“Act as if everything depended on you; trust as if everything depended on God.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola

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On Our Knees In His Hands

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The book of Wisdom was written about hundred years before the birth of Christ Jesus. Wisdom can be defined as a person; wisdom is God himself speaking to us. The book of Wisdom spoke of the creation of God. The lines of the book of Wisdom denoted the magnificence of the creation of God. Everything God created was pleasing to him. It is clearly spoken in the scriptures that God never created death or destruction.

A mother who was heartbroken due to her child’s decisions stopped praying. The heaviness of her sorrow pushed her to contemplate leaving the church. Her question was; “why did God do this to my child”? This is a pathway we take often. We seldom consult God when we make decisions in life. Yet, when our own plans lead us to destruction, whom do we blame? Today’s first proclamation clearly mentioned that God never created death and destruction but it is the envy of the evil that brought forth destruction and death to the world. We need to have wisdom to understand this truth. The truth is that God created all good things or all things that were created by God are good. Evil and death crept into the world and into the lives of human beings after they opted to trust in the lie that was told to them and through their disobedience to God.

St. Paul mentioned it more clearly to us in the second proclamation today. Even after the fall of humanity God brought forth the plan of salvation. The Son of God became man for the sake of humanity and creation. God in the person of our Lord Jesus left his status as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity stepped down to become man. In the letter to the Philippians the action of Lord Jesus is beautifully stated. He left His status and became man and out of obedience agreed to die. He became like a slave and died a death on the cross. God’s richness was compromised and God became poor for our sake. It is a sorrowful situation in our lives when we carry the attitude that destruction and negativity is brought into our lives by God. It is our ignorance within us that we assume that God brings destruction to us. The richness of God is the holiness of God. Our internal richness is our holiness. Christ Jesus hung on the cross to make us rich within. Whoever is rich internally is full of God’s love and has experienced the forgiveness of God. Such persons can love and forgive others easily.
Our poverty is our inability to love others. God never created poverty but loved and provided equally for every human being. Poverty in our lives and in the world is due to human limitations. But St. Paul urged us to be mindful of the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ became poor to make us rich.

The Gospel proclamation explained how to remain within simple faith. We simply need to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the pinnacle of the ministry of Lord Jesus. Crowds were gathering around our Lord Jesus because wherever he went miracles were taking place. Could it be that the crowds gathered to witness the miracles? Or could it be that every person who gathered around our Lord Jesus had a need to be fulfilled. Inspite of being an official of the synagogue, Jairus came during the day to the Lord Jesus rather than at night and fell at the feet of the Lord because he wanted his child to be cured. This was his desperate need.

What is significant is the faith that Jairus had in our Lord Jesus. Jairus knew that if Lord Jesus visited his daughter that the she would be healed. His faith was two-fold. His simple faith was tested to the maximum when the messengers came with the dreaded news that his daughter died. What would we do in such situation? Amazingly, our Lord Jesus stepped in and answered on behalf of Jairus. Our Lord Jesus decided to continue the journey to visit the small girl even though the messengers came with the dreaded news. The New Testament often referred to death as fallen asleep. Christ Jesus was able to plant faith in the heart of Jairus. The Lord went against the tide and the commotion and performed the miracle, which built faith in the heart of Jairus, his wife and the people who were around that place.

The highlight of this whole event was the woman with the hemorrhage. No one ministered to her. She came in her brokenness and sickness. She came not to get prayed over or to get the Lord to lay hands on her but that she could touch the cloak of the Lord Jesus. She has suffered much and she only needed to be healed. She had the simple faith within her. She was rich within her. She knew that the Lord Jesus could heal her and would make her whole.

We should not be disheartened when we are faced with challenges in life. Every challenge could be overcome with the power of surrendering to God. Let us cling to the Lord Jesus through our pains and struggles and we will experience His redeeming power and love.

Pray: Abba Father, your grace is sufficient for me. Your grace will keep me in you. When I remain in you I could put my trust you. Your wisdom will help me to touch you with faith. Amen.
Beneath the façade of an Indian summer of prosperity and influence, was a nation seething in corruption and rottenness. Into this atmosphere “Yahweh” roars from Zion, His voice thunders from Jerusalem” (Amos 1:2) Through Amos, a shepherd from nearby Israel, he denounces their immoral lives, social injustice and oppression of the poor. Their hollow pretence of religion depending on external practices was an abomination – a mere mockery to Him. His wrath would inevitably fall on this rebellious nation and enemies would overpower them – a prophecy fulfilled 30 years later when the Assyrians invaded Israel.

While Amos denounces false religion, in the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus defines the cost of discipleship, to two people who wanted to follow Him. To one He offered the gift of homelessness!! To the other an invitation to abandon tradition. He bids them count the cost of discipleship. To follow Him would mean a radical turning away from one’s comfort zone. Tradition can sometimes enslave one to a ‘dead’ society. A leap of faith to break free and totally commit oneself is asked from the Lord Jesus. It is no rose garden He offers. To follow Him is to leave all one’s personal ambitions and desires and surrender totally to His will. Contrary to expectations we would then receive true peace and joy that every human heart craves for.

How easy it is in the present world to be caught up in the whirl-wind of commercialism and materialism! How easy it is to pursue power prestige and prosperity! How easy to follow rites and rituals of religion and ignore the call to follow the Lord! To attend Sunday Mass, say the Rosary recite prayers – are all excellent practices, but as disciples is that the life we are called to? (I too was guilty of this way of life till I was baptized and born again in the Spirit thanks to the Renewal). In Baptism we have received the calling to be Priests, Prophets and Kings - Prophets to actively proclaim the Word and live it. As Priests we are called to intercede for the weak, the non-believers and for the sinners we identify with. As Kings we are asked to take authority against all forms of social injustice and oppression of the poor. Our calling has been bought at a tremendous cost, His very Blood and it is imperative that we respond to His love in whichever way we can.

Prayer: Abba Father, we want to follow you. We ask the Holy Spirit to teach us how. Amen
Today’s first reading reminds us that we are no longer foreigners in this world but fellow-citizens with God’s people. “Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Eph 2:19).

The first time I read this verse it did not mean much to me because from my smallest days I have heard that we are children of God and we belong to Him and many such quotes. But today as I read this verse thrice I realised that not everyone in the world comes under this category. The late Jim Reeves sings “This world is not my home, I’m just passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue”. On planet earth we are foreigners like passengers waiting for their aircraft to arrive to get on it and fly home. But everything changes when we accept the Lord Jesus Christ and are Holy Spirit filled. When we have resurrection power inside us, we become a powerhouse of God from the outside. When this happens we will only have one motive in life and that is to do the will of God in every instance of our life and by doing so we become members of God’s household.

When our lives are transformed we look at the world through the eyes of God and earth becomes Heaven to us. In each passing moment on earth we will not see a threat but an opportunity to build the Kingdom of God. The worst thing that happens becomes the best thing that could happen to us because we will have the peace and joy of God flooding our hearts. We will see the plan of God unfolding in our lives. Then we will realise that we are Citizens of this world because we are under the obedience of God’s command. The definition of a Citizen is a status of a person recognised under the custom or law as being legal members of a sovereign nation. As Christians we need to be recognised under the custom and law of the Kingdom of God. Always remember the Kingdom of God is with you and you are within the boundaries of this planet for the moment, so the kingdom of God is also within planet earth. As we celebrate the feast of St. Thomas the Apostle, we remember the words “He who is humble easily obeys everyone, fears to offend anyone, is at peace with everyone and is kind with all”. This is our calling.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to be imitators of our Lord Jesus Christ as we journey on this earth as citizens of your Kingdom. Amen.
Amos was sent to the northern kingdom to prophesy during the prosperous reign of king Jeroboam II. Amos was from Judah. Amos is a prophet of divine judgment. Amos spoke in favour of social justice. Israel built altars in Bethel and was practicing cult worship. This was an abomination to God. The social upheaval and cult worship in Israel displeased God and Amos commanded a return to God.

Is it not terrible when our sacrifices and offerings are rejected by God? God’s displeasure shown to us are moments of grace for us to return to God. The unending love of God pulls us back from our sinful state to divine grace. Where sin is great we find am abundance of grace. Prophets come to us to remind us that we belong to God. Would God be pleased with our outward rituals and good mannerisms? The greatest foolishness is to think that our inward dirt can be washed by paying them off by our outward sacrifices. When bribing, cheating, deception, delaying employees of their wages and not paying our dues to the deserved are our normal practices can we be justified by sacrifices made to God or offering huge donations towards God and the poor? God does not want our sacrifices, He wants us.

Our battle is with the dark and negative forces. Our Lord Jesus came face to face with evil possession. The marvel is that they recognized the Lord Jesus immediately. In the present day the evil one experiences the real presence of the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist whereas the normal human person fails to. Was the livelihood of people of Gadarene ruined? Interestingly, the demoniacs questioned the Lord Jesus as to why he came before the appointed time? What is the appointed time? It is the time of the fulfillment. We are in the appointed time. The Lord Jesus established the Kingdom of God on earth and poured out His Holy Spirit. We are a liberated generation. St. Elizabeth of Hungary lived a life pleasing to God. She loved her unfaithful husband. She made peace between her son and husband by mending a huge dispute. She acted as a prophet and brought peace to her nation. She did so because she was set free by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus. We too are redeemed by the precious blood Christ Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for choosing us to be prophets through our baptism. Grant us the grace to be faithful to you. Amen
Thursday 5th July

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” Matthew 9:2

The first reading speaks of how Prophet Amos was prophesying to the nation of Israel. This was the northern kingdom of the divided land. Amos preached against the social injustice of the day: the poor were taken advantage of and mistreated. Amos preached against the excessive drinking that plagued Israel. People brought offerings to God, but they did so out of routine; their hearts were not in their acts of worship. Amos preached against the sins of Israel. What was the response to his preaching? Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, went to the king and told him to make Amos stop preaching. Amaziah then went to Amos and told him to get out of Israel. He did not want to hear about sin; but wanted to silence the messenger. It is not too difficult to see that nothing has changed. Our society is not interested in hearing voices that point out sin. Whether it be homosexuality, materialism, or the reality that not all gods are equal (or actually exist), our society’s reaction is to call those views extreme and not worth listening to.

The Gospel proclamation today speaks of how our Lord Jesus healed the paralytic man. For the Lord this man’s inability to walk was not the primary issue, instead we read “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” (Matthew 9:2). It was the man’s spiritual needs, rather than his physical needs that mattered the most. Being put back into a right relationship with God, through the forgiveness of his sins, mattered more to Jesus than his inability to walk. But to prove that Jesus Christ has the power to forgive sins, he also said to the man “Get up, take your mat and go home.”

For me this story is a reminder that what I might think is most important for us, may not be what God thinks is most important. Because how God looks at us, is different to how we look at ourselves. This should not come as a surprise. For as it says in Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. (Isaiah 55:8) Because like this paralysed man, what we need more than anything else is to be put back into a right relationship with God through the forgiveness of our sins, and that matters most.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray you give us the spiritual eyes to look at things the way you see them and not the way we want to see them. Amen.
Friday 6th July  

St. Maria Goretti,  
Virgin & Martyr  

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”  

Matthew 9:13

It was a beautiful Sunday Morning and people were filling the church. At the end of the line stood an elderly man. His clothes were filthy and you could tell that he had not bathed in days. His face was covered in whiskers where he had not shaved for a very long time. When he reached the usher, he removed his tattered old brown hat in respect. His hair was a long, dirty, tangled mess.

The usher put his hand to his nose, glared at the man and said, “I’m sorry, but I’m afraid we can’t let you in. You would distract and offend the congregation and we don’t allow anyone to disrupt the service. I’m afraid you’ll have to leave.” The old man’s face fell as he looked down at himself, placed his old brown hat back on his head and turned to leave. He didn’t want to cause a commotion so he hung his head and walked back down the steps of the church. He sat down near the brick wall outside and strained his ears to listen to what was going on inside.

A few minutes passed by when all of us sudden younger man came up behind him and sat down near him. He asked the old man what he was doing. He answered, “I was going to go to church today, but they thought I was filthy and were afraid I’d disrupt the service.” The old man introduced himself as Tom, and as they shook hands couldn’t help but notice that the younger man had long hair like his. He wore a cloth draped over his body tied with a purple sash. He had sandals on his feet that were covered in dust and dirt. The stranger turned to Tom and said, “Hello Tom, don’t feel bad because they would not let you in. My name is Jesus, and I’ve been trying to get into this same church for years, and they won’t let me in either.” (Source Unknown)

Is my heart moved by what moves the Lord’s heart? “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9: 12, 13) The Lord reveals His heart to us today. His heart is for all who are broken, abandoned, rejected and lost in sin, those people in our lives who we do not tolerate. All those whom we have decided are not deserving of mercy. The Lord unmistakably says that He “desired mercy not sacrifice.” We must extend mercy, without exception, to all.

Prayer: Abba Father, break my heart for what breaks Yours and give me the grace to extend to others the same mercy You have extended to me. Amen
Saturday 7th July

Blessed Virgin Mary

“I will restore David’s fallen shelter, I will repair its broken walls and restore its ruins” — Amos 9:11

The first Saturday is a day dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary as tradition has it. I am moved to reflect on the beauty of her as a person and the integral role she played in obtaining salvation. How little do many of us realise how powerfully present she is even today in our lives in the journey to Salvation. Amidst a world full of chaos, with deteriorating values, enmeshed in materialism one can hardly focus on the truth unless one has the support and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Mary shines out as a role model. She was the closest friend of the Holy Spirit. As Pope Francis beautifully says it- She is the mother of our Redeemer, goes before us and continually strengthens us in faith, in our vocation and in our mission. By her example of humility and openness to God’s will she helps us to transmit our faith in a joyful proclamation of the Gospel to all. Our mission is fruitful, when it is modelled on the motherhood of Mary. To her let us entrust our journey of faith, our desires especially of those who hunger and thirst for justice, for peace and for God.

In the first reading Amos gives a prophetic declaration of the restoration of Israel to its former beauty, to a land flowing with milk and honey: a sense of newness in life. While in the Gospel proclamation, the disciples of John are concerned about why the disciples of Jesus do not fast while they do. The Lord Jesus rightly brings them to the awareness that the bridegroom is with them and the best mortification they can do is to welcome the presence that will bring full restoration to the people. While they had moralistic ideas about mortification—the Lord Jesus is in reality saying—‘be attentive to what is before you.’

How often we miss this point in our own lives. Our Lord Jesus says in contemporary terms that our minds must be open to receive and contain new ideas. The comparison used of new wine in old wine skins would result in the old hardened wine skins bursting and wine being lost. Likewise patching a new cloth which is not shrunken, to an old garment when exposed to water will wrench the garment. Jesus was never under illusions he saw the cross waiting for him. He was prepared. Here is the courage of a man knowing, God’s way costs, and yet goes on. Implicit faith and trust took him through to the end and the glory followed.

Prayer: Abba Father we open our lives to you through the intercession of Mary our mother. Re-build our lives and lead us on the pathway you have planned for us. Amen
Today’s liturgy is about prophets and their recognition. It is easy for us who live in the 21st century, with not much experience in prophets and prophesies in our day and age, to feel that these readings are only of historical value. Yet, is it really so? Are we living in an era of no prophets? If so, are we not in a pitiable state, being God’s people but not hearing from Him through His prophets? The Oxford dictionary describes a prophet as a person regarded as an inspired teacher or proclaimer of the will of God. As we prayerfully reflect on today’s Readings, may the Holy Spirit enable us to recognise the responsibility we have received in and through our Baptism to be a prophet for our family, workplace and society! May our spirit be awakened to recognize the prophets God has sent us in this day and age, thus not missing out on the blessings He has prepared for us to receive through their words!

The First Reading describes Ezekiel’s call to be a prophet. In Ezekiel 2:1 God asks Ezekiel to stand up on his feet for God to speak to him. In other words, Ezekiel was asked to do something to receive God’s revelations. Yet, in the very next verse we are told that when God spoke those words, the Spirit of God came upon Ezekiel and raised him to his feet, upon which he heard God speak. This is applicable to not just the calling be a prophet but also to being a disciple of Christ. We do not have the strength to fulfill the requisites to be God’s servants unless the Holy Spirit empowers us to do so. Have we not heard the saying, that “God does not call the equipped, but equips the called”?

The Gospel proclamation reveals another aspect of a prophet’s life. Many people of Nazareth, the hometown of our Lord Jesus, were amazed at His teachings. They recognised that there was something supernatural and extraordinary about His words and actions, and they rightly understood that He had been gifted with a different form of wisdom, to which they were all attracted. They knew about the coming of the Messiah and what the Messiah would be doing when He comes. They would have, even for a fleeting moment, felt in their depths, that the moment they had been waiting for had finally arrived, the Messiah among them! Yet, at once, familiarity sprang up in defense…”Isn’t he the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son…?” (Mark 6:3). All those who were amazed and got excited at the wisdom of Lord Jesus would have been taken aback and felt deflated and ashamed.
of their own selves, for their ‘foolishness’ to ‘assume for a moment that they were in the presence of the Messiah’. They would have thanked those who reminded them of who, the Lord Jesus was. They must have thanked God for saving them from being deceived!! What was the result? The Lord Jesus could not do any miracles among them, except healing a ‘few’ sick people. (cf. Mark 6:5) This is in contrast to the other places where the Lord healed ‘all’ who came to Him. (cf. Matthew 8:16, 14:36, 4:24, Mark 6:56) Does this ring a bell in our memory? How often do we allow our familiarity and our own knowledge and understanding to become a barrier to experience the mighty works of the Holy Spirit among us? How often do we close our ears and our hearts to the voice of the Lord spoken to us through an individual, just because that person has a broken past?? Let us repent today, and ask the Lord to enable us to hear His voice loud and clear through any one whom He chooses to send to us.

The Gospel proclamation also speaks to us about our own call in Baptism to be His prophets. When we live in the Spirit, witnessing to His love and power, we too need to be willing to be misunderstood and rejected by those closest to us. This, to me, is actually a great opportunity to be humble, keeping my ego firmly crushed, giving inner responses in love. Today’s Second Reading affirms this. Being called by the Lord does not mean that we become holy overnight. Nor does it mean that we will have a flawless character. All of us have a thorn in our flesh, just like St Paul, making us weary, discouraged and hurting at times, when we struggle to remove the thorn by self-effort. This thorn could be our own brokenness in a certain area of our life, or the brokenness of someone who is close to us. This thorn becomes a huge blessing when we choose to use it to prevent us from becoming proud or arrogant, thus making it impossible for the Lord to use us for His work. It keeps us humble and glued to the Lord, depending only on His grace to enable us to do His will and His work. It helps us to laugh at our own mistakes and weaknesses, so that we do not indulge in self-defense to clear our name at any cost. We also learn to thank God for the thorn in our flesh as it makes us more merciful and forgiving towards those who are around us, releasing the love and mercy of God to our world. This helps to make our homes, workplaces, prayer communities and essentially our society to experience love and forgiveness. Our parishes will become places of inclusion and not of exclusion to broken and marginalized people. As this Scripture passage takes root in our hearts, we will become streams of living water, giving life and healing to the world. Heaven on earth.

Prayer: Abba Father, I lift up my eyes to You, as the eyes of a slave looking to the hand of his master, as the eyes of a female slave looking to the hand of her mistress. Your grace is sufficient for me, and Your power is made perfect in my weakness. May You be glorified in and through my life! Amen.
Monday 9th July

“I am going to allure her, lead her once more into the desert, where I can speak to her tenderly.” Hosea 2: 16

Today’s first reading speaks of God’s restoration to the land of Israel. The Lord speaks to prophet Hosea and says even though Israel went behind false gods and sought after what was displeasing to God, He is coming after them – alluring them and leading them into the desert once again, where He can speak to them tenderly.

However, only after they are led into the desert does the restoration begin. First, they hear the voice of God speaking to them as He did in their first desert experience. Next, they know His love, for He gives back their vineyards and provides for them. Finally, they experience union with Him for He betroths Israel to Himself forever, as a husband and wife are betrothed to each other.

The Lord is inviting us to this same experience. He longs for us to hear His voice, know His love and experience union with Him. In our lives, we may be wandering through various deserts and times of unknowing. It is in these moments that the Lord is waiting to pour out His love and intimacy. In the olden days, the Valley of Achor was known as a place of deep trouble. However, the Lord says that this valley will become a door of hope for the Israelites. In the same way, whatever trouble we may be facing in these days will turn into a door of hope and expectation, where we will see the glory of God.

Today’s Gospel proclamation speaks of another kind of restoration – one from death to life and another from sickness to health. The synagogue leader’s daughter had died, but the man said to the Lord Jesus, “Put your hand on her, and she will live.” It was a simple act of faith that he exercised before the Lord, and immediately, the Lord and his disciples went to the man’s home to raise the daughter to life, and when the Lord took the girl by her hand, she got up. In the midst of this, a woman with a blood disease who had been suffering for twelve years, made her way to the Lord Jesus. Again, it was a simple act of faith on her part that brought healing. She believed that if she touched the edge of His cloak she would be healed – and it happened. Not only was she healed instantly, but she was restored completely for the Lord Jesus turned to her and called her ‘daughter’.

Prayer: Abba Father, reveal yourself to me in the deserts of my life that I may hear your voice, know your love and experience your intimacy. Amen.
‘The Law of the Farm’ states that you will reap what you sow, and the first reading today says that the people of Israel reap the whirlwind and sow the wind – in other words, they gain nothing from their efforts because their efforts too are in vain. Though they offered sacrifices to the Lord, it was useless because the Lord was not pleased with them. All that they sowed in the end was impending destruction.

This is further consolidated in the Psalm of today. Psalm 115 speaks of false idols that have been made by man. Verse 8 says, “Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.”

However, in the gospel proclamation, a different light is shed. We are first introduced to the Lord Jesus healing a demon-possessed man who was mute. He amazed the crowds, yet the Pharisees blasphemed, by saying, “It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.” The Pharisees were like the unrepentant Israelites of the Old Testament. They too had followed their own understanding, building idols of unbelief in their hearts. The Law of the Farm applies to them as well; they sowed doubt and they reaped unbelief.

However, our Lord Jesus was not perturbed by their ways of thinking. He continued to travel throughout the land, healing all diseases. His compassion and mercy shone forth even during His time on earth, for when He saw the large crowds of people His heart went out to them all, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. It is then that He tells His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” Today, we still have a bountiful harvest of people that needs to be gathered to the Lord. In order to be a worker in the harvest field, we need to keep in mind this Law of the Farm. Sow faith and miracles will take place; sow doubt and we will be like the Pharisees of old, not having any change in our own lives or the lives of the people in the harvest.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to reap what we sow first in our own lives, and then in the lives of those around us. Amen.
Let alone seeking or returning to the Lord, we are living in a time that the Lord is been rejected. Modern technology today pushes us to live a self-centered life of living on our own strength and depending on our own decisions and desires. Hosea 10:1 tells us “Israel was spreading vine, rich in fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more he adorned his sacred stones. There is no difference between the Israelites of those days or the Christians of today. Many of us are caught up today in the sin of abandoning our Creator and the Saviour and worshiping false gods such as money, power, strength, beauty. We are caught up in a wave of worldly pleasures.

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ we see God inviting His people through prophet Hosea to return to Him from the darkness they were bound in.

In the New Testament God sends His only begotten son, and invites all those living in the dark to return to God. The gospel proclamation today enumerates how the Lord calls his disciples and strengthens them and gives them a mission. “Go to the lost sheep of Israel” perform miracles and invite them to return. After His death and resurrection the Lord poured out the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the disciples and said “Go, proclaim the good news to the whole world” Go and call for repentance and return of those who have abandoned the Lord and are living in sin, sadness, depression and oppression. He redeemed those who repented and returned. Thousands of lives were changed. Even the Roman Empire knelt before the Lord.

After over 2000 years since Christ, technology has advanced. The human brain is so developed that almost nothing is impossible for man. Most intellectuals have turned away from God. They try to live their lives on principles such as “I am my own help” and “My destiny is in my hands” This is a testimony of a doctor. He achieved great heights in his profession but got addicted to drinking, clubbing and a bad lifestyle. One Wednesday he came to a prayer meeting looking for relief. The love of God touched him and redeemed him from darkness to a life of light. Today he is lives a transformed life.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us all the grace to return to you today. Amen!
We know what this means. It means that if you give, you ask for nothing in return. What we do not realise is that there is always a cost, a price that must be paid by the same giver. Nothing comes free, not even salvation. A high price was paid for our salvation and it was paid by the Lord Jesus who saved us. The Lord has chosen us and in His faithfulness, delivers the people who are burdened with problems and difficulties. We see in the Gospel proclamation, how He tells them to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons. Who can do that? Who can clear themselves of addictions, pornography, alcohol or drugs? Who can end the plague of sexual abuse, abortions, and eating disorders? How can we free ourselves from the throes of war, poverty and illness?

Remember the miracles the Lord has done. The Lord has done marvelous deeds and Holy is His name. He Himself cured the sick, raised the dead and cleansed the lepers. He gives us hope and asks us to give without any cost. The Lord has spoken words of wisdom. He speaks the truth which sets us free. He tells us how we should live, forgive and give. He gives us the truth and asks us to give it too. He gives us his love and asks us to give it without any cost.

To us parents, He asks that we take our vocation seriously. We are to die to ourselves, live for each other and strive for our children. We are called to lead the children while being led by God. Parents are to swim against the current worldly pressures which continue to flood and suffocate religious beliefs and worship in and outside their home. The Lord asks us to do whatever it takes to parent our children from being slaves to sin. We are to give our words, works and life freely and without cost!

Pope Francis, in one of his sermons said the following: “Your children’s ‘little eyes’ gradually memorize and interpret with the heart that faith is one of the greatest inheritances you have received from your parents and ancestors…. And if you hand on the faith and live it well, that is where the transmission happens. Showing them how faith helps us to go forward and face challenges and tragedy, not with pessimism but with trust; this is the best witness we can give them.”

Prayer: Abba Father, you have made me to know you, to love you and to serve you. I pray that you send your Holy Spirit to me to live with me. Amen
Friday 13th July

“..whoever endures to the end will be saved.”

Matthew 10: 22

In Deuteronomy 6: 4-5, is the greatest commandment, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.” The Lord Jesus confirms this in Luke 10: 27 saying, if you follow this commandment, you will live.

Time and again the Israelites forgot the God who delivered them from the land of slavery to freedom. Instead of putting their trust in God alone, they trusted their own military strength, turned to foreign powers and ran after Baal, the god of fertility. Even though the people of God have turned away from their God, Creator, Father and Mother, God cannot turn away from His own, His people, His children.

In today’s first reading Prophet Hosea is calling the people of Israel, who are fallen because of their sins, to sincere conversion and a new life. He reminds them that, no political power (Assyria - foreign country), no human power (horses), or our own abilities (work of our hands) can save us. (Hosea 14,4) Humbling oneself like an orphan, (who has no one in this world to cling on to) and trusting in God alone will enable us, to experience the compassion, healing and love of God. (Hosea 14: 4-5)

Today, let us examine our hearts. Have we turned away from the Lord Jesus who died for us, who interceded to the Father and poured into our hearts the promised gift of the Holy Spirit to live a life of victory? Today do we feel sad, lonely, addicted or burdened? Our spirits and hearts are burdened because we have suppressed the Holy Spirit living within us. We live our lives as if God does not exist within us and amongst us. More than trusting God in day to day issues of life, we live our lives depending on our own understanding and the understanding of the world. As a result our hearts are heavy and burdened. The Lord is calling us to repent and return to Him once again. Let us repent, fall at his feet and give the truth of our lives to the Lord Jesus. As we empty ourselves and trust in God alone, once again the Holy Spirit living within us will be awakened. The Holy Spirit alone can fill our hearts with love, peace and gladness. The result is freedom and rest even in the midst of trials. (Matthew 10:19-20 & 22)

Prayer, Abba Father, you will open my lips, and my mouth will proclaim your praise. Amen.
Saturday 14th July

Feast of St. Camillus de Lellis, priest

“The then heard the voice of the Lord, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” I answered, “Here I am. Send me!” Isaiah 6:8

The first reading today takes me down memory lane to the beginning of my journey in the community. In those days there was the worship song that was sung most often during the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. “Holy”, which was based on the first reading today. It always had the effect of bringing down heaven and would make me feel that I was truly in the presence of the Lord. There were tears pouring down as God’s presence filled the place.

At such times, just as Prophet Isaiah said, have we not felt unworthy to be in the presence of the Lord who is holy? Our lives are tainted with unworthiness. For day after day, we fall into the ways of our flesh. According to the words of the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of St. Mathew, our spirit is willing but our flesh is weak. Therefore, we tend to judge ourselves and withdraw from the Lord just as Prophet Isaiah did.

What truly happens when we come face to face with the Lord is that we become painfully aware of our sinfulness and then the Lord in His mercy purifies us and calls us to serve Him. The good news today is, we too have the burning coal in the form of the sacrament of reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist that cleanses us and washes our guilt and gives us the grace to look to the Lord. When the prophet was cleansed of sin and guilt he was able to boldly offer himself to the service of the Lord.

In the Gospel proclamation today the Lord is calling His disciples to boldness just as God called Isaiah. The Lord foretells the disciples of the experience He would have to face and encourages them not to be afraid of those who would kill the body. He is calling them to their mission and warns of impending persecution. This is the same call we are given today in that we are to be bold to proclaim the good news and be prepared to be persecuted. The hope we have is in the first reading that one day we shall see the Lord our God face to face in all His Glory and Majesty and live in joy till all eternity. As the Lord Jesus assures us in the Gospel proclamation, on that day, we will be acknowledged before the Father and we shall reign with Him forever.

Prayer: Abba Father, let your Holy Spirit sustain boldness in our hearts to serve you all the days of our lives, here on earth. Amen!
Recently we reflected that when God wants to intervene in human history His default modus operandi is to intervene through a human partner. All of today’s readings deal with God's choice of partners. By reflecting on the readings let us try to discover what God sees as important, and more importantly, if there is anything that we see as important, which is of little or no value to God.

Today’s first reading is taken from the Book of Amos, a prophet whose ministry took place during the reign of King Jeroboam II. Biblical scholars tell us that Amos was from the Kingdom of Judah, but his Mission was in the Kingdom of Israel. The reading tells us that Amos was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees, not one who carried credentials that qualified him to be a prophet in the Kingdom of Israel. So much so, that Amaziah implies that Amos is a charlatan, who has no business prophesying in the court of Jeroboam. So, we learn the first principle. Human credentials and qualifications are of little no value for the mission of God. The very fact that you are called, is of much value.

Often, I think that if I were a cleric, I would have been able to reach out to so many more people. I think that if I had the favour of a powerful figure in the church, it would be so much easier to bring the message of the Four Steps to others. It would be so much easier to get people to attend our Prayer Meetings. However, God does not seem to be interested in dealing with the currency of human advantage.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we see Our Lord Jesus sending out the twelve, two by two on a mission. But before He sends them out, He calls them to Him. Those who are called are called to know Him and have a relationship with Him first. Serving Him in mission comes second.

Among those who were sent on this mission was a certain disciple named Judas Iscariot. We discover another principle. God does not choose holy people. He cares for humanity so much, that He will use even the most unsuitable of vessels, provided they lend themselves to be sent. So, if you hear His call, telling Him that you are not worthy as a reason to back out no longer applies.

The disciples were not yet filled with the Holy Spirit – They were still
in the “with Jesus” experience, and not the “in Jesus” experience. They did not have the prayer life, inner revelation, and the insight that our Lord Jesus had. Yet “The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.” – Mark 6:13 When they anointed the sick with oil; when they performed a ritual like activity, God would work supernaturally and intervene in the circumstances. How did this happen? “Our Lord Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over unclean spirits.” Mark 6:7.

When God sends us, He sends us with His authority. Not with human authority and credentials. Therefore, the consequences of any action we perform will be supernatural. Had we gone only with human credentials and authority, the consequences would only be natural. It is now clear why God does not deal in the currency of human advantage.

When our Lord Jesus sent out His disciples he gave them instructions that go against conventional wisdom and logistics. “Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts.” – Mark 6:8. We discover another principle. If He sends us, providing for us is His business, not ours. Those who organize Four Steps retreats share amazing testimonies of how God provided supernaturally, opening doors in places they thought none existed.

Today's second reading tells us “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world’. So if you are reading this article, it is because you are chosen. What is the mission He is sending us on? “to be holy and blameless in his sight” To this effect “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins”. So, our first mission is to keep coming back to Him, be washed in his blood, and be forgiven. As I keep on coming back to Him, just like it was said in the Gospel, something supernatural takes place. Situations and people who seem to be beyond control no longer appear so, God works in our circumstances and they appear to be brought under the Lordship of Christ. “he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Like the 12 who went out on mission, we are not only blessed, but we become a blessing to those around us.

Prayer: Abba Father, you have called me to a purpose that is bigger than what I live for today. Give me the grace to keep coming back to you in the blood of the Lamb, so that your mission will be fulfilled through me. Amen
Monday 16th July

Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Give God a better space and place in your life

In the reading from Isaiah today, we hear of God being angry at His people because He is fed up with their empty rituals and sacrifices. He has closed His eyes to their outstretched hands and blocked His ears from their prayers. As nice as it would be to ignore this warning, pushing it to the Old Testament days, the truth is that so many of us would do well to heed this warning because just like the Israelites, we have reduced God to a series of rituals and traditions that fit nicely into our busy lives when we see fit. How often is my prayer a regimented exercise that follows the rules of my own making rather than being an open ongoing conversation with God.

As a people who know God, who have had some sort of an experience of God, why do we try to limit God to our prayer time or just to Sunday mass? Despite my best intentions, why does my conversation with God end after the “glory be” or the three “Hail Mary’s”? Is it because time with a God has become a duty rather than a delight? Sometimes it is my spouse, sometimes it is my child, sometimes my job or friends or sometimes just wanting time for myself – whatever it is, there is always something that distracts me from the Lord Jesus. It might be for the kindest and purest reason but if it pulls me away from God then I run the risk of displeasing God.

Our Lord Jesus speaks to us about this in the Gospel proclamation today. He states that if anyone loves His mother or father more than Him then that person is not worthy of God. We are to leave everything behind when we follow God. Everything I have is from God and everything I am is because of God. But how easy it is to love the gift more than the Giver.

So let us reflect on our own personal prayer life today and see what makes us rush through our prayers; what we prioritise in our life over God today. And let us repent of this admitting to Him that it’s difficult for us to maintain Him as our priority throughout the day. And through surrender let us choose to believe that God can take our desire to give Him the first place in our life and make that a reality in us despite our broken nature.

Prayer: Abba Father, I admit to you today that I place other things and other people over you in my life. Today, I choose to make you my first priority and I pray that you will give me the grace to make this real in my life. Amen
Today’s first reading is taken from the book of Isaiah. Ahaz, son of Jotham was the king of Judah the southern nation. He heard that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the king of Israel which was the ten tribes to the north of Judah, were going up toward Jerusalem to war against it. People were terrified when they heard the news of war against them and Ahaz, in fear called them two powerful princes. It was at this time the Sovereign Lord sends His prophet Isaiah to assure the victory over the enemies. If we pause for a moment and reflect on this I am sure many of us can relate ourselves with this situation. When we are caught up in a crisis, when we go through storms in our lives we begin to believe that the problem we are facing, is more powerful than our God.

Fear and depression grips us and we worry because our focus is on the problem and we forget God in the middle of our crisis. However, the Lord promises us victory He says “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” (Isa 7:9). In other words He reminds us to be still and know that He is God. He is God over everything; He is all mighty and all powerful over people and the circumstance we are placed in. But can we simply trust Him and be still in the middle of our crisis? How can we have this bold faith to trust Him? Because if we try on our own, our nature rebels against us and it will not allow us to trust Him. May be our thought and subconscious will tell us if we trust Him we will be defeated. Instead we will have to fight, we will have to work around to find a solution. And therefore we spend all our lives restlessly, looking for a solution. But bold faith stands on the shoulders of quiet trust. To have this unwavering faith and trust in the Lord, we should know Him first. We will not be able to trust Him if we do not know Him. And we begin to know Him as we spend quiet times with Him. As we spend that time with Him, and His word, we begin to know How powerful He is. He is the Lord above everything and this realization leads us to quietly trust Him.

The Gospel proclamation is about repentance. I think our greatest sin is not trusting in Him. We must confess and repent for that and ask the Lord to take complete control of every area of our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, I’m sorry for the moments I took control of my life without trusting You. But today I come before You with a heart of repentance. Amen!
The Israelites foolishly gave themselves into the hands of the Assyrians. They thought that Assyria would become the super power of the world and the Israelite kings signed policies and treaties in alliance with the Assyrians. God sent His prophets to get the attention of the people back to Himself but the kings who reigned during this era would not heed the call of the prophets.

Today’s scripture says that God used the Assyrians to make His people awaken. The foolish actions of the kings distracted the whole nation of Israel and they strayed away from God. Their lifestyle was an abomination to God. The Israelites ended up worshiping Baal and were involved in the cult worship of the Canaanite gods. Their actions and the social injustice displeased God.

In today’s reading God’s action showed favour to the Israelites. God said that He used the Assyrians as an instrument to bring the Israelites to their right minds. They were blinded to their actions. They were unaware of their ways of moving away from the covenant relationship they had with their God. The favour of God upon His people is that God acted against the other nations to save the Israelites.

This is a warning to us today. When we become blinded to our own actions, someone is sent into our lives to bring us back to an awareness of God. We should be mindful that we do have a covenant relationship with God. The encounter we had with Lord Jesus is until our last breath. We should not move away from God in and through our life here on earth. We are called to worship our God and be within the covenant relationship until our spirit parts from our body. This reality is what God taught the Israelites and is teaching us today. The Lord Jesus said that the Father hid the reality from the knowledgeable people and revealed it to the childlike. Our faith is the solid soil in which the love of God can be planted. Our developed intellect and our human knowledge and wisdom can be hindrances to God to teach us His ways. The childlike person trusts in God whilst the one who puts trust in their own intellect cannot trust God. The psalmist says the one who fashioned the body of the human person can understand the human psyche.

**Prayer:** Abba Father, help me to know that you can hear, see and know my human ways. Let me have your wisdom to surrender to your plan. Amen.
Thursday 19th July

“Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.”

Isaiah 26:12

Today’s first reading is taken from the book of Isaiah which reflects a song of praise to our God for what He has done. It also reveals the heart that longs for God’s presence “My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.” (Isa 26:9). Because we know in the end God alone can fulfill the deepest need and the desires of our hearts. We may be looking for temporary solutions everywhere and running from place to place. But the only thing that our hearts should long for, is for the presence of the Lord. Because when He comes to dwell within us, He changes everything. In and through the situation we are placed in, He grows us and matures us into the people He wants us to be. Therefore, without asking the Lord to change our situations, we cry out for His indwelling presence within us. In fact we see the same cry of David in the book of Psalms. David cries out for God’s presence in His life; he is so desperate for God’s touch in his life; “My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” (Psa 84:2). When he was in the Desert of Judah he prayed “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.” (Psa 63:1)

Today’s Gospel proclamation reveals to us the beautiful invitation that the Lord Jesus has for us. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Mat 11:28-30). Too often we are caught up in a situation that makes us weary and tired. Perhaps our inner struggles makes us feel let down. In the midst of our own struggle we forget our Lord, run to so many places or seek others help to find rest. Most often we never find the rest we are looking for. But today our Lord Jesus is reminding us to come to Him to find His perfect rest. We know when the Lord calls us “those who are weary and burdened” He knows that there are so many reasons in our lives that make us weary. But He did not stop there. He is offering us a perfect solution which we can find nowhere. He says in John 16:33; “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Prayer: Abba Father I want to thank you because as I come before you with a heart of surrender and I can lay down everything at Your feet. Amen!
In the Gospel proclamation today we see the Pharisees always watchful to see when the disciples of Jesus break the law. While the disciples were eating the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, they threw a question to Jesus. Their target was Jesus not disciples. They were so blind that they couldn’t recognize who Jesus was and what was he doing.

Our Lord Jesus revealed the true nature of God the Father. That is why the Lord reminded us of what pleases the Father. He said in Matthew 12.7 “And if you had understood the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless”.

The Lord Jesus invites us today, to relax in His Holy presence. Be still while He transforms our hearts and minds. Let go of cares and worries so that we may receive His peace. Cease striving, and know that He is God. He is merciful. He does not condemn. He transforms our own understanding into the true meaning of God’s mercy. Jesus says ‘do not be like Pharisees who multiplied regulations, creating their own form of ‘godliness’.

When the disciples were with Jesus, they were so relaxed. As we come to the Lord Jesus today, we may be burdened ourselves with lots of duties and responsibilities. We may be focusing more on sacrifices, rules or regulations. Our focus may be on performance, rather than on Him. Not only that we might have condemned the blameless. In summary, we might also be making the same big mistake that was done by the Pharisees. Pharisees were unable to see the Lord as the master of the Sabbath. They could not realise that there was something greater than the Temple. Let us remember that we are not alone. The Son of man is with us. He is greater than the Temple. We become a walking temple with His presence. We remember that mercy is what pleases him, not sacrifices. This merciful Lord Jesus comes to live inside of me. As we claim this beautiful revelation in worshiping and praising our Lord Jesus, His presence becomes real in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that my heart may be transformed into the merciful heart of your Son, so that I may show mercy to others in your name. Amen
Saturday 21st July

St. Lawrence of Brindisi

“The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless” Psalm 10:14

We live in a world which is ruled by brutality and injustice, it seems as though evil has an upper hand, the schemes of people who are powerful in the world. They have a final say and plot their evil plans to gain wealth and to stay in power to satisfy the desires of their hearts. Their carnal mind can only think of wealth and power as the ultimate goal of their life.

Most of us face similar situations in our offices today. Some managers misuse their power and play political games to eliminate people and build kingdoms unto themselves. They have a final say and people have to be fearful of them. They use fear and punishment to rule over people who report to them.

In the corporate world I have faced many challenging situations where I was humiliated and bullied by my managers who had the ultimate power to work their schemes. They showed their power over me and victimized me till I was helpless.

In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus’ words are contrary to the thoughts and schemes of the Jewish leaders. They were plotting to kill the Lord Jesus using their power and position, but the Gospel reading says “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out”. A bruised reed is without strength and is powerless and will ultimately die out soon, but the word of God says “yet he will not break it”. Our Lord Jesus was the epitome of power being the second member of the Trinity, yet he does not abuse his power over the powerless for his self-glory. He he chooses love to overcome evil by ultimately giving his life on the cross of Calvary to win the glorious victory over the schemes of the enemy. The Lord is inviting us to the fact that he is the “helper of the fatherless”. We may be facing situations in our lives where we are powerless against the schemes of the people but the Lord is reminding us that He is our helper when we are victimized and he will ultimately bring justice when we do not take things into our hands by following the schemes of people. We are to give our inner response by completely trusting in the Lord to bring about justice and victory.

Prayer: Abba Father, awaken my spirit to your truths and promises and help me to give inner response of complete trust in your ways of love. Amen
In today’s first reading, God goes on the offensive against Shepherds of Israel. By Shepherds, he is referring to the leaders of the people, who are supposed to guide His people in His ways. He says that He will punish leaders who do not lead His people in His way, Shepherds who have not cared for their flock, and Shepherds, whose actions have resulted in the scattering of the flock.

A Shepherd does not necessarily mean a leader. If you are father or a mother, you are a Shepherd. If you are someone who at least one other person looks up to, you are a Shepherd. The importance that the Lord places on Shepherds, places a heavy burden of responsibility on the shoulders of a Shepherd. The Lord reminds us, not to take this lightly. If you are taking your responsibility lightly, the Lord says that He will find a replacement to shepherd His people, but you will be punished.

As for the sheep, or the people who are led by a shepherd, the Lord places an immense value on them. If you have been misled or are suffering because of the behavior or action of a Shepherd, the Lord promises to intervene for you. He also paints a beautiful a word picture of the perfect Shepherd He has planned for Israel. Today we know that this was a prophesy that was fulfilled by our Lord Jesus, who is the Good Shepherd.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we see our Lord Jesus listening to the disciples who have just come back from a mission He sent them on. The crowd is so large, that they are unable to even have a meal. They needed to get away from the place to take a break. Yet, the people come looking for them. The Lord looks at those people and His heart goes out to them. He perceives them as sheep without a shepherd. This gives us an insight into who a good shepherd is and who is a sheep without a shepherd.

Even before our Lord Jesus walked the streets of Galilee, people worshiped God and studied His word. Yet somehow interventions by God were few and far between. God seemed more of someone to be feared, revered and worshipped. But then, when Our Lord Jesus was around, this same God appeared to be more than eager to be involved in the lives of people and intervene in their lives and save
them from things that were beyond their control. Our Lord Jesus made God come alive to the people of His time. This seems to be what is expected from a Shepherd. Someone who is able to pull down the intervention of heaven among the people. When God is distant, and the hand of God appears to be short, the people are reduced to being sheep without a shepherd.

I often reflect on an incident in the Gospels, where Our Lord Jesus comes down from Mount Tabor, and finds a commotion, where His disciples were unable to set a demon possessed boy free. Our Lord Jesus was able to chase the demon easily. This means that God was always eager to intervene and set the boy free. Yet there was something lacking with the disciples and, as a result, they were not able to pull down heaven, even though it was God’s desire to release the boy and his parents from the nightmare they found themselves to be in. I wonder how many people who live around us are condemned to continue to live through a nightmare just because we, like the disciples, are unable to harness the intervention of God?

The second reading speaks to us about Jew and gentile being reconciled into one body through the saving act of our Lord Jesus. This one body, the church which is the body of Christ, is the Shepherd that God now sends into the world to pull down His presence and intervention.

The early church, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, played this role to perfection. But will he look at us today and say, “woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture”? Will he look at the world around us and think “they are like sheep without a shepherd”? How do we get back to being the Shepherd he wants us to be? The second reading gives us that formula as well.

If you are far off, come back to him through the blood of Christ and be reconciled with God. We have the gift of the Four Steps that we can use to come back to him and be filled with His Holy Spirit. Whenever we fall, return back through the Four Steps so that we may be connected to him 24/7. In the relationship that ensues We will hear His voice and be transformed into the Shepherds after His own heart.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to keep on coming back to you and learn from you. Lead me by your spirit to be the Shepherd you created me to be. Amen.
Monday 23rd July

But no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah the prophet

Matthew 12:39

In today’s Gospel reading we encounter Pharisees and scribes, who ask for a sign as proof that our Lord Jesus is the one who He (or his followers) claims to be. Pharisees and scribes were not bad people. On the contrary, they were good religious people, whose intentions were to protect the people of God from being misled by charlatans. Our Lord Jesus did not have the proper credentials to measure up to their criteria.

I realise that even if I constructed my knowledge of God’s ways by studying scripture, I can still get it wrong. God is a person, not a set of rules and principals. Outside of a relationship with Him, human logic and wisdom alone will not help me recognise Him or the work of His hands.

Miracles such as the sick being healed, and the dead being raised were not enough for the Pharisees and scribes. They needed something more. Our Lord Jesus says that the irrefutable sign that He will give them is the sign of Jonah.

The sign of Jonah is commonly understood as the death and resurrection of Our Lord. However, I think there is more to this. Jonah was running away from God when the fish swallowed him. Inside the stomach of the fish, he turns back to God, and it is only after this conversion that the fish vomits him out. After this, the Jonah we see is a different Jonah. When he speaks people repent. He is so successful that He begins to have an issue with God as well.

Often, we ignore God, and we remember him only when we are in a no-hope situation, like Jonah was in when he was in the stomach of the fish. To me, the sign of Jonah is the conversion experience that happens in the heart of the crisis and the encounter experience that happens thereafter. To me it was in a problem that had no answer that I discovered the Lord. I not only saw Him as the one who saves me, but as the one I cannot live without. It changed my life and God came alive to me. If you have known the resurrection only as a religious truth, the Lord is inviting you today to seek and find the sign of Jonah.

Prayer: Abba Father, today I understand that intellectual conversion alone is not enough. Lead me to that encounter that changes my life, where you come alive to me. Amen
Tuesday 24th July

“Abba, I belong to you”

In the reading the prophet Micah declares that the people must encourage themselves with God’s promises. They must themselves triumph in the mercy and grace of God, and His faithfulness to His covenant. The psalm helps us in our prayers to God—both for His church and in general; to direct our desires and to encourage our faith and hope in prayer. In the Gospel we see our Lord Jesus clarifies to us who His relations truly are.

We often think of our mother, father and siblings to be those who are biologically connected to us. That is our human understanding of relations or ‘our own’. Our Lord Jesus invites us today to take this question to prayer. Who is my father? Who is my mother? Who is my brother and sister? These are very complicated questions to most of us and we may not even know the answer to them. Some of us will feel great pain, hurt, regret and even anger when we close our eyes and ask ourselves these questions. God gave us parents and siblings when we entered earth. Have we grown to love and appreciate them or hate and reject them? If so Jesus calls us to repent and love them just as He loves us no matter what the circumstance or situation we have or are in today.

Our Lord Jesus speaks to us of a greater and deeper relationship in the Gospel. It is the relationship between Him and ourselves. Am I related to Jesus? Do I want to be related to Him? If I am what kind of a relationship do I have with Jesus? Our Lord Jesus loved me first—before I was born and even when I’m in sin and gone away from Him. He loves me anyway and calls me His own. I have no qualification to be related to the Lord except for His unconditional love for me. For me to experience this relationship with the Lord Jesus I have to enter into a relationship with Him. I have to desire to spend time with Him in prayer so that I can experience His love and grace for me. He invites us if we are not already in a relationship with Him to come and spend half an hour with Him each morning so that we may start and deepen our relationship with Him. As we experience this relationship with our Lord Jesus we become secure and safe in His love for us. We rely on His guidance in our lives and can turn to Him through every experience of life.

Prayer: Abba Father, I believe that you are granting me the grace to know you at a deeper level and to experience your great love in my life always. Amen
Wednesday 25th July  

**Feast of St. James, Apostle**

And as death is at work in us, life comes to you  

2 Cor 4: 11

The mother of James and John knelt down to ask the Lord Jesus a favour. We do the same. We beg, plead, bribe God and wish to turn things in our favour. We want our way and no other way.

But in the Kingdom there is always another way. That is why the Lord says My ways are not your ways and my plans are not your plans. We are often convinced that we know how God should deal with our lives.

The first reading tells us otherwise. It says 'and as death is at work in us, life comes to you Though the apostle Paul meant that he was facing hardship and death for the sake of the Gospel but in the long run bringing life to people, in our lives when we are faced with an ongoing failure it should only propel us to seek a life in Christ. For most of us a gnawing crisis has been the tool used to draw us in submission before God. If we did not have a crisis we would never have knelt before God. He draws us to our knees. We imagine that death is coming to us but the spark of life is always rising from the ashes.

St Paul says “Everything is for your good, so that grace will come more abundantly upon you, and great will be the thanksgiving for the glory of God. We may not see the reasons now but later on we will understand the problems.

What should our response be? When we understand that we are loved by the Lord and being led into a journey of faith, the result should not be pride but an outpouring of humility. We are meant to serve others. Being served is ingrained in our culture. Even between married couples one believes that the other was given primarily to serve and maintain the home singlehandedly while the other earns and is doing such a magnificent job earning. But the Lord’s perspective is different. We are called to humility and service.

The Lord Jesus sets the benchmark for true service. He says that we are not only called to serve but give our lives for the other. There are many people who silently give their time, talent and freedom in service to others. It is easy to give excess wealth in service of others but hard to give personal time, draped with oodles of love and compassion and lined with a willing heart. Let’s serve with love.

**Prayer:** Abba Father for too long I have asked for favours. Today I desire to serve you and in humble service I am assured of your favour and presence. Amen
Thursday 26th July  

But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear

God is speaking clearly through our Lord Jesus, in this short verse in the Gospel passage, that the true way to life is in the Lord. To prove this truth, the Lord Jesus performed many miracles, He spoke a word and the blind received sight, the deaf began to hear, the lame walked and the dead were brought back to life. Those who believed were rewarded not only in their present life but in life after death.

In the preceding paragraph of this chapter, our Lord narrates the parable of the sower. If we follow this parable closely, the Lord Jesus is clearly telling us that the seed, which is the Word for life is the Lord himself, and He was given to everyone and it is up to us to accept His Word in our hearts and make it grow. Those who choose to do so, will be fruitful and yield a great harvest, on this earth and in the life after death.

Yet, there were others who refused to believe the truth behind these miracles. They, like many of us are looking for a problem solver or some miracle maker to meet their present need. God’s purpose in our life is much higher. He wants us not just to look at the miracle but at Him the giver of life and life after death.

Like any other teacher who wants to do a spot check on his students, the Lord Jesus asks his the disciples (Mark :8/27) “who do people say I am? The disciples replied, “some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets”. “but what about you? Who do you say I am?” The reply his great pupil St. Peter said was “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”. Although Peter denied Jesus at the time of his death, when he turned back and repented, Peter was rewarded for his belief and so were the rest of the disciples. The first reading confirms the action of God rewarding the great ancestors of old who chose to live virtuous lives. Not only were they rewarded but the promise was to their future generations.

Prayer:  Abba Father, you revealed your love and power through Jesus in all the miracles performed. As promised in Jn 14/12 ....you shall do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”, loving Father may your power and love continue to live in the hearts of people till the end of time. Amen
I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. Jeremiah 31: 13b

“Come back, faithless people, it is Yahweh who speaks, for I am your master.” Do I fall into the category of faithless people? Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.” What is it that you hope for? It is a new job, a new vehicle, an honest relationship? As Christians, we must enthusiastically believe in Jesus Christ and cherish the hope that all may be brought to believe in our Lord and Master. We should be wanting to see Christ not only rule and reign in our life but our loved ones around. We may see this as something impossible, something that can never take place as we may sometimes feel that some people in our lives may never turn to God. Our Lord Jesus calls us to believe in this hope today and He’s waiting to turn it to a reality.

But we too have a part to play in this. Actions do speak louder than words. We may have heard this a thousand times over but do we really do it? We always blame the family and friends who do not journey with the Lord. It’s so easy to pass a judgement but what do we really do about it? Have you allowed the Word of God to work in and through you? The Gospel proclamation today shows us the many ways we take-in the Word of God: Some hear the message but do not take it seriously, some hear it and accept it with joy but do not have the roots for it to grow, some hear the word but the worries of life and love of money choke the word - we may wanting to be faithful to God, but there are moments we cannot give up our worldly pleasures because they seem more real and pleasure-giving than the Lord, we may also justify the ways of the world as our right and unerring. This thought may blind us to God. The last category mentioned is where most of us will want to be: “they hear the word and understand it and they bear fruit.” Is the Word of God real to you today? Do you just read it in order to get a message alone or do you really believe in what it says and believe that as you read the Word of God that it has the power to transform you as it is truly the living Word, Jesus Christ Himself coming in to you. The Holy Bible is like a mirror before our mind’s eye. In it we see our inner face. From the Scriptures we can learn our spiritual deformities and beauties. And there too we discover our spiritual progress.

Prayer: Abba Father, we ask you today for strength to accept our problems from Your hands and believe that You are in control. Amen.
Saturday 28th July

Blessed are those who dwell in your house.

Psalm 84: 4

In today’s first reading, the Lord issues a strict warning to those who come to the Temple of the Lord to worship. He demands that the people of Judah reform their ways and actions; At that time, the people continued to live in rebellion to God – being disobedient to Him and running after false gods – but after all such wrongdoing, they would enter God’s Temple and say, “Now we are safe”.

In Jeremiah 7:11 it says, “I have been watching!” declares the Lord.”

Today, in our own lives, we too have the tendency to do all that is detestable in the eyes of the Lord, yet run to Him once we have been worn out by our sinful practices. We assume that no harm can come to us because we are children of God. Although it is true that God is ever merciful, it is wrong to forget that He is always watching what we do and in love and for our own good, will discipline us.

In the Gospel proclamation today, our Lord Jesus speaks of the parable of the weeds. According to this parable, both wheat and weed are allowed to grow together – until a certain time. One school of thought is that saints and sinners are allowed to journey together until harvest time. Another could be that the wheat is our own journey and the weeds are the problems of our lives. In the parable, the man’s servants ask if they should uproot the weeds from among the wheat, but the owner tells them not to, for while they are pulling the weeds out, they may also uproot the wheat.

In the same way, the problems we face have been divinely, tailor-made for each of us for the discipline we need to grow spiritually. The problem that seems so impossible that is in front of us today is there for a purpose, and that purpose is to strengthen our journey. The Lord is allowing such problems to journey alongside us, so that we may see the hand of God more clearly upon our lives.

Just as the Lord declared He was watching the people of Judah in the Old Testament; that same God is still watching over each and every one of us today – and is intimately aware of the situations of our lives. He constantly guides us to become wheat through a journey of righteousness amongst problems so that we be gathered into His barn on the day of harvesting.

Prayer: Abba Father, we ask you today for strength to accept our problems from Your hands and believe that You are in control. Amen.
Some years ago, we had an upcoming retreat in a North American country. The organisers were short of funds and all they could do was to intercede to the Lord to provide. Low and behold a few days before the retreat could begin, one of the organisers found an envelope on the doorstep of their home with enough funds to cover all the expenses for the air tickets. The Lord can provide from the most unlikely sources.

This has been the experience in the Old Testament times, during the Lord Jesus’ life and in these days as well. The Lord does not just provide financially but also when it comes to the needs of our body, spiritual support, emotional help and whichever area of our life that needs His hand extended.

If we look at the two instances in the Old testament and in the New Testament we can identify certain principles at work.

For instance, where Elisha was and where the Lord Jesus was ministering there was a dearth of food. We expect God to automatically provide when we believe that we are working in tandem with Him. But there are times when He allows for a lack, because in those times we are made to look to Him.

The question is, “Do we look to Him to provide?” Can we trust Him enough to meet our need?”

Both Elisha and the Lord Jesus looked at the immediate resources at hand. The meagre provisions came from the most unlikely of people, a widow and a little boy. They were to become the facilitators of a large miracle or supernatural happening. If you told the boy’s mother that, her little meal was going to feed over five thousand people, she would have laughed.

If the Lord is blessing you with an insight, a spiritual poem or a hymn, do not keep it to yourself. No matter how insignificant it sounds or feels it may bring comfort to thousands if not millions of people. We spend time forwarding so many videos and attachments, let us pray and forward simple messages of love and hope.

In both instances, the people in charge requested for the most
absurd things. They took the little in their hands and asked for them to be distributed. It was an opportunity for those around to see the impossibility and magnanimity of the miracle at hand.

Both Elisha and the Lord Jesus at no point asked for themselves to be fed first and then the rest distributed to the people. They might have held the food in their hands but nothing is recorded if they tasted the meal. The point to note is that the miracle was not for their personal gain, it was for the community. We are by nature selfish and want things for ourselves where as a true leader is concerned about the needs of the entire community. There is no amassing of resources.

The people were never given the burden of the problem. They shared in the joy of the miracle. They were never charged or told about the lack and how the organisers had accomplished this feat. They were simply asked to be seated on the lawn and partake in the meal.

The Lord Jesus did not make a prayer for the Father to provide, instead He looked up to Heaven and thanked God for already providing for the people. Our confidence in God’s provision is a reflection of our level of faith. Recently, we were at a family event and the prayer of local pastor struck us because of the confidence in his tone of voice when he addressed God. We find fault with our Christian brethren but do we carry the same fire of faith they display in any area of life. So often we make defeated prayers, like there is no hope and the battle has been lost or our cry is “Why me Lord?”

Today, the Lord is reminding us that He is always in control especially when there seems like there is no hope. We need to be on a confident prayer journey with Him. He is able to provide from the most unlikely of sources, sources which the world may despise.

What the Lord accomplishes should evoke humility, unity of spirit and bonds of peace in our lives. Seeing the wonders He performs should humble us and not make us feel like we have accomplished anything. St. Paul tells us that we have One Father above who is above all - above all circumstances - and works the through all - widows, children, the despised, homeless and marginalised - and He is in all. The miracles were for all to share in and feed on. Through our prayer life let us feed thousands of people with rich meals of faith and hope. The Lord is moving us to draw people out of their hiding places and encourage them to share the little they have that it may multiply and bring comfort to those in need.

Prayer: Abba Father, We pray for the grace to look at you and to you in moments of scarcity and pain. You will lead us to look in the most unlikely of places where your hand is outstretched to meet our needs substantially. Amen
Monday 30th July

St. Peter Chrysologus,
Bishop & Doctor

“Though it is the smallest of all seeds, when it grows, it is the largest of plants” Matthew 13:32

In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, which later grows into a large tree. All of us have seen how small a mustard seed is, but when it fulfills the purpose its creator planned for it, its physical size and potential is far greater than its initial beginning. The Lord reminds each one of us that our faith, even the tiniest bit of the Lord’s kingdom that we carry within us, is like this – it has the potential to grow into something far greater, provided we nurture it spiritually. Our calling is that through the Lord’s kingdom that we carry within us, that we should be able to support our brothers and sisters to come closer to the Lord and for them to experience His love.

We have different talents, strengths and weaknesses. We may not be able to preach, sing, evangelise or talk as eloquently as some others do. Yet we are blessed each one of us with different talents to use it for His glory. Sometimes by helping out at a registration desk during a retreat, ushering someone to a seat during the prayer meeting, volunteering to help in the hospital ministry and pray for the sick or sacrificing our time for intercessory prayers we are able to spread the Lord’s love and His kingdom. As Saint Francis of Assisi said “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.”

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Peter Chrysologus, who was a Bishop of Ravenna, around AD 433 until his death. Pope Benedict XIII declared him as a Doctor of the Church in 1729. Peter was born in Italy and ordained a deacon by the Bishop of Imola. He was made an archdeacon through the influence of Emperor Valentinian III. Peter was known as The Doctor of Homilies, for his short but inspired talks and he is said to have been afraid of boring his audience. After hearing his first homily as bishop, Empress Galla Placidia is said to have given him the surname Chrysologus, by which he is known. St. Peter spoke against the Arian teachings, condemning them as heresies, and explained topics such as the Apostles’ Creed, John the Baptist, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the mystery of the Incarnation, in simple and clear language. He also advocated daily reception of Holy Communion and urged his listeners to have confidence in the forgiveness offered through the Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to allow that mustard seed of faith to grow within me. Help me to be all that you want me to be. Amen
In the prophetic proclamations for a new Pentecost, Pope Francis has been repeatedly calling on the Church and the world to come together in rebuilding a just, peaceful and all-inclusive society which he says are the main features of the Kingdom of God.

In the Vatican last month the Pope called a meeting of automobile and energy company executives to urge them to streamline their moves to find renewable sources of clean energy and vehicles that will not pollute the environment.

Pope Francis widely regarded as one of the great prophets of modern times is pushing for poverty alleviation and for all religions and countries to get involved in the battle against global warming and nuclear disarmament.

In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus explains the parable of the seeds and weeds. “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 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”.

In a selfish and wicked world today we see a catastrophe where one per cent of the people comprising the rich and the ruling elite, control and enjoy more than 50 per cent of the world’s wealth and resources. Hundreds of millions of people caught up in the poverty trap are suffering without means for their daily meals, health and education for the children, sanitation and other facilities. This is not God’s will but arises from the weeds sown by evil forces or demons. The Lord Jesus wants that those who are upholding and promoting such an evil system will be pulled out and thrown “into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”.

*Prayer: Abba Father fill us with the Holy Spirit to build a just, peaceful and all-inclusive society. Amen*
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