



# IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

June 2016

St. Anthony of Padua...

*"Attribute to God every good that you have received. If you take credit for something that does not belong to you, you will be guilty of theft."*

*"Damned money! Alas! How many religious did it blind! How many cloistered religious did it deceive! Money is the 'droppings of birds' that blinded the eyes of Tobit."*

*"The life of the body is the soul; the life of the soul is God."*

*"Christ acts like a loving mother. To induce us to follow Him, He gives us Himself as an example and promises us a reward in His kingdom."*

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# On Our Knees In His Hands

*June 2016*

Editors:

Lalith Perera

Louis Benedict

Co-ordinator:

Felicia Adhietty

Contributors to this Issue:

Ashika Fernando

Kauchi Gunasinghe

Ayomi Jansz

Lalith Perera

Charmaine Peiris

Louis Benedict

Christy Akkarawatta

Marie Navamani

Darshi Egodawatte De Silva

Mercia Perera

Duthika Perera

Muriel Obiris

Gerard Victoria

Natasha Adhietty

Geetha Fernando

Rushika Pieris

Himaya Perera

Sajee Jayasuriya

Inuk Jayasuriya

Sheika Abeykoon

Jeevaka Perera

Scalina Ratwatte

Jayanath Perera

Sunimalee Fernando

Jeya Chelliah

Vinette Perera

Juliana Francis

Yogini Yogarasa

Kamala Fernando

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**I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day 2 Timothy 1:12**

2 Timothy 1:1-3,  
6-12

Psalm 123:1b-2

Mark 12:18-27

St. Paul in his message shows us how he responds to adversity. In spite of being in prison and facing death, he keeps the right kind of attitude. He does not allow himself to be angry and bitter, but uses his position and his problems as an opportunity to encourage St. Timothy. St. Paul knew that his calling was from God. It was not according to works, but according to God's own purpose and grace. At the time he wrote this letter to St. Timothy, St. Paul was in chains: a prisoner. He was in bonds because of his calling and his obedience to preach the Gospel. In spite of his present condition, he is not discouraged nor does he detour from what God has ordained and instructed him to do. St. Paul enjoyed the security of believing in Christ.

Almost every day we encounter different problems. Often in the face of crisis we respond by being negative and bitter. We point fingers and blame people after encountering trouble. These responses do not make us feel better nor do they help our situation.

As believers, we may face times of uncertainty about the future or maybe even the next hour; but one thing we do not have to question, doubt or be uncertain about is our salvation. He who saved us has the power to keep us saved. "He has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Timothy 1:9). It is not our emotions that seal us, but His Holy Spirit. It is not we who hold on to God, but He who holds us in His hands.

We may not be able to control much of the adversities that we encounter, but we are able to control our response by putting into practice what St. Paul did. When we face adversity, rather than collapse, let us be challenged. It may be sent our way to challenge us to a deeper faith in Christ. An adversity or crisis may be sent our way so that others may witness the presence of God in us through suffering.

When troubles come, there may be things we do not understand, but if we know the Lord, we know enough. No matter what we, as believers face, we are safe in the arms of God. We belong to Him. We are His children and He will never abandon us. He is faithful.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we thank You for the gift of salvation You have freely given us. Give us the grace to hold onto Your promises in every crisis we face. Amen.**

**“You are not far from the Kingdom of God”****Mark 12:34**

2 Timothy 2:8–15

Psalm 25:4–5b,  
8–10, 14

Mark 12:28–34

Today's Gospel reading speaks of the way to the Kingdom of God. The Psalmist says, "Teach me your ways Lord", and the Gospel passage is beautifully connected to the ways of the Lord. The Pharisee, an expert of the Mosaic Law, asks our Lord Jesus for the most important commandment and the answer that the Lord Jesus gives has the law expert embracing it with thoughtful understanding. Seeing this, the Lord Jesus gives him

a promise - "You are not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34).

What does this promise mean to us today? What is the deepest desire of the heart of any believing Christian? Is it not to live in union with God? Today, through the scriptures, the Lord Jesus is reminding us of the way to the Kingdom of God. It is to first love the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds and all our strength and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

There is however, a clear distinction in the words of our Lord when He says "You are not far – from the Kingdom of God". This means you still need to get there. It is one thing to understand the truth intellectually and another to humble ourselves to actually follow the teachings of the Lord Jesus. It is the latter that will help us enter the Kingdom of God.

How do we follow these seemingly simple but difficult teachings of the Lord? There is no other way than to submit our will to the will of God and consciously choose to build a deeper love-relationship with God through a daily prayer life, praise, worship and sacramental living. If we do not develop this deep connection with God we will not be able to love ourselves with our human weaknesses. In return what we will project to our neighbor, whom we are supposed to love, will be our broken, selfish and wicked reactions. This broken self-love will only take us further away from the Kingdom of God.

Today is the feast of two Saints-- Marcellinus and Peter, who are examples of what is spoken about in today's First Reading. They suffered and died for the Gospel to gain eternal life. It is recorded that the two Saints happily cleared the spot chosen for their death: a thicket overgrown with thorns, brambles and briars and that they were beheaded and buried in that spot.

***Prayer: Abba Father, bring me closer to You in union daily so that I may have the grace to live Your decrees and enter Your Kingdom one day. Amen.***

**God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit  
Romans 5: 5**

Ezekiel 34:11–16

Psalm 23:1–6

Romans 5:5b–11

Luke 15:3–7

The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in a great apparition and requested that the Feast of the Sacred Heart be celebrated. In most Catholic churches and in the homes of the faithful, one of the most revered images of the Lord is the image of the Sacred Heart. It is the image of God's love revealed in the pierced heart of His Son. It is the symbol of love that conquers sin and transcends death. It

is the symbol of the one who loved us to the end.

In all three readings we see the heart of God's love towards His people. He comes like a good Shepard looking for His lost, wounded and broken sheep. While we were still sinners He died for our sins and gave us the potential to be changed into the likeness of God's Son. This can be only experienced if God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Until then it will only be an idea or a concept in our minds.

This is a testimony of a drug addict: I was a long standing heroin addict and was put into prison. I was a non-Christian then. I was angry with my own self and I was angry with every person I knew. One day I was so depressed I didn't want to live. When I got my lunch packet, I took the paper in which it was wrapped and read the whole paper. On it was printed in small letters. "Come to me all who are burdened and heavy laden I will give you rest." Those words touched my heart. I knelt down where I was and cried out to the person who wrote these words; whoever he or she was. I cried out, "Please, please I am burdened, give me that rest". The very next minute I saw a Catholic nun passing that way. I called her over, showed her these words and asked her, "Do you know the person who said these words?" She said "It is Jesus". "Can you please teach me who this Jesus is?" I asked. She gave me a Bible. Every word I read became a flame of fire in my heart. For the first time I encountered a love beyond my understanding. Day by day I fell in love with my Lord Jesus. I entered the prison as a broken wounded sinner, but when I came out of the prison I was a Son of God. I was too rich to go back to my old life. Like my Lord came after me, He gave me a ministry to search for other drug addicts. This Sacred Heart beats in love for the lost.

Today the Lord is calling you to be enflamed with the love of Christ. All you have to do is reach out to Him. He is waiting for you.

**Prayer: Abba Father Let my heart beat in love for the lost. Amen.**

## And Mary kept all these things in her heart

Luke 2:19

Isaiah 61:9-11

Ps.1 Samuel 2:1,  
4-8d

Luke 2:41-51

The Immaculate Heart of Mary is a feast dedicated to the inner life of the Blessed Mother. At the Community of the Risen Lord, we place importance on the inner journey. One aspect of the inner journey is also the 'In Christ' experience as opposed to the 'With Christ' mode which relates to the plea of the Lord Jesus which is 'Remain in me, and I will remain in you.'

The Blessed Mother was always 'In God'. The word of God reveals to us that whatever she faced, she pondered over it. It means that she meditated over the experience till she was able to see it in the light of God and from God's perspective. How do we respond when we go through a trial? Often we choose to immediately come up with our reasons and justifications or accusations. We do not pause to see the experience in the light and wisdom of Christ.

The First Reading is taken from Isaiah 61 which is a chapter about the Year of the Lord's favour. Having the favour of God does not mean that everything goes right but that the person has the grace, peace and joy of God in the midst of the worst storms in life. Mother Mary has this special sort of favour. Verse 10 says I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God, for he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness. The Blessed Mother's grace, dignity and confidence came from having her heart 'In God.'

The Blessed Mother had two instances of three days of darkness and uncertainty. The first instance is in the Gospel reading from today. Both Mother Mary and St. Joseph had left the temple and were travelling for a day when they discovered the Lord Jesus' absence. For three days they searched for him. Returning to the Temple they found Him talking with the elders. In this instance and when she beheld the limp body of the Lord, the Blessed Mother could not understand what the Father was doing and the life of the Lord but she pondered these things in her heart. Clothed in garments of salvation, she was able to hold her mind from assuming and racing to conclusions. Though her soul was bitter she was able to cling to the little body of the boy Jesus and to his cold corpse and at both times she had the grace to magnify the Lord. When the Lord was aware that He was about to be betrayed, He also saw it as His hour of glory. We pray for a similar wisdom to invade our hearts.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, the example of the Blessed Mother is way beyond the type of responses I give and live. I pray for the same grace and pondering heart. Amen*

**The Lord hears our cry and sees our tears, He feels our sorrow.**

1 Kgs 17:17–24

Ps 30:2, 4–6,  
11–13

Gal 1:11–19

Luke 7:11–17

As I reflected on today's liturgy, there was one simple truth that struck me profoundly -- the goodness of God who is Almighty.

In the First Reading God heard Elijah's cry and the dead boy was brought back to life. God's mercy was revealed to a poor widow whose sole treasure was her only son. This awesome experience brought her to faith in the living God and in

His Word spoken by His messenger, Elijah.

The Gospel reading presents the mercy and compassion of God that is revealed through His Son. His heart went out to the widow of Naim, whose only son was dead. The Lord Jesus, who Himself is God, comforts this poor woman saying, "don't cry" (Luke 7:13). The woman didn't even plead for a miracle, but His Mercy sprang into action and the Lord ordered the dead man to "get up" (Luke 7:15). This resulted in all who witnessed it, to praise God; the God who had come to help His people (Cf. Luke 7:16).

The Second Reading reveals how the Lord went after the greatest persecutor of the early Church. It was not by a teaching that Saul was changed to St. Paul, the great apostle, but by an experience he was made to go through. When the Risen Christ Himself visited Saul on the way to Damascus, he was knocked down by the heavenly light and was stripped of all worldly strength and wisdom, only to be filled with the divine revelation that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20).

Have you ever wondered why the world has somehow formed a wrong impression of God? The world thinks of God as being distant and aloof, waiting to punish the law-breaker and also powerless to defend the innocent against the wicked? The devil has cleverly taught the world a big lie, just like the one he taught the first woman, Eve. The whole world seems to be moving steadily to become a gentile territory. Many Christian families, caught up in the rat race of the modern world, seem to be having no time to devote 20-30 minutes to pray together as a family. Many Christian countries are doing away with Christian teaching in their schools, thus depriving the little minds of the treasure of growing in faith during their formative years.

I still recall the family Rosary prayed each evening at our home. Any crisis meant more time spent in prayer. I still remember, as a Year 11 student of a Catholic school, having studied the Gospel of St. Luke. I was moved to put into practice the little faith I gained through

learning the Scripture. During a school trip to “Sigiriya” (a famous ancient rock fortress in Sri Lanka), my new camera (received as a gift for my good results in the exam) fell into the thick jungle as we were climbing up. Searching for a small Kodak instamatic camera in that vast jungle was unthinkable. While everyone was feeling sorry for me, I suddenly remembered the miracles of the Lord Jesus stated in the Gospel of St Luke and I lifted up a silent prayer, affirming that the Lord was the only One who could find it for me. We all started singing the hymn, “Over and over, like a mighty sea. Comes the love of Jesus, rolling over me.” While we had the guided tour I tried to shut my doubts out, asserting the Lord’s power all the time. As we climbed down, to my utmost surprise, there was a person, holding my camera, without even a scratch mark, looking for it’s owner. The Risen Lord had heard my cry, saw my helplessness and knowing that my parents could not afford to buy me another camera, had found my camera and brought it back to me.

Through this life experience, the Lord increased my faith that had been planted as a seed by my parents and further fertilised by the nun who taught us Religion. That day I learnt the simple but most profound truth -- that God loves and cares for me, no matter how careless I may be. It is a shame that many young people in today’s world are growing up without God ever being real for them. If they had no relationship with the Lord Jesus from their childhood, how can they turn to Him in their hour of need? They will never know the mercy and grace of God. They will never experience the sheer joy of knowing Christ and having a relationship with Him. Is it not surprising that there is so much depression and anxiety among the youth and young adults of today. Even young teenagers and preadolescent children are not being spared of this monster that snatches their hopes away, driving many to self harm and even suicide. If these children knew Christ their worlds and lives would be different today.

Today, let us search our hearts. Where are we in our relationship with our God and Creator? Do we forget Him and ignore His presence when our life is flowing smoothly and run to Him with all types of prayer and devotions only in a crisis? Are we guilty of not bringing our children to this experience, excusing ourselves that the new generation is too advanced for “God-stuff” and that they have no time for a prayer life? If so, let us repent and ask the Lord to forgive us and have mercy on us. It should be our continuous prayer that God, who set St. Paul apart from His mother’s womb and called him by His grace, will reveal His Son to our children too. Let us claim the inheritance that has been won for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, as sons and daughters of the Most High.

***Prayer: Abba Father, Your Son has removed our sackcloth and clothed us with joy. Grant us the grace to acknowledge Your love in good times and in bad. Amen.***

**Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in Heaven****Matthew 3:12**

1 Kings 17:1-6

Psalm 121:1b-8

Matthew 5:1-12

Elijah whose symbolic meaning is "Yahweh is my God" was the greatest prophet representing all the prophets at the Transfiguration. James presents him as the model of faith (5:17) Tishbe was a town poor and untouched by the apostasy and infidelity of the Israelites in Samaria. Now he stands as a strong rock proclaiming fearlessly the word he was certain God spoke to him. The drought prophesied by him affected him too but God took care of him.

Centuries later a prophet par excellence strides across the world proclaiming Good News. This time a new Magna Carta new laced with the most staggering promises of blessings. Jesus too braved the wrath of a hostile audience knowing that God would indicate to him, how the hearts of the poor, the lost, lonely and the marginalised would have leapt with joy listening to Him! The blessedness was not only for the future but for the here and now. But who was this homeless indignant carpenter who dared to storm the bastions of traditional beliefs held by the Jews for centuries. Were not wealth, property, self fulfillment considered hallmarks of God's blessings? On the other hand who better than the one who came from the heart of the Father with a mission to proclaim the kingdom could speak for Him?

The whole list is one of Be-attitudes. Poverty of spirit reflects the attitude of one helpless to face crises, depending solely on God's unlimited providence. The thrust of the sermon is being dependent on God and being other centered - mourning for the other's grief, hungering and thirsting for equality for all being merciful, gentle, working for people and standing up for justice in spite of persecution. Here is the essence of the teachings.

Despite evidence to the contrary our rational mind struggles to accept the extraordinary promises of the Lord Jesus - to be heirs of the kingdom of Heaven and inherit the earth. But we consider the martyrs who went to their death singing with joy and the apostles Paul and Silas singing hymns as prisoners. In our day we see people who took His words seriously to lose their lives and find it (Mark 9:39).

Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Henri Nowen and saints like St. Therese - who lived life to the full. Let us take the Lord at His word and we shall be comforted.

**Prayer: Abba Father help me to accept your invitation to step out of the material and enter the spiritual. Amen**

“Do not be afraid”, Elijah said to her...

1 Kings 17: 13

1 Kings 17:7-16

Psalms 4:2-5, 7b-8

Matthew 5:13-16

God sent Elijah to Zarephath of Sidon saying that he has designated a widow there to provide for him. Elijah moved without any questions and encountered a widow at the entrance to the city. Though Elijah was a prophet assigned by God to Israel, this widow of Zarephath was clueless of the Israelite prophet and the God of Israel. Elijah made requests and commanded the widow in the name of God. There is nothing in the scripture to say that the widow was told by God what to do.

This widow could not say no to another human being who was thirsty and hungry. With the little she had, she was willing to provide for the man. The words of the prophet must have strengthened her. It is God who spoke through the prophet and certainly the widow's fears must have been taken away with the assurance of the prophet.

We are often in these situations. God has given us talents, wealth, capabilities and placed us in positions where we can contribute towards the Kingdom of God. When the widow fed Elijah, she was actually helping the Kingdom of God. Are we contributing towards the expansion of the Kingdom of God? Or when we are talented and capable, do we use our talents for our benefit and do we use our capabilities for the Kingdom of God? We are too possessive of our wealth and top ranks. We do not like to contribute or we contribute to the Church and the Kingdom of God with strings attached.

When we hold on to our talents, capabilities, wealth and status we become the losers. Look at the widow; she provided with the little she had and she survived the drought. She had plenty for over a year. We rot in our wealth, status and talents when we hold on to them and we become the salt which has lost its saltiness as the Lord Jesus says in the Gospel.

We too are designated by God for a purpose. We do not need to wait until angels or prophets come and tell us what to do. We need to be ready to do to others what God has done to us. God forgave us, accepted us and loved us. We too should forgive, accept others as they are and love them. We should be bold to talk when necessary and stand for the truth. We are called to be the light of the world.

**Prayer: Abba Father, let the world taste You and see You through me. Amen.**

**The law and the spirit****1 Kings 18:20–39****Psalms 16:1b–2b,  
4–5b, 8, 11****Matthew 5:17–19**

Today's Gospel reading needs to be put in context, lest we get confused by the seemingly contradictory teachings of the Lord Jesus regarding the Law. According to Catholic Bible scholars, in the time of the Lord the Law had several meanings. First of all, it meant all the commandments and practices based on the teachings of Moses. The Law was also another term for the Bible.

There are several places in the Bible where the Law designates the Jewish religion, which was based on the Old Testament. With these explanations we could have a better understanding of the apparently contradictory sayings of the Lord Jesus regarding the Law.

Everything is to be fulfilled (Matthew 5:10). The Lord Jesus does not refer to the commandments. Rather He affirms that the religion founded on the Old Testament's scripture was a temporary, yet necessary, step in the history of salvation. The prophecies had to be fulfilled; also the rites and sacrifices of that religion served to instruct the people about the mystery of sin and mercy that would be fulfilled in the person and work of the Lord Jesus. With Him comes the perfect and definitive fellowship of God with man. In 5:19 the Lord is referring to the commandments. In 5:20 "If you are not righteous in a better way than the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven". Here the Lord refers to the spirit of the Law.

Catholic scholars say the laws of Israel were written, adapted and completed over the course of many centuries. Those laws are in the Bible, and it is not easy to reconcile so many regulations which are not always in agreement with one another. This is why, even before the Lord, the teachers of the Law began teaching and writing many explanations and adapting those commandments for the use of Jews, who lived in a changing circumstances. However, when the Lord proposes a perfect law, He does not intend like other Jewish teachers to reform the religious laws or to increase them. Instead He exhorts us to receive the spirit which inspired the Law. The Lord also tells us it is more important to consider the mercy of God than to continually meditate on the commandments. He who intends to live as a child of God becomes better than the religious leaders who were preoccupied only with the fulfilment of external duties.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, may we experience more deeply Your amazing grace, unconditional love and mercy so that we can pass it onto others. Amen.*

“How long will you straddle the issue”.

1 Kings 18:41–46

Psalms 65:10–13

Matthew 5:20–26

I had a harrowing experience during the Sinhala New Year. My new neighbor had a loud and boisterous all night party. I was averse to complaining either to them or the police. I surrendered my disturbed heart to the Lord Jesus. No respite came my way; I felt disappointed with the Lord. I was in two minds. Had He abandoned me through that dark night of torment.

In the early period of Israelite history there had been much Baal worship. In the first reading prophet Elijah warns his people of such worship. Baal was a Canaanite god. The people believed that worshipping Baal, would make all go well with them. The true prophets objected to such worship, because it entailed child sacrifices and associated with ritual sex apart from other false beliefs and practices. They resorted to Baal having experienced much disappointment, difficulties and darkness. The prophets would however give reasons for such experiences. They assured people that God was still in control. We should not lose that attitude of hope. Having such an attitude of mind facilitated the Lord doing something beautiful out of something terrible He had permitted to happen.

Elijah asks how long they would waver between two opinions or attitudes. He says ‘if the Lord is God follow him; if baal, follow him (V 21). They do not answer him (V 21). We can see they are in two minds here. There then follows a contest between the Baal prophets and Elijah. Elijah outmaneuvers them. Read the text, it’s both hilarious and awesome. The people now convinced, worship and obey the true God.

In the Gospel reading emphasis is on guarding one’s attitudes, following God and doing His bidding empowers one’s mind. When we ponder the Word and believe it, we can bring it into reality. Likewise when we ponder evil, hatred or negative thoughts, we are prone to making it activated to cause destruction, pain and disharmony. Bad suggestions, fed and entertained in our minds, should be avoided. We should take every attitude and such thoughts captive unto the Holy Spirit. When we don’t, every evil and negative thought could take captive of our very life giving spirit.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father may your Son’s words “Take courage I have conquered the world” (John 16:33) be pondered and become my own experience. Amen*

## 'The secret sin in our hearts'

1 Kings 19:9a,  
11–16

Psalms 27:7–9c,  
13–14

Matthew 5:27–32

Many of us entertain sin secretly in our hearts. We think as long as we give a good external impression to our loved ones, to the world and as long as nobody knows, it is alright to secretly satisfy our lustful desires and selfish ambitions even at the cost of harming another innocent person. Thus secretly we have an extra-marital relationship, get into a same sex relationship, molest/ abuse children, get addicted to pornography, alcohol and drugs and secretly earn money the wrong way. After doing all these things we expect our children to be perfect and everything else to be fine in our lives. But sadly what we do in secret our children will do in public just as it happened to King David in the Old Testament and sooner or later our lives will fall apart.

As it is said in 1 Samuel 16:7, God is not interested in our outside appearance, as man does, He looks into our heart. In today's Gospel reading the Lord Jesus says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away..... and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matt. 5: 29-30). In these seemingly harsh words is He not asking us to deal with the secret sin of our hearts before it is too late?

In the First Reading we find Elijah driven by fear, hiding in a cave in the mountain of God. As the Psalmist says in 27:8 in his desperate situation it is the face of the Lord that Elijah seeks. The Lord comes to visit Elijah in a gentle whisper and ministers to him as he pours out the truth of his heart to the Lord. If we too turn to Him, the Lord is waiting to visit the darkest and ugliest spot of our lives to restore us and make us new once again.

Today the Lord is calling us to stop living in denial. If we do not deal with our secret sin, it will gradually kill our spirit, soul and body and we will live in our own hell, here on earth. St. Paul says in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are invited to turn to the Lord Jesus, deal with the bitter truth of our hearts and be reconciled to God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I pray that You will hear my voice as I call out to You. Do not hide Your face from me. Be merciful to me and answer me. Amen.*

**'The kingdom of heaven is near'****Matthew 10:7**Acts 11:21b–26,  
13:1–3

Psalm 98:1–3, 4–6

Matthew 10:7–13

In today's Gospel reading, the Lord Jesus prepares His disciples to go on mission. He instructs them on the message to be preached, that the kingdom of God is near, gives them the power, guidelines and stresses on the way they have to serve.

John the Baptist began his mission saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Matt. 3: 2) The Lord Jesus also, starts His mission saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Thus the main task of the mission was to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near and to repent and turn back. By baptism every Christian is called to this mission. Yet we live to find worldly success. We labour, utilize our time and energy and compete with one another. Further, we live discontented lives harboring jealousy, anger, doubt, fear and insecurity within. The Lord Jesus says, to collect treasures in heaven.

One might question whether it is wrong to labour to eat, drink, and dress and to find shelter. The Lord Jesus says in Matthew 6: 32, "... and your heavenly Father knows that you need them." It is not His will for us to worry about our lives. Worrying is a result of not having faith. When we have complete faith in God and give the first place of our lives to proclaim His kingdom, He takes on the responsibilities of our lives. This faith fills our minds with peace, love and joy that come from above. This experience, we will not get from anything of this world.

The Kingdom of God is near. The kingdom of God which was far away is now close to man because the Lord Jesus, by living in complete obedience to the Father to the end, made it possible. The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until the time of John. Since that time, the Good News of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. (Luke 16:16) The Lord Jesus says in Luke 17: 20, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is' or 'There it is' because the kingdom of God is within you." Where your treasure is your mind will be. Today He is inviting us to meditate on where our mind is and to give the first place of our lives to His kingdom. Then we will experience the joy of His kingdom.

**Prayer: Abba Father, let your kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.**

Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me

**Galatians 2:20**

2 Sam 12:7-10, 13

Ps 32:1-2, 5, 7, 11

Gal 2:16, 19-21

Luke 7:36-8:3

The First Reading talks about the encounter between the Prophet Nathan and King David, after the Lord had asked Nathan to confront King David about his act of indiscretion with Uriah's wife.

The Lord reminds David of the blessings He has given him. David received power and riches. He could not be touched even by those more powerful than him. He received more carnal pleasure than any other man in his land. No one dared to question him. Was he not living the dream of modern man? Yet he wasn't satisfied. He lusted for the wife of another who was less fortunate than him. The Lord speaks to David and tells him if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in my eyes? The Lord seems to be asking "Why did you resort to this? Why didn't you come to me? I could have given you the happiness and satisfaction your heart was seeking."

The Lord speaks to me. Do I really believe that God can give me joy and satisfaction? Is it not because I do not believe this that I have to find my own ways and means of finding joy and satisfaction?

Even though the incident took place behind the walls of secrecy, God used Nathan to make David deal with the truth hidden from the rest of the world. If we are to be used by God like David was, we too will be called upon to deal with truth of our true inner motives. The Lord will send us Nathans from time to time, who will expose our hidden nature and some traits that are hidden from our own eyes. When David accepted the truth of his heart rather than justify his action or use his power and authority to shut Nathan up, God forgave him. We too can receive the forgiveness of God when we come to Him with the truth of our hearts. Today's Responsorial Psalm reveals that when you are forgiven, you are blessed. Sin results in a curse, while forgiveness results in a blessing. So when we give the truth of our heart to the Lord, the very act that brought a curse into our lives, will bring blessings. God has the power to take a curse on our lives and turn it into a blessing.

The Gospel reading relates the beautiful story of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee. The Lord Jesus makes the stunning revelation about how the sinful woman, because she was forgiven, is able to love more than the righteous Pharisee.

Simon the Pharisee was not like any other Pharisee. He defied convention, recognised and publicly acknowledged that there was something special about the Lord Jesus. Some experts claim that Simon the Pharisee and Simon the leper in Mark Chapter 14, are one and the same person. This means that he experienced divine healing at the hands of our Lord. Yet the response and the love of the sinful woman was greater than his.

Some come to the Lord because of a crisis. Unless the blessing is associated with repentance and conversion, they tend to fall away. Others come to hear intellectually stimulating sermons. Yet none of these can match the dedication, fervor and love of someone who has gone through a conversion experience. In the heart of the sinful woman, the alabaster jar becomes far less precious than her love and gratitude to the Lord. Therefore she gives up something that may have been of fair worth to her in thanksgiving to God. For she knows that the forgiveness of the Lord is worth much more than an alabaster jar of perfume. Because of this, as she worships the Lord, she is blessed with the gift of tears, while the others are not. There is another aspect to Simon the Pharisee. Even though he is converted from being the typical Pharisee to a follower of our Lord Jesus, his mind is trained in the teachings and beliefs of the Pharisees. This influences his perspective of God and His ways and constrains his understanding. Our Lord Jesus reaches out directly to his closed mind, using imagery that Simon is capable of understanding. Simon receives an insight into the heart of God and his mind expands. We also like Simon the Pharisee, are trained to think on the principles of rational thinking. Our perception of reality and of God are heavily influenced by this and we are unable to fathom our God for who He really is. Like Simon the Pharisee, if we accept our Lord Jesus as fundamentally good, even though we cannot understand what He is doing, He provides insights, expands our consciousness and sets us free from the prison of our minds. The secret is that we must spend time with the Lord, just like Simon the Pharisee did by inviting him home.

In the Second Reading, according to the law, I am hostile to God, and I have no chance. This is in agreement with the thinking of Simon the Pharisee. St. Paul says something strange; that I am already dead and hence the law doesn't apply to me anymore. Our Lord Jesus lives in our place and we live for God. Not for ourselves any more. So insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who has loved me and given Himself up for me.

***Prayer: Abba Father: Lord, as I struggle between the rational perspective of life, and the revealed Word, give me the grace to spend time with You like Simon the Pharisee did, so that I may get to know You and trust You. Amen.***

**“But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek turn to them the other cheek also.” Mathew 5:39**

1 Kings 21:1–16

Psalms 5:2–3b, 5–7

Matthew 5:38–42

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, whose popularity for miracles as a finder of lost articles is but a drop in the powerful testimony of his life. The Gospel reading's call, is to leave everything and follow Christ. It was St. Anthony's rule of life. Over and again God called him for something new in his plan. Every time, St. Anthony responded with renewed zeal and self-sacrifice to serve his Lord Jesus more completely. The call of God came again at an ordination where no one was prepared to speak. The humble and obedient St. Anthony hesitantly accepted the task. The years of searching for the Lord in prayer, of reading sacred scripture and of serving Him in poverty had prepared St. Anthony to allow the Spirit to use his talents. St. Anthony's sermon was astounding to those who expected an unprepared speech and were unaware of the Spirit's power to give people words. Recognized as a great man of prayer and a great scripture and theology scholar he was called to use this profound knowledge to convert and reassure those who had been misled by their denial of Christ's divinity and of the Sacraments. It has been commented that he should be the patron saint of those who find their lives completely uprooted and set in a new and unexpected direction. Like all saints he is a perfect example of turning one's life completely over to Christ. God did with St. Anthony as God pleased and what pleased God was a life of spiritual power and brilliance that still attracts admiration today. He whom popular devotion has nominated as a finder of lost articles found himself by losing himself totally to the providence of God. This invitation is for us. 'We can do all things in him who strengthens us.' In contrast to this holy man we see in the First Reading the utter greed of man and his craving to conquer and possess material things.

In the Gospel reading the Lord tells us to offer no resistance to one who is evil – when someone strikes you on one cheek offer the other as well. We cannot do this by our own strength, but in the power of His Spirit. This response can be the transformation of your opponent and ultimately the world we live in. It is said that Saint Anthony was invited by his enemies and offered food which was poisoned. To their astonishment the poison did not have any effect on him. There was a revolutionary change in them. Love conquers all.

***Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to seek You diligently; that I may receive the power to love beyond my human limitations. Amen.***

**“...you shall be righteous and perfect in the way your Heavenly Father is righteous and perfect.” Matthew 5:48**

1 Kings 21:17–29

Psalms 51:3–6b,  
11, 16

Matthew 5:43–48

The Lord Jesus' moral teaching reaches its summit in today's exhortation to love. He is asking us to go beyond our selfish whims and desires into a state of consciousness that seeks only the love of God and neighbour. 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (v.44) a command we cannot fulfill, yet with God's grace we can strive to be more like Him, He who is Love,

and in whose image we are made.

By the grace of God some people are able to rise above their instincts of revenge, because, like Jesus, they hope and pray for a new humanity, a new kingdom on earth. The Lord Jesus died for this, and we were made for it, but first we have to endure the crucible of sacrificial love.

During the Second World War a Dutch Christian named Corrie ten Boom endured unthinkable suffering at the Ravensbruck concentration camp. In her book 'Tramp for the Lord', she writes of her struggle to forgive a former Ravensbruck guard. She had just been preaching about the love and mercy of God and knew she had to forgive him, but as she recalled how her sister Betsy had died at the camp, Corrie just could not bring herself to forgive her 'enemy'. As her former captor stood before her, hands outstretched, asking for forgiveness, Corrie prayed; she told the Lord that she would stretch out her hand, but that he would have to do the rest. And he did!! Corrie writes: 'woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" A hated and feared enemy was transformed into a beloved brother.

God is our model of 'agape'. We did not merit his unfailing love and mercy as we let him down constantly. But, like God, we need to love and forgive. Do not despair, as Corrie ten Boom discovered, 'when God tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love itself.'

***Prayer: Abba Father, pour out your love into my heart by your Holy Spirit, so that I might be empowered to love my enemies as the Lord Jesus commanded. Amen.***

**Praise be to the LORD, for he showed me  
the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege.**

2 Kings 2:1, 6-14  
Psalm 31:20-21, 24  
Matthew 6:1-6,  
16-18

The Gospel reading takes us back to the beginning of Lent, it reminds us that it's not only in Lent that giving, fasting and prayer should be done but throughout the year. How often do we think that it is only during the Lenten period we should observe this sacrifice. When we practice it throughout the year we will experience the love, peace and grace of God every day.

What do giving alms, prayer and fasting have to do in our context today? These practices must be a manifestation of our spirituality, it should not be an act designed to secure the notice of people around us. If we do so, we will only be righteous in other people's eyes and we will be left with anger, jealousy and dryness. Let us choose to be right with God rather than trying to satisfy the people around us.

Let us make fasting and prayer a doorway to God's presence and a life in the Spirit through recognizing the darkness and sinful patterns of life within us and returning to God through Confession and fast from what we think is correct and let us hold on to His promises and His Word.

In the First Reading Elijah is instructed by God what to do and as a reward he is filled with the Holy Spirit. Are we conscious of the Voice of God today? Are we seeing the revelations he is waiting to show us? Do we see God's hand in our day-to-day activities? Most of us are comfortable in our individual comfort zones and we tend to keep our relationship with God only in Church and at Prayer meetings and not take Him to our homes, offices and to our friends.

Let us make that choice today to go that extra mile, to take that extra step towards the people God has gifted us with and reach out to them; putting aside our ego, self-esteem and self-respect that are holding us from hearing the voice of God and doing His will. "Should we fall a thousand times in a day, a thousand times we must rise again, always animated with unbounded confidence in the infinite goodness of God."- Ven. Louis de Granada

**Prayer: Abba Father, make me a channel of Your peace. Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life. Amen.**

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”

**Matthew 6:7**

Sirach 48:1–15

Psalms 97:1–7

Matthew 6:7–15

Today's first reading speaks about two great prophets; Elijah and Elisha. The Prophet Elijah is one of the most interesting biblical characters, yet his life was so filled with turmoil because he was at times bold and decisive and at other times fearful and tentative. In spite of victory and provisions he received from the Lord, he enters a period of wavering faith and depression when he heard that Ahab's wife Jezebel has made a vow to kill him. Why? Because he got his eyes off God. It is then that the Lord instructs Elijah to stand on the mountain as the Lord passed by. There was a great wind, an earthquake, and then fire, but God was not in any of those. Then comes a still, small voice in which Elijah hears God and understands Him. Just like Elijah, when we focus on the noise and the tumult of life in this world, we may get our eyes off of the Lord. However, if we listen for His still, small voice and walk in obedience to His Word, we find victory and reward. Elijah was filled with human frailties yet was used mightily by God. The life of Elisha reveals the prophet's humility, his obvious love for the people of Israel and his faithfulness in a lifelong ministry.

Today's Gospel reading shows us the Lord's way to pray via the Lord's Prayer. Is prayer merely asking God to get the favours done? Or when we're in trouble and desperately need Him? No, prayer is something beyond that. It should be our lifestyle. Mother Teresa beautifully said; "Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts."

I have recently come across this beautiful meaning of "PRAY". It means Praise, Repent, Ask and Yield and I believe this is what the Lord Jesus teaches us in the Lord's prayer. When we begin the Lord's prayer by saying "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name", we praise God acknowledging who He is, how great He is. Secondly we ask forgiveness from God and repent when we say "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Thirdly we place our prayer requests and ask for the need of others and for our needs by saying "give us this day our daily bread." Finally we yield our will to God's will and we surrender ourselves into His hands when we say "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

**Prayer: Abba Father, let your will be done in every area of my life as I place myself at your feet in total surrender. Amen.**

**“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

**Matthew 6:21**

2 Kings 11:1–4,  
9–18, 20

Psalms 132:11–14,  
17–18

Matthew 6:19–23

Looking at today’s Gospel reading in the context of the entire chapter will help us to understand clearly what the Lord Jesus is trying to tell us. In the entire 6th Chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, the Lord mentions the ‘Heavenly Father’ literally a dozen times. He then addresses two kinds of temptations that we as believers face that try to distract us and pull us away from the incomparable fulfillment that we can have in knowing the ‘Heavenly Father’ and having a relationship with Him.

The first temptation is the so-called religious man doing his works before man to receive the praise of people instead of doing it in secret and receiving his reward from God. The temptation is to be noticed, valued, admired and honoured, to gain the praise of men. We get so offended, affected and emotionally down when we are not given the place we so desire. We allow the value people give us to define us and give us our identity.

The second temptation we face is to be like the people of the world and seek after the ‘treasures’ on this earth. We become aware that we are caught up with earthly treasures when we look at the things of this world and think, “I wish I had that.” We are seeking to be satisfied by these temporary things, things that bring us momentary pleasure or happiness and leave us thirsty eventually, instead of allowing the Heavenly Father who knows all that we need to fulfill us from deep inside. (Matt 6:32)

Let us ask ourselves these crucial questions today. “Where is my heart?” “What are the things that stir up the affections of my heart?” “What do I consider as ‘valuable’?” Most often, what we deem as valuable shows us where our treasure is. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt 6:21)

There is a beautiful saying that goes like this: “Our emotions reflect what we worship.” And so do our attractions. Let us allow our emotions and attractions to be our compass right now. Am I sad, angry or reactive when I don’t get what I desire? Let us together with St. Paul consider everything garbage compared with the infinite value of knowing, loving and serving our Lord Jesus Christ. (Philippians 3:8)

***Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to desire and seek you beyond everything else. Amen***

## To whom do we belong?

2 Chronicles  
24:17-25

Psalms 89:4-5,  
29-30,34

Matthew 6:24-34

Today's readings pose a question to each of us. To whom do we belong to? Do we belong to God the Father, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit or to the world and all its wealth?

In the first reading, following the death of the priest Jehoiada, the Israelites abandoned God and His temple and began to worship Asherah poles and idols. The scriptures tell us that although the Lord sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen (v.19). They even killed Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest, after he tried to turn their hearts back to God. Their loyalty lay with the world and false idols and gods. Finally they lost to the Aramean army and the king Joash was killed by his officials in his own bed. He was not even buried in the tombs of the kings. All this took place because they went against God.

The Gospel reading may be familiar to us. We have heard it during the 4 Steps Retreat. The Lord is asking each of us to come to Him and leave the world and its worries behind. When we surrender to God and decide to only follow Him, our mission in life changes- we live to please God and God lives to please us. Just as He provides for the birds of the air, He will bless us abundantly and will provide everything we need. He asks us to trust Him and surrender our lives to Him.

In ancient times, everything in a kingdom belonged to the king. The land, the people and the lives of the people belonged to the king. All of the subjects of a kingdom belong to the king. When the scriptures say seek the kingdom of God, we must ask ourselves who do we belong to? The Lord Jesus says we must become the property of God itself. When we become God's property, we must change our lives for the Lord to provide for our needs. To begin with, our purpose should be to first seek the Kingdom of God. We do not need to worry about meeting our needs, instead the Lord is asking us to focus solely on having a relationship with Him and fulfilling His mission. God is the ruler of the universe and when we focus on His Kingdom, He can turn the universe around to meet our needs and He begins to take care of us.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, whenever I feel unloved, unimportant or insecure, help me to remember to whom I belong. For when I have You, I have all I need. Amen.*

**What does 'Messiah' mean to you?**

Zechariah 12:10–11,

13:1

Psalms 63:2–6, 8–9

Galatians 3:26–29

Luke 9:18–24

On this Sunday we focus on the meaning of the 'Messiah' in our lives. We might have gone to church. We may be spending time in prayer. We may choose this day to relax and unwind, but suddenly the readings from today bring questions to our minds.

We are called to unearth the real meaning of the 'Messiah' in our hearts. The Jews have always been waiting for their Messiah. When they had the judges ruling them they cried out for a King. Their notion of a king was one who would be like King David or Solomon and one who would protect, defend, unite and fight for them. When the Lord Jesus appeared as a Nazarene, He was pretty far from their notion of a king and they made all the efforts to squash His claim to the throne. What is our notion of our King? In my life, do I need a Lord and Saviour? Does my Messiah have to answer my prayer and do as I wish Him to do? Has He failed to be the Messiah I thought he would be?

The apostles had this problem. They imagined that the Lord Jesus would be a successful leader who would be crowned King of Jerusalem and they would receive powerful portfolios. However, the Lord squashed all their hopes when He took time to tell them that their Messiah was one who would be crucified. Worse than that, they had been called to follow in His footsteps. It was too much for them to stomach and He knew they would share his serious message as a piece of gossip and not be able to understand and accept it.

In my life, when I realise how easily I fall into sin and get trapped by vices; when I am aware that my inner journey is not similar to my 'outer pious expressions' I become aware that I desperately need a Messiah. I need thee every hour. I need a Messiah every moment to lift me from my self-made messes. If I am self confident and secure I will not feel the need for a Messiah. If I am not open to accepting my sinfulness and I dismiss thoughts of repentance saying that the world is that way, I will not feel the need for a Messiah. But when there is a wave of grace over me I will cry out for the Messiah.

Zechariah prophesies about the day when the Jews will see the significance of the Lord Jesus and recognise that He was and is the Messiah. It will be an eye opener and a massive outpouring of grief

will erupt. He compares it to the days when two such outpourings of grief happened in Jewish history. What will happen on that day and how will it happen? Like in our own lives, it will be a doing of the Lord - His promise is - "I shall pour out a spirit of grace and prayer and they will look to me." Lord, before you do that, pour out a spirit of grace and prayer in my life that I may look to you as my Saviour. The result is, they will mourn for the one whom they have pierced as though for an only child. So deep will their remorse be. But the story will not have a sad ending. As with a promise there is always hope. The word says, 'When that day comes, a fountain will be opened for the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to wash sin and impurity away.' We can cling to this promise. When we realise that the Lord Jesus is our Saviour, we will have the opportunity for a Baptism of Repentance and an outpouring of grace where we can wash ourselves clean from our sin and guilt.

What is a result of that washing? The answer comes to us through Galatians 3: 26 onwards. Once we are washed our identity changes. When we identify the real Messiah, we discover our true identity. We are no more slave nor freeman, Sinhala or Tamil, local or international and even male or female - instead we are all one in Christ and heirs named in the promise.

Discovering the Messiah, is seeing our mess, having an outpouring of grace, and a switch in our identity to becoming known as children of God. If we are still standing our ground, overtly proud of our heritage and walking around with an air of superiority, then we can be sure that we have not come to know the Messiah.

Further, correcting our identity and knowing we have a Messiah is not enough. We receive a call to action, to renounce ourselves, take up our cross everyday and follow the Lord Jesus' example. In the process we are invited to lose our life, that we may gain a real life. It is a cycle of events, we find the Messiah, we reshape our identity, we begin living a Christian life, at certain moments we fail and fall, we go back to the Messiah and we are lifted up. That's why we call it a spiritual journey, one with breaks, tiredness, smooth times, pauses, beautiful moments, broken moments. In all of them our Messiah accompanies us.

Today we also take time to pray for our beloved Pope, His Holiness Pope Francis. We find in him a beloved leader, a voice for the lost, struggling and discriminated. We are called to imitate him and we thank God for his example. He is in love with the real Messiah.

***Prayer: Abba Father, You sent the Lord Jesus as my Messiah to save me from my sin and shame. May the spirit of grace overshadow me and renew my life. Amen***

## Have compassion for all

2 Kings 17:5-8,  
13-15a, 18

Psalm 60:3-5,12-13

Matthew 7:1-5

Pope Francis who is seen as a new Moses with the Holy Spirit working through him to bring out a new Pentecost, has after his election three years ago often said that he believes the institutional church over the past few centuries has been too judgmental and contradictory. He has appealed to the clergy and lay people to allow the Holy Spirit to bring about a transformation whereby, individually and collectively we will become more merciful and compassionate. This is what the Lord Jesus says in today's Gospel Reading.

The Lord takes it to high dimension in the parable which has unfortunately been mistakenly named as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is more the Parable of the Father with his amazing grace, unconditional love and unfailing mercy. The other two actors are two foolish children, one with a greed for money and goes into self-dissipation in a pigsty while the elder son wallows in self-righteousness. In line with the teachings of the Lord Jesus, Pope Francis urged compassion for all, in a landmark proclamation on family values. The Pope called on the Catholic church to revamp its response to modern family life, urging greater acceptance for divorced people and those in same-sex relationships while adhering to traditional church teachings.

The historic papal document, entitled *Amoris Laetitia* (Joy of Love), was hailed as a "paradigm shift" by Pope Francis's biographer Austen Ivereigh, who said it had the "potential to shape the church's response to the family for generations to come". Pope Francis outlines a more compassionate vision for the church on family issues, urging priests to respond to their communities without rigidly enforcing church rules. "Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs," he wrote. Mr. Ivereigh said the document was "a remarkable step forward for the church". It was "epic in scale, bold in ambition, and beautifully direct and tender, the fruit of decades of a holy man listening carefully to the truth of people's lives". He added: "It's a fantastic piece of work." Pope Francis urged the church to "reaffirm that every person ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration", while "every sign of unjust discrimination" is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression or violence.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, give us the power to cooperate with You and Pope Francis in this new Pentecost to turn the church and the world upside down. Amen.*

“He is my Everything, He is my All”

2 Kings 19:9-11, 14-21, 31-36

Psalm 48:2-4, 10-11

Matthew 7:6, 12-14

In the first reading we see Hezekiah king of Judah, in total surrender to God. He lays everything at the feet of God waiting for direction. He gives praise to God, proclaims God above all. His plea is not that he wins the battle and gains glory for himself but that by God delivering them from the battle with Sennacherib King of Assyria, that God be glorified as the one and only true living God.

His focus was not fame, his capabilities, the strategy, nor the outcome but bringing glory to God. God speaks to Hezekiah, through Isaiah, giving His word assuring him of God's sovereign reign above all and Hezekiah's faith in God's word is in the fulfillment of God's promise.

In the Psalm we read that blessed is the country, family and heart, in which God is great, in which He is all. All the streams of mercy that flow down to us must be traced to the fountain of His loving-kindness. Let us give to God the glory of the great things he has done for us.

In the Gospel reading the Lord teaches us, not only what we are to know and believe, but what we are to do; not only toward God, but toward our neighbour. Presented with the choice between the two gates: The narrow gate or the wide gate? The way of sin is very easy, the gate is wide, inviting, and stands open. The road is broad with many paths that satisfy our ego, lust, wealth, power, relationships, addictions and life style. The way to eternal life is narrow. Many saints have taken this path. The broad easy road is full of temporary satisfactions and pleasures that lead to destruction but it is the gate that we enter through the blood of the lamb, to honour the great I AM through which we are saved! Do we desire the narrow gate? We are unable but with the Lord we can.

St. Aloysius Gonzaga, patron saint of young people came from a wealthy and influential family. His father had big plans for him to be the heir to the throne but he was drawn to spiritual things more than material wealth and power. As a teenager he renounced his inheritance to enter religious life as a Jesuit. He prayed for the Blessed virgins' protection, mercy and intercession. In Rome during the plague he went looking for the sick, bathed them himself and prepared them for death. He contacted the disease and died at the age of 23.

**Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to believe in your word and surrender to your will. Amen.**

**Wednesday 22nd June**

*St. John Fisher, Bishop  
St. Paulinus of Nola, Bishop*

**"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.**

**Now remain in my love!"**

**John 15:9**

2 Kings 22:8-13,  
23:1-3

Psalm 119:33-37, 40

Matthew 7:15-20

In today's Gospel reading the Lord Jesus speaks to us about the "True and False Prophet". As I reflect on these verses, many times I limit these words to checking on who is a "True Prophet" and who is actually a "False Prophet". However, today the Lord is revealing something deeper and challenging to us. As I sit before the Lord with His word, the Lord reveals that the "True Prophet" and the "False Prophet" are both hidden deep within my own heart.

Day by day as the Lord takes each of us closer into His heart, He also gives us a deeper revelation of what is hidden within ourselves. Many times when I fall into reacting with the people that the Lord brings on my way during the day, I think at the external level that the problem is actually only with the person that I meet out there. But today the Lord is challenging us to come deeper into His love, to that place where our own vulnerability is exposed in the presence of His Holiness. The storm which I am being led through this day is tailor made to bring out the hidden truth of my own heart. The truth of my heart is that on my own, I am only a "False Prophet" full of insecurity, loneliness and fear. So it is with this heart that I keep reaping the bad fruit of hurting, criticizing and being indifferent towards my brothers and sisters.

Seeing our true nature and brokenness, the Lord Jesus gives us the promise; "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love!" (John 15:9). As I am exposed to the reality that I cannot even love my self for who I really am, the Lord Jesus reveals the truth that He loves me in the same way that the Father has loved Him. His invitation for us today is to remain in His love. In my frailty and weakness, I am fully hidden and bathed in the love of the Lord Jesus. It is the revelation of this love that changed Peter who denied the Lord, into Peter the rock who was used by the Lord as the leader of the Church. So I have nothing to fear and be ashamed, but instead place my trust and confidence in the Lord who is living within me.

No matter how strong the opposition is, we are invited today to "... continue to live your lives in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness!" (Colossians 2:6-7)

**Prayer: Abba Father, let Your Holy presence overflow from my heart today. Amen.**

**“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”**

2 Kings 24:8–17

Ps 79:1b–2, 3–5,  
8–9, 8–9

Matthew 7:21–29

The Gospel reading gives us a new insight which is more like a wakeup call. The Lord points out a clear distinction between the work of God and the will of God. It seems that the Lord impugned the concept of the will of God the way we perceived it to be. This subsequently makes us ask the question as to what exactly is the will of God.

Looking much deeper into the verse we can identify that the Lord is probably talking or addressing a selective audience, not everyone in general but for those who look more deeply to serve him, of course bearing in mind that everyone is commissioned by him. Those who wish to serve Him also desire to be anointed to the point of being able to prophesy, heal, cast out demons and do mighty works with good intentions. It looks like an entire package in my walk with the Lord Jesus, what more do I need? But is this good enough to take me the distance?

Pondering on this passage I remember the letter to the Corinthians by Saint Paul who preached more or a less along the same lines “If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.” Could this be the answer that we are looking for? “Love”. If we closely look at everything the Lord Jesus preached it can be seen that there is a theme that runs with it which is “love”. Love in the worldly sense is so distorted that we sometimes don’t really understand the depth of it.

What is Christianity without love? We are first called to love the Lord and then love others. If we do not have love and yet follow God and do mighty works it could be because of our own self-glory or for a personal benefit. We are called to love, for God is love and loved us first. We make efforts to achieve many things but have we ever stopped and made an effort to love? Right now in our lives we could be at some point trying to achieve something, we could be surrounded by circumstances that overwhelm us, whatever it may be, let us question ourselves to see whether we are actually doing the will of God. It is a good time to penetrate through this veil and look deeper.

***Prayer: Abba Father! Today I pray that you enable us to build our lives on a firm foundation of love. Send us your spirit and help us to do your will. Amen***

**Friday 24th June**

*Nativity of John the Baptist,*

*"You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb" <sup>Solemnity</sup>*

Isaiah 49:1-6

Ps 139:1b-3, 13-15

Acts 13:22-26

Luke 1:57-66, 80

We celebrate the nativity of St. John the Baptist today. He was sent to herald the coming of the Messiah to the chosen Israel. God molded him to be the person according to his call. Scripture says, "the child grew and became strong in the spirit and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel" (Lk 1:80).

Elizabeth, who was called barren, conceived. Barrenness of a woman was understood as God kept the womb closed. Therefore Elizabeth's womb was opened by God. Zachariah was given a promise, which he couldn't believe. But everyone was amazed when the child was named. This was the plan of God.

Think of ourselves in the place of John and his parents. We have our own dreams for ourselves and our children. Especially when it's a delayed pregnancy, extra ordinary preparation and careful planning would be done. Never would we be open to the plan of God. The best laid plans by us should take place in our lives and in our children's lives too. We need to be awakened to this fact. Personally, I had a dream as a child. In the dream I lived in a farm with a good husband and many children. The highlight of the dream was going to church on Sunday with my husband and children. But according to the plan of God that's not what took place in my life. Could I be angry or disappointed with God? I was disappointed with God for a while, but I have awakened to the fact that I need to be open to God's will to happen in my life.

St. Paul's words are soothing. David was chosen by God, though David sinned. God calls him 'a man after my own heart; he will carry out my every wish' (Acts 13:22). We may be sinners but we need to awaken to the presence of God. God's presence will shift our consciousness from self to God. Our self centredness may be the greatest hindrance to sensing the presence of God. We are chosen to be a John the Baptist to another person. Each of us is to be used instrumental to announce the Messiah's presence. This is not a difficult task. We need to make God's way our life style. The world will experience God's love and encounter Lord Jesus through us. We were born for this purpose.

*Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you that I can always come to you, no matter what. I thank you for your un-conditional, never failing love for me. Amen*

Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.

Matthew 8:13

Lamentations 2:2,  
10-14, 18-19

Ps 74:1b-7, 20-21

Matthew 8:5-17

In the Gospel reading, the centurion himself came to ask the Lord Jesus help for his paralyzed domestic aide. Even though he was a man of high standing and would have had many other aides under him, he humbled himself and came to the Lord – he came as he was. Next, he accepted his sinfulness and unworthiness, and because of this he did not want the Lord Jesus to come under the roof of a sinner – he gave the truth of his heart to the Lord. He believed that the Lord Jesus had authority over life, and because of this he asked the Lord only to say a Word to heal his aide – he surrendered this situation to the Lord’s hands. Because of this sequence of events, the aide was healed – the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

Not only did the Centurion and his aide experience the Lord’s healing and the anointing, but many others also witnessed the Lord’s authority and power. This seed of faith planted by the Centurion caused the faith of the others to grow and multiply, this in turn created the opportunity for the Lord Jesus to heal Peter’s mother-in-law of her fever. The Gospel reading does not state that she asked for a healing or even that the Lord spoke a healing – He simply touched her hand and she was made well. Once again faith grew and multiplied among the people so that the Lord Jesus “..... drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick” (Matthew 8:16). This is a totally opposite situation compared to Matthew 13:58 - And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Where do I stand ? Am I completely, half-way or no-where? Do I believe that the Lord can heal my diseases and solve my problems ? Or do I think the Lord can do it for someone else, but I’m not too sure if He will do it for me ? What if it is not His will ? Or like the father of the boy who had an unclean spirit would I say “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). At this moment, no matter where I stand, or whatever condition I am in, I come to the Lord as I am and give him the ugly, sad, shameful truth of my heart. I surrender myself to Him and allow His Holy Spirit to do in me, what I cannot do with my self-effort. Even if there is no change in me and I have to give the same truth to the Lord many times, still I will wait on Him, because He promises in Luke 1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God.”

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I thank you that I can always come to you, no matter what. I thank you for your un-conditional, never failing love for me. Amen*

**“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”**

**Galatians 5:16**

1 Kgs 19:16b, 19–21

Ps 16:1–2, 5, 7–11

Galatians 5:1, 13–18

Luke 9:51–62

They say he was from an affluent family. Yet, he worked hard in the fields to make his future and the future of his family secure. While everything seems to be going according to plan, something else was taking place unknown to the young man. God had revealed to Elijah, that the young Elisha was to be his successor. This is the background to today’s first reading; the call of Elisha.

It was a Kairos moment in Elisha’s life. The moment Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha, something shifted in the heart of the young man. All his future plans and priorities in life changed in a moment. He slaughtered the 12 oxen that he was ploughing the fields with, set fire to the plowing equipment and cooked the meat over it! Who would make such a rash decision? Only a man (or a woman) who has no plans of returning. After what seems like a farewell meal, he follows the great prophet of Israel to an unknown future.

Sometimes, when we least expect it, God sends an Elijah into our lives who throws a mantle on us, that changes the direction of our lives. Just like for Elisha, the call may come with personal sacrifices, giving up comforts, and starting a new life that we know nothing about. When we received the direction to start a CRL ministry in a foreign country, we had no idea what to do. Worse still, we did not even know where to begin. All we knew was, we had heard the voice of God and we could not continue to live the way we did before. Turning back was not an option, and the option did not even cross our minds!

In today’s Gospel reading we find James and John who did not quite understand their role as disciples. Calling down fire from heaven to burn the Samaritan village that rejected them seemed like a pretty good idea to them! It is clear their solution to the problem was far from the mind of the Lord. Just like the disciples, we too find that our methods and answers to our circumstances are far from the mind of the Lord most of the time. When we are faced with difficult situations and difficult people, we come close to calling fire down from heaven on them or taking the next nearest exit out.

Today, the Lord is reminding us of three key areas in the life of a server;

Sacrifice: “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of

Man has no place to lay his head.

Priority: "Go and proclaim the kingdom of God".

Commitment: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Who can live up to such high standards? Is it even possible for us mere mortals?

We however know that every saint of the church proved it is possible to live by the standards the Lord has set for his disciples. Be it in the world or in the silence of their homes, they lived by these standards. How was it possible for them and sounds impossible for us? Their secret is revealed in today's second reading.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free". For most people, freedom means the opportunity to do as we please. It is only when it is too late that we realize, the type of freedom we enjoyed has enslaved us. There is another type of freedom that the Lord gives to those whom He calls to be disciples. It is the freedom to be poor so that others may become rich.

St Paul in his letter to the Galatians confirms this; "you, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love". I remember one of the servers sharing with us his life as a server. He was in the music ministry singing and playing the guitar as a worship leader on the stage. He was passing by the car-park one day when he saw one server struggling with the car-park duties and he offered to help. He said since that day he joined the car-park ministry. To me, that is real freedom, the freedom to be poor so that others can be rich.

Today St. Paul is giving us a method that is fool-proof, the method of the saints; So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. St Paul acknowledges the battle we face, the battle between the flesh and the spirit. We know how strong our flesh is over our spirit. The good news is, there is a solution; life in the spirit. When we are led by the power of the Holy Spirit what is impossible to us becomes possible.

***Prayer: Abba Father, set my heart on fire for the things of your Kingdom. Purify my thoughts and give me the grace to become internally free so that I may live for you and your kingdom. Amen.***

**“Those who offer praise as a sacrifice honour me,  
to the obedient I will show the salvation of God” Psalm 50:23**

Amos 2:6–10, 13–16

Psalm 50:16b–23

Matthew 8:18–22

Amos was a shepherd called by God to take His message to where social injustice was taking place. During the reign of King Jeroboam II when Israel was prosperous, Amos was called to prophesy against their evil ways. The result was that he was rejected.

This is similar to our lives. When things go well, when we are both wealthy and healthy we move away from God. When prophets are sent to us, we judge them and approve of those who suit our thinking. Seldom do we remember that richness and good health come to us from God.

God is clearly saying that goodness and redemption comes to us through Him and Him alone. God harps on the fact that He delivered us from our slavery. Yet we have forgotten this truth. We are quick to accept miracles but we abandon the miracle giver. We forget that we are the losers not God. We have to digest the repercussions of our own acts. God does not punish us but we call punishment upon ourselves by our own actions.

God does not invite us to live by our own plans. During the time of the Lord Jesus, a scribe was more educated than an ordinary citizen of Israel. He received a confusing answer from the Lord Jesus. The scribe wanted to follow the Lord Jesus, but the Lord offered him nothingness. Why? The Lord Jesus is calling us to be set free from attachments. Knowledge of this world can blind us from the visions of God. We need to be wanderers where knowledge is concerned, kind of homeless, so that we will be filled with Divine wisdom.

Burying your father in the Jewish culture was an important act. Lord Jesus says to leave it to the dead itself. Why? Those of us who are heavy laden with the things of this world are dead to the things of God. The Lord Jesus tells us, if anyone who is attached to the world is stopping us from following Him, to detach from them and to enter into the Will of God. Amos was doing his own job when God called him to go to an unknown territory and utter a prophecy which was not very soothing to the ears of people. Today we could be the Amos God calls for the same purpose. Are we ready

***Prayer: Abba Father, as your child, let me offer praise as a sacrifice and see your salvation. Amen.***

**Chosen for no reason... not even our goodness**Amos 3:1–8,  
4:11–12

Psalm 5:5–8

Matthew 8:23–27

God chose Israel to be the people through whom all other nations of the world would come to know Him. He made this promise to Abraham, father of Israelites. The Israelites did not have to do anything to be chosen. God gave them this special privilege because He wanted to, not because they deserved special treatment.

Pride in their privileged position, however, ruined Israel's sensitivity to the will of God and to the plight of others. Amos 3:6 reveals how God Himself would be sending disaster on them. However, even in anger, God is merciful. In the Psalms we see how God cannot condone or excuse even the smallest sin. Therefore we cannot excuse ourselves for sinning only a little bit. As we grow spiritually, our sensitivity to sin increases. As God makes us aware of our sins, we must be intolerant towards it and be willing to change.

The Gospel reading showcases yet another miracle the Lord Jesus did by calming the storm, we see how the disciples stressed and feared the raging storm. We too encounter storms in our lives, where we feel God cannot and will not work in our life. When we truly understand who God is, we will realize that He controls both the storms of nature and the storms of the troubled hearts. The Lord Jesus' power that calmed this storm can also help us deal with the problems we face. The Lord Jesus is willing to help only if we ask Him. We should never discount His power even in terrible trials.

As we celebrate the feast of St. Irenaeus, a Bishop and Martyr, we see how St. Irenaeus had this faith in God. He continued his writings and living the exemplary life he was called to live, believing in power of God. We, the present generation are so blessed to have examples of our ancestors who never gave up on the power of God amidst trials and storms they faced. Let us ponder all these examples and the power of Jesus, knowing that it is He who walks the ways of life with us, keeping us safe from all storms.

***Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for the early church that teaches us Your power in and through storms. You sent us Your only begotten Son Jesus to calm the storms of our lives. May we never cease to remember that the Lord Jesus not only walks with us, but is in total control of our storms, as we seek to trust and obey Him, in every area of our lives. In Jesus name. Amen.***

**“I sought the Lord, and he answered me”****Psalm 34:4**

Acts 12:1–11

Psalm 34:2–9

2 Tim 4:6–8, 17–18

Matthew 16:13–19

Today we celebrate the feasts of St. Peter and St. Paul, two of the greatest saints in the Catholic church. Both saints guided the early church just after the time of our Lord Jesus. Both died as martyrs for the faith in Rome, in the first century. Both these saints are important for different reasons. St. Peter is important because he was the first Pope who kept the church united. It was growing very rapidly in the years following Pentecost. As time went on St. Paul began to preach also to the Gentiles (non-Jews). All of us are Gentiles. His preaching was successful and he brought huge numbers of non-Jews into the church. It is because of St. Paul that we are now in the Church. Whenever we see statues of St. Peter and St. Paul, usually St. Peter is holding a key, symbolizing his duty as head of the church, and St. Paul is holding the Bible, symbolizing his preaching.

Most people in the world are on an adventure to find themselves. Scientists try harder and harder to understand why we do this and why we do that. We think the more we know and understand about ourselves the happier we will be. However, this is a trap, because we tend to feel worse about ourselves than be happy. That is why God calls us to have a relationship with Him. Instead of looking around the world or inside ourselves to find happiness, He calls us to gaze at Him, for in Him is true happiness and freedom. When we start a relationship with God we will realize that God is all powerful and that nothing is impossible for God. When He speaks a word things that were not there come into being and things that we thought could never happen start happening because God decides it will take place. When we start believing in God we stop setting limits to what God can do.

In today's First Reading St. Peter is helped to escape from prison by an angel of God. If we do not know God and we read about St. Peter's escape from the prison it will seem like a magical dream or a fairy tale. But when we have a relationship with God we will know nothing that happened is a dream or a fairy tale. That is the nature of our God. He can work miracles that seem like magic to non-believers. This shows that nothing is impossible to God. When we have faith in God and allow Him to work in our lives, He can do miracles and save us from things we never thought would be possible. He can do things we have only read in fairy tales and fantasy novels. He can make the

impossible possible. All He asks is that we believe.

In the Second reading St. Paul is awaiting his death. He knows that He has done all that God expected of him and he is sure he will be rewarded in heaven by His God, the rightful judge. When we look at our lives, if tomorrow were our last day on earth, would we be able to be so sure that we will go to heaven and meet our creator? That we too will receive the reward for our lives here on earth? Are we sure that we have completed the mission of the Father to perfection? St. Paul is assuring us, that if we have completed the mission the Father has set out for us then we too will be rewarded with the appearance of the Lord.

The mission St. Paul was given was to have a living relationship with the Father. He had a deep connection with God and received strength from God to go through trials and persevere in preaching the Gospel. The Lord rescued him from everything to ultimately bring him into the Kingdom of God. The Psalm tells us how we should live everyday of our lives—praising and thanking God like St. Peter and St. Paul. They both praised and thanked God in every situation of their lives—whether good or bad. God saw what they were going through and saved them. As the Psalmist says, the angel of the Lord encamped around them and saved them from harm.

Both saints looked to God and their faces were radiant with the love of God. They became the persons they were looking at. This is an example for us to follow. To follow God and see Him do the impossible in our lives we must gaze on Him.

In today's Gospel reading the Lord asks His disciples who people say He is. Today, the Church teaches us that we too must begin our journey with the Lord Jesus from where He says He is. We can learn this from both saints. They began from where Christ left off. St. Peter realized who God really was. Not a power, vengeful God but a God who loved him even in his sinfulness and weakness. On the way to Damascus, when the Lord Jesus appeared to him, St. Paul realized the Lord Jesus was still alive and lived in each of His believers. These were the foundations of their journeys with God. Just as God called St. Peter and St. Paul, today the Lord is calling us into a relationship with Him. He does not want a moment here and moment there, but a real relationship, where we gaze upon Him and become more like Him. He calls us to a relationship where we will be able to see Him do the impossible in our lives. His word assures us that when we seek the Lord, He will answer us (Ps.34:4).

***Prayer: Abba Father, I come to you as I am. My heart yearns for a relationship with You. Give me the grace to seek You every day of my life. Amen.***

**Saved by the Lord Jesus Christ**

Amos 7:10-17

Psalm 19:8-11

Matthew 9:1-8

In today's first reading, the prophet Amos faces a conflict with the prophet of Bethel, Amaziah. Amaziah attacked Amos, abused him, threatened him, and told lies about him to the King Jereboam. Amaziah was working in the background to stop Amos from prophesying. Amaziah sought to make the task of Amos as difficult as possible.

In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul asks them to put on the whole armour of God, because the battle may be severe and they will not stand without the armour of Christ. St. Paul compares the Christian life to that of a soldier who must fight in a battle. The Bible never speaks of the Christian life as a bed of roses but as a struggle and a fight. This is what we see in the life of the prophet Amos.

In today's Gospel reading a paralysed man is brought to the Lord Jesus. Matthew 9:2 tells us that the Lord saw the faith of the paralysed man's friends. His friends could not heal this man or forgive this man of his sin. But they knew the Lord Jesus could. All they could do was bring their friend to the Lord Jesus. This is a lesson to us as well. When people come for Christian counseling we cannot change their circumstances or give them instant solutions to their problems, But what we can give them is the Lord Jesus Christ. Only He can save someone. Only He can heal someone. If you know someone searching for a solution, the Lord gives you a mission. Bring them to Him. Trying to help our friends, we tend to talk about events and people hoping to find a solution to a crisis. But most of the time it gets us nowhere. Instead the Lord calls us to lead people to Him. When they know Him, they will find the real solution to their lives.

In Matthew 9:2 the Lord says to the paralysed man "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." This man may have not made the right decisions in his life, and as a consequence to this, he became paralysed. The Lord frees him from the effects of his past and turns everything into a blessing. The Lord sees the real paralysis and fixes the past and frees the man from his sins. We also can be living a distorted life as a result of the mistakes and failures we have gone through. When we come to the Lord Jesus, our Saviour, He is able to wash us in His blood and turn our curses into a blessing.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I too have made many mistakes in my life. I come to You to be healed and made whole once again. Amen.*

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