with Christ and keep His word in our hearts, we begin to know the right thing to do and we are called to respond in obedience to His word as and when we are faced with an opportunity.

As we live our lives, we will be faced with various opportunities where no one will be around to judge us or correct us, but we will have the word in our hearts and the word will whisper to us quietly and lead us forward. Many of us blatantly judge a person from another background or religion as being this or that way. We are so stuck to our ways of thinking that we fail to fail to love, accept and understand.

I am reminded of St. Joseph Vaz. He had such a deep relationship with God and love for man that he put away his pride and came to Sri Lanka as a coolie or luggage carrier. He made friends with the poor villagers, Tamil speaking and Sinhala speaking, then with the ruling class, the Royalty and with the Buddhist monks. He was able to converse with them and yet feel safe and loved by God. Only the eternal one can remove the coloured lenses from our eyes so we may see clearly ahead and love and accept people beyond all boundaries. Only then eternal life will be waiting for us and we will understand the real definition of what a neighbour is. Recently a Christian boy told my son, 'I hate Catholics' and my son replied, 'It is okay with me.' As parents, teachers and elders let us spread love instead of hatred.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me love in my heart keep me burning, burning, burning. Give me love in my heart I pray Allelulia. Amen

*'...surely I will save, all those who obey me'***Psalm 50: 23**

Isaiah 1:10-17

Psalm 50:8-9,
16b-17, 21, 23

Matt 10:34-11:1

Today's Gospel proclaims to us, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." What is this sword? Hebrews 4:12 says, 'For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword.' Here the 'sword' is equaled to His word'. Further it is said in that verse, that this sword judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Also in John 1:1 the 'word' is equal to the Lord Jesus Christ. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Now one thing is clear to us. That is 'sword' equals the 'Word'. The 'Word' equals to the 'Lord Jesus Christ'.

The life of one who experiences this living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ will be completely changed. The purpose of life and thoughts will change from a materialistic way of life to a spiritual one. Thereafter the whole purpose of life would be to obey God and do His will. Yet the purpose of many in today's world is to live for themselves. We live in a human society where many strive for their own prosperity, happiness, value and good name, even at the cost of going against their own conscience. We live meaningless lives, hiding our sin, practicing rituals, offering sacrifices and offerings to get help from God to fulfill our selfish ambitions. That is why in today's first reading God says, "Stop bringing meaningless offerings!.....they are stained with your sins." (Is.1,13) He is saying whatever you do externally, hiding your sin inside is useless. These are detestable to Him.

Thus the Lord is inviting us today, to walk towards the higher purpose of our life, which He, Himself has ordained for us. In Isaiah 1:16-17, He says, " Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. When we say 'yes' to this calling, this purpose, the gift that He gives us is 'salvation'. (Ps 50: 23)

Therefore today, let us ask Him, Lord, pierce my life also with that sword. Break through my sin, selfishness, change my thoughts and take me to Your higher purpose. Since you are doing this miracle in my life, I thank You. I praise You."

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the power and the strength to deny ourselves take up the cross and follow the Lord Jesus. Amen

Miracles & Repentance

Isaiah 7:1–9

Psalm 48:2–8

Matthew 11:20–24

The central message of the preaching of the Lord Jesus was the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and the need for repentance, a complete change of heart and conduct, on the part of those who are to receive this great gift of God. (Matt. 4:17) The Lord Jesus performed miracles to generate faith among the people, but most of His own people failed to recognise Him. They did not believe in

Him and were unable to receive the good news of salvation.

Thus, in today's Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus openly condemns His own people. He is disappointed and disheartened. His Galilean ministry has failed. The Lord Jesus realises that the people have followed His miracles and not Him. He realises even His own disciples though they lived with Him, walked with Him, and witnessed the miracles had hearts that were unchanged.

Have we also failed Him? We enjoy miracles in our life and return to our old ways of life? The words of the Lord Jesus, in Matthew 11: 23, "And you Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.", sounds the warning signal that being namesake Catholic/Christians will not assure entry into the kingdom of God. God is near us, like a father, like a mother, loving and forgiving us. Yet He is also Almighty God, Creator of the universe, distant and mysterious. If we do not respond to His love, repent and turn back, we will have to face the consequences of sin.

The hardened hearts of the disciples were changed when they were filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, as they waited upon the Lord in thanksgiving and prayer. By the power of the Holy Spirit these uneducated disciples of the Lord Jesus, became fearless, bold and courageous. As they began to speak about the suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus many Jews who were gathered for the Feast of Pentecost were cut to the heart and as they accepted the good news of salvation were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Today let us repent and ask for the Holy Spirit to melt our hardened hearts and lead us to live our lives according to the values of the kingdom of God.

Prayer: *Abba Father, as I read your word and listen to your voice, let me be cut to the heart and live according to your plan. Amen*

**“The Lord will not reject His people:
He will never forsake His inheritance”**

Psalm 94:14

Isa 10: 5-7, 13b-16

Ps 94: 5-10, 14-15

Matthew 11: 25-27

In today's reading the prophet Isaiah talks about Assyria. It was a great nation that terrorized Israel, though Israel as a simple tool in the mighty hands of God, 'a rod, a staff' was used to subdue this godless nation. This nation that would have caused Israelites to quake in fear and cry out that their God has forgotten them was in fact completely under the control of God. For the ax cannot raise itself above the person who swings it, nor the rod control the person who lifts it up. Once its purpose was fulfilled, God sent a wasting disease upon these sturdy warriors and they were laid to waste.

In my life there have been times when I too have lost my way and needed to come back to God. In my brokenness, I got caught up in the mess of life and forgot the power of God. I saw the vastness of the problem I was facing, the huge implications of the sin I was caught in and gave into despair because I assumed there was no way out. It seemed bigger than God Himself.

The psalmist confronts us in the readings today. He confronts us when we complain that God cannot hear or see our distress. That He does not take notice of our sufferings. He calls us fools, senseless ones in need of wisdom because “Does He who fashioned the ear not hear? Does He who formed the eye not see?” Looking back at my journey so far, it is clear that the biggest breakthroughs I've made, have been in the midst of the worst moments of my life. The breakthrough came when I was able to accept that God was not removed or powerless but rather that He was right with me, orchestrating it all if only I would surrender to Him. I learnt to surrender to His sovereignty and allow Him to use the crisis to cleanse and purify me. The pain, the lack of control was the only way God could subdue my ego and the false kings of my life so I could accept the one true King in my life.

In the Gospel proclamation today the Lord Jesus cries out “Father I praise you because you have hidden these things from the wise and revealed them to little children”. We can offer praise in the midst of our battle knowing that God is always in control.

Prayer: Abba Father I praise and thank you because you are in control of my life. Whatever I face today, I do so with the knowledge that You are sovereign over it all. Amen

“Love one another as I love you”.

John 15:12

Isaiah 26:7-9, 12,
16-19

Psalm 102:13-21

Matthew 11:28-30

In the Gospel proclamation today the Lord Jesus speaks what most Christians see as the most comforting words. Often we are restless and tense. Realising this the Great Physician tells us to come to Him as we are and give the truth of our lives to Him. Then He will fill us with the Holy Spirit so that we can rest in the Lord.

The Lord Jesus tells us He is gentle and humble. When we come to Him to find rest and peace, we also will be transformed to be gentle and humble. The Lord also tells us that His yoke is easy and His burden light. As he told St. Peter and other apostles, the Lord tells us today, “if you want to be my disciples deny yourselves, take up your cross and follow me”. The word of the Lord is not a request, it is a command. If we are not obedient to that command we are not Christians and we have no right to call ourselves Christian.

The New Testament tells us that it is our care for others that is the measure of our greatness. I am what I am to others. The Lord Jesus provides an inner liberation from selfishness and self-centredness, greed and jealousy or the desire for personal gain or glory. This happens through the amazing grace, the unconditional love and unfailing mercy which God gives us freely. Freely, freely as we receive, freely freely we need to give. All power is given in the Lord Jesus' name and in His name we need to go to others share the Lord's love as He told us “Love one another as I love you”.

During the flood havoc from May 15 with more than half a million being affected, about 100 killed and another 100 missing and feared dead we saw the worst of times and the best of times. Amid the death devastation and destitution we also saw how people came out to help generously and sacrificially. While that worst ever flood in more than 25 years was partly due to natural causes we also saw the wickedness and greed of those who indulge in illegal rock blasting or sand mining thus causing landslides and overflowing of rivers and canals.

Pope Francis in His encyclical on the environment has outlined the theology of the ecology to save planet Earth. We need to act on this.

Prayer : Abba Father thank you for your rest. Give us the power to leave our boats on familiar shores and in faith leap with the Lord into the deep. Amen.

“The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath”

Matthew 12:8

Isaiah 38:1–6,
21–22

Isaiah 38:10–12d,
16

Matthew 12:1–8

The Sabbath is the day of rest, consecrated and set apart holy unto the Lord. In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus is telling us that He is the Lord of the sabbath. He gives us rest. In him is true peace, peace that goes beyond our understanding, peace that will last no matter what the circumstances are. He is our consecration he is the one who makes us holy and set apart from the world, It is His life in us and not our goodness. It is His love and presence in my heart. Jesus is the Lord of peace and rest, the Lord of holiness and consecration.

Today's first reading tells us how king Hezekiah was at the point of death and he wept bitterly. We face such times when there is no hope, when all hope is lost. At the point of death alone, afraid and abandoned, King Hezekiah remembered his walk with the Lord, he remembered his journey with God and then he wept bitterly because he knew what he had lost. He had lost his relationship with God. This had brought him to the point of death. It is the same with us when we are affected by sin separated from God we are brought to the point of death because of sin.

We can see the heart of the Lord 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' (Matthew 12:7) where God makes the sun go backwards for King Hezekiah. Here was a man who once walked with the Lord but had fallen into sin and was about to die. This is the same heart the Father has for every lost sheep, every son or daughter of his who was once close to him. People who were once on a journey and now separated, lonely, and living in bitterness. The Lord is inviting us come to Him saying I am the Lord of the sabbath I am the one who can and will give you rest. Not only that He is showing us today in and through the readings that He is willing to move the heavens the sun and the moon for us to repent and come back to His love.

We come as we are. We give the truth of our hearts. We tell him, Lord I am sorry I messed up. I walked away from your love and because of that I am living in bitterness and loneliness I want to walk with you again I want to enter into your rest again to know your freedom and joy to live by the power of your love. He will restore us from death to life.

Prayer: Abba Father, You bring peace, love and joy into our lives today even in the midst of what we face in life. Thank you for loving us. Amen

My servant, my beloved in whom my soul delights

Isaiah 42:1

Micah 2:1-5

Psalm 10:22-25,
28-29, 35

Matthew 12:14-21

All over the world we have the powerful vs the powerless, the rich and greedy against the poor and evil against the good.

When faced with such situations we tend to fix our gaze on the powerful and evil and we assume that there is no hope for the poor and weak.

However we are invited to not feel helpless and turn our gaze from the powerful and evil to the word of God. In and through the word, God reminds us as in the 10 Remembrances that we have been practicing, that He is still on the throne and the Lord Jesus is still in control, no matter what happens. We tend to limit life to the present and to earthly life. However God sees beyond generations and centuries and He always will have the last word.

How did the Lord Jesus deal with threats and uncertainty? In the instance in the Gospel reading when the Lord Jesus became aware of the threats, the word says that He quietly withdrew from there since it was not His time to die. How does God address the Lord? Through Isaiah He says, 'My servant whom I have chosen, my beloved.' It tells us that when we go through trouble as we journey with God, we are not abandoned but remain as God's chosen and beloved. He loves us in our struggle and even though we may seem to be beaten in the world's eyes, we remain precious to the Father. The Lord Jesus humbly accepted worldly defeat and died a shameful death on the cross. But ultimately the Lord was raised to life. His victory is not visible to the world but through faith we experience the Lord's victory when through His death and shedding of His blood we are delivered from sin and addictions.

On the feast of Our Lady of Camel, we are offered additional protection from the Blessed Mother through devotion to her. According to tradition the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Simon Stock, a leader of the Carmelites, and gave him a scapular which symbolizes her special protection and calls the wearers to consecrate themselves to her in a special way. The scapular reminds us of the Gospel call to prayer and penance and instils in us that we are not alone.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for reminding us that we are not alone when we face injustice and suffering. It is not that you have left us or abandoned us, but you love us and we thank you for your presence. Amen

“Lord, don’t you care...? Tell her to help me!”

Luke10: 40c

Genesis 18:1–10a

Psalms 15:2–5

Colossians

1:24–28

Luke 10:38–42

Isn't this the complaining prayer that most of us make, to the Lord? Don't we pray, "Lord, make him or her change their behaviour; make them love me more...and so on? Just like Martha, we too, often tell God, who created us and sustains us, what to do, as if He does not know what He should do, or how He should be caring for us. This Sunday, the Lord invites us to open our inner eyes

to a reality and a lifestyle, much different to what the society around us is drawing us into.

Can we hear the Lord Jesus insisting upon the importance of His advice? "Martha...Martha!" Today, as we sit at His Feet and pray with the Scriptures, the Lord is calling us by name, not just twice but may be many times more, simply because we do not stop telling Him what to do for us. The Lord knew that both sisters, Martha and Mary, loved Him very much. The Lord and his disciples would have been hungry as they were "on their way" (cf. Luke 10:38), and as the elder sister it was her responsibility to make sure that this very special guest was made comfortable. I too have those moments when my duties as a wife, mother, daughter and a sister demand my time. So, is the Lord telling me that I should not be fulfilling those duties? Certainly not!

The Lord Jesus teaches us several lessons through today's Gospel proclamation. Each task, however big or small, material or spiritual, is a calling to glorify the Lord in and through our lives. We are called to accept every duty, demand or command not from the hand of another, but from the Hand of God Himself. This is true not just with regard to worldly chores but also in spiritual service too. Then, it is not hard for us to accept everything with a joyful and grateful heart, as against a grumbling and resentful heart. Then we will not be looking at another person and comparing life situations, seeing them as 'lucky' and ourselves not so. When comparison ceases, the frustration that tends to build inside of us will cease too. Martha was annoyed that her sister was not running around like her. In other words, she envied her sister at that moment. Isn't this the hidden issue that we often struggle with. Are we going to dare admit that we are envious of others? Never!

The Lord also invites us today to have our priorities right. We have been sent to this world, with just one purpose, and that is to prepare for a billion years spent with our Heavenly Father and Lord Jesus. We are called to love God with all our being and to love each other as the Lord Jesus has loved us and still does, which is a total and an unconditional sacrifice. We have been given a family, a career and a community with this one purpose and calling, and the people who have been gifted to us by God should not become gods in our lives.

The First Reading speaks to us about the importance of not letting God pass us by, in our day-to-day life. Abraham saw three men standing near his tent and while he could have ignored them and enjoyed his leisure at that hot hour of the day. Instead his heart went out to them and offered to serve them. He was not aware that he was actually playing host to the Almighty God of the Universe. The heart of servitude that Abraham had, made him offer the best, to his guests, even causing inconvenience to his household. What was his reward for serving three unknown guests with love and care? Abraham received the fulfilment of the promise God had given him many years before, and his wife who was dragged into serving against her wishes, was blessed abundantly too.

The Lord challenges us today. Are there barriers to the Hand of God being upon our lives, our families and our finances? Is something blocking the fulfilment of God's promises to us? We are invited to search our own hearts and find if we have been letting God pass by us when He comes to us in the form of a needy person, unlovable person, a challenge which demands us to go beyond our comfort zone. Do we let God pass us by when we tighten our wallets when called to let go of our resources for God's work, not trusting Him to provide for our own needs?

Through Baptism, we are called to evangelise. We may not be called to preach to multitudes but are certainly called to proclaim to those around us, that the Lord is alive, and that His unconditional love and forgiveness of sin is available to anyone who come to Him as they are. We cannot speak of the Lord unless we have met Him and heard His Love story written to us, in the Word of God. All three Readings of today speak about the vital need to listen to God speaking through the Scriptures, which transforms our lives totally, even turning every curse to a blessing. "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." (Romans 14:8)

Prayer: Abba Father, Your Word is the lamp unto my feet and the light unto my path. Empower me by Your Holy Spirit, so that I will always listen to your Word and live by it. Amen.

“...to the obedient I will show the salvation of God”

Psalm 50:23

Micah 6:1–4, 6–8
 Psalm 50:5–6,
 8–9, 16b–17, 21,
 23
 Matthew 12:38–42

The desperate cry of our God, pleading for His people to come back to Him is melting our hearts. We have seen people begging for love. But in the book of Micah, we see God begging people to be with Him. The sad and weary tone of a rejected person has become our God’s plea. What wrong have I done to you, for you to leave me? Isn’t this the desperate question we ask people who reject us? We hear this heartbreaking and drained tone of our God, asking His people, how did I weary you?

We need to ponder on these words? What have I done to weary you? Has God done anything to weary us? Isn’t it our internal problem that we cannot obey God? In the Psalm today, it is beautifully phrased; “You hate discipline” (Ps 50:17). Isn’t this our problem? We expect a trouble free life and blame God when we do not enjoy life. We forget that it is our internal issue which makes us feel defeated.

When people harm us, we get hurt. We end up bitter, questioning God and we harbour resentment, while God has already given us the answer. What is the answer? Forgive people endlessly. We forget that we are released when we forgive because God’s blessings flow into us as we obey God’s words. Our issue is that without obeying God we try to manipulate Him to get done what we want.

The Lord Jesus clarified this further. There is no end to the questions we fire at God. We demand signs at times instead of obeying God’s word. This is exactly the incident in the Gospel today. When the Messiah was among the people, they could not recognize him and demanded a sign. In today’s context too, the Messiah is among us in so many ways, but we fail to recognise Him. He is in the Holy Eucharist, in the Word of God, in the prayer meetings and in people. The Lord speaks to us in so many different ways; through hymns, sermons and reflections, yet in different situations we demand signs from God.

The Lord’s resurrection is our greatest sign. There would not be a resurrection without a death. This sign projects the love of God.

Prayer: *Abba Father, permit me to be a resurrected person to witness to the Paschal Mystery of Lord Jesus. That’s when I will be able to share your love with people in submission to you. Amen.*

**For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven
is my brother and sister and mother. *Matthew 12:50***

Micah 7:14–15,
18–20

Psalm 85:2–8

Matthew 12:46–50

Stretching out his hand over his disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ declared: Here are my mother my brothers and my sisters. Anyone who does the will of my Father who sent me, is my brother and sister and my mother.

Today's Gospel proclamation teaches us how the Lord at His young age accepted from the hands of His Father all of us as His Mother, His brothers and His sisters. But we still opt to live in the flesh and in the world. As I write this reflection today I am faced with a situation where I am overseas and my Mother has had a fall is being hospitalized and will undergo a hip replacement surgery. I just want to pick up and run to her but it will take time, instead all I am able to do is sit at the feet of the Lord and ask for his grace. Thank God for this journey in the CRL where I have learnt to completely surrender to the Lord, praise and worship Him every moment when I face difficulties, happiness, brokenness throughout the day and hold on to His Word. I know this accident has happened for God's glory to be revealed in my family and we will storm heaven with praise, worship and prayer for God's mighty healing and that He may work through the surgeon's hands during the surgery.

As we ponder and reflect on these words in the Gospel proclamation-like the Virgin Mary, who had faith and conceived by faith, who was the chosen one from whom our Saviour was born among men, who was created by Christ, before Christ was created in Her - did she not do the will of the Father? Indeed, our Blessed Mother did the will of the Father and so it was for her a greater thing to have been Christ's disciple, then to have been His Mother. And she was more blessed in her discipleship than in motherhood.

When the Lord was passing by and crowds were following him, His miracles gave proof of divine power and a woman cried out: Happy is the womb that bore you, blessed is that womb! But the Lord said: more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Mother Mary heard God's Word and kept it, and so she is blessed. We will be blest when we imitate her example of discipleship.

Prayer: Dear Mother, we love you. We thank you for your promise to help us in our need. We trust in your love that dries our tears and comforts us. Teach us to find our peace in your Son, Jesus, and bless us every day of our lives. Amen.

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born
I set you apart..”

Jeremiah 1:5

Jeremiah 1:1, 4–10

Psalms 71:1–6b, 15, 17

Matthew 13:1–9

Low self-worth and low self esteem are something that I have struggled with for as long as I can remember. I would always try to do something or be someone to be accepted. I would feel valuable based on their acceptance and opinions of me. I felt like a circus animal, desperately trying to perform to get people to like me. I was sick and tired of it but I could not stop because my self worth depended on what people said I was or thought of me. If they did not like me I had nothing to like about myself. One day I lost this race and all my efforts miserably failed.

I looked at myself and saw someone with no substance because I had spent all my life being who others wanted me to be. It was in this sorry state that the Lord Jesus encountered me. When I saw nothing lovable in me, the Lord showed me that my worth to Him started before I was born. I had worth because I was born in His heart and mind before I even entered my mother’s womb. I am a product of His creativity and love. This is something that can never change or ever be taken away from me. This is the only thing I cannot lose.

The prophet Jeremiah had a really low self esteem too. He did not think much of himself. But the “word of the Lord” came to him. (Jeremiah 1:4) And it was God’s word that showed him that he was valuable to the Lord because, even before he was formed in his mother’s womb, the Lord knew him. (Jeremiah 1:5)

Our society gives extreme value to outer appearance. It values youth, beauty, talent, intelligence, education, wealth and popularity. If this is our measurement of value, where do we get our feelings of self esteem and worth when everything on which we have based our value has vanished? For me, the Lord used the example of the man who climbed the tall ladder, spending much of his time and energy only to find, once he reached the top, that his ladder was leaning against the wrong building. He showed me that it was pointless to base my feelings of self-worth on how I see myself or on how others see me. He has value, a purpose and plan for our lives that is different from others. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us receive this revelation today so that it will produce a crop in our lives. (Matthew 13: 8)

Prayer: *Abba Father, help us to receive our worth from how precious and valuable we are to You. Amen*

“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”

Psalm 36:9

Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8,
12-13

Psalm 36:6-11

Matthew 13:10-17

In the first reading we stumble upon “the word of the Lord came to me”! God’s word is spoken, a message is given, and a mission in God’s plan is assigned. God’s love for His people is so great that he urges them to repent and turn to Him. The one true God! God reveals to us two kinds of sin, forsaking God, the spring of living water and creating our own broken cisterns. We distance and disconnect ourselves from God and His Love, and we become prisoners in our sinfulness, that even when God is constantly reaching out to us, saying “I love you my Son”, “I love you my daughter” we just do not realize it! We continue to wonder “Where is God?” We are reminded to repent from our idolatries and give that place in our lives to God and not to the world and flesh.

In this psalm we are led to the goodness of God and how gracious He is, to all His creatures, and to His own people in a special manner. Our hearts are opened to reject sin and to experience the satisfaction of God love and kindness.

Our Lord Jesus wants us to know of His kingdom and chooses to share with us the truths of the kingdom. In the Gospel our Lord Jesus speaks to us about the great hindrances of us receiving the blessing and fulfillment of the Word of God. He reminds us that so many of us do not receive the fulfillment of the Word of God and its promises due to our own folly. “Though seeing, we do not see; though hearing, we do not hear or understand.”

This is what the Lord preached to the people then, but it is as if He is speaking directly to me. I realize how distracted I have become with the world and everything of the flesh. I have created a broken cistern for myself. Although God continues to pour living waters into me, it leaks through the cracks. I have become comfortable relying on of my own self unless something goes wrong and need to go to God for help. I have forgotten that I was sent from the heart of God, with a mission and that it should lead me back to the heart of God. I have got lost in the world and its temporary pleasures! The Lord Jesus is inviting me to turn back so that I may be healed and am able to see, hear and understand His kingdom.

Prayer: *Abba Father, as you give me the grace to enter your kingdom and fulfill my part in it. Amen.*

“...I held Him and would not let Him go”

Song of Songs 3:4

Song 3:1-4 or 1

Corr.5:14-17

Psalms 63:2-6, -9

John 20:1-2, 11-18

During the time of the Lord Jesus, society treated women as second class citizens. Jewish women took no part in public life and were largely confined to the domestic scene. Women sat apart from men in the synagogue. In that context it was shocking that the first person to encounter the Risen Christ was a woman. The Lord is validating the role of women, their personhood, contribution and worth. He contradicts the cultural norm at this moment to make His point. To appear first to women reveals that it is the Lord that is important, and not our mere human traditions or beliefs.

The Gospels proclamation reveals that the Lord Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene when He met her. She then accompanied the Lord Jesus as He went about serving people. She was one of the women who stayed with Him right up to His crucifixion. She was present at the tomb. She was the first person to whom the Lord Jesus appeared after His resurrection. She was first to hear the Risen Lord speaking her name “Mary”. The first to preach the good news that the Lord Jesus is alive and that you can see Him, you can meet Him and you can hear Him. How did she receive such a privilege, having been a sinner who was possessed by seven spirits? It is simply God’s mercy and grace.

Today God’s mercy and grace is coming in search of us. If we hear Him speak our name, our whole life will be transformed. When we are transformed we have to journey towards saintliness. Saintliness is a lifetime journey. In the Song of Songs we see the internal journey of St. Mary Magdalene. “Night and day I looked for the one whom my heart loves. When I found Him, I held Him and would not let Him go till I brought Him to my home.” Twenty-four hours of the day we are being called to live in the presence of the Lord Jesus. To live in the Spirit. The moment we lose the presence, we must turn in repentance and prayer to find our lover. We should see Him and hear Him. Then we will receive His strength and courage to stand firm in the midst of our crosses and tombs of life to experience the resurrection that He gives. Then our lives will be a witness to the world that we live in.

Prayer: *Abba Father, give me the grace to look for You and to live for You day and night. Amen.*

“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God!”

Romans 8:14

Jeremiah 7:1–11

Psalm 84:3–6a, 8a, 11

Matthew 13:24–30

Today's Gospel proclamation refers to the “Parable of the weeds”. In the Gospel, the Lord Jesus says that a man sowed “good seed” in his field; The Lord gives us an insight that there was nothing wrong with the seeds of wheat which were planted. The good seed was ready to bear much fruit and bring a great blessing of harvest. However, once the seeds were planted and as time went by, there arose a problem of a dual harvest of weeds. As a result, all were disturbed except for the owner of the field. The owner was aware of the source of the weeds and what was required to do to burn the weeds and bring a harvest to the field, without destroying any of the wheat in the field.

The life each of us live in the Spirit, is a direct resemblance to this field that the Lord Jesus speaks of today. Today, as I'm baptized in the Holy Spirit and in His Fire, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside me and makes my body His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). I am led into the experience of being a child of God (Romans 8:14). This baptism of the Holy Spirit is a free gift that we are called to receive. However, as a result of receiving this baptism we do not immediately become completely free from our human nature. Instead, the Lord is calling us to walk with Him day by day on a journey of discipleship. As we live in the Spirit and walk in this journey of discipleship we are also confronted with the weeds of the disturbances and weaknesses which come from our own human nature and from the environment around us. A brother while sharing his testimony explained that though he had received the grace to let go of a lifetime addiction of resorting to pornography every day, he still feels unconsciously driven into a deep emptiness and dryness without this addiction. As we face the weeds of the brokenness of our hearts, the Lord assures us today, “You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh, but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you!” (Romans 8:9). In my brokenness I am invited once more to quietly connect to the Holy Spirit that comes to live in my heart. Just like the owner of the field, today, the Lord is not surprised at my brokenness, but His Spirit is gently leading me day by day, out of a lifetime of sin, into the true identity of being a child.

Prayer: *Abba Father, thank you for giving me Your Holy Spirit and making me your child today. Amen.*

Change the heart of God through prayer

Genesis 18:20–32
Psalm 138:1–3, 6–8
Colossians 2:12–14
Luke 11:1–13

Today's readings speak of the value of intercession. When I first began a long journey with God, I thought of intercessory prayer as a waste of time. I could not understand why someone would want to sit and pray for someone else when they could be praying for themselves. The question that came to my mind was where do these people have time to pray for others when they must have plenty of requests of their own that they want to pray to God for. It was only as I matured in my spiritual journey that I realised that to intercede for someone else was not a waste of time but a privilege given to those who trusted God with everything. The Lord calls us to come to a place in our spirituality that we can become an intercessor for someone else. What must we do to become an intercessor?

God touches the heart of people, but prayer touches the heart of God. The first qualification needed to become an intercessor is to have an intimate relationship with God. This relationship is not one where we call on God only in our times of need and forget about Him when things are going smoothly. We must have an intimate relationship with our creator and seek His face every day. We can build this relationship with God as we do with any other relationship in our lives. We will not be able to get close to others unless we spend time with them and get to know them. It is the same with God. He wants us to take time out of our lives to talk to Him. As we pray every day, we will become more comfortable in prayer, the Father will begin to reveal His true nature to us and He will also reveal His heart and mind to us. An example of this is given in today's First Reading from Genesis. Abraham has developed a relationship with God over the years. He has learnt to understand the ways of God and He is in a position to freely talk to God. In verse 20 God told Abraham that he was getting ready to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, those two cities infamous for their immorality. Abraham did not want the believers to be swept away in God's judgment so Abraham prayed to God. God listens to Abraham and is willing to spare the whole city for the sake of ten righteous people. God could have said, "Abraham, it doesn't matter what you say. I'm going to do what I want." God wanted to change His plans, for the sake of Abraham's prayer. The same thing can take place in our lives when we build a relationship with God. He will listen to what we have to say and He will respond. This is what intercessory is all about—knowing God so intimately that you are able

to boldly go forward and speak to our loving Father. When we know God intimately we will no longer have the desire to pray for ourselves, because God will reveal His desire to take care of us and answer every need in our lives. We will be so secure in our relationship with God that we will no longer ask for ourselves, but intercede for others.

The Second Reading from Colossians says, “When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.” One of the greatest intercessors is our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus knew we would lead weak defeated lives because of the sin inside us. And because of this He prayed to the Father and sacrificed His life so we would be able to live a life free of sin. The Lord Jesus gave us victory by nailing our sins to the cross. He had the most intimate relationship with the Father and therefore was able to intercede on our behalf and become the sacrifice needed to free us completely.

The Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus gives us the format of intercessory prayer. The disciples want to begin a relationship with God the Father and ask the Lord Jesus how they should pray. The Lord teaches them the ‘Our Father’ as a prayer they can use to build their relationship with God. The parable the Lord tells the disciples depicts how we should intercede. When we become intercessors, other people in crisis and problems may come to us and ask us to pray to God for them. Like the host in the parable when an intercessor is confronted with an unexpected problem they do not give up in despair. The host in the parable did not just sit down; instead he walked through the dark streets until he came to a house where he knocked on the door and asked for bread. In the same way, we can pray to God, asking Him for an answer to another’s problem or crisis. The Lord Jesus encourages us to pray and intercede persistently for people. In verses 9-10 He says “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Today God is calling on us to become intercessors. We are asked to never give up, but always pray to God for a solution.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to be able to seek You each day and build a relationship with You. I also pray for the grace to be able to persist in prayer for others. Lord, make me an intercessor for Your people. Amen.

**When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dreamed**

Psalm 126:1

2 Corinthians 4:7–15

Psalm 126:1b–6

Matthew 20:20–28

The way I see it, in today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus addresses the issue of selfishness head on. He tells the disciples that this is the way of the world and not of those who claim to be His disciples.

The definition of selfishness is: lacking consideration for other people; concerned chiefly with one's own personal profit or pleasure. Selfishness is not the way of the Kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus teaches a new way of life for His followers: A way that puts the other above oneself. "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26-28). The Lord's entire life was about loving and serving those around Him. If there was one person who could have had everyone at His beck and call it was Him. But the Scripture tells us that "being in very nature of God, He did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage." (Philippians 2:6)

The question is, how do we be like Him? We human beings are basically selfish. We primarily want to fulfill our own interests and agendas. We want our opinions to be heard, we want our contribution to be appreciated. We want to be more valuable than the 'others'. We cannot bear to see someone else being praised and appreciated when we feel we deserve recognition too.

I feel most of the issues within families are a result of selfishness. There is anger, bitterness, disappointment, resentment and reaction because what takes precedence above and beyond everything else is to get our own needs met. It makes us blind to the needs of others. I was one such person for most of my life. What mattered was me and mine. I was not even aware of it most of the time. I was such a discontented and unsatisfied person. I gave the members of my family a real hard time.

The grace of the Lord made sure I learnt, even the hard way that this was not the way I was supposed to live as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. He who loved me changed my life and perspectives.

Prayer: Abba Father, I know and trust that you are continually restoring me from brokenness to a life of fullness in You. Amen

“May the groans of the prisoners come before you; with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die.” Psalm 79:11

Jeremiah 14:17–22

Psalm 79:8–9, 11, 13

Matthew 13:36–43

Today’s Gospel proclamation tells us that the sinful nature and the holy nature that is both in the body of Christ or the church is also within us. “Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for the Virgin Daughter” (Jeremiah 14:17) This speaks about the nature of the virgin daughter that is the bride of Christ who is pure and holy that is within us because of the infilling of the holy spirit and the blood of Jesus that comes into our lives but because of the sinful nature in us that comes from the world and from the flesh “my people, have suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow. If I go into the country, I see those slain by the sword; if I go into the city, I see the ravages of famine. Both prophet and priest have gone to a land they know not” (Jeremiah 14:17-18)

The Lord Jesus speaks of the angels who will come to remove the weeds and separate the evil from that which is holy and set apart for God. I believe this can also be looked at as if the coming of the fire of the Holy Spirit that came upon the apostles at Pentecost. The fire that will separate the sinful nature from us and make us holy. The pure and virgin bride of Christ. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father..” (Matthew 13:41-43)

How do we enter into this experience and how can we make this real and alive? We enter into this through the four steps. We come as we are and give the truth of our hearts and surrender our lives into his hands then the Lord Jesus fills us with the power of his Holy Spirit. It is then that we experience what is mentioned in today’s psalms “May the groans of the prisoners come before you; with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die.” (Psalm 79:11) The groans of the prisoners are us who are held captive to the sinful nature and the strong arm of God is the holy spirit who comes to destroy this sinful nature within us to make us holy. When this happens, we praise him as mentioned “Then we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will proclaim your praise: (Psalm 79:13.)

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace today to live by the power of your spirit and not in the desires of our flesh. Thank you for doing this in our lives. Amen

“Sells all to buy that of great price ”

Matthew 13:46

Jeremiah 15:10,
16-21

Ps 59:2-5, 10-11, 18
Matthew 13:44-46

Saint John of the Cross, the great mystic penned these lines:- “To come to the pleasure you have not, you must go by a way in which you enjoy not – to reach satisfaction in all, desire its possession in nothing – to come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing - to arrive at being all, desire to be nothing”. He discovered every spiritual gift going through persecution from his

religious superiors.

Jeremiah becomes God’s prized possession. He is called out of God’s great love towards him and the people. The Almighty wants to give of himself to them. People seek the greatest treasure but do not know how and where to find it. Jeremiah is anointed to speak on how God may be discovered. The people however are disturbed by his words. His words call for a change in attitude and life style, which they do not want to give up. His persistence creates animosity and hatred. They make life very difficult for the prophet. Jeremiah curses the day of his birth and goes through an inner crisis. He questions God’s love and mercy and feels God’s assistance cannot be relied on. In his confusion he turns to God, he is asked to convert by giving up his rebellious thoughts. He rediscovers a deeper treasure of God’s love and grace.

It is probably easy to believe in God’s love when things go well, but to believe in His Love when things are not as desired, is the test of faith and more genuine and life transforming. When people reject or malign us, or when, as we say, all hell has broken loose, can I still dare to believe in His unconditional love. Pope Francis says “God constantly surprises us, He bursts our categories, he wrecks havoc with our plans. He tells us ‘trust Me, do not be afraid. Let yourself be surprised, leave all behind and follow me”.

The Gospel proclamation calls us to give up all those precious plans and things we hold so dearly for the sake of allowing God to work things His way. In His kingdom He has already drawn up plans for us. But we have to take the risk to give up ours. “I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord. Plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope. Jeremiah 29:11

Prayer: *Abba Father, may I discover the joy of knowing thee, within the pits of my own dark experiences and helplessness. Amen*

“He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them”

Psalm 146:6

Jeremiah 18:1–6

Psalm 146:1b–6b

Matthew 13:47–53

The first reading from Prophet Jeremiah today carries one of the most beautiful narrations of the Creator and the sheer intricate beauty of the creation of man. Words cannot not justify the magnitude of the beauty of this scripture reading.

Prophet Jeremiah walks in obedience to the command that came from the Lord and enters into the potter’s house. There as he waits for the promised message of God he receives it as he watches the potter at his wheel, moulding the clay with all control of the shape upon him, giving the pot the perfect form he chooses.

The Lord reminds us of the same message He gave Prophet Jeremiah that we are exactly like the clay in the potter’s hand. The dust, grime and dirt, substance of no worth, carved into a masterpiece. Just as He would, the broken and worthless lives of ours are carved into a new creation for the very purpose of God

The psalmist compliments the first reading further on the Creator and the mighty Creation. He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them (Psalm 146:6) He is the creator God, who created every atom of every planet and every star and every particle that no one probably has even discovered. Yet He is the Creator who knows every movement, shift and shudder within His creation. Can anything escape His attention?

In the Gospel proclamation today the Lord Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God through the parable of the net. If the first two readings speaks of the beginning of creation and the work of the Creator as the Potter, the Gospel awakes us to reflect upon the end of our life. What remains constant in between the beginning and the end is the continuous work of the Potter. The word of God says that the angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Therefore, let us decide before it is too late, to become the clay in the hands of the potter, our Creator God, surrendering ourselves fully, to be moulded as the Lord pleases for the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, let me gaze on you, my Creator, in everything I do so that I could be moulded and re-moulded a thousand times into Your disciple. Amen!

**“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives
in them and they in God.”**

1 John 4:1 5

1 John 4:7-16

Psalms 34:2-11

John 11:19-27

Luke 10:38-42

Today we are celebrating the feast of a saint who I assume did not quite understand the ways of the Lord. “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself?” I am quite certain the Lord’s response was not what she expected; “Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her”.

“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Their relationship with the Lord was such that she expected Him to rush to Bethany the moment He heard about Lazarus.

Martha of Bethany was a woman who knew her priorities. It was she who opened her house to the Lord and His disciples. It was she who was cooking alone for them while everyone else was in the living room. After her brother died, it was she who stopped grieving and went to meet the Lord. It was Martha of Bethany who dared to point out to the Lord, if He had His priorities right Lazarus would not have died.

Martha served the Lord even though she did not understand His ways. She served even when she was not supposed to! She continued to serve even after the Lord said; “Martha, Martha... only one thing is needed”. It is clear; St. Martha did not serve her way to sainthood.

In today’s second reading St John says “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God”.

Most people lose their faith in God at the death of a loved one. Yet, Martha while still grieving her brother’s death made a profound statement; “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” At the heart of her crisis she received a revelation identical to that of St. Peter at Caesarea Philippi and I believe it was what happened after this revelation that took her on her journey to sainthood.

Prayer: Abba Father, come and fill my heart with your kindness and mercy. As I experience joy and gladness directly from you, break the hold that earthly pleasures and wealth have on me. May my heart be consumed with the desire for the things above, so that I may see you at the most influential place in the universe; seated on your throne. Amen

“Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink. Rescue me from my enemies and from the watery depths” Psalm 69:15

Jeremiah 26:11–16,
24
Psalm 69:15–16,
30–31, 33–34
Matthew 14:1–12

Jeremiah was chosen by God while he was in his mother’s womb. Jeremiah did not want to be God’s prophet. He trembled and disliked the call of God. If he had a choice he would have run away. Jeremiah is a prototype of who we are today. We are the chosen ones to carry out the difficult tasks for the Lord Jesus.

To be an instrument in the hands of God is a tough job. The recipients of God’s message rejected the prophet. We face similar situations. When we are called to be a messenger we will be cast away and rejected. Similarly we could also be bad recipients of God’s message. When we are corrected we may not want to accept it either. No one desires to accept a threatening message from God. We know that God is loving and merciful. God’s corrections come out of love. But since we are proud and arrogant we do not want to accept advice, especially if the messenger is not so prominent in society. We will choose to reject the message and the messenger.

The leadership did not approve of Jeremiah’s prophecies. They rejected Jeremiah. But Jeremiah was able to convince them and survive. It was not such a situation to John the Baptist in the Gospel reading today. John faced death.

John the Baptist boldly challenged Herod and his wife Herodias. When powerful people live unapproved lifestyles everyone in the society has to turn a blind eye. That was the situation then and also today. When they are challenged they misuse their power. Jeremiah survived death, but John the Baptist faced death. What would we do?

We could be in these two categories at different times. Let us ask our Lord Jesus to open our eyes to these blind spots in life. Will we allow wrong to continue for fear of rejection? Will we reject the person who challenges us? These are our blind spots in life and only God can reach out to these places.

When we are caught up in the spells of lust and power, we prefer not to be set free. God in his mercy sends prophets to get us out of the spell, but we reject the prophet. But the Lord in His mercy rescues us and chooses broken and lowly to be His instruments.

Prayer: Abba Father, I am blind to my sin. Without you in my life, I would live in the hell fires daily. Father, grant me wisdom to choose your counsel. Amen.

Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy
and gladness all our days.

Psalm 90:14

Ecclesiastes 1:2,
2:21–23

Psalm 90:3–6, 12–13

Col 3:1–5, 9–11

Luke 12:13–21

The first reading is an honest look at the state of life, and the writer paints a depressing picture. Examining the reading closely, we notice two things. The first is that God does not play any part in the lives examined by the writer. The second is that they were singularly focussed on gathering wealth, knowledge, and fame for themselves.

This seems to aptly describe our world today, where we live in a society that has rejected the existence of God, and has fostered a self-centred materialistic life style. We who have “known” God often get sucked into thinking and acting just like those around us. Our actions, our values, and our perspective of a successful life are influenced by what we learn from the world around us. In verse 23 the writer observes that “All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest” and concludes that such a life is meaningless. As we look around what can we say besides nod our heads in agreement?

The responsorial psalm also looks at the state of life, but this time the perspective is not a Godless perspective. The Psalmist concludes his reflection with a prayer; “Teach us O Lord to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” The Psalmist prays that God transforms the very situation that the first reading portrays as a meaningless curse, into a source of wisdom. The Psalmist adds these words to the end of the prayer; “Fill us at daybreak with your kindness, that we may shout for joy and gladness all our days.” The Psalmist has discovered that joy and gladness are not a result of accumulating wealth, knowledge, or power and acceptance. Joy and gladness are a result of being filled with the “kindness and mercy of our God”.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we see a man requesting Our Lord Jesus to advise the man’s brother to share his inheritance with him. Maybe the man had a rightful claim to the inheritance, and what had happened might have been a huge injustice. Maybe the man had a big problem, which could be solved easily if his brother shared his inheritance. Maybe the brother who had denied him the inheritance was already a disciple of the Lord, which explains why the man wanted our Lord Jesus to advise him. Our Lord Jesus seems to be unconcerned about the injustice that has taken place.

Whenever someone has wronged me or cheated me, I become in-

dignant. I then come before our Lord Jesus and plead with Him to fix the situation for me. The attitude of our Lord Jesus in this episode really jolts me. Why is He not concerned? Will does He ignore my plea? What on earth is He doing?

Even though I follow our Lord Jesus, often, my idea of a successful life is no different to that of one who does not believe in the Lord. Deep within my heart, I believe that happiness (joy and gladness) lie in having extra disposable cash, being great in the eyes of others, and having the power and authority to get things done. When I pray and ask the Lord to help me, more often than not, I find that it is connected to this dream of success. Perhaps this was the case with the man who wanted his brother to share his inheritance. Our Lord Jesus identifies this as a trap that can easily lure us and tells us to be on our guard.

The Lord then relates the parable of the Rich Fool. One thing is clear, our Lord Jesus is not happy when we hoard wealth for ourselves. His Lordship Bishop Christopher Prowse once shared; “Life is Short, Death is certain, Eternity is long”. Our Lord Jesus wants us to invest in things that will make us rich for the long haul; eternity. If our priorities are not right; If our hearts are not converted from the ways of the world, it matters very little whether we are treated fairly or wronged or cheated. Hoard wealth in Heaven He says, that is the important thing.

I am told that those on death row have to shout “Dead Man Walking” as they walk around. In today’s second reading, St. Paul wants us to carry the same attitude. Life as we know it has been put to death. Instead, there is a new life set apart for us, that goes on for millions of years. This life is hidden, and hence not visible to the naked eye. This life, he says, is with Christ Our Lord. He wants us to “set our hearts on things above” – desire (just desire, not anything else) this new life that is hidden with Him. At some point Christ will appear – there will be a breakthrough and all this will become real. St. Paul says that this new life “is being renewed”. He uses the present continuous tense, which means that this is a journey over time. Experiencing moments of eternity as we go on, and shedding the ways of the earthly nature along the way.

Prayer: Abba Father, come and fill my heart with your kindness and mercy. As I experience joy and gladness directly from you, break the hold that earthly pleasures and wealth have on me. May my heart be consumed with the desire for the things above, so that I may see you at the most influential place in the universe; seated on your throne. Amen

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