



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

July 2017

Speaking about St. Mary Magdalene's encounter with the Lord Jesus, Pope Francis said, "Around Jesus there are many people who look for God; but the most marvelous reality is that, long before, there is above all God who is concerned about our lives, who wants to uplift, and to do this, calls us by name, recognizing the personal face of each person,"

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“In doing this He fulfilled what was said by Prophet Isaiah: He bore all our infirmities and took on Himself our diseases.” Mathew 5: 17

Gen 18:1-15

Luke 1: 46-55

Matthew 8:5-17

Today is a day that the Catholic Church has identified as a day of the seafarer. Let us think of these men who risk their lives in the deep blue ocean far away from the world isolated in the work they do, while making a livelihood for themselves. To those surrendered to God there are many interesting testimonies in their lives. The writer of the song ‘Amazing Grace’, John Newman was once a slave trader. This song was his inspiration when he was at sea. This song in turn inspired one man named William Wilberforce to fight for the abolition of slavery in Britain.

Today’s readings show us that a deep internal intimate connection with the Lord can reveal the presence and power of Him in our lives. At the same time we also see the different attitudes and reactions than can emerge from us. We have in the first reading Abraham who senses the Lord’s visit through the three strangers who were standing by the oak of Mamre. His immediate response was to serve them with unstinted hospitality. When they announced that Sarah would conceive and have a son, Sarah secretly laughed in disbelief. This is the natural reaction of human beings to a situation where the circumstances seem impossible. But the confirmation that “is there anything too wonderful for the Lord?” is so true. In our lives we have seen this happen time and again but we forget this as easily, as the world is often more real to us than God.

Conversely we see in the Gospel proclamation the Centurion’s faith and belief in the Lord’s power to heal and restore by merely pronouncing a word. The Lord says, “Go back, you have believed so let this be done for you’. The centurion is one of the most attractive characters in the Gospels. What was special in him was his attitude to his servant. He was grieved that he was ill and was willing to do anything in his power to save him. The Lord Jesus saw this love and was touched. This was the reverse of a master- slave relationship.

It is this same spirit of faith and attitude that we are called to demonstrate in our life’s journey. A follower of Christ cannot seek for rest while there are others to be helped and healed: the most beautiful fact is that we will find our own weariness refreshed and our own weakness strengthened in the service of others.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us your strength and power to serve others according to your Holy will. Amen

Becoming dead to sin and alive to God's saving love

2 Kng 4:8-11,14-16

Ps 89:2-3,16-19

Rom 6:3-4,8-11

Matt 10:37-42

Today's first reading speaks of a woman's love for God and His servants. The Bible specifically says she was a rich woman. When I think of this lady I imagine she may have had everything she needed in life but she still may have had emptiness inside her. She may have used her money and searched far and wide for something to fulfill her life but found nothing. Alas she met the prophet Elisha who introduced her to God. In a relationship with God she found fulfillment and satisfaction. She realized her purpose in life.

This is the same story for many of us. We may have had everything we needed but something inside us was always looking for something more. We tend to look to the world to fulfill the emptiness inside us. Through our work, friendships, relationships, etc. I know a little bit about this, because for years I was looking for something more in life. With every relationship or friendship I was looking for a long lasting sense of happiness and joy. But nothing could bring it until I came to know God. The book of Malachi tells us that God will never change. As I learnt more about God and started a relationship with Him, I realized that no matter how much someone loved me or spent time with me it could not compare to being loved by God and knowing that he was in control of my life.

After the rich woman met the Lord her whole life was changed. She began to serve the Lord in every way she could. One of these things she did was to provide a place for the prophet Elisha to stay. For this the Lord rewarded her with a child.

In the same way, the Lord is teaching us when we encounter him, surrender our lives to Him we will want to do more for the Lord. Serving will be effortless because the love the Lord pours into our hearts will overflow to others. As we do this, surrendering our lives to God, He will take care of us and meet our every need.

The second reading from Romans tells us that when a believer is baptized into Christ, the believer has already died. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Nothing can be more unresponsive than a person who is dead. Imagine someone trying to evoke a reaction from a corpse. It can be com-

manded or kicked and no response will come, for the simple reason that it is dead to all such stimuli. In the same way God reckons the believer to be dead to the promptings of sin. Next St. Paul asserts the triumph of it; and to drive home his point, he gives two illustrations. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (v. 3-4). Verses 8-11 tells us that God has made death to work on our behalf.

It swings open for us the door to victory and glory. "Now if we be lead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (vv. 8-9). Paul wants us to grasp the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. It stands to reason, he argues, that if we are identified with Christ in His death, then likewise we are identified with Him in His resurrection. The two go together. The same mighty power which raised up Christ from the dead is at work in the believer's life today. This statement does not refer primarily to the coming resurrection at the last day, but has immediate application to the present power of the indwelling Holy Spirit who ministers to us the blessings and the benefits of Christ's resurrection. It is with this power of the resurrection that we are able to give our lives fully to God.

The Gospel proclamation from Matthew tells us that how we must place Christ at head of our lives. This reading can bring up many questions for us. Have we allowed anything to hinder us from loving the Lord Jesus as we ought? Are we allowing family and relatives to come between us and the Lord? Has our selfish love for ourselves hindered us from loving the Lord as we ought? Today the Lord is speaking to us and telling us to place Him first. Then just as the rich woman in the first reading give the first place to the Lord and was taken care of, we too will be taken care of when we give the first place to the Lord.

One way to get the Lord working in our lives and clear the way for His power to become active is to claim the blood of the Lord Jesus over our lives. I was losing out on the battle to be triumphant over sin and sin was getting a hold on me. Then, every morning I began praying, 'Blood of Jesus, was over me and deliver my mind, heart, soul, spirit and emotions'. Gradually I was delivered from a very strong oppression that I have been living with and had allowed to dominate my life. I believe it is the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, cover me and deliver me with the blood of Jesus. Amen

**You are the household of God... being built
to become His sanctuary**

Ephesians.2:19

Ephesians 2:19-22

Psalm 117:1bc, 2

John 20:24-29

Mere words fail to grasp the meaning enshrined in these words - "the length and breath, the height and depth of His love which surpasses all knowledge." Is it not incredible that mortals like us, sinful and weak are chosen to be the household of God – a sanctuary for Him to dwell in? By reflecting on this promise, will it not give us purpose and direction for our lives? Will anything the world has

to offer compare with the immeasurable treasure contained in these words? Will we need to seek glory from any other source? Do we need to flaunt our identity as being of a special class, status or even religion – when we have been given an identity from God Himself, as belonging to His family? The fleeting illusion of happiness we chase after melts even as we try to hold on to it. But the promise here is a treasure that will last beyond time itself. A religion once confined to the Jews alone, has become a relationship with God as Father. The Gospel destroys all differences, building a structure uniting all humanity with the Lord Jesus as the cornerstone.

One such person who took the promises to heart and brought more people into this awareness was the apostle St. Thomas, whose feast we celebrate today. It is a pity that the sterling qualities of this Apostle are clouded under the label "Doubting Thomas". He was man of uncompromising honesty, not pretending that doubt did not exist. It was his love that pushed him to want to go and die with the Lord Jesus. (John 11:16) It was he who took seriously the commission to go out and preach the good news to the ends of the earth and was martyred for this cause. Churches and places of veneration are standing proof of his success. The Lord Jesus looks into his heart with gentle compassion, eliciting the famous response, "My Lord and my God" – words that have entered the liturgy and at every mass.

As the Father sent the Lord Jesus, the Lord sends His disciples. With the privileges promised, come the obligation. Receiving the sacraments alone will not entitle us to belong to Him. We need to see ourselves as He sees us and relate to others and the world as He does. When Thomas asked Him the way, the Lord Jesus spoke the immortal words, "I am the way, the truth and the light." It is His transforming love that will help us to experience these words.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us through your spirit, to know who we are called to be, what we are called to do. Amen.

Since he ignored them, they took his hand ...his wife...his two daughters,
because the Lord was sparing him. **Genesis 19:16**

Genesis 19:15-29

Psalms 26: 2-12

Matthew 8: 23-27

The angels urged Lot to take his family and hurry out of Sodom since God was going to destroy it due to the sinful lifestyle of the citizens. Lot hearing the bad news hesitated to leave the city at once and therefore the angels had to grasp not only Lot's hand but the whole family as well and lead them out of the city.

We might wonder that even after two angels visited Lot and informed him beforehand about what God was going to do to the city, Lot hesitated to leave. Lot knew that his was the only family that God had chosen from the city, Alas he had to be forcefully taken out. In fact we may act in a similar manner if such a situation arises. Why is that? Most of us behave stubbornly, even after having a God experience and understanding God's purpose for us. We need to take certain decisions so God will be able to execute his plan in our life. But we too tend to hesitate to make these moves since we are so used to living the way we have wanted for many years. This life style has become a part of us. This is what happened to Lot and his family. They had become comfortable with the Sodom life style and because of this they just could not move out at once. But God was merciful to them and because of that the angels forcefully led them out.

This reminds us that the same God is merciful to us even when we are unable to let go of certain things, God will surely send someone to guide us. There is something very significant that we need to take note of and that is Lot and his two daughters obeyed what was instructed but his wife half way down disobeyed it and ended up becoming a pillar of salt. This is because even though they left the city knowing that God had something great for them her heart had not left that sinful city. This can happen to us as well. While God is guiding us to greater heights, we tend to boast about our past sinful acts instead of taking about how God saved us. Some of us are even proud of our sinful acts. Today as we hear God speaking to us, let us take a serious stand and seek what God wants us to do without playing games with Him. Let us strive to live a righteous life because God needs us to act accordingly for Him to use us for something great that we would not have even dreamt of.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to listen to your voice and act immediately without hesitation in order to please you that your will may be done. Amen

**“In my misfortune I called, the Lord heard
and saved me from all distress”**

Psalm 34: 7

Gensis 21: 5, 8-20

Psalm 34: 7-13

Matthew 8: 28-34

God's hand was twisted by a human hand. A person's impatience disturbed the serenity of God's plan. Sarah's outburst brought sorrow to Abraham's life, how much more is God the Father hurt when His children are cast away. Our God can draw straight lines through the crookedness of our life. God's good counsel led Abraham to do what was demanded of him and God's faithfulness to His promises is at work to this day. In moments of distress we too can become blind like Hagar. As aimless roamers we tend to give up but God does not turn His face from a distressed person. God stands up for those who are crushed.

Hagar received a revelation from God. Her eyes were opened to springs of water. This can happen to us. In our distress when we call upon the name of Lord Jesus, He gives us a revelation and opens our eyes to things we never saw before and springs of water. Our needs are fulfilled and we experience the security of God.

Our internal disposition determines our closeness or distance to God. The Lord Jesus encountered two demoniacs. Their internal disposition pushed them away from our Lord Jesus. Yet the power of our Lord Jesus delivered them from the demonic possession. Who is at the centre of my life? Is it God? Is it I? Or is it other people or possessions? Whoever is in the centre of my life will be the one who rules me. If God is not in the centre of my life, we need to be opened to be exorcised by our Lord Jesus. When we are exorcised, we will know it because our inner eyes will be opened and we will have a new perspective towards life. We might lose materially yet we will gain spiritually. St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria was a doctor who dedicated his whole life to the service of God. His devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was evident. A miraculous occurrence during his first mass took place where supernatural light and multitude of angels surrounded the place during the consecration of the Eucharist. This experience was shared by the contemporary witnesses. He boldly faced difficulties and differences against the church and faith. He was able to bring forth a transformation in two years; people were led to live morally pure lives through his inspiration. He died at the age of 36.

Prayer: Abba Father, open our eyes to see your mercy liberating us as it was for Hagar and the two demoniacs. May we too become true witnesses. Amen

Lives of faith

Genesis 22: 1b-19

Psalms 115:1-9

Matthew 9:1-8

When we dig deep into these readings we encounter two stories of faith coming alive. Two people are laid out on stretchers, left to the mercy of God and the Lord Jesus to speak into their lives and set them free. One is bound to an altar and the other is confined to a stretcher.

St. Maria Goretti in her own way surrendered her purity to the Lord and was subjected to the brutal assault of the man who was lusting after her. Her precious example exalted her to the highest of realms as a Virgin and Martyr. Today purity and virginity is no more fashionable among young people.

In the reading from Genesis, Abraham was instructed by God to sacrifice his only Son. Abraham proceeds with the journey to the place where he has to sacrifice his son. I think the hardest moment would have been when Isaac asks his father where the sacrificial lamb is. Abraham calmly replies that God would provide. We know the end of the story and so it is easy for us to read through it but the struggle brewing in the heart of Abraham and his son would have been an experience. Imagine Isaac tied down to the altar, seeing his father lift the dagger over him. In today's time and age fathers, uncles and brothers are doing this not out of true love but out of honour and self righteousness. This incident is one of faith that Abraham had in God the Father but it is a clarion call to remind us of our attachments to worldly things. Am I able to give up articles, people, relationships, wealth, fixed deposits. Imagine the people trapped in the London Grenfell Tower which became a towering inferno. There were infants, young couples, youth, seniors, architect students... none could escape the final call.

In the Gospel proclamation, the paralysed man was also brought by friends to the Lord. Seeing their faith the Lord declared, 'Stand up, take your stretcher and go home. Have we cared to carry sick people or people in need to a prayer meeting, mass or healing service? Seeing our faith, the Lord will respond, take the daggers away over our lives and deliver such people from their sicknesses. Do we have the faith? Today's Psalm is a promise of hope which says, 'I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living.' Let us have this expectant faith as we intercede for others and then for ourselves.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for clarity when we are being tested like Abraham or confined to a bed when sick. We believe in your saving help. Amen!

Binder of the broken hearted!

Gen 23:1-4, 19:
24:1-8, 62-67

Psalms 106: 1-5

Matthew 9: 9-13

Thanks be to God that He is attracted to sinful people. Zaccheus and Matthew were both tax collectors who were despised and loathed because they were considered as traitors by the people of that day and age. It is said that if a tax collector was walking on the road, people would spit in their direction as a display of their disapproval and contempt. They were judged by all, except

for the only one righteous enough to judge, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord knew that nothing good would come out of shunning and ostracizing sinners. He knew that the only way he could win them over to His love, was to make sure they knew that they would always be welcome with Him. He delighted in showing mercy. And this is what the Lord expects of all of us, who call ourselves His followers.

Ironically though, in today's world, Christians are not known for their non-judgmental, merciful, acceptance of those who do not uphold or live by the same ideals as they do. They are known for their intolerance and condemnation of those they consider sinful. The Lord makes Himself very clear in the Gospels. He tells us that those who judge will themselves be judged. He says that we should get the plank stuck in our own eye before we try to take the dust out of others eyes, for none of us is without sin. He will judge our sin more severely if we judge the sins of others. Instead, if we extend mercy to those who are weak and broken in their sin, the Lord will extend mercy to us. For it written that "Mercy triumphs over judgment."

As one of the final major events of the Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis celebrated Mass on Sunday for the Jubilee for Prisoners in Saint Peter's Basilica.

"Whenever someone makes a mistake, the Father's mercy is all the more present, awakening repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace." Going off the cuff from his prepared homily, the Pope said how every time he enters a prison, he asks himself: "'Why them and not I?' All of us have the possibility of making mistakes." The Holy Father reminded those in prison to not be held "captive" by their past mistakes, and "never yield to the temptation of thinking that we cannot be forgiven."

Prayer: Abba Father, make our hearts like your own Son's Sacred Heart, that reaches out and seeks after those in need. Amen

“How can you expect the wedding guests to mourn as long as the bride groom is with them” Mathew 9:15

Gen 27: 1-5, 15-29

Psalm 135: 1-6

Matthew 9:14-17

Today, in the Gospel proclamation, we see a question raised by the disciples of John the Baptist. They were surely aware of fasting and what it did to both the spiritual and physical realms. Earlier in the ministry of John we see a proclamation pointing to our Lord as the One Greater than John. John’s disciples would have experienced the great signs and wonders confirming his proclamation. Then they would have seen in comparison the disciples of Jesus, their behavior, way of life and how they went about with their daily work. But one thing they did not see them do is fast. Puzzled they ask the Lord, why his disciples did not fast and we see an amazing teaching of our Lord as an answer to it.

The Lord Jesus identifies himself as the bridegroom of the nation of Israel. In the Holy Scripture of the Jews, the almighty God is depicted as the husband of the nation of Israel and the Jews. Many prophets reminded the people time and again that God as the bridegroom chose the nation of Israel as his bride and loved his bride dearly. In the Gospel proclamation today we see the Lord Jesus claiming that he is God and the groom they knew in their holy books and reminding the people that their nation is his bride. He goes on to say that when you are with the groom of the heavenly kingdom the necessity for fasting is not required.

The Lord Jesus soon realising their inability to fully grasp His answer as they were wired down to the old covenant explains that the new covenant with the groom is filled with grace that it cannot be contained in the old frame of the mind and the old ways of living. He compares the new covenant to a new and fresh hide as well as new wine which is rich and full of life.

The question the Lord posed can be directed to ourselves as well to consciously examine the relationship we have with the bridegroom who is not only of the nation of Israel, but through his death on the cross and resurrection the bridegroom of the entire universal church. Is He with us or is He in us? If He is in us, do we share his message of love to the world? Are we stretching our old self to introduce another sister or a brother to his or her unknown eternal groom?

Prayer: Abba Father, grant us the grace to see your Son as the groom of the universal church and live pleasing lives as a gift to be offered to him. Amen

“Come to me....”**Matthew 11:25**

Zec 9: 9-10

Psalm 145:1-2, 8-14

Rom 8:9, 11-13

Matthew 11: 25-30

This Sunday's liturgy gives us a clear outline of what the life of a Christian should be. Who is a Christian? What difference is there between a person with worldly success and a person who belongs to Christ? Is there a middle path or not?

As I reflect on today's liturgy I am amazed and delighted at the way the Holy Spirit leads and guides the Catholic Church to feed us, Her children with the Word of God, like a mother preparing a complete balanced meal. The First Reading introduces the nature of our God. Christ's words in the Gospel proclamation confirm the same. The Second Reading connects it to our life as followers of Christ and the Psalm gives us promises to hold on to, in our Christian living.

A king riding on a colt ...! Where in the world have we heard of such a king? Kings ride on horses and elephants. These powerful and graceful animals walk tall and confident, in control of the path they tread. Yet we have our King, victorious and righteous, riding on a lowly and humble weak animal who can easily be subdued and overpowered. Why? The One who rides the lowly colt is the Lord of the heaven and earth. He does not need an animal to show His power and authority, the glory and strength being inside Him. Our God is the King who brings peace, removing all weapons of destruction and hurt, by the love and sacrifice of His own life.

God's Son who willingly came to the earth, becoming one of us, confirms the prophecy of Zechariah about Himself. The Lord Jesus reveals the heart of the Father that embraces all, good and bad, powerful and weak. The Lord invites us to do the divine exchange, our weariness and brokenness with His easy and restful ways. Who said that the way of the Lord is easy and restful? The Lord Himself. If He says so, it has to be true. How do we do that? By placing all our burdens at His feet and taking the yoke of seeking and choosing to do the Will of the Father.

St Paul reminds us that we, through our Baptism have entered a different realm to that of the world. As the Holy Spirit has made His home inside us, He makes it possible for us to make the divine exchange and choose to do the Father's will, rather than holding on to our problems and solutions, becoming weary and burdened.

St Paul's words tug at my heart as he says, that "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." (cf. Romans 8:9). That means if I am not gentle and humble in heart like the Lord Jesus, the King who rides the colt, bringing peace and removing harm and hurt, I do not have the Holy Spirit in me and also that I do not belong to Christ. It also means that I do not belong to Christ, if I do not embrace and include those who are unlovable, weak and broken, but rather prefer to associate only with 'good' people, .

The Lord's teaching and His example are so different to the advice and words of wisdom we often receive from the world. Sometimes it contrasts with even the childhood advice of our parents and elders. The world's smartness is to find intelligent & influential friends and to strive to belong to the elite of society. Even in our parishes and other religious work we prefer to appoint those who are influential and well-connected, enjoying a high social status, rather than those who are broken in their lifestyles and relationships, whose wrongs and sins had been public information. Unthinkingly we have fallen into the same sin as the Pharisees of the time of our Lord Jesus. Will the Lord call us "whitewashed tombs" too?

The Catholic Church is amply blessed with hundreds and thousands of saints who dared to shun the world's wisdom, saints who embraced the word and became a living example of the Lord Jesus. We in the present time, are being given a living saint, whose lifestyle is a challenge and a threat to the comfortable reign of the wisdom of the world. He is Pope Francis. He follows in the footsteps of his Divine Master, and calls and invites all those who left the church for whatever reason to come back. He speaks of himself as a sinner, saved by the grace of God, and refrains from judging anyone by their life situations. He is a true good shepherd who strives to find ways of gathering the sheep rather than expelling them from the sheepfold.

Reading the daily homilies of Pope Francis, I have received the grace to overcome my judgmental nature, by which I used to label and brand people in the past. His simple way of life and honesty manifested in handling difficult issues of the Church, the ease with which he speaks about the weaknesses and limitations of the hierarchy of the Church including himself challenges and at the same time makes me proud to be a sheep of his flock. Under the shepherding of Pope Francis we are now in the best time to enthrone in every human heart, the humble and righteous King who rides on a colt, bringing peace and not division, calling all who are weary and burdened to come to Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, our Good Good Father, who is good to all You have created, grant us the grace to uphold those bowed down by sin and struggles. Amen.

“He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.” Psalm 91:15

Gen 28: 10-22a

Psalm 91: 1-4, 14-15

Matthew 9: 18-26

Today's reading speaks about Jacob's dream. God appeared to Jacob. We all know who Jacob is. He is a great manipulator who stole his brother's birth right. But later we see in the scripture that Jacob had the greatest sense of guilt for what he had done to his brother. And he in fact wondered fearfully about the Lord, "if He exists whatever does he think of me?" In the end, God sanctified his life and he became a great trophy of grace. Today, you may be in the same situation feeling guilty for what you have done in the past and thinking that you do not deserve God's mercy. You are aware of how you've 'blown it' and of how you've let things slip through your fingers; you have been a failure and you're ashamed. But know this; you are the very kind of person whom God loves to save, because the more complicated your problem, the greater the glory God will receive. The greater your sin, the greater is the forgiveness. This is not to justify what you have done. This is not to justify what Jacob did, but it shows that God will take that which was wicked, which was wrong, and cause it to work together with other things for good.

Jacob ran miles away from his brother to protect himself and he discovered God on his journey. In a dream Jacob saw a stairway resting on earth with its top reaching to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Many theologians ask what Jacob's ladder means. I cherish this explanation. 'Notice it says the angels of God were both ascending and descending on it. You may have thought the angels should just have been coming down but the Bible says they were also going up. It means the whole time Jacob was on this journey, scared to death, he had angels with him. So Jacob learned what the Psalmist talked about in Psalm 91:11-12 "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands; so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." As much as Jacob feared the Lord, some people are afraid to meet the Lord because He is a God of holiness, a God of truth. No wonder Jacob felt awful. But it turned out to be pure grace from God. Grace is unmerited favour. God blesses us when we do not deserve it. That's what Jacob discovered: God was with him.

Prayer: Abba Father, redeem me from all of my unworthiness and make me worthy in your sight. Thank you for your love and grace. Amen!

**“I am the good shepherd, says the Lord; I know my sheep,
and mine know me.” John 10:14**

Gen 32:23-33

Ps 17: 1-7, 8 & 15

Matthew 9:32-38

We have here Jacob still on his journey towards Canaan. Never did so many memorable things occur in any march as in this of Jacob's. The highlight of his journey is that he wrestles with the angel. Jacob pursues his journey home-ward towards Canaan and not relenting. When God has helped us through difficulties we should go on our way heaven-ward with so much the more cheerfulness and resolution.

Jacob's prayer was frequent, earnest and fervent, and so were the trials and temptations he had to face. His weapons were prayer and tears. The battle is long, both physical and spiritual. Even so it did not shake his faith nor silence his prayer and the strength that of which he prevailed is what was given to him from heaven. The Spirit intercedes through us and helps us in our infirmities. (Romans 8:26) Jacob chooses to wrestle for a blessing even to have his limbs dis-jointed rather than any other task at hand. He wore the injuries of his battle as marks of grace from God. It is of no use to achieve great success without a blessing from God. For this he is called Israel – a prince with God. Even though we have many enemies, if we have God on our side, we are safe; those of us who by faith have power in heaven have thereby as much power on earth.

In this psalm David is in great distress and danger by his enemies and prays to God and seeks shelter in him. He appeals to God concerning his integrity and to be preserved from the malice of his enemies and comforts himself with the hope of his future happiness.

In the Gospel proclamation we read of the power and mercy of our Lord Jesus. He is both able and willing to save us from harm. Casting the devil out of one possessed and healing all manner of sickness. He preaches the Gospel, and in compassion to the multitude, provides for them. He proves Himself to be, as undoubtedly the Son of God, who is a skilful and faithful physician to both our body and soul. Receiving healing from Him is possible only if we yield to Him in prayer and presence eager to hear His word and glorifying Him both with our bodies and with our spirits.

Prayer: Abba Father, I believe that you are granting us the grace to be strong in prayer and faith so that we may receive the grace to honour and glorify you in all we face in life. Amen

‘The Kingdom of God is Near’**Matthew 10:7**

Gen 41: 55-57,
42:5-7, 17-24

Psalms 33:
2-3, 10, 11, 18, 19

Matthew 10:1-7

St. John the Baptist preaches in Matthew 3: 2, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near.” In Matthew 13, the Lord Jesus explains about the Kingdom of Heaven through the parable of the sower and many other parables. What is this Kingdom of heaven and where is it?

According to Catholic theology the ‘Kingdom of heaven’ is not a place. It is a state of life. A life filled with joy, love and peace, free of fears, enslavement, sadness or suffering. You do not have to die to enjoy this. Even while we live in this world any person can enter into it. That is why the Lord Jesus is saying to His disciples, “Go, and tell the people who are suffering and in pain, that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” The Lord Jesus brought this Kingdom of heaven, into our hearts from the heart of the Father. We are heirs of that Kingdom but we live like outcasts. Many do not know how to enter into this beautiful life. That is why the Lord Jesus says, “Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matthew 10,6) His invitation was first extended to the sheep belonging to the family of God, who were lost and suffering. Today the good news proclaimed all of us, is that ‘the Kingdom of God’ is near. Whoever enters into it is fortunate.

How can we enter into the kingdom of Heaven? In Mark 1:15 the Lord teaches, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.” For what must we repent? – for thinking and acting as if God does not exist; for thinking unless we find a solution to our problems there is no other way. This way of life makes us fall into the trap of sin. Entering into the kingdom of God is, instead of believing the lies of the world, believing God. We need to repent and enter into the reality that, ‘God is real and He will answer me’. Otherwise however close the kingdom of God is, we cannot enter into it.

The values in many of us are built by our parents, ancestors, family and school. The Lord Jesus is saying to repent of those worldly values and identities with which we hold on to. He says, “You have a new identity. You belong to the family of God.” When we repent and believe His word, we enter into the kingdom of Heaven. It is then that we begin to experience the love, protection and the providence of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, bless all those, today, who through repentance, hope to enter in to your Kingdom. Amen.

The Kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the Gospel.

Gen 44: 18-21, 23-29, 45: 1-5

Psalm 105: 16-21

Matthew 10:7-15

Today, the Psalms remind us to Praise God continuously even when things don't seem to go our way. But with all the chaos happening around us and what we are going through, can we do so with all our heart, mind and spirit? The Psalms give us the answer they say, "Remember the marvels the Lord has done"-Psalm 105:5

We see in the first reading how Joseph understands the plan of God clearly as he states; "It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you."-Genesis 45:5 Let us place ourselves in Joseph's shoes and reflect on what our reaction would have been if we were in the position of Joseph? We would be very bitter, filled with anger towards the people around us and would not have been able to do one tenth of what Joseph was able to do for the people of God. How did he manage to do this? He was able to do the things he did because of the relationship he had with the Lord. This relationship made him into a joyful, lovable and helpful person. God was able to do the things He had planned for Joseph and His people because Joseph responded to Him. Are we open enough to God today for Him to work in and through our lives? Are we a blessing to people around us or are we becoming bitter and self-centered?

The Gospel proclamation is teaching us today of what God has planned for us. He wants us to go out and proclaim that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give."- Matthew 10:7-8. Our Lord wants us to perform these miracles in the name of Jesus. How can we do this? This is possible through the relationship we have built with the Father. Today He is calling us more deeply into this intimate relationship with Him. What is our answer to Him today? Are we too busy with things in our lives that we cannot give 15-30 minutes to the Maker of everything?

"Take care of your spiritual life, your relationship with God, because this is the backbone of everything we do and everything we are."
-Pope Francis

Prayer: Abba Father, we know nothing is impossible for you, no matter where or in what we are in, help us to come back to you and love you with all our heart, mind and spirit. Amen.

The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord...

Psalm 37: 39

Gen 46:1-7, 28-30

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

Matthew 10:16-23

In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus foretells His disciples the challenges they will have to face when they witness to His Name. "Sending out like sheep in the midst of wolves" ... being handed "over to courts and scourged in the synagogues" ... "led before governors and kings" ... "brother handing over brother, father his child, children rising up against parents" ... "being hated." – is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and is not encouraging. Thus the choice to follow Christ is not an easy task but a difficult journey. Then why should we follow the Lord Jesus? In today's reading the Lord Jesus tells His disciples, that the ones who are willing to endure these things until the end will be saved. Thus the reward for going through persecution and suffering for the sake of Christ is eternal life.

The disciples could not and we too cannot by self-effort become the disciples the Lord Jesus wants us to be. Yet hidden in between the verses from Matthew 10, 19-20 is the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is fulfilled in the lives of the disciples on the day of Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles and first disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and thousands of others thereafter became witnesses to the good news of salvation. They willingly went through suffering, pain and sometimes even gave up their lives with love, forgiveness and intercession - the same inner responses that the Lord Jesus gave.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha whose feast we celebrate today once said, "I am not my own; I have given myself to Jesus. He must be my only love." The impossible became possible in the lives of the disciples of Christ because the only love in their lives was the Lord Jesus. Since they were 'not their own' - whatever adverse situation they faced, it was God who defended them and spoke on behalf of them.

Romans 5: 5 says, '.....God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us.' Today let us pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that the Lord Jesus is the 'only love in our lives' and we may belong to Him completely. Then we will be able to face unexpected or impossible situations.

Prayer: Abba Father, You are our stronghold, You are our refuge. Give us the grace to trust in you and commit our lives to You. Amen.

“What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops”

Mathew 10: 27

Gen 49: 29-32,

50:15-26

Psalms 105: 1-7

Mathew 10: 24-33

In the Gospel proclamation today, the Lord Jesus reminds us of the persecution that we must experience in our spiritual journey. It is indeed a powerful message of what we are to expect when we give our lives to Christ. We receive the deep assurance of the words of our Lord Jesus ‘Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but have no power to kill the soul’ (Mathew 10:28)

Most readers of these reflections have been through a four step retreat where we surrender our lives to the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us from there onwards. That is when the early persecution begins, first from our own family members and then friends and work colleagues. These are people closest to us. I can recall the number of times I have been criticized or made fun of for not willing to even sip a drop of wine. The fact is neither the church nor the community demands this of us but it is because of the deep conviction in our own heart only to become filled by the Holy Spirit. Another area that we get chastised is when we politely refuse to attend a party or a dinner as we have this burning desire inside to serve at a retreat, outreach or attend the weekly prayer meeting.

This is what the Lord Jesus is proclaiming in the word of God today. ‘What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops’ (Mathew 10:27) Once we give our whole life to the Lord to mould as He wills, along with the love for the reading of the Word of God comes the revelations and convictions in our hearts. No matter what persecution we face we are to demonstrate in our lives the glory of God and His kingdom.

The Lord assures us that we are worth more than sparrows and that the Father’s protection is with us. This is evident in the first reading today in the life of Joseph. Many were the trials he faced due to the ungodly actions of his brothers. Joseph through all his trials continued to listen and carry out what God was stirring in his heart. His righteous actions were louder than preaching from the rooftops. The Lord is calling us to the same life of dying to ourselves so like the disciples and saints, we become witnesses to the love of our Father.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the courage to proclaim the good news at all times. Amen!

**The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven
has been given to you.**

Matthew: 13:11

Isaiah 55: 10-11

Psalms 65: 10-14

Romans 8: 18-23

Matthew 13: 1-23

Today's first reading was written during a time where the prophet Isaiah was promising the people of Israel that God would be setting them free from Babylonian captivity, and would be making them a light to the nations. But looking at their circumstances and what they had become, this was a promise that was hard, if not impossible, to believe. They were decimated by the Babylonians in a way they never expected, and the Babylonians exercised considerable power over them. They were not the people they used to be. Their self-confidence was pretty low and they were highly demoralized. The promises of God appear to be words that soothe the mind, rather than a pen picture of what is truly real. It is to this people that the Lord speaks when he reveals the power of his word. If you are struggling to believe the promises of God regarding your challenges and future, today's first reading is directed to you.

The prophecies about the escape from Babylonian captivity did come true till a few years later. The Lord did not set them free by making them strong and enhancing their capability to beat the odds. Instead, unknown to the Israelites, God worked inside the head of a powerful King in a nearby country Persia. The King got this uncanny idea that he should attack Babylon, a superpower during that time. When he eventually did, he set the people of Israel free. The Lord reminds us that His hand is not defined nor limited by the resources we have access to or the possibilities that we can think of. He is the God of creation, and he can come up with creative solutions, which cannot be conceived nor imagined by our limited intellect. We hear testimonies of such things ever so regularly at our weekly prayer meetings. The Lord is promising us that He has creative solutions for our circumstances as well. His word is our assurance.

Today's Gospel proclamation continues the theme of the word. I am inclined to think that our Lord Jesus looked around him and wondered why people reacted differently to his preaching, even though they heard the same word being preached. Maybe he was discouraged at what He saw. Then one day as he noticed a farmer go out to sow seed, God must have spoken in his heart. The Lord reminds us that God can speak to us through mundane day to day incidents. I feel that the Lord is telling me that I must carry the same attitude even when I read scripture. To hear what He is saying to me personally,

rather than read scripture like a historical chronicle, a story book, or a list of do's and don'ts.

The Lord teaches us that the effect of the word is influenced by the ground the word falls on and the surrounding environment. Strangely, the effect this word had on those regarded as sinners and uninterested in religion, was more profound than the effect it had on the religious. It means that simply indulging in religious practices does not result in the fertile ground or environment that yields several fold. What must we do to allow the word to bear fruit?

Initially, our Lord Jesus does not offer any explanation to the parable of the sower. He describes the incident, full stop. It must have sounded pretty cryptic. The disciples ask Him why he speaks to the people in parables. Our Lord tells the disciples that some see yet not see. Then he looks at the disciples and tells them "For you it's not so. You have been given the knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom." It means that this ability must "be given", it is not cultivated through study or education. But did the disciples really have this ability? Weren't they as clueless as the rest of the people?

The people attended events, listened to the sermons, saw miracles, and went back home. The disciples lived, dined, and spent time with Our Lord Jesus. It was during the time that the disciples spent privately with Him that Our Lord would explain the parables. We learn the secret of how to make the ground fertile. The secret lies in the time that we spend with the Lord privately. During this time, He opens our heart to the secrets of the kingdom. These secrets have life, and when shared with others, they have the potential to change lives and bring unbelievers to faith. This was the secret behind the words spoken by Our Lord, which jolted the sinners and agnostics to conversion. These are the words that fulfill the prophesy of the first reading.

The Lord says "Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them." The more time we invest in a relationship with him, the more time we spend with him, the greater the secrets he will share with us. Studying his word devoid of a relationship with him will only result in what little revelation we have in our hearts, disappearing.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant us the grace to build a closer relationship with your son. When we fail and fall, inspire us to use the Four Steps and come back in to your heart; the secret place where you share the secrets of your kingdom with us. Amen

“Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth”**Psalm 124:8**

Exodus 1: 8-14, 22

Psalm 124: 1-8

Matthew 10:34 - 11:1

The readings for today are somewhat harsh, uncompromising and almost divisive – something that is hard to accept and understand, especially for those like myself who like to believe in an all loving and all forgiving God and follow a path of comfortable feel good Christianity.

In the first reading we hear about how the Israelites, the chosen people of God are given over to slavery in Egypt and treated harshly and ruthlessly by the Egyptians. On the surface, this seems to be just pointless suffering. But on deeper reflection, it becomes obvious that the Egyptians mistreated the Israelites because they were scared of them. Though they were slaves, the Israelites were a considerable threat to the Egyptians. And though they were mistreated and given the hardest of work, the Israelites flourished and continued to grow. God’s people grow in strength not in comfortable places but rather in the middle of adversity, in the middle of struggle. There God refines and renews His people. God uses the very plan of the enemy to destroy Israel to strengthen them and make them grow even more.

Jesus states He did not come to bring peace on earth - a strange utterance by the One who is called the Prince of Peace. But Jesus came to bring peace between man and God. The fight between good and bad, light and darkness is inevitable. There is no peace to be negotiated here. The Lord Jesus came to bring a sword into this, to clean the good from the bad because God does not accept compromise. His Kingdom is a Kingdom of light – there can be no space for darkness. We are not called to be comfortable Christians, to ignore the darkness within us and around us and to pretend that everything is well. God requires single minded determination, uncompromising devotion from His children to choose Him over everything else – even when it is hard, even when it is awkward, even when we would rather be doing something else. The good news is that He does not expect us to do this on our own. When we are in the furnace, when the people around us are doing their utmost to destroy us, when the brokenness inside us is too big for us to handle, when it is almost impossible for us to choose His kingdom over the world around us – we are not alone. He will not forsake us.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to let go of my comfortable notions of how my life should be and rather trust you in my struggles. Amen

And she adopted Him in place of a son, and called him Moses, saying
,"Because I took him from the water" **Exodus 2:10**

Exodus 2: 1-15

Ps 69: 3-14, 31-34

Matthew 11: 20-24

Today's' reading reminds us how the Pharaoh's daughter while bathing in the Nile sees a basket in which she finds a child. Now all of us know that this child is the great man of God, Moses.

Now Moses' biological mother had no choice but to take the risk and let go of the child in the river because that was the only way to save him from the mass killing of Hebrew children by the Egyptians.

I am sure as she let go of her child she would have been convinced that God will take care of him. But she would have never thought that God would use her own child to set free the Israelites' who had been under slavery for 400 years. At times we too have to let go of certain people and things for God to take hold off and make his own, to be used for something greater.

Now both the biological and adopted mother of Moses might have imagined great plans for him. The real mother would have only wanted her son to live. At the same time the adopted mother would have had a bigger plan for him such as to educate him and to see him grow as a great commander of the Egyptian army and even to the level of Pharaoh. But all these plans were dust compared to what God had in store for this child who was floating on the Nile. Moses turns out to be a man of God and a leader like no other. God used him to show the world His mighty power. Moses was known as the law giver and the one who saw God face to face. Today the three main religions in the world consider Moses as a great man of God and talk about him even to this very day.

God had to prepare Moses for this mission. Moses lived a luxurious life till he was about forty year's old. Once he ran away he looked after the flock of Jethro for many years. It was during this period that God was able to make Moses a humble man, and after the conversion of attitude and heart God was able to speak to him. God always moulds and then he starts to make. If you have been rejected and have lost hope, consider that period as the best period of your life because God is at work behind the scene and He is preparing you to be used for something that you have not planned for or even imagined.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray to give us the grace to become humble and kind to others and let your love flow from us to the people we meet on a daily basis. Amen

“and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone whom the Son wishes to reveal him”

Matthew 11: 27

Exodus 3: 1-6, 9-12

Psalms 103: 1-7

Matthew 11: 25-27

Our mistakes in life open us to experience a whole new world and we become wise through these mistakes. God is capable of working through our mistakes and bring forth His eternal plan into completion. Today's readings show such an occurrence. The mistake of Moses was made a blessed one because his mistake brought him to Sinai to encounter God.

Moses was observant of the burning bush. Like a child he wanted to explore the unusual sight. God does similar things in our life too. We suddenly notice events in life which turns out to be 'Kairos' moments in life. Those unexpected and unusual events are invitations from God.

We are certain that God feels for His people. He came in search of a person who would be His vehicle. God hears and sees. Especially He's moved by compassion towards the broken and oppressed. So, if we are crushed, broken, oppressed or rejected, we should be joyful because God will never turn His face away from us. Hallelujah!

The prayer of the Lord Jesus to our Abba Father is touching. The Lord Jesus is showing us a path to live. Our strengths should not be hindrances for us to experience God. Our abilities, capabilities and intellect are gifts from God. We are gifted people because of God. He has made us gifted. Our foolishness will be displayed when we demonstrate our ownership over our strengths. God can create or dismantle anything and everything in a moment.

To be a child means to be innocent and dependent. Children are simple, innocent and totally dependent on their parents. Having a childlike mentality is to be humble to be corrected and to trust to the end. According to the promise God gave Moses is to know that God would accompany Moses. Sinai becomes significant because God says that He would meet up the crowd again on that mountain. This is a promise that God is giving us too. The place where we encounter HIM is surely a Holy ground and His presence will be in that place. Therefore when we are disheartened and in despair we should not lose hope but we need to go to the place where we first encountered God and experience His love.

Prayer: Abba Father, our soul blesses you. We will remember all the gifts you have bestowed upon us. For you pardon us and heal all our ills and never let us separate from you. Amen.

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened...

Matthew 11:28

Exodus 3: 13-20

Ps 105: 1&5, 8,9,
24-27

Matthew 11: 28-30

This is one of the most beautiful invitations we can receive. Can any teaching or preaching match these consoling words of our God and creator inviting us to leave our burdens at his feet. The Lord is simply asking us to stop where we are, change direction and come to Him. These life giving words are a true invitation to freedom.

So often we see advertising hoardings declaring that a place or a car will give us such freedom and joy. The fact is that the people who own that ultimate car or home in a short time have to add another car or home in another location.

Such a story of deliverance from bondage to happiness is given to us in the reading from the Book of Exodus. It was deliverance from the land of Egypt which is bondage and suffering to the Promised Land Israel. Much time is spent on God introducing himself and telling Moses what He has been doing and will do. God introduces Himself as 'I Am who AM' When I think of this name I imagine myself rotating in a merry-go-round bound to the passage of time and God smiling and watching each rotation happening. I am subject to time and space while He is not

God once again introduces himself as Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. Today God wants to introduce himself to us. He is the God of our grandparents and great grandparents. He is the God of St. Joseph Vaz. He is the God of Einstein, the God of St. Padre Pio, the God of the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. This same God is my God and Father. And what has this God being doing? He has been seeing the injustice meted out to the Israelites who were slaves for many years. He also saw the injustice to the Jews during the World Wars and the injustice to many minorities across the world from Australia to Nigeria. He saw their pain and then chose to act. As much as God is watching countries he is also watching individuals. He watched over Moses in the crocodile infested Nile river and He is watching over our children in the these times of social media, drugs, alcoholism, partying and gaming. Let us come to him because thinking of all these dangers can make us weary but resting in Him alone will give us strength and hope.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I want to know you, touch you, feel you and hear you. I begin with your word and the life of your Son. May we be one. Amen*

'I desire mercy not sacrifice'

Matthew 12:7

Ex 11: 10 -12: 14

Psalm 116: 12, 13,
15-18

Matthew 12: 1-8

In today's Gospel, the disciples of the Lord Jesus are walking through a grain field. They were hungry and because of that begin to pick some heads of grain and eat them. I am wondering whether the Lord Jesus did not see their hunger. What comes into my mind is the way the Lord Jesus multiplied and fed 3000 & 5000 people, the way He turned water into wine in Cana. Is He not concerned about His disciples? But the Lord Jesus, at that moment was in another realm. Seeing the mind of the Pharisees He makes that an opportunity to explain what God's mercy is. It is not that He did not see the hunger of the disciples but He makes this an opportunity to quench a greater hunger.

Sometimes in our own life situations, the way God acts puzzles us. We wonder, why He is not thinking about me. But God does not act according to our limited understanding. The lives that are surrendered to God are used by Him to bless the lives many others. Therefore when we face a crisis that cannot be fathomed by our limited understanding, we need to walk by faith in thanksgiving and praise knowing that finally, God can turn all that into a greater blessing.

In the Old Testament, the way God acted in the midst of His people, is mentioned in today's first reading. Pharaoh rejects all the wonders performed before Him. He does not allow the Israelites to go out of his country. The Lord gives an order to Moses & Aaron. Each household is to take a perfect lamb. Instructions are also given to the way they should eat it. He says, to apply some of the blood of the lamb on the door frames of the houses. When they obey all these instruction then the Lord will pass through Egypt and free all those who are in the households where the blood of the lamb is applied.

That meal brought and built unity among families. A community was built up. They ate the food given by the Lord making them people of God. The protection of God came upon them. The presence of God came into their community. When they were fed by the flesh and blood of the lamb, God passed over them and a miracle took place. Let us receive the body and blood of our Lord. Then when the Lord passes over great miracles will take place.

Prayer: Abba Father, before your holy plan, we worship you. We praise You. Increase our faith. Amen.

“Have you seen him whom my soul loves?”

Song of Songs 3:3b

Song 3: 1-4

Psalms 63: 2-9

John 20: 1-2, 11-18

The first reading today from the Song of Songs teaches us of the perfect love of a bride and a groom. A love that is so perfect where two people yearn for each other. The Church also portrays this beautiful book as the ultimate love of our Lord Jesus for His bride, the Church, His union with the souls on the earth and vice-versa.

In the Gospel proclamation, we see this yearning for the Lord in the actions of St. Mary Magdalene. In a time of total devastation of losing her Master to a cruel death, and knowing that her own life is at risk of having been associated with the Lord, she faithfully comes to the tomb where the Lord Jesus is buried. Her intention is to perform the burial rituals, showing her ultimate love for her Master. The word of God proclaims her dismay at finding an empty tomb and the devastation that His body is gone and what follows with the disciples St. Peter and St. John.

Then the reading takes us to another moment which I believe we can personally relate to. She wept! She wept with the despair of the separation from her beloved Master. True that the Lord Jesus was already dead in the eyes of St. Mary Magdalene, yet, she yearned to be close to His lifeless body, to anoint him with spices and show her utmost respect and devotion to her Master. Therefore, her despair and weeping were from her very depths. This is the same depth of despair we go through when we grieve our Lord and are separated from Him in our hearts by our own guilt.

Yet, as the book of Songs reveal, true love is inseparable, and at the voice of her beloved Master, St. Mary Magdalene is reconnected to the Lord with the full realisation that she is not separated from her beloved Master but He is Risen from the dead and is alive!

We too experience this re-connection to the amazing love of God after a time of separation due to our sin. That is when we come as we are and do the four steps. Romans 8:39 gives us the assurance that nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God. The love of the groom for His bride is everlasting.

Prayer: Abba Father, let me never believe the lies of my own heart that my sin is bigger than your everlasting love. Let me never forget that you are my groom for eternity. Amen!

The nature of God

Wis 12: 13, 16-19

Ps 86: 5-6, 9-10,
15-16

Rom 8: 26-27

Matthew 13: 24-43

The beauty of the word of God is that it reveals to us the true nature of God. As we go through life we have various experiences and we tend to carve a new image of God based on assumptions. Often we fall short because we have to realise that we will never be able to understand God nor his ways of working.

When faced with a complex question of life I compare the size of my head or skull to the size of the earth. If such a vast difference in size exists surely my little brain cannot grasp the workings of our creator.

On the other hand the word of God from Wisdom gives us insights into the nature of God. The first clear cut instruction it gives us is this. There is no other God beside you, our triune God stands tall and alone in unity. There is no other God beside the trinity. In the universe, there may be powers and principalities which God the Father may allow to exist but ultimately there is only one God. We need to get this straight. Our response to this truth is to respect other people's beliefs and show compassion but the reality within our heart is that we have only one God. The writer from Wisdom says - there is only one God, who cares for everyone.

As the writer exclaims God he declares that God's strength is the source of his justice and because you are the Lord of all, you can be merciful to all. Often we think that we can understand people and the reasons behind their life and actions. But it is God alone whose wisdom and knowledge of a person spans the ages, generations, past, present and future. Because of such knowledge of a person or community, He alone is able to show mercy and understanding.

This passage from Wisdom can be linked to the reading from Romans 8:26-27 which says likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. What is this weakness? Our inherent weakness is to tell and instruct God about what he has to do for us. Every day in our prayer we assume that we know what is best and ask God to do as we please. The right approach would be to leave our worries at the foot of the cross and worship our Saviour and God. A week ago, a worried mother sent an urgent request for prayers. It was to pray that the relationship between her Catholic son and his non-Catholic fiancé would break. The fact is, who knows in time God may touch the heart of this non-believer

and she may go way ahead of us in the faith journey. While we prefer Catholic partners for our children, instead of praying for breakups let's pray for God's plan to unfold. In fact, if we have received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, we are called to spend time praying in tongues, because the Spirit knows the real needs of our hearts and the right intentions we must be interceding for. Every born again person must exercise this way of praying because through it we will be sanctified and strengthened.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to three different scenarios. The first being the kingdom can be compared to a field of good crops where weeds have been found growing. The Lord explained that the good and the bad are allowed to thrive in God's love, mercy and patience. We are impatient for God's justice to be meted out when we see injustice. But the word reveals to us the fact that at one time God's angels will arise and justice will be served. Till then we just need to trust God.

Secondly, the Kingdom of God can be compared to a mustard seed. The mustard seed starts out in in life insignificant and tiny but blossoms into a large tree big enough for birds to find shade in. This can be compared to the word of God in a believer's life. A single word or phrase can awaken hope and help a person break away from a life of habitual sin. This person experiences the love of God and in time, provides guidance, love and prayer to others who find rest and shade in and through the saved person.

Finally, the Kingdom of God can be compared to yeast hidden in four measures of flour. I love the word 'hidden' because true believers are called to live a prayer life hidden in the arms and heart of God. Nobody need know how long or how deep we pray because that would make us Pharisees. Instead, connecting with the Kingdom of Heaven makes us spirit filled which moves and inspires us to live for the salvation of others.

From what we have gathered, we understand that there are many beautiful aspects to the Kingdom and about God. There is only one God and He loves all. In His mercy He allows the sun and rain to shine and pour down on one and all. As a God of justice and mercy He will choose His time to act or to hold back. We who are loved by him but insignificant are invited to worship Him in spirit and allow His inspiration to enter our being. He will bring us to repentance and will be our cause for hope. Let our faith nurtured by the word, grow from the size of a mustard seed into a majestic tree providing love and hope to people around us.

Prayer: Abba Father, let thy Kingdom come and let thy will be done. Amen.

Recognising the hand of God in difficult moments

Ex 14: 5-18

Ex 15: 1-6

Matthew 12: 38-42

The Israelites were in a difficult position. The Egyptian Army was behind them, the Red Sea before them and they panicked. When they left Egypt, they witnessed the saving hand of God and the most amazing of miracles. God, who had appeared to be silent and withdrawn for many years, had intervened through Moses and had shown himself to be alive and sovereign over the powerful Pharaoh. According to the book of Exodus, not only did they leave Egypt, but rather they left with treasures and riches obtained from the people who had wielded power over them for a long time. With a God like the one they had experienced, they must have assumed that nothing and no one would be able to stand in their way. They surely never bargained for the situation described in today's first reading because they left Egypt under the guidance and leading of the Lord.

Many of us who attend CRL meetings boast of a "conversion experience," where a dormant God suddenly came alive to us. We were so attracted to this God that we gave our lives to Him and decided to respond to His calling and live for Him. We witnessed His mighty hand and had come to believe that circumstances would never let us down thereafter. Yet, as life goes on we get into bad situations that overwhelm us and, like the Israelites, are tempted to think that the days we lived without God in our lives seemed better.

As we go through the reading we see the Israelites respond to the situation in one way, while Moses responds in another. What made Moses different to the rest? Moses knew God, while the rest knew the miracles of God. Moses had a personal relationship with God and he would hear the voice of God. If ever the others heard the voice of God, it was through Moses, not personally.

Not so long ago, Moses was the man who gave many excuses to avoid going before the Pharaoh. But, look at him now. He has become fearless. He has learnt what God is capable of. He knows the heart of God and his intentions. Moses hears the voice of God and knows him well enough to trust him. This courage overflows to encourage others who are down, and help them believe.

Prayer: Abba Father, bless me with a deep relationship with you, so that I may discover who you are, and be a blessing to those around me. Amen.

“I chose you from the world, to go and bear fruit that will last”

John 15:16

2 Cor 4: 7-15

Psalm 126: 1-6

Matthew 20: 20-28

In these verses the apostle gives an account of their courage and patience under all their suffering and what it was that kept them from sinking and fainting. Christ had told them that in the world they would have tribulation, and so they had. Yet they sought help in God, and help from God, and had liberty of access to God.

They too experienced the many emotions and thoughts that we go through on a daily basis – they were uncertain, in doubt of what will become of them, in anxiety, were pursued in hatred and violence by friends and enemies, persecuted with fear of defeat, but they knew that God would never leave them nor forsake them. Whatever condition we may be in, in this world, we have no need to fear or tremble. It is not so bad as of the suffering of Christ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us (2 Corinthians 4:14)

As disciples of Christ we should be ready to be like our Lord Jesus in life and death. Whatever the burdens and troubles we may face the grace of faith will keep us strong. As we believe and speak; we will see the glory of God. When the church is edified, then God is glorified. Psalm 126 was penned in reference to great deliverance of the people of God. This psalm can be prayed for any particular deliverance for the church, for our country and for the world and for our deliverance from wrong ambitions. Zebedee's sons were James and John, two of the first three of Christ's disciples. They and Peter's were the Lord's favourites. Whom Christ loves best he rebukes and disciplines most (Rev. 3:19). The ambitious petition they made through their mother is criticized. Christ had so often spoken to them of His kingdom but yet it seems that they expected a worldly kingdom. They asked for honour in the highest place of the kingdom. What we request should be according to the will of God revealed to us in prayer. Pride is a sin that most easily troubles us, and is hard to get rid of. He calls us to be meek and humble. To know the kingdom through Him – It is not of this world. Am I ready to become a servant to be great and a slave to be first?

Prayer: *Abba Father, through the intercession of St. James who was chosen by you to bear witness to your glory on Mount Tabor. obtain for us the grace to drink of the same cup Christ drank. Amen*

Sirach 44: 1, 10-15

Psalm 131: 13-14,
17-18

Matthew 13: 16-17

The Bible diary reference from which we check our readings has some important facts to note. The only saint couple in the liturgical year is Sts Joachim and St. Anne the parents of the Blessed Mother. We have individual saints but here is a saintly couple. Secondly, they are not referred to as Bishops, Saints or Doctors but as Parents, highlighting the importance of the role parents play in the lives of their children and the world.

In today's day and age if we have to ask a child if they have good parents most often he or she will refer to one good father or one good mother. With so many broken marriages and homes it is becoming increasingly difficult for a couple to run the race successfully and make it to the end. Along the way the baton has to be passed to another father or mother.

The parents of Mother Mary were entrusted with the task of loving her and bringing her up, without having a clue of what the future would hold. She was not the heir to some profound wealth or earthly kingdom but the role she was chosen for would never have been understood by her parents. We have been entrusted with children and often we see their failures, shortcomings and weaknesses and we are never able and will never be able to see the role they will play in the future.

Hence on this day when we remember this saintly couple, we are called to seek their intercession in loving and nurturing our children. We are reminded of the role our parents played/are playing in our lives and we must thank and praise God for them. We are called to pray for parents to run the race together and accomplish it to the end. Once I got into an elevator with a very attractive couple. Once the doors closed, assuming I was nobody, they got into an argument over some jealousy and it really made me sad. The Lord put it into my heart to always pray for couples that they will love more, understand more and hold on to the end. Today is a great day to pray that couples will be delivered from forces that threaten to tear them apart, specially social media, mobiles phones, facebook and the like which are wreaking havoc among so many families. The Lord Jesus is the glue that can hold us together.

Prayer: Abba Father, we offer to you all the couples we encounter in our lives. Bless them and bind them together in your abundant love. Amen

'This people will listen and listen, but not understand;
they will look and look, but not see... Matthew 13:14

Exodus 19: 1-2, 9-11,
16-20

Daniel 3: 52-56

Matthew 13: 10-17

At a glance, today's Gospel passage seems slightly unfair. The Lord Jesus says that to the person who has something, even more will be given; but for the person who has next to nothing, even what he has will be taken away. Even in the parable of the talents the Lord Jesus says something similar. Can't the one who has more share, and shouldn't the one who has less get something more, instead of taking away what little he has? Yet we know that the Lord will never be unfair or unjust. He says more will be given to the person who has, because the person who has something strives to increase what he has – his knowledge of the Lord, his spiritual journey, to do the will of God. Yet the person who has nothing does not do the same. This person lives according to his own understanding and thinks he is always correct. He only wants to receive and hoard worldly possessions - not spiritual treasures.

All God's children are invited to be a part of His kingdom and it is available to everyone who wishes to enter it. However, the secrets are revealed only to a few chosen people most probably because they have already heeded His calling. Others, even though they receive the invitation, chose not to accept it – therefore they do not have the opportunity to know the secrets either.

As I examine my life in the above context, where do I stand? I know I am a part of and 'in' the kingdom of God. Yet am I in the place where the Lord wants me to be, or am I simply in my comfort-zone? Most people who internalized what the Lord spoke and applied it to themselves were able to repent, have a life transformation and spread the good news to many others who did not know the Lord. Yet those who thought that what the Lord spoke did not apply to them, that they were very sanctimonious and righteous and felt there was no need to repent because they were 'good' people, never experienced a deep love relationship with the Lord. Many times as I hear a message being preached, what initially comes to my mind is 'this is ideal for the other person'. But then the Lord reminds me that I am that 'other person'. As I begin to rely on the Lord Jesus, what I failed at in the flesh, I am able to conquer in the Spirit, because of His amazing grace.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for your un-ending, un-conditional, abundant love. Amen

Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart
and yield a harvest through perseverance.

Luke 8:15

Exodus 20: 1-17

Psalms 19: 8-11

Matthew 13: 18-23

My mother loves gardening; it is something she does with great enthusiasm. Once she was beaming with joy when her newly planted red chilli plant bore fruit. She would be so proud when a meal she prepared contained vegetables that grew in the backyard. The parable of the Sower reveals deep insights about the Sower, the seed, and the soil. It is also referred to as the parable of the soil.

We are the soil that Lord Jesus speaks about in this parable – we are the ground on which the seeds of God’s message fall upon. I feel that during our lifetime we switch between these 4 types of soils at various phases in our lives.

For example sometimes we are selective with the word of God, hence even when we read the scriptures, and receive a clear message, the seed dies almost immediately because our hearts were not ready to accept the word. Our own prejudices and blindness cause this to happen. This is why we are able to adhere to certain commandments with ease, and others not so. Yet at some other time the word takes root in joy but does not last long enough, because we did not grow deeper in a relationship with God. And when a problem or sickness comes, we completely let go of God. Thirdly when the seed falls among the thorns it cannot survive for too long and it dies without bearing much fruit. Similarly when we receive the word of God with an unrepented heart, it gets choked by our sinful nature which prohibits the word from bearing fruit in our lives. This is why sometimes even though we receive the word of God and we believe it, our life remains sinful and untransformed. And finally the seed that falls on the good soil bears much fruit and brings joy to the Sower. This happens because the soil was ready to receive the seed without reservation and give it the corporation it needed.

God is kind, merciful and patient. He spreads the seeds of His good news even upon hardened hearts which have rejected Him. He waits, knowing that through the grace of the Holy Spirit even our hardened hearts can become fertile ground for His message. No matter what stage we are in life, today let us remember that if we allow the word of God to take root in our hearts and we give God the corporation He requires, very soon our lives will be transformed.

Prayer: *Abba Father, have your way in our cold, unrepentant hearts that we may become welcoming soil to your inspiration, love and grace. Amen*

"Do you believe?"

Matthew 13: 52

1 John 4: 7-16

Psalm 34: 1-8

John 11:19-27 or Luke
10: 38-42

For a spouse who keeps getting betrayed they last thing he or she would want to hear is, "love one another". It is the same for anyone who is having a relationship problem with a family member. We cannot escape or take a break from an unfaithful spouse, or a difficult family member. We keep our guards up, we keep them at a distance, so that we will not be used or manipulated anymore.

Today's first reading says "if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is made complete in us". The truth is, we who have our focus on Him, who serve Him with our lives, feel powerless when it comes to a difficult family member or an unfaithful spouse. We get caught up, we react, and then we feel worthless about ourselves.

Just like Martha and Mary in today's Gospel, we wait for the Lord to turn up and do a miracle. Just like them, we too feel disappointed in Him for not turning up when we need Him the most. He can in a moment change everything, yet we go on day after day, watching helplessly as things go from bad to worse. We ask God why He is silent.

The Lord visited Mary and Martha three days after the death of Lazarus, when the body had begun to decompose. At that point, Lazarus was beyond help. His body has started to fall apart; most probably maggots would have started to feast on the decomposing flesh. When we look at our lives, the things that have happened to us or the things that we have done, often seem beyond hope. Things have fallen apart, started to decompose and stink. The Lord walks into our lives when we have no way of turning things around, and He speaks His words of life.

The Risen Christ, the one who overcame everything is asking us: "Do you believe"? We respond, Yes Lord, you are the Messiah, the Saviour of those who are lost. You have come to save me and from my circumstances. Today He is speaking to me words of life that take away the pain and the shame. He is recreating what has been broken, restoring what has been lost. I sit before Him, just like the dead Lazarus and allow the power of God to move in my mind, my emotions and in my life. I wait upon Him to come and He makes His home in my heart.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I wait for your words of life to recreate in me what has been lost, what has been stolen so that I may love just the way you love me. Amen.*

“A disciple... is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.” Matthew 13: 52

1 Kings 3: 5, 7-12
Pslam 119: 57, 72, 76-
77, 127-130
Romans 8: 28-30
Matthew 13: 44-52

When life is going the way we expect, we do not bother to discern God's plans for us. How many of us would stop to ask God's direction if we get that “dream job” we always wanted? If the man or the woman of our dreams falls in love with us, how many of us would stop to think what God has to say about it? Will we discern God's mind if we inherit an unexpected wealth? In today's first reading we are challenged by the newly appointed young king Solomon, to whom God said: “ask what you want me to give you”.

Youthfulness and the power that come with being a king would have been a deadly combination. The power, the privileges, and the influence that come with the job would have been too much even for a grown man, let alone a young boy. So Solomon prayed: “I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.” Solomon could have asked God for anything, yet he asked for the tools he needed to serve faithfully. 1 Kings 3:10 says: “The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this”. His prayer for the fulfillment of God's mission through him pleased God immensely. Therefore, Solomon was given wisdom to rule God's people, along with wealth and fame that were matchless to any of his contemporaries.

Often we come across prayers and novenas that guarantee answers. We use them to tell God what He should do for us. Today's first reading teaches us that the prayer that pleases God most, is the prayer of submission to His mission through us. That prayer makes us rich spiritually; opens doors in places which are humanly not possible, and gives us a new perspective to life itself.

When we first came to live in a foreign country, we thought it was a brilliant idea. Our goal was clear; earn, save, and return to Sri Lanka. Even though we lived comfortably, I used to feel alone and fearful. Most things were a burden; the jobs we did, the children's education, their future, even a common cold gave me anxiety.... I did not feel rested or at peace. Everything changed with an encounter with the Lord. We went through tougher times and greater struggles after the encounter, but we saw the hand of God along the way, and His purpose. The more we gave up of our lives, our time, and our finances

for His mission through us, the more we felt at peace and secure.

Most often, we are restless till we get what we want, when we want. We lose sight of God in sicknesses, family problems, financial problems, and struggles with our addictions.

Unconsciously, we come to the conclusion that God is just as powerless as we are. What we do not realize is, that every struggle, every situation, every enemy that threatens to destroy us, is being used by God to take us deeper; to conform us to the image of His son. Someone once said: "Goliath was strategically placed in David's path, not to defeat him, but to promote him".

Just like Goliath was used to make David king of Israel, God can use our deepest, darkest struggles to conform us to the image of Christ. God has a plan for us, and that plan is to the world we live in. It is when we live in complete submission to His mission through us, we can be completely secure, fulfilled and made whole.

Our faith, our knowledge and our relationship with God is made stronger in the struggle of living in that mission. I believe that is why St. Paul said "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose".

The Lord is speaking to us through the Gospel about choosing the Kingdom of heaven over everything else. Unless we know God intimately, we will never fully know the value of His Kingdom. Through the parable of the net, the Lord is reminding us that we have to make a choice to possess and live in the Kingdom of God. He works with us and not against us; just as it is so easy to get in to the Kingdom in the power of God, it is also easy to get out by our own choice. With every conscious decision we make, the Lord is inviting us to choose to live and expand the territories of the Kingdom of God.

The Lord says: "a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old". New treasures are waiting to be found, new opportunities are waiting to open up when we walk in complete submission to the will of God for His mission through us.

Prayer: Abba Father, may I have the wisdom and the grace to choose you among all the distractions around me, to say yes to your will in every moment of my life. Amen.

We are called to be Spirit led people

Exo 32: 15-24, 30-34

Psalm 106: 19-23

Matthew 13: 31-35

In today's first reading we see how the Jewish people—despite all the wonderful miracles God had done for them in liberating them from enslavement from Egypt—make a golden calf and worship it because Moses delayed in coming down from Mount Sinai. Do we also worship golden calves. We may not make idols of gold or other materials. Our idols are mainly in the self not on any shelf. They could include selfishness or self-centredness, greed or bitterness, the desire for power, prestige or popularity.

Even in religious life it may be a desire for personal gain or glory. If we give a good talk we might expect compliments from others. God gives us the Holy Spirit, the wisdom and the knowledge to give a good talk or accomplish some other spiritual work. If we take the credit for it, it is idol worship and stealing the glory from God. If we go on like that, it would be disastrous for us and for others. That is why every day we need to come to God as we are, sincerely give the truth of our lives to him surrender our selfishness, hypocrisy or other sins and allow the Lord to refill us with the Holy Spirit.

As we heard at the International Pentecost Rally in Rome last month, Pentecost is perpetual. The anointing of the Holy Spirit is not something that happens once in our lives. We need to be filled and refilled with the Holy Spirit 24/7. That means every day, every hour and from moment to moment. Further it is not enough just to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to be Spirit-led, so that we will do God's will only in all things, grow in our awareness that we are sons or daughters of God and cooperate with Him in building the kingdom by loving one another as He loves us. As Pope Francis says the kingdom of heaven is a peaceful, just and all inclusive society where even the oppressed people are freed from their enslavement to poverty and given an equal place even in the decision making processes.

Today as we celebrate the Feast of St Ignatius of Loyola, let us thank God for the thousands of Jesuits through whom the Holy Spirit is bringing about liberative spirituality for world poverty alleviation, the battle against climate change and conflict resolution through dialogue instead of war or violence.

Prayer: Abba Father we thank you for Pope Francis, himself a Jesuit through whom you are bringing about a new Pentecost in the church and the world. Amen.

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