



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

June 2017

**The Pentecost of the upper
room in Jerusalem is the
beginning.
It is a beginning
that endures
forever.**

- Pope Francis

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On Our Knees In His Hands

June 2017

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“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

Acts 23:11

Acts 22:30; 23:6-11

Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11

John 17:20-26

Are you aware that we are in the 6th month of the year? Time seems to run so fast that some of us are unable to keep up with it.

As St. Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin to be questioned about his actions, we realise that among the people who were accusing him, stood groups of Pharisees and Sadducees. I assume that St. Paul filled with the Spirit of God and so much of fire within him to take the good news to the ends of the earth, that he might have thought to himself that it is pointless arguing with these people. Having so much to accomplish for God with limited time he came up with a creative idea. Well versed in Jewish scripture he would have remembered what God had promised King Jehoshapt in 2 Chronicles 20:15, “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this cast army, for the battle is not your, but God’s.”

St. Paul was so convinced that nothing was going to happen to him in Jerusalem because he knew God had called him to do greater works. So to get things going fast he put the crowds into confusion and arguments among themselves. This could be seen in Acts 23:6. The two groups started to argue with each other forgetting the reason this gathering was called for. St. Paul knew God was in control of the situation. Just as He confused the 3 armies who waged war with King Jehoshapt, He confused the people gathered in the Sanhedrin. Acts 23:11 goes on to say, the following day the Lord stood near St. Paul and said “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” Since St. Paul was faithful in Jerusalem, the Lord was now able to give him a greater task -- to convert the whole Roman Empire which was the largest empire the world had ever seen.

As we reflect on this, let us take a moment and ask ourselves if we are spiritually mature enough for God to share the secrets of His heart with us and to execute His plan through us? Are we going to live an ordinary life when God has called us to live an extra ordinary life? Remember St. Paul and us are the same in the eyes of the Lord. Time waits for no man and each moment we delay we are not only wasting our time but God’s because He was waiting for our response from the moment we were born.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to know the plan You have for us. Amen

Friday 2nd June

*Feasts of Sts. Marcellinus & Peter,
Martyrs*

“For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”

Psalm 103:14

Acts 25:13-21

Psalm 103:1-2,11-
12,19-20

John 21:15-19

St. Peter promised the Lord that he would be with Him until the end, but he ended up denying the Lord three times. The moment St. Peter saw the charcoal fire the Lord had lit for them on the shore, in the Gospel reading of today, he may have been transported to the charcoal fire that was burning in the courtyard of the High Priest's house where he stood warming himself, the night he denied the Lord Jesus. The memories of his failure would have come flooding back. St. Peter may have been weighed down with guilt and self condemnation. He may have thought that he was no longer suitable or qualified to do any sort of thing for the Lord.

However, the most amazing thing is that whilst St. Peter is wallowing in all these things within himself, unable to deal with them, the Lord Himself initiates a dialogue with him. The Lord gives St. Peter an opportunity not only to redeem himself for what he had done, but gives him a chance to see for himself that he does indeed love the Lord even though he made a mistake. In entrusting the care of His sheep to St. Peter, the Lord tells him, “The mistakes you have made in the past do not disqualify you or make you unworthy to serve me. Those failures do not define who you are or limit your capabilities. I, your Lord and master, am the one who defines you. Your mistakes will not make me change my mind about you being the rock on which I will build my church. Forgive yourself because I have already forgiven you.”

The Lord speaks these very same words to us today. We have beaten ourselves up for the mistakes we have made. I used to think, “I can not believe I did that after all the Lord has done for me. I have no right to serve him. I have let Him down.” But let the guilt and self condemnation end today. Holding these things against ourselves are punishment that we are giving ourselves. The Devil knows that as long as he can keep us in that pit of guilt and shame, he can stop us from ever realising how much the Lord loves us, trusts us and needs us to do His work. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, we need to run into the waiting arms of the Lord and repent. We must believe that our sin is not greater than His desire to forgive. We must accept His forgiveness and allow the Him to use us to be a blessing, as He did with St. Peter.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I want to lay down at Your feet my mistakes and failures that weigh me down and take up Your mission for my life once again. Amen.*

Saturday 3rd June *Feast of St. Charles Lwanga & Companions*

“For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; upright men will see his face.”

Psalm 11:7

Acts 28:16-20,30-31

Psalm 11:4-5,7

John 21:20-25

We are in the last week in Easter and today is the preface to the feast of Pentecost Sunday where we celebrate the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.

Today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles elaborates St. Paul's mission in Rome. He was not imprisoned with the others who were captured but was allowed to stay in a house for which he paid the rent. His first action was to call the authorities of the Jewish community and explain to them his position, so that he is not misunderstood as a traitor, as most Jews did not believe in the Lord. St. Paul's zeal to preach the Gospel was rewarded that he proclaimed the Kingdom of God openly without hindrance.

In contrast in the Gospel we see St. Peter questioning the Lord Jesus about the apostle that the Lord loved and Him reprimanding him - the typical inquisitive St. Peter despite being identified as the leader wanting to know about St. John. However, we know of St. Peter's transformation when he received the Holy Spirit. Just as Sts. Paul and John were inspired to take on their mission for the Lord - you and I are called in the same way to a journey through life and propagate the Kingdom of God. Just as the apostles and disciples of Christ could not achieve this in their own human strength and knowledge, we too cannot. God has promised a helper and an advocate so that they could complete the mission they were entrusted with. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that inspired St. Paul to boldly proclaim the Gospel to the pagans. It was with that same zeal that St. John lived in a prison camp in Patmos where he had the most transcendental experiences of heaven as reflected in the Book of Revelations.

May this day prepare us to welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives and experience transformation, so that righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit will be ours. The Psalmist confirms the promise that the just will gaze at His face.

Today we remember 19th century saints like Charles Lwanga and his companions from Uganda. They were martyred for having the courage to oppose King Mwanga for his immoral behavior as a pedophile who molested the young boys who served him.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we pray for Your Holy Spirit that we may rise boldly to the mission You have called us for in every role of our journey through life. Amen.*

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

John 20:21

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104: 1,24,29-31

1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13

John 20:19-23

Today the Catholic Church celebrates Pentecost Sunday. Pentecost is the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and their followers and the beginning of their ministry to make disciples of all nations.

In today's Gospel proclamation from St. John, the Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples for the first time after His resurrection. The apostles willingly locked themselves in the upper room in fear. They had witnessed the death of their master and were in fear that they would also be killed. The relationship the apostles had with the Lord was a human relationship. The one they adored, followed, worshiped and loved had been taken away from them and they would have been comforting each other in this time of sorrow. It is into this room of fear that the Risen Christ enters, bringing with Him love, peace and joy. The bible says the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. But the Lord coming into the room had not made a significant change on the way they lived their lives. They would have thought that they could go back to going around from town to town with the Lord Jesus once again. The disciple's internal lives were still the same-- they thought the same way the world thought and their desires and aspirations were the same. The only difference was that they were happy that the Lord had risen.

Many of us are like the disciples in the upper room. We believe in the Lord Jesus and God and we are happy He is there for us. But our desires and aspirations are formed by the world, our solutions to problems are formed by our brokenness and we adopt strategies that are sinful and selfish. We pray to the Lord asking God for help, but not realising that the biggest problem is not out in the world but inside us. The baptism of John was for sins and the brokenness of human beings. But he could not transform people. He could only show them their problem and they could only repent. But the people's internal beings remained the same. But the Lord Jesus gives us the answer to this problem. He has something extra to give people: He is bringing the Holy Spirit to live inside of us.

There are two reasons the Lord Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit. The first reason the Lord wants us to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is given in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. The disciples are in yet another upper room. The Risen Lord, who they were overjoyed

to see, has now ascended into heaven. However, they are not waiting in fear, but in exoectant hope. They are waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once they received the Holy Spirit, their lives took a 180 degree turn.

In the same way, when we receive the Holy Spirit, our lives will change. Most people think that the power the Lord Jesus gives us through the Holy Spirit is to do ministry and evangelization. But this power is first given to us to grow into the holiness of God. When we grow into the holiness of God we will enjoy being a son or daughter of God. We will hear His voice and know His love deep inside. We will have union with Him as He lives inside us and our fears are taken away and peace is restored. We will have internal joy and freedom and our desires are changed and God's purpose becomes our purpose. This is the experience of those living in the early church. The disciple's inner lives were transformed. They no longer thought like the world and this is how they changed the world.

Therefore, today the Lord is not looking for people to go out and do big things. The Lord is looking for people who will be baptised in the Holy Spirit and grow into the life of God.

Today, some of us may have dry prayer lives or have stopped praying. Others may have struggles and have given into weaknesses. Desires have overcome the purpose God has for us and we have given into our flesh. We have fallen from inside. The Lord is calling us at this feast of Pentecost and telling us to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and find the holiness of God in our lives. When we come to Him in expectation and thirst He will do this for us. If we do not come to Him we will always be people living without the perfect solution to all that life throws at us. Today, let us tell the Lord that we want to go beyond and the Holy Spirit will give it to us. The world needs people who are grown in their awareness of God.

In the second reading, St. Paul tells the people of Corinth when the Holy Spirit is given to a person, it is impossible for them to not say Christ is Lord and this testimony brings others into the faith. St. Paul is saying that the second reason we are baptized in the Holy Spirit and given the gifts of the Holy Spirit is for the betterment of the Chruch. We must use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to increase the number of believers.

Today God is inviting us to be baptised in the Holy Spirit to first change our inner beings and then to bring others to this same freedom.

Prayer: Abba Father, baptise us in Your Holy Spirit that we may be changed from the inside and receive the mission to make disciples of the nations. Amen.

This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see.”

Mark 12:11

Tobit 1:3; 2:1-8

Psalms 112:1-6

Mark 12:1-12

The book of Tobit belongs to the Deutero-canonical books and is found only in the Catholic Bible. Set in the time of the Babylonian captivity, this fascinating story relates how Tobias stood firm in his commitment to God and refused to compromise, though many of his compatriots succumbed to the influence of the Babylonians. He even went against the norms of society to bury a man strangled and thrown into the public square. He did this despite the severe punishment inflicted on him for doing the same thing (V.19-20). He followed God's law of righteousness even at the cost of his own life. The common belief was that if one had a good life according to God's leading one would be blessed. But the good he does brings nothing but misfortune. He was rejected by society and even cursed by his own wife. Poor, blind, rejected and insulted, his prayer is a model to be emulated. He praises God, repents for his own and his people's sin and comes to Him with the truth of his heart. He surrenders himself to God's will and he finally vindicates his faithfulness by restoring his sight and filling his last days with boundless joy.

In the parable the Jews are presented with a familiar picture (Isaiah 5:1-6). The owner of the vineyard is God. The vineyard represents the people of Israel. The cultivators represent the leaders and rulers. The servants refer to the prophets and the son is the Lord Jesus Himself. The parable speaks of the generosity of God who has provided all that is needed for the cultivators. It shows His trust in them and gives them the freedom to cultivate the vineyard. It speaks of His patience which they little deserve. It tells of the ultimate justice of God. Not only does He punish the cruel cultivators, He turns the vineyard over to others. You and I are the fortunate "others". Since the Jews did not live up to His expectations, the vineyard was handed over to the Gentiles. The parable tells us that the Lord knew His fate. Rejected, humiliated and tortured, He clung to His Father, to do His will, trusting Him until the end. Like Tobias, the Lord cried out, yielded and surrendered to God. Then He received the grace to journey to the cross. Tobias received a personal restoration but the Lord Jesus received a sign for beyond anything we can visualize - the gift of the resurrection which impacts the whole of humanity for all time. Truly the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. *Prayer: Abba Father, help me to value the gift of the Lord Jesus that You have given me. Amen.*

Happy is the man who honors the Lord, who takes pleasure in obeying his commands **Psalm 112:1**

Tobit 2:9-14
Psalm 112:1-2, 7-9
Mark 12:13-17

In today's Gospel reading we see how the Pharisees try to trap our Lord Jesus by complimenting him and asking him a question, as if they were genuinely listening to His words of wisdom and following His advice. They had only one objective deep within and that was to somehow trap our Lord by His own words since He was a huge threat to them.

The Pharisees knew that the Lord Jesus was a righteous man, but their pride prevented them from accepting His words. As I read today's Gospel, I thought of the many people who have come and gone out of my life. Many of them acted as if they were trying to help me, but had ulterior motives in what they did.

As I thought about it once again I realised that I too have done the same thing to others. Things I would never want someone to do to me. I have faked my friendships and even cheated during relationships. How many times have I faked a conversation or a smile, and once the person leaves, talked behind their back. We even go to the extent of posing for pictures with them and posting them on social media.

I asked myself "Am I genuinely following the word of God or am I faking it all like the Pharisees?" It is time I stop it and strive to live a righteous life. It does not matter what others say. Happy is the man who honors the Lord, who takes pleasure in obeying his commands (Psalm 112:1).

The reading goes on to say "Then Jesus said to them, give to Caesar what belongs to him and God what is God's". This command of the Lord is crystal clear on how we should live our lives. He is basically saying that we need to obey all the rules and regulations of the particular nation or office that we are placed in. At the same time give to God what belongs to Him, which is not only the 10% of our income but most importantly 10% of our time on a daily basis. Giving 10% of our time is one of the toughest things to do in this busy world but it is the most important thing in our lives. If we have not given time for prayer the Lord is inviting us to start with 20 minutes and He will surely give us the grace to gradually increase it.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray that You will give us the grace to live a righteous life and give You the due time on a daily basis without fail. Amen.

**“Guide me in your truth and teach me. For you I wait all the long day,
because of your goodness, Lord”**

Psalm 25:5

Tobit 3:1-11, 16-17

Psalm 25:2-9

Mark 12:18-27

Isolation should be alien to us; God’s children. Our distress, burdens of life and lack of knowledge of a living God isolate us from Him. The cry of an old man and a young virgin was heard by our loving God at the same time. It was a helpless cry. It was a cry of desperation to end their life. God shows to us that He has other plans for us. Nothing in this world happens without the knowledge of God our Father. This is a comforting message for us. Our cry to our God from any corner of the world will be heard by Him. Our cry could be of one request but our Father works it for our betterment according to His riches and glory.

Raphael, God’s healer or God heals was sent to sort out these two desperate cases. Tobit’s eyesight was restored; Sarah’s demon was exorcised and she was given in marriage to the one God had destined. Our plans are not God’s plans. His plans are higher than ours. The love of our God spoken in the scripture makes us reflect our own inadequate inner being. In our own despair we offer God our plans but God in His mercy works out His best plan in our lives.

The Lord Jesus shows us where we go wrong. The answer He gave the Sadducees is an answer to all of us. Our poor and improper interpretation of life is because we do not know the scripture and the power of God sufficiently. We have brought in materialism and our imperfect attitudes to the spirit realm. We speak the language of the spirit but our inner being has not yet been transformed. Our imprudent identifications and judgment as the blessed ones amongst us are the gifted ones or rather front line servers or those who are blessed materially and those who are enjoying good health are signs that we are present day Sadducees. The Lord Jesus is telling us that we are being misled because we do not know the scriptures or the power of God.

God loves people more than anything. God’s plan for His people is eternal life. We Catholics are of three fold, which is the triumphant church, the suffering church and the militant church. We are not called to live in isolation and suffer alone. Christ intercedes for everyone and brings them triumph. When we are with God we are victorious.

Prayer: Abba Father, in You I trust; do not let me be disgraced. Make known to us Your ways and guide us to live Your ways. Amen.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength
Mark 12:29

Tobit 6:10-11; 7:1,
9-17; 8:4-9

Psalm 128:1-5

Mark 12:28-34

The Lord Jesus tells the scribes that the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is to love our neighbor as ourselves. On reading this Gospel, we must ask ourselves 'Is this how I love? Do I base my life on these commandments?'

This first commandment deals with how we relate to God. Are we really giving all that we have to Him? What does it mean to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? Well, since we are human beings, we have four main components that specifically make us human- physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. The Lord Jesus, being fully human and fully God understood these four dimensions well. By having four areas that make us, this commandment is telling us to love God with everything that we have. We should hold nothing back but give ourselves completely to God. We must love Him with our bodies, with our intelligence, with our hearts, with our feelings and with our soul.

It was God who created us. He knows how we are and how we work. He does not want us to hold anything back from Him. God wants us to be alive and thrive in all aspects of our lives. The only way to give our all to Him is to surrender our day to Him, wait patiently and He will do all that for us. Not necessarily that He gives us that we ask. But He will give us something better for our lives.

We need to remember that we are not simply called to love God. But we are also called to love our neighbor as ourselves. That means that no matter what those who are close to us do or say; we are still called to love them as ourselves. It is these two commandments which our Lord says are the greatest. While they are certainly not easy to follow, they can lead to a freedom on this earth and an eternity in heaven with our Father.

Today we are invited to add the Lord Jesus into every circumstance, decision or problem we face. When we do this, we are putting Him first above anything else in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank You and give You praise for this day. Help us Lord to increase our faith and follow You. To surrender all that we have and all that we are to You. We praise You for Your love and mercy. We pray that we would cling to You instead of the things of this world. Lord, we know that You will lead us to everlasting life in heaven. Help us not to stray away from You. Amen.

Scripture brought me to the Gate of Paradise**St. Ephrem of Syria**

Tobit 11:5-17

Psalm 146:1-2, 6-10

Mark 12:35-37

In today's first reading, the angel Raphael reveals to Tobiah, that the eyes of his father will be opened. Tobiah being a devout Jew, faithfully follows the instructions of Raphael and the eyesight of Tobit is restored. As a result of God's voice which came through Raphael, Tobit was transformed from darkness and misery into light and joy. This miracle took place in Tobit's family who were deported to Assyria in 722 BC. In the midst of a non-Jewish civilization they held on to their identity as God's chosen people and continued to be faithful to the Laws of Moses. Their perseverance, good works and prayer resulted in God's abundant blessings.

In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus had knowledge of His true identity, that He was the beloved Son of God. The light that shone throughout His life was the familiarity with the Holy Scriptures and the deep personal relationship He had with His Father in heaven. This enabled Him to defeat Satan when He was tested in the desert and obey the perfect will of the Father throughout His life in the midst of opposition, rejection and betrayal by His own. His submission to God resulted in Him being glorified and humanity being freed from the bondage of sin. The Lord Jesus followed the will of God in an environment that was hostile to Him. In the first reading Tobit's family was faithful to the God of Israel in the midst of a non-Jewish civilization. Submission to the will of God and perseverance resulted in victory in both instances.

Today as we reflect on this, the Lord Jesus is inviting us to trust Him. To persevere, hold onto His perfect promises and wait upon Him in our darkness and crisis. For this we need to dwell upon the Word of God on a daily basis and have a close relationship with God through personal prayer. In addition we must also receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. It is only then that we can persevere to hold on to God; even when He seems to be silent and absent. We are indeed children of God. Our call is to seek Him when darkness envelopes our lives and God seems to be absent and silent. Then surely the Lord's angel will visit our lives just as Raphael visited the family of Tobit and our darkness will become light and our misery will turn to joy.

Prayer: Abba Father, we trust You and bless Your holy name for You are faithful forever. Amen.

How severe a sentence they will receive

Mark 12:40

Tobit 12:1,5-15, 20

Tobit 13:2, 6-8

Mark 12:38-44

In today's Gospel proclamation, our Lord Jesus reveals to us the beauty of a grateful heart. The story of the widow's mite is a story that has captured my heart. It challenges me to show true Christian love in true giving. How many times have we been challenged to tithe when the bills were stacking up or help someone in dire need when there was not much left to share? The story also teaches us a profound lesson -- the poor widow was full of obedience to God. How? She surely knew that no matter what went on in her life and how difficult it was to share, her cheerful and grateful heart of giving all that was left of her was pleasing to the Lord. She knew that her humble action would assure her a place in heaven.

We notice that the reward for the poor widow is assured, as we hear what the Lord says about the widow, as opposed what he says about those in high places. As the Lord and His disciples sat on the temple ground watching the actions near the temple treasury, He speaks of the rewards of giving through poverty as opposed to giving from plenty. This is shown in the beginning of the Gospel proclamation today as the Lord tells His disciples to be aware of the hypocrisy of the teachers of the Law and the like who are full of self glory. The Lord clearly speaks of a severe sentence that awaits such people. The Lord Jesus surely denounced the pretence of piety.

In the first reading today from the book of Tobit we see a correlation to what the Lord is teaching us. It is said that it is better to do a little with honour than much with injustice. As the Lord showed in the Gospel proclamation, the rich gave a lot out of plenty and most probably what was earned unjustly as He says that they at times would devour the widow's and orphan's goods to fill their coffers.

Today, let us look back at our very own lives and the way we give not just our wealth but our time and our energy. Is it to please God or to please man and show the world? Also, as the book of Tobit shows, do we thank our God enough for all that He is doing in our lives? The giving of thanks is easier than parting with our possessions. We miserably fail in giving God His due praise and also in thanking Him in witnessing to His mighty goodness.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I thank You for revealing Your love to us through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son”**John 3:16**

Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9

Dn 3:52-56

2 Cor 13:11-13

John 3:16-18

Today is Trinity Sunday. The dogma of faith, which forms the object of the feast is this: There is one God and in this one God there are three Divine Persons: the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet there are not three Gods, but one, eternal and incomprehensible God. The Father is not more God than the Son, neither is the Son more God than the Holy Spirit.

This almighty, omnipotent spiritual being has no beginning or end and is way beyond our imagination and understanding. The only way we could even get close to know God is through His own revelation of His nature, as stated in today's first reading. He is 'The Lord' – the ultimate authority who rules over every creature. He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. He is forgiving of wickedness, rebellion and sin; yet at the same time He is not declaring the guilty guiltless.

Despite this revelation by GOD Himself, humans struggle to understand God because they understood God's characteristics only to the extent they themselves had possessed and exhibited these characteristics. If I cannot forgive, how can I understand the forgiveness of sin? If I have no compassion for others, how can I understand the compassionate nature of God? If I cannot show Agape love, how can I trust God to love and care for me all through my life? This has been the struggle of the human race throughout history, resulting in the original sin and all other sins since then. God's own chosen people rejecting His messengers, namely prophets, who delivered God's messages to the world. Finally God The Father, had to make a decision. He, whose one desire was to love and be loved by His creation, chose to become one of them. "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling amongst us." (John 1:14).

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His Being, sustaining all things by His powerful word." (Heb 1:3). This Son revealed to us who the Father is. He revealed the love of The Father by forgiving sin, feeding the hungry, delivering those under evil oppression and by raising the dead. People saw it and acclaimed Him, flocked around Him and tried to make Him king. Yet some others were furious, felt threatened by this unusual Man who challenged their comfortable religiosity. They plotted against God the

Son and killed Him. The creation murdered its Creator. Why would The Omnipotent Creator submit to His own creatures? It is beyond human nature. The Lord Jesus revealed to the world that humans in fact have the divine nature, as they are created in the image and likeness of God Himself, but this nature is often hidden beneath our sin. The One who was without sin, revealed this divine nature to the fullest and in love for the creation and in obedience to the will of the Father, the Son submitted to a cruel death on the cross. Thus God the Son, revealed to us that we could in fact live a life pleasing to the Father. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Even after being with the Lord Jesus for three and a half years, His disciples struggled to clearly understand His purpose of life. The one chosen to be the leader denied Him when his own life seemed threatened. Another betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver, the price paid for a slave. Others deserted Him and ran away as their dreams were shattered when the Lord insisted that He was not going to summon legions of angels for His assistance, when He was being arrested. (cf. Matthew 26:53). That is why after He was glorified through the Resurrection, He instructed His apostles to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the gift the Father had promised to send (cf. Acts 1:4), the advocate to help and remain with them forever (cf. John 14:16). This gift was the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Blessed Trinity. When the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles their fears vanished and the fearful, illiterate men took the Good News to the ends of the earth.

How does the Holy Trinity impact our lives today? As children of human parents how often do we hear others commenting about our likeness of our mother or father? It is not uncommon to hear exclamations such as "you must be the son/daughter of so-and so!" In the same way, we are created in the image and likeness of this God of love, mercy, loving kindness, truth and peace. How much of our God do others see in and through our lives? When we were baptised, this God came to live inside of us. Yet, due to our sinful nature, even our best efforts do not reveal God's image to others. It is through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that we too can share the experience the apostles had after Pentecost. This is when the advocate, comforter and counsellor comes to live inside of us. Gradually we begin to manifest His fruits (cf. Galatians 5:22). The sacraments of the Church greatly assist us to continue to live by the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:26). Thus we will become a living witness to the very nature of God Himself. This is the highest praise we could give God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: We praise You Father, we praise You Son, we praise You Spirit, all three in one. This unity, Your Trinity, we bow before this mystery. Amen.

The Favoured Place

2 Cor 1:1-7

Psalm 34:2-9

Matthew 5:1-12

We want to live a life free of trials and tribulations. We want to live a peaceful life filled with happiness and love. But this is an illusion. Instead we often face problems in life. Either a financial struggle, an illness or a relationship problem. Today the Lord is telling us that He has a greater purpose for our pain and sufferings.

In today's first reading St. Paul writes in verse 4, "who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." When we find God in a crisis, He will comfort us through the storm. Not only will He comfort us, but He will use us to comfort others going through similar struggles. Through each problem we are being built up by God for a bigger purpose. In my own life, I had to deal with a broken engagement. It was one of the most painful experiences of my life. However, I see now how I am able to empathize and feel for others going through a relationship breakup or problem. The Lord has given me His heart to feel for others in the same situation. He used me to comfort others with the comfort He showed me.

Today's Gospel proclamation is about the beatitudes. The Lord is telling us that when we come to Him with whatever problem we are facing, He will turn our curse into a blessing. Those who are poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn will be comforted. Those who are meek will inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. Those who are merciful to others will be shown mercy. The Lord says that when we become poor in the eyes of the world, we will become rich in the eyes of God.

A British evangelist named Smith Wigglesworth wrote about 'the favoured place'. He wrote "You are in a favoured place, a priceless position, if you have no way out and nowhere to go but to God." He says that when we are faced with a problem that has no solution in sight and we have nothing to hold on to but God in our desperation then we are in a favoured place. When we come to God in this state, we will be able to surrender everything to God and allow Him to perform a miracle in our lives. When we sacrifice our worldly answers and seek God, it opens us to see a miracle from Him.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I pray for the grace to be able to find this favoured place where each curse in my life will ultimately be turned into a blessing. Amen.*

Have you lost your saltiness?

2 Cor 1:18-22

Psalm 119:129-
133,135

Matthew 5:13-16

Imagine eating rice or a curry without a tinge of salt. It will taste insipid. The Gospel proclamation declares to us that we are the salt of the earth.

When the Word declares to us, 'You are the salt of the earth' there is no doubt of our status. What follows is, 'But if salt has lost its saltiness'. This means that there is a possibility of salt losing its

saltiness. Salt losing its saltiness is not salt losing an additional ingredient, but the very nature of its being. If correctly understood, when we lose our saltiness we are losing our very purpose of life. We were made to worship the King and when we lose out on that we lose our innate nature and calling. The result is that we are fit to be trampled.

If we retain our saltiness we become a light to the world. How do we stir up this saltiness in ourselves? It is through a deep relationship and inner journey with the Lord. When we build a relationship with the Lord through reading and dwelling on His word we build up faith within us.

In the first reading we are told that God's promises in His Word are always yes and amen - so be it. There is always hope when we have a living relationship with the Lord and claim His promises. Mark this promise from today's reading - 'God himself has anointed us and strengthens us with you, to serve Christ; He has marked us with his own seal, in a first outpouring of the Spirit, in our hearts' (2 Cor.1:22).

The Word tells us that no one lights a lamp and covers it. The lamp within us is lit by the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Once they light the lamp in your heart no one can cover it. When a lamp is lit and kept covered, it begins to burn through and the flames reach out to expose the lamp. If God has called us then, the fire that is within us will burn through and no human effort will be able to contain it. So it was in the life of St. Anthony of Padua. In 1222, at a meeting of the Dominicans and Franciscans there was no one to preach and St. Anthony was forced to share a message and that is when the gift he had as a preacher of God's word was revealed in all its glory. Let us strive to preserve our saltiness through a life of prayer and journeying with the Lord. The Lord will light the fire within us and take it to the world.

Prayer: *Abba Father, light the fire of love and prayer within my heart that I may retain my saltiness. Amen.*

“Such confidence we have through Christ before God”

2 Cor 3:4

2 Cor 3:4-11

Psalms 99:5-9

Matthew 5:17-19

“Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt.5:19). We humans do not have the competence to obey the commands of God and live accordingly or to teach others His commands.

Our sinfulness constantly pushes us to violate God’s law. How many of us suffer physically, mentally and spiritually by violating the laws of the Kingdom of God, laws of nature and the laws of the country? Many of us do not know that all these laws are finally for our own well being. We also do not have the strength to obey them. In today’s Gospel reading, the Lord Jesus reveals to us, that the will of God for us is to obey the commands.

Psalms 19:7-8 says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.” We need power and faith to embrace the Lord’s law and live by them. But when we do this, it refreshes our soul, makes us wise, gives joy to the heart and gives light to the eyes. This is because we do not have the power to go against our sinful nature and live in submission to the laws of God. In the second reading St. Paul says, “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God”(2 Cor. 3:5). This competence is given through the Holy Spirit to anyone who surrenders to God.

I did not have the discipline of crossing the road at the yellow crossings. One day, while going by bus to my daughter’s school, I was praising God. As the bus was getting closer to the traffic light, I heard a voice in my depths say, “What you are doing is wrong and I am not pleased.” The voice further told me to get down from the bus and cross the road at the pedestrian crossing. I felt that the Lord was speaking to me. From that day the Lord gave me the power to obey that law. This is a small experience but it gives me immense joy. Today let us ask the Holy Spirit to give us more power to obey the laws of the Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, You are holy. We fall at Your feet in our weakness and shame. Give us the power to obey Your laws and statutes. Amen.

“God said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” and made his light shine in our hearts **2 Cor 4:6**

2 Cor 3:15, 4:1, 3-6

Psalms 85:9-14

Matthew 5:20-26

In today's first reading it says, "but we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord." Here, St. Paul uses two phrases: "with unveiled face, beholding" and then "the glory of the Lord." What is he referring to by 'unveiled face'? It is our blindness to the Lord's presence, our hardened hearts towards Him. This stems from our focus on the law and external observance. The good news is through Christ, the veil, which covers the glory of the Lord, is removed. As John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." In the person of Christ, we continually behold the glory of God.

This readings background can be found in Exodus 33, where Moses meets with the Lord on Mount Sinai after the people of Israel commit idolatry. After seeing the glory of God, Exodus 34:29-30 says: "It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai that he did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. So when they saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him." The bible says in Exodus 34:33, "When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face." Just as Moses reflected the glory of God after meeting with Him, we too reflect His glory by meeting with Him in worship. 2 Cor 3:16 says "whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." When we focus our hearts on Christ and turn to the Lord, our blindness is taken away and we become more aware of the presence of the Lord. We reflect the glory of God when we host the Lord's presence. This is our ultimate purpose on earth.

Today's Gospel proclamation is about repentance for our sin and God's abundant mercy. The Lord contrasts the demands of the Law with those of the Gospel. In His time, virtue for the scribes and Pharisees was largely measured by the external observance of the law. This was not enough for the Lord. For Him real virtue was in the heart. 1 Sam 16:7 says; "The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." Therefore, let us truly repent for our unworthiness and receive God's mercy and grace in abundant!

Prayer: Abba Father, I come before You in true repentance. Search my heart, test my thoughts and cleanse me to receive Your mercy and grace. Amen.

“Too costly in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful”**Ps 116: 15**

2 Cor 4:7-15

Psalm 116:10-11,
15-18

Matthew 5:27-32

While human beings are sensory beings, we are also spiritual. We live in this complexity. We fluctuate from one end to the other. The person I was yesterday is not the same person I am today. I will be someone else tomorrow. Situations, circumstances and the environment have a big role to play in us.

When we encounter the Risen Lord we realise that God is omnipotent and He is present deep down within me. When we are deeply connected and rooted in the Lord we come to this realisation. We experience the omnipresence of God deep within us.

St. Paul described this paradox. We as sensory beings are fully affected by our situations, circumstances and our environment. Yet we are not destroyed. We are challenged one way or the other every day. Either we are struck with illness, spoken behind or in deep crisis; these negative challenges draw us down. The senses provoke us to behave in an animalistic way, whilst the Spirit of God deep within us prompts us to behave otherwise. We need to be conscious of this irony. This will go on until the day we are separated from our bodies, which is the earthen vessel. This earthen vessel is full of senses.

The Lord Jesus further deepened the above teaching. He made one thing absolute, which is that ‘Gehenna’ is real. Gehenna means the hell. In this Gospel passage the Lord emphasized on the fact that we should not give into our senses and live this life on the sly because there is a real place called hell that we could end up in. We should not be wicked, mean and deceiving deep within. We could have self centered attitudes and spiritualise every act and word of ours. By living such a dualistic life, without knowing we will be deceiving ourselves. .

We certainly have a way out. St. Paul said that we are carrying the death of the Lord Jesus within us and that we will also be raised up. That is our way out of this complex life. We should become aware of our weaknesses and accept it deep within. Confessing our sins and dealing with the truth of our hearts, even if it is difficult for us to break away from our corrupted ways, God’s power will see us through. All we need to do is focus on Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, may we run to You and find shelter in You. Hide us in the wounds of Christ. Cause us to live a truthful life to bring glory to Your name. Amen.

If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here

2 Cor 5:17

2 Cor 5:14-21

Psalm 103:1-4, 9-12

Matthew 5:33-37

Our natural state is one of selfishness and self-centeredness. We live for ourselves. When I scratch the surface, I find that even with the kindest of deeds have self-interest behind them. No matter how hard I try to disguise it, self-interest and self-preservation remain the primary driving force within me. It is built into my DNA. Yet, in today's first reading St. Paul says that our Lord Jesus Christ died so that this state of affairs would change. Because of what He has done, there is going to be a radical change within us - rather than live for our own selves, we are going to live for Him. The change is so drastic, it is as though we have died and a completely different and new creation has taken our place. Can this be true? Do I really see myself weaned off self-interest? Yet this is the promise of today's first reading.

St. Paul says from now on, we do not regard anyone based on what we see with our eyes or what we understand with our mind. We do not even look at our Lord Jesus based on our human understanding. But rather, we are invited to look through our eyes of faith. We are a new creation.

St. Paul speaks of where all this flows from. God has reconciled us to Himself. Reconcile means two parties who were working against each other have now become friends and will work together. If God seemed angry and distant, if we lived as though God did not exist, the first fruit of the cross is reconciliation and God would become real to us. St. Paul says all this is the work of God – something that comes from above. We will not stop here, we will go beyond to become vessels that carry the message and the power of reconciliation. We see this happening again and again at Four Steps retreats and prayer meetings. But first we must be reconciled.

I remember this inspiring post on Facebook. Our Lord Jesus did not deserve to die. All He did was good. He reached out to the broken and infirm and raised them up. Barabbas on the other hand was a murderer. Barabbas deserved to die on the cross. But Barabbas walks free and in his place the sinless Lord Jesus dies. Look again - I am Barabbas. It is I who deserved to die. But I walk free.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for Your forgiveness. Thank You for taking me beyond myself and making me a new creation. Thank You for the cross. Amen.

My flesh is really food, and my blood is truly drink.**John 6:55**

Deuteronomy 8:2-3,
14-16

Psalm 147: 12-20

1 Cor 10:16-17

John 6:51-58

Today's first reading is considered an excerpt from the address Moses delivered to the Israelites before they crossed the Jordan to take possession of the promised land.

The Israelites had spent an inordinately long time in the desert - a harsh place where finding even the basic of needs is a challenge. Many of us go through desert experiences. For one it maybe the drying up of their source of income. For another it may be the loss of a loved one. Still for another it may be the encounter with a life-threatening disease like cancer. Yet to another it could be the betrayal and unfaithfulness of a trusted one. As the Israelites discovered, even though the desert was a difficult place to be in, it was also the place where God sustained them and provided for them in a miraculous way. Often, when we look back on our difficult times, we find that not only has God met our needs in the most amazing of ways, but to many of us, He has transformed the curse into a blessing.

In my own life, my most significant desert experience was when I lost my job. I remember that during those days of anguish, I clung on to the Lord for dear life. It was only when things settled down that the temptation to be complacent kicked in.

In today's first reading Moses addresses the people who are about to leave the desert and enter a different phase of their life or journey. Moses puts the difficult incidents into perspective. We learn that each incident had a specific purpose and they learnt the ways of God. They also learnt that no impossible situation, nor powerful person, was beyond their God. As they leave the desert, Moses advices them "remember – don't ever forget – how God intervened." Remember who God is and what He is capable of.

To me the most significant thing that Moses reveals is that while God provided manna, He taught the people that "one does not live by bread alone". There is more to life, there is more to our journey, than meeting our needs.

Today's Gospel reading describes the incident that occurred after our Lord Jesus feeds the five thousand. When the people realised what He could do, they try to make Him the King. Our Lord Jesus then runs up to the mountain to consult His Father. He comes down from

the mountain and tells the people that they are coming behind Him only because He met their need for food. He confirms what Moses revealed in the first reading-- there is more to life than meeting our needs. It also reveals that it displeases God if we come to Him only to get our needs met.

I have often wondered what eating the flesh and drinking the blood of our Lord Jesus meant in a pre-eucharist setting. Scripture reveals that many of His followers left Him because they thought He was talking about cannibalism and it offended them. I think He was using loaded words to explain something deeper than what meets the eye. For example, concepts such as born again, life, light, and living water found in the Gospel of St. John. Our Lord Jesus says that His flesh is true food and His blood is true drink. To me it seems that He is saying that His impact on us is just like the effect of normal food and drink on us. He is telling me "I can truly fulfil your day to day material needs". He also tells me that just like how normal food and drink gets digested, converted to my own flesh and blood and provides me with the energy and strength to move, touch, think, and speak, He will give me the strength I need. When I touch and speak to others, it will be He who will be touching and speaking to them.

On my part, I have to make Him my food and drink. His words and promises will be my perception of reality, my source of hope, and the principles I live by. I will spend time in prayer to escape from the realities of this world and live in the alternate reality His word shows and I will worship Him. In return, our Lord Jesus promises a relationship with us, just like the one He had with His Father.

Today's second reading reveals that the eucharistic celebration is a place where we can have a true encounter with our Lord Jesus. When we have that encounter, we become an extension of the body of our Lord so that the world can encounter Him through us.

Today, on the feast of Corpus Christi, we are told, never forget who God is and what He can do. What He has done for us in the past and how He has taken care of us. In the future we must hold on to His promises and teachings. We must make Him our food and drink and the world around us will encounter Him through us.

Abba Father, May I be given the eyes to see your flesh as true food and your blood as true drink, so that I may not waste my life seeking earthly needs. May your revelations become real to me, so that I be given the grace to abandon myself into your reality and become a blessing to those around me, so that the world around me will know your touch through my hands. Amen

“As God’s fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain”

2 Cor. 6:1

2 Cor 6:1-10

Psalms 98:1-4

Matthew 5:38-42

In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul urges them not to waste God’s grace given to them. At first glance this seems a rather strange sentence as most of us perceive God’s grace as the blessings, healings and solutions we ask for and receive. We perceive God’s grace to be those things which make our life easier here on earth. But St. Paul understands God’s grace as the calling we are given to be a part of God’s ministry. He states that the invitation to work alongside God in His ministry is the grace of God.

He also says that they have not put a stumbling block in anyone’s path. Can this be said of us as well? Unfortunately for many of us, we regard this calling we have received to serve as a hindrance or at best something we do if we have some time to spare. Most of us are unable to receive this calling as grace and often we do our share of grumbling, complaining and hold grudges. We put stumbling blocks in the pathway of others by our brokenness, our selfishness and our inability to reach out or give of ourselves. We are still so focused on asking God for blessings for ourselves, to make our lives easier. But God is not interested in making sure that our few human years on earth are comfortable and well spent if it means that we are condemning ourselves and so many others to eternal damnation.

The Lord reiterates this in today’s Gospel proclamation when He urges us not to resist or turn away an evil person or a broken person or someone who does not have God in their life. He wants us to give without limit and without counting cost. After all, that is what He did for us. And was it not His unending love, His limitless mercy and forgiveness that first drew our hearts to Him? Give to the one who asks you, He says, give of your talents, give of your money, give of your resources and most of all, give of your time and love. “Do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you”, do not turn away from the one who has nothing, who has no love so they cannot love you. Do not turn away from the one who has no kindness so they are unkind to you. Do not turn away from the one who is selfish, who has addictions and who has messed up everything. Meet them in love and endurance because God is waiting for us to bring that person to Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, You are calling me to bring others to You. Give me the grace to serve You as You desire me to. From today I want to live for You. Amen,

Our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you might become rich. 2 Cor 8:9

2 Cor 8:1-9

Psalms 146:2, 5-9

Matthew 5:43-48

St. Paul writes to the Church of Corinth about the great service done by the Church of Macedonia, contributing to the body of Christ. He goes on to say that even though they face many persecutions, their joy was overflowing and their poverty had turned into a wealth of generosity. Their hearts longed to serve the Lord. They experienced joy not only by receiving blessings, but also by contributing towards His kingdom. This brought them joy and happiness beyond what the world could ever give.

The first reading tells us that though the church of Corinth excelled in spiritual gifts, they lacked generosity. St. Paul emphasized the need for generosity. Without generosity and love the church would surely face trouble because it lacked the very characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us ask ourselves if we too lack the overflowing joy that the Macedonia church experienced? Is it not joy and happiness that we seek in our day to day lives?

Today, the Lord is inviting us to not only come and attend mass at your church or attend a prayer service and only to listen to a powerful sermon. He is calling us to take that extra step and serve at our parish or at the place where we attend the prayer service. Generosity not only means contributing money. It can also be contributing our time or talent to the Kingdom of God. It could be something that no one notices. What matters is that the Lord will see our act and He will fill us with joy and love to an extent that this world cannot offer us.

In my own life, I turned to the Lord whenever I had a crisis. The Lord was always faithful and got me through each one of them. Even though I received generously from the Lord, I hardly gave anything back. During this time, a gentleman invited me to serve the Lord and told me that I will be able to experience the presence of God mightily when I serve Him. To be honest, ever since the day I started serving my life was never the same. Today the Lord invites you to do the same because He wants to give you something more. Something beyond what you can ask or imagine.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we pray for the grace to take that extra step and serve You so that your Kingdom may be established on earth through us. Amen.*

**“Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight
in God’s commands”**

Ps 112: 1

2 Cor 9:6-11

Psalms 112:1-4, 9

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Portrayed in the readings today, is the true world beyond our temporary realities. St. Paul speaks of the abundant blessings that God has showered upon us. We often forget who we are. We are the children of our Almighty God. The Heavenly Father has lavishly showered blessings upon us. St. Paul says that we need to give without murmuring or grumbling. What does this mean?

When we were placed in our mother’s womb we were designed to be a light to the darkness and sight to the blind. The repercussion of sin has made us blind and caused us to live in darkness.

Our selfishness has made us greedy. We have become ravens and are enslaved to power, money, appreciation, recognition, sexual pleasures and comforts of this world. This has caused us not to share or be sensitive towards our fellow human beings. When we say that we are called by God for a purpose, it means we give lavishly as determined by God. Those of us who are struck by spiritual/psychological/material poverty due to various reasons should be uplifted by those who have been blessed richly. Equality takes place and no one will be in need.

The Lord Jesus taught us how to live a bountiful life. We are actually sharing with others what God has given us. We have the wrong understanding that we are the owners of our riches. If God had not given these to us, how could we have become rich; spiritually/psychologically/materially? The Lord said that we should not be proud/arrogant/greedy stewards of the riches God has given us. The bountiful life is to be simple/humble/compassionate. There is no need of a show to distribute what God has given. We should find God within us. Anyone who finds God within will not need to display themselves. Finding God behind locked doors denotes the personal relationship we have with God. This means the need not to show off.

St. Aloysius Gonzaga was born into a rich aristocratic family in Italy. His association with the Jesuit monks led him to encounter the Lord, and become a Jesuit priest. He had a kidney disease, which drew him closer to God. “It is better to be a child of God than king of the whole world”, said St. Aloysius Gonzaga.,

Prayer: Abba Father, cause us to live in You and do Your will. Amen.

I will extol the Lord with all my heart

Psalm 111:1

2 Cor 11:1-11

Psalm 111:1-4, 7-8

Matthew 6:7-15

In today's first reading we come across a disappointed St. Paul. He brought the good news to the Corinthians and even though he was giving them a treasure, he did not burden them in anyway. When they needed something, he asked other churches' support to meet their needs. He gave them so much but received little and at this moment all his efforts seemed in vain because the

Corinthians easily forgot the true God.

I believe many of us would have gone through similar situations in life. We would have helped someone, gone out of our way and stuck our neck out for a friend, only to be disappointed in the end. Maybe instead of getting a thank you all we got may have been scoldings or our name being tarnished. Maybe right now we are in an emotional, financial or spiritual crisis as a result of giving too much.

St. Paul gave of himself and went to the Corinthians because he did the will of the Lord. If we are in a crisis right now, is it because we discerned and followed the will of the Lord? If the answer is yes, then we need not worry or fear – the Lord will lift us up at the right time. If the answer is no, then we need to examine our hearts – was it that we merely wanted to please people? Did we simply want to get a good name? Or was it only a 'good deed' and not a 'God's will deed'? However good the intention, if that is the case, then we need to repent and ask the Lord's forgiveness for doing our will and not His.

Thomas More became a lawyer. For two years, he lived next to a Carthusian monastery, followed their lifestyle of simple piety and joined their spiritual exercises. In 1504, he was elected to Parliament and earned a reputation as being honest and effective. In 1517, Henry VIII took a liking to him and gave him posts of increasing responsibility and in 1521, he was knighted. The King's trust in More grew and he was made Chancellor and prosecuted those accused of heresy and worked tirelessly to defend the Catholic faith in England. In 1530, King Henry wanted an annulment from his wife, but More refused to sign a letter requesting an annulment and also to attend the coronation of Anne Boylen, now Queen of England. This offended the king. This resulted in his imprisonment and death. More was canonized in 1935.

Prayer: *Abba Father, give me the grace to listen to Your voice and do Your will. Amen.*

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.**1 John 4:16**

Deuteronomy 7:6-11

Ps. 103:1-4, 6-8, 10

1 John 4:7-16

Matthew 11:25-30

Today we celebrate the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus. The Sacred Heart of Jesus represents not simply His physical heart but also His love for people. This love God has for us is reflected upon in today's readings.

God tells us in the first reading, "The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (V. 6). We have been chosen by the Lord to follow Him. We did not do anything to deserve this special treatment, but He chose to treasure us because of the love He has for us. The Psalm confirms this in verse 10, "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." If God only loved those who were without sin, we would all miss out. For we are all sinful, but God loves us anyway.

The second reading from 1 John illustrates beautifully the love of God. As human beings, we express our love for one another through words, gifts, actions, etc. But these expressions of love do not compare to the love God has for us. His love for us was so strong that He sacrificed His one and only Son for our sins; to redeem us from the pit and take us back into His heart.

In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord is calling us to give Him our problems and weaknesses. As I read the Gospel I remember as a school girl how my father used to walk with me to the top of our road each morning and wait with me until my school van picked me up. As we left the house each morning he would carry my heavy bag on his shoulders and wait with me. God wants to do the same for us. He wants to lighten our load and make us feel comfortable.

Today if we feel unloved and alone the Lord is speaking to us. We are loved more than we will ever know by a God who died out of love for us. When we feel like no one loves us and want to give up on life, remember that God died on the cross for us. Even if you were the only person alive, He would still allow Himself to be crucified for you. That is how much He loves you. The shape of true love is not a heart or a diamond, but a cross. It was on this cross that God died for the love of His life-- You.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I put my intellect and human logic aside, for I cannot fathom the extent of Your love for me. I only pray that I may experience Your love everyday of my life. Amen.*

“I will make you the light of the nations”**Isaiah 49:6**

Isaiah 49:1-6

Psalm 139:1-3, 13-15

Acts 13:22-26

Luke 1:57-66, 80

Have we ever pondered the greatness of the miracle of giving birth to a child in old age? These greatest of miracles took place for the fulfillment of the plan of God's salvation of the world.

Today we celebrate the feat of St. John the Baptist. The life of John the Baptist through Christ is what we as Christians are supposed to live out today for the salvation of our own families, friends and colleagues.

The life of St. John the Baptist was full of righteousness. His ministry attracted large crowds around Judea and the river Jordan. His popularity among the ordinary people grew that it became a threat to King Herod and he was ordered to be arrested. While in prison St. John the Baptist had many opportunities to talk to the King and he vehemently denounced the King's sinful living of marrying his brother's wife. This resulted in the plot by the Queen and princess to have the beloved saint killed.

The life of St. John the Baptist teaches us a great lesson. He was more than a figure and voice in the wilderness. He was more than a baptiser. His adult life was characterized by absolute and total devotion and utter surrender to the calling of God. He is also the precursor to the modern day evangelist as he shared the good news of Christ. St John the Baptist is the role model for all of us who wish to share our faith with others.

Today's Psalm confirms through the life of St John the Baptist that we are indeed formed and knitted in the mothers' womb by God Himself and that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. That all our works are wonderful (139:13-15). As this is true for St. John the Baptist so it is for all our lives as we are sent to this earth for a purpose.

Let us ponder on the life of this wonderful saint and ask ourselves the question-- are we living our God given calling to the fullest? Have we been projecting our selfish needs as we serve? Have we blocked the grace of God flowing to others? Are we in spiritual dryness? If so, let us look to the life of St. John the Baptist and be strengthened in our walk of faith and in witnessing.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to be bold and proclaim the Good News in thought, word and deed. Let us lay down our lives for Your Kingdom. Amen.

“The Lord hears the needy and does not despise his captive people”

Ps 69:33

Jeremiah 20:10-13

Ps 69: 8-17, 33-35

Romans 5:12-15

Matthew 10:26-33

I am generally a happy server, especially when things go the way I expect. However, when I am rejected or misunderstood, I tend to get into a corner to dwell on the “injustice” and nurse my bruised ego. My focus shifts from God to my circumstances and the voices of those around me become louder than the voice of God. I felt that the background to today’s first reading has a similar ring to it. Jeremiah had prophesied against Judah and Jerusalem. The official in charge of the temple had him remanded and beaten. Jeremiah complained to God; “you deceived me”, “The word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.”

Today’s first reading begins with the voices Jeremiah was hearing: “terror on every side; friends waiting for me to slip. People waiting to denounce and take revenge on me.” Like most of us, prophet Jeremiah was shaken by the situation that threatened his life. The voices around him became louder and clearer. The God he had come to know seemed useless and distant in the heart of the crisis. Nevertheless, Jeremiah had an advantage-- he was trained to tune into and pick up the voice of God among the many voices around him. The moment he started to listen to God, Jeremiah’s perception of the situation changed. He said; “But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior.” Once again, he started to see that the threats of his enemies were no match for the God of Israel. Jeremiah’s complaints turned into a song of praise. “Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.”

When the Lord sent out the twelve disciples to minister, He gave them instructions, “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.” Sometimes when I see the self-destructive behaviors of those close to me, I close one eye. I fear ruining our relationship. I fear being rejected and ridiculed like Jeremiah was when he prophesied against Judah and Jerusalem.

The Lord is reminding us today that we are a people sent by God to the world where people are lost in their self-destructive ways. He has not sent us to judge or condemn them or to look the other way minding our own business. He is inviting us to first host His pres-

ence and carry Him to those who are on a self-destructive path. To intercede for them, wait for a door to open and to reach out to them. Discern with an elder in the community to ensure that we are not operating in the flesh ourselves when dealing with them. Then we can be His voice to them.

The Lord is assuring those who respond to His invitation; “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven”. When the Lord acknowledges us before the Father in heaven, a miracle will happen, heaven will open and a breakthrough will come to those we have been sent to.

Often we see how repercussions of sin sometimes flow from one generation to the next. Yet, many of us fall into the same traps of sin that our ancestors fell into on their pursuit of happiness. St Paul, in the letter to the Romans says, “Sin and death entered the world through one man.” It takes just one person, one little act that may even appear harmless for an addiction to form and a family to be destroyed. A young father once shared how helping out a young colleague who was struggling in office turned into an extra-marital affair that destroyed his relationship with his family, his own reputation and the reputation of his colleague. He cried out “how do I fix this?” Today’s second reading reaches out to many who are asking the same question. “For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many.”

Today the Lord is inviting us to hear His voice above the other voices around us that say there is no hope for us because we have messed up bad. God’s grace is available to us because His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ offered His life for our salvation. I remember the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior.” Our addictions, mistakes and enemies are no match to Him. He will not stop till we are completely free. When we are set free and restored, the Lord sends us out into the world to our brothers and sisters who are lost under the weight of sin. We are to proclaim the Good News of His salvation to them. “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.” When we sit in the presence of God we will hear His voice speaking to us. When we hear His voice and spread His word to others, we are fulfilling the purpose the Lord has for our lives. We are hearing His voice and obeying His Word. However simple or difficult it may be, this is the mission God has called us to.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for Your presence within me. Give me the grace to carry You to my brothers and sisters who are lost and broken in their sin. Amen.

I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing

Genesis 12:2

Genesis 12:1-9

Psalms 33:12-13, 18-20
& 22

Matthew 7:1-5

These days the first readings track the journey of Abram the uncouth and unprincipled, to Abraham, the friend of God. We look at Abraham to discover how God leads his people and thereby recognise His hand in our own lives and cooperate with Him in our journey with God.

Today's first reading begins with Abram's encounter with God. God initiates the encounter. It was not at the behest of Abram. In fact, there is no record that Abram even knew God prior to this. With the encounter, Abram's destiny changed. He was 75 years old and set in his ways. He should have been winding down, not preparing for anything new. But all that was going to change.

Many have had similar encounter experiences at the Four Steps retreat and at CRL prayer meetings. Their choices had destined them to live as alcoholics or under the curse of a broken marriage or as people who had totally messed up their lives. Their destinies changed after the encounter experience.

The Lord had promised Abram that He will bless him. Those who have had an encounter experience testify to being blessed. The promise does not end there for Abram. Abram is to become a blessing to others. God did not bless Abram so that he would be happy and prosperous and live long. God blessed Abram so that He would be able to bless others through him. The Lord reminds us that our own blessings are not just for our sake.

According to today's first reading, the land that God promised Abram's descendants is currently occupied by the Canaanites. What is more he has no children and is past the age of child bearing. The dream that God has for us, is not defined by our capabilities nor circumstances or by those around us.

As I look into myself, I find many areas within me that are occupied by "Canaanites". Areas that should belong to God and areas within which the promises of God are yet to be fulfilled. Abram, even after seeing the promised land, had to journey beyond. The Lord led Abram one step at a time. Each time Abram obeyed, the Lord gave him direction and reminded him of the promise and his greater call.

Prayer: *Abba Father, come and encounter me and change my life. Walk with me like You did with Abram and fulfil Your dream in me. Amen.*

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

Genesis 13:2, 5-18

Psalm 15:2-5

Matthew 7:6, 12-14

In the first reading we learn of Abram, his riches and his devotion. In this story Abram quarrels with Lot. Abram made me ponder on what I would have done in a quarrel. I would not have settled if the other person wanted to make the decision. Abram teaches me how not to rely on my judgment and capabilities of ensuring a good and happy life for myself, but instead to do what God would want me to do in all situations. We do not see and know God's plan for us in our lives but if we walk in His path we will know that we are on the right track. Goodness and mercy will follow all the days of our lives. Abram was not even capable of fathering a child in his old age but God gave him offspring like the dust of the earth.

The Psalm shows us the way to heaven, and convinces us that, if we are to be happy, we must be holy and honest. Our Lord Jesus, who is the way, the light and the truth is our guide.

What is detailed in the Psalm is almost impossible in day-to-day living. I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Phil 4:13). But if I am to receive this strength I need to have a constant and close relationship with our Lord Jesus in prayer. We cannot pretend to have a relationship with God and pretend that we are holy. The people around us will soon see our real selves. Do we actually fear the Lord and keep His ways even when it hurts and seems unfair? Or do we change our mind when faced with life's challenges?

The Gospel continues and concludes with Christ's sermon on the mountain. It is purely practical, directing us toward life in every way both toward God and man. There's a saying close to my heart "God crucifies those who loves Him and loves those who crucifies Him." If we do to others what we would have them do to us and always choose the right path even though it is narrow and winding what a wonderful world this would be? The little voice inside me, which I know is the right path even though the consequences may seem blur and grey. There is a danger however as I keep ignoring this voice and if I do not have a relationship with God this voice dims and even dies. I then fall into the majority who cannot find the narrow gate that leads to a truly happy life.

Prayer: Abba Father, I believe that You are giving me the grace to seek Your face everyday so that I may be strengthened by Your Holy Spirit. Amen

Then Yahweh brought him outside

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18

Psalms 105:1-9

Matthew 7:15-20

In the preceding chapter Abraham's story of is of the wars he had with kings from the surrounding areas. Abram as he was called successfully carried out the campaign and was blessed by the mysterious King Melchizedek with bread and wine. Abram responded by offering him a tenth of everything. After all these confrontations Abram had this new word from God, 'Do not be afraid

Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great."

Often when we go through trials and tribulations we assume that God is not with us and He has abandoned us. We assume we are alone. We assume that there is no point in turning to God since it appears that He himself is the cause of all we are facing. But in these moments after we have gone through them, God seeing our response offers us promises and hope. The trials and problems tend to push us into a corner. Our vision and hope begin to shrink. We feel boxed up and hopeless. We begin to nitpick our lives and dwell on our problems. While the external problem in Abram's life was the wars with kings, the internal issue was the fact that he was childless. So while he flashed the sword and rode his horse, the only cry in his heart was I have no son to take over. We must search our hearts for the real cry.

It was at this moment in Abram's life when God visited him and brought him outside. God delivered Abram to a whole new world of promise and hope. Abram was looking for one child while the Father of all creation had generations as numerous as the stars to offer Abram. This is a call for us to step out of our box of darkness into the floodlights of God's grace and love. Let us examine the fruit within our lives. Are the fruits hoplessness, sadness, depression or hope in the promises of God? If we have placed our hope in God's promises, we will have a life of abundant love, joy and peace.

The Father of love, cleared up every doubt in Abram's heart and even made a covenant with him. The Lord Jesus is aware of every issue in our lives and has already sacrificed His life for us. His presence and word is our reward and shield. When we spend time with His word and in His presence the real fruit will manifest. Love, joy and peace will be become real in our lives. He will take us out and raise us up.

Prayer: *Abba Father, widen my vision and open me up to all You have in store for me that I may bear the right fruit. Amen.*

Acts 12:1-11

Psalm 34:2-9

2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18

Matthew 16:13-19

In today's first reading we reflect on another dramatic episode in the life and work of St. Peter and other disciples after Pentecost. The reading tells us that the self-centred King Herod played a double game and arrested some disciples intending to persecute them. St James, the brother of St. John, became the first martyr among the apostles.

He was beheaded on Herod's orders. That is why we believe where the Church grew on the blood and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and the disciples of the early church. To what extent are we ready to give our lives for the Lord today is a big question. We may be ready to serve the Lord and make sacrifices for Him. But if our lives are threatened what will we do?

Herod's persecution took place during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Thousands of Jews gathered in Jerusalem for it and when Herod saw how St. James' execution pleased the people he arrested St. Peter. The reading tells us that Herod put St. Peter in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So St. Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. This shows us the power of intercessory prayer. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, St. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. The angel touched St. Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said and the chains fell off St. Peter's wrists.

Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And St. Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. St. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. It was then that St. Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

Prayer: *Abba Father, may we be gifted with the heroic faith that St. Peter, St Paul and the early apostles had. Amen.*

Genesis 17:1, 9-10,
15-22

Ps. 128:1-5

Matthew 8:1-4

Many years ago, I learned of a job opening at a prestigious company. At that time I was working for a small sized enterprise and obviously greener pastures enticed me. The package was twice as good as my current pay with additional benefits. I got through the interview and was called for the final discussion. Thrilled to be selected, I had to make a decision to give my resignation; and just before I could do that, I asked the Lord if he was pleased with my decision. I started receiving negative signs from God. It was as if he was holding a big “No Entry” sign. I fought long enough in prayer and finally gave in to God very reluctantly. I had to refuse the job offer. The worst part was I had no valuable reason. I did so because I felt a strong stir in my spirit.

So many years later, I can clearly see that God had my best interest when He prohibited me from accepting that job offer. Even though at that time it was extremely frustrating to let go of a golden opportunity, looking back, it looks like the best thing that happened to me. Today we are reminded that God always wants what is best for us. The leper in the Gospel teaches us this truth.

In the Gospel proclamation the leper braved the ridicule of the public and approached the Lord Jesus in utmost faith. He bows down and worships the Lord and acknowledges the supreme authority of the Lord over his life. In his prayer he willingly surrendered; not reluctantly with a bitter heart. The leper says “if you wish, you can make me clean.” He is certain that God can heal him instantly, yet he yields to God’s timing and desire and the Lord Jesus honours his prayer by healing him instantaneously.

God wanted the best for Abraham and Sarah. He assured them that they will have a child of their own, who would be a blessing to the nations. However sometimes it is difficult to surrender to God 100% and trust in his timings. That is why we resort to our own mechanisms of resolving problems. As opposed to the leper who bowed down before the Lord and said “if you want to you can make me clean”, we tend to say “Lord give me this or Lord let me do that”. Sadly this tends to complicate our life. Today let us pray the leper’s prayer.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I pray for the grace to be able to let go of what I want for my life and surrender the rest of my days into Your hands. Amen.*

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