



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

March 2017

“Lent is like a long retreat. It is a time of spiritual ‘combat’ which we must experience alongside our Lord Jesus, not with pride and presumption, but using the arms of faith: prayer, listening to the Word of God and penance.”
- Pope Benedict XVI

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March 2017

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“Repent, and believe in the Gospel”

Mark 1: 15

Joel 2: 12 – 18

Psalms 51: 3–6, 12–14
& 17

2 Cor. 5: 20 – 6: 2

Matthew 6: 1–6, 16–18

Lord, forgive us for we know not what we do. Sin is a part of us. Where sin abounds the grace of God is active and for this reason we are invited by God to repent and turn to Him.

Human beings operate in a dualistic reality. Often we are not fully aware of our own shortcomings. Our prayer and confession could be on the surface level. Our harmful and deliberate actions can

wound others. These are visible to us and others. But our thoughts and feelings could destroy ourselves and others. However these are unseen.

In the repentance ritual of the first covenant, people tore their garments and wore rags. It is an outward sign of repentance. But God is inviting us to an inward repentance. When He says tear your hearts He wants us to repent from within. Let us put a stop to the pretence and move to God with true repentance.

St. Paul says the Lord Jesus became sin on our behalf and became righteous in the eyes of God. The Lord Jesus earned that righteousness in the eyes of God for us through His baptism of blood- through His death on the cross. We became righteous in the eyes of God through the Paschal mystery of the Lord Jesus. We are invited to be God’s ambassadors on earth to make known to the nations that we have a merciful Father, a Lord who has risen from the dead and a Holy Spirit who constantly abides in us to witness to this amazing God. We have been made citizens of heaven; therefore we are the ambassadors of heaven on earth. The question is -- are we genuine representatives? Does our lifestyle witness to the forgiveness of God and God’s everlasting love? If not, we need repent for not living the real purpose we have been called to live.

Today’s Gospel proclamation teaches us to live without pretence. Repentance means never to repeat what we have done. We have been accustomed to wound other people and confess publicly. Rather we need to go to the ones we wound and ask for forgiveness in private and desire never to wound anyone thereafter. Our heavenly Father, who sees this act, would reward us. Anything done in public should be carefully measured, because hidden agendas could be involved.

Prayer: Abba Father, place in us a contrite heart with a willing Spirit. Do not take Your Holy Spirit away from us and shield us from the lie we live. Amen.

"Today I have set before you life and good, death and evil"

Deuteronomy 30:15

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 1:1-4, 6

Luke 9:22-25

Today God is reminding us that we have to make a choice in life- between Him and worldly values. He explains these two options in today's readings.

In the first reading, Moses gives the Israelites a choice between life and death. He explains if they choose to obey God and follow His commands they will receive life and will grow as a nation.

However, if they choose other gods they will ultimately receive death. Moses is urging them to choose God and to receive the abundant life God has to offer them.

The Lord Jesus is giving this same choice to His followers. He says, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

Both readings tell us that when we choose to trust in God and only lean on Him in our lives, He will ultimately lead us to victory. Our role model is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He choose to follow God, handed His life into the hands of the Father and died on the cross in obedience to Him. What first seemed like a failure and a curse was eventually turned into a blessing- for the Lord Jesus and for the whole world.

God gives us a choice each moment of our lives. Are we going to choose to host His presence in our lives or are we going to follow the world?

I remember once when I sought spiritual counselling when I was going through a major disappointment in my life. I was told I was at a cross-road in my life. I could either hold on to God, His promises and go against my nature or I could follow the world and do what I thought was rational. Following what everyone else in the world would have done seemed easier than holding on to the Lord. Eventually this is the case for everyone. Most of the time, the right path is not the easy one. But God promises to turn our difficulties into life -- a blessing. When we say yes to the will of God, not only will it be a blessing for others, but ultimately it will be the greatest blessing for our own lives as well because the Lord Jesus has risen from the dead and He will raise us up as well.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to always choose You in every decision I have to make. Amen.

Fast to sharpen your ax

Isaiah 58:1-9

Psalm 51:3-6, 18-19

Matthew 9:14-15

A frequent topic that arises during Lent is the topic of fasting. Most of us wonder what is fasting? Why does God invite us to fast? How do we fast correctly?

A true story is told about two lumberjacks. The younger lumberjack was proud that he could cut down trees at a fast pace and wanted to challenge the older lumberjack to a tree cutting contest. The one who could chop down more trees in one day would be the winner. They began and the young man went at it non-stop, all day long. He thought it looked pretty good for him when he noticed the older lumberjack only chopping trees down for one hour and then taking a 15 minute rest. But when the end of the day came, the older lumberjack had chopped down 1/3 more trees than the younger one. The younger lumberjack was somewhat put off and went over to the older one and asked him how he managed, after taking 15 minute breaks every hour. The older lumberjack replied, "when I stopped cutting and sat down, I sharpened my axe."

Most of us work hard to do right with dull axes. We put in so much effort and wonder why the tree is not falling and we are not achieving greater results. Fasting and prayer are about sharpening the axe of the inner person- our spirit. Fasting fine tunes our spirit to receive direction and guidance from the Lord and makes us efficient in every area of our lives because we no longer have to strive and figure things out all by ourselves.

While reading Isaiah 58:6-7, I noticed that the Lord Jesus mentions the very same things in Luke 4:18 and Matt 25:35. There are 5 types of human needs that the Lord is concerned with-- the need for freedom from bondage and oppression, the need for food, the need for shelter, the need for clothing and the need for respect. As Christians we should be known for the good works we do (Ephesians 2:10, Titus 2:14, Matt 5:16). This lent God wants us to share His heart regarding these things. This is the kind of fast that He has chosen for us-- to pour ourselves out for others. Isaiah says, only then will our "voice be heard in high" and "our light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear" (verses 4 and 8).

Prayer: Abba Father, expand our hearts so that we will be able to sincerely feel what Your heart feels for those who are in need. Amen.

“Then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like noonday.”

Isaiah 58:10

Isaiah 58:9-14

Psalms 86:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Luke 5:27-32

As we entered into the season of lent we received the mark of mortality on our foreheads. While it symbolises a warning to remind us where our bodies will ultimately go- it is a promise and a passage for the one who longs and craves to see the Redeemer. In this season we are called to pursue and prepare ourselves for this great experience.

When the Lord Jesus called St. Matthew to follow Him, St. Matthew's gloom became like the noonday sun. Only His presence in our lives can give us the courage to stop following our own ways and seeking our own interests. Prophet Isaiah says the light shall rise for you in the darkness- He will guide you always – He will renew your strength and you will be like a watered garden – like a spring where water never fails.

Our call is to follow the Lord faithfully and He will satisfy your every need. The complexity and chaos around you will be dispelled and transformed into a transcendent peace and completeness in Him. The Psalmist's cry is the same for the grace to walk in His ways, in spirit and in truth. The world we live in negates the very mission we are called for, but there are people who have walked this way before, leaving us to emulate their example.

Saint Casimir whose feast we celebrate today, is one such person we can emulate. He was a prince of Poland. He opposed his father to be obedient to the calling of his heavenly Father. As a son of a King he was entitled to unlimited luxury which he rejected; spending nights in prayer and sleeping little. His father sent him on a mission to take over the throne of Hungary. He was only too glad to turn back at the advice of his officers and later he found that Pope Sixtus IV had opposed this as well. His father was furious and had him imprisoned. But his commitment to what was right became stronger. He later entered whole heartedly to studying and praying and serving the poor. He died at 23 years of age in 1484 of a lung disease.

Where are we in our journey? Today let us choose an action to give God back the first place in our lives. This is the place is due to Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to totally surrender of our lives into Your hands. Amen.

Experience the power of God through any temptation

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7

Psalms 51:3-6, 12-13, 17

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Today's readings speak of the temptations Satan and world offer us. Satan has been tempting people from the beginning and it did not end with mere human beings, but he also tried to tempt our Lord Jesus Christ. He is at work even today. He is always looking for a way to draw us away from God and His commands. How can we overcome the temptations he sets before us? Firstly, it is through a relationship with God. Secondly, it is through the word of God that we can stand firm because it directs us in the right path.

The first reading is about the fall of humankind. When God created Adam and Eve, the devil would have been looking for a way to lure them away from God. It was the cunning nature of Satan that made him successful against Eve. He knew the instructions God had given Adam and Eve about not eating the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. Nevertheless, Satan lies to the woman and convinces her that eating the fruit will not end her life, but instead make it better-- that she would become like her creator. Why would Eve want to be like God, knowing good and evil? Up to that moment in their lives they had been shielded from the hardships and troubles of life. God had provided everything for them. God had not allowed them to see the evil in the world. Eve may have not understood what knowing good and evil really entailed because she only knew good. The bible says in Genesis 2:6 that Eve saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye. We have all been through some kind of temptation in our lives and we know that the devil does not come into our lives with a red face and horns as is shown in movies and cartoons. Instead he comes to us beautifully disguised as everything we have ever wanted. Eve may have seen the fruit hanging from the tree many-a-time before. However, when the devil presented it to her once again, she saw that it was good to eat, pleasing to the eye and desirable for gaining wisdom. Eve wanted the wisdom of God. Having eaten the fruit, their eyes were opened to everything that the Lord had tried to shield them from.

In the Second reading from the letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes that this original sin was carried down to each generation- "Sin entered the world through one man and spread to all humankind" (Rom 5:12). Sin and death reigned in the lives of the Israelites from Adam all the way to the end of the Old Testament. Adam brought sin into the world.

It was his sin that carried on from generation to generation. The Psalm says we are born with sin, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." We were born with sin because of the sin of Adam. It was only through the life and death of the Lord Jesus that we were saved from this sin. God's gift to humankind was His Son. The Lord Jesus' sacrifice on the cross went beyond the sin of Adam. Now our sin cannot even be compared to the forgiveness we receive through His precious blood and holy name.

In today's Gospel proclamation our Lord Jesus overcomes 3 temptations of the devil because He knew God and His Holy Word. It was through the Word of God that the Lord refuted the devil. In Genesis Adam and Eve sinned because they did not precisely know what God had said as well as Satan did and they could not use God's word to stand up to the devil. In Matthew, the Lord Jesus was victorious because He knew scripture better than the devil and was living in the spirit.

The devil wanted to create some doubt in the mind of the Lord as to whether He was from God or not. But the Lord Jesus was not swayed because He was strong in heart and mind. At His baptism in the river Jordan, He heard the voice of God say "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." The Lord Jesus carried this experience in His heart throughout His forty days in the desert. In His mind He carried the Word of God. Though He was physically weak, He was strong in God. He knew who He was and no one was going to take that away from Him.

Are we able to say the same as followers of Christ? When the devil tempts us with something are we able to hold on to our experience of our encounter with God and hold on to His Word? At one server's meeting Lalith Thaththa said something that struck me. He said even though we may go for prayer meetings, pray and guide people to God, we may have fallen from inside. The Lord is calling all of us to be baptized in the Holy Spirit every time we come to Him in our personal prayers. 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 in sin. To move beyond this all we have to do is tell the Lord that we want to go beyond. The Holy Spirit took the Lord beyond the temptations and ultimately to the resurrection. All we have to do is hear His voice and know His word. Then we too will experience the power of God through any temptation and will be victorious just as our Lord Jesus Christ was.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that Your Spirit may lead me through every temptation that comes my way. That I may strengthen myself through prayer and Your Word to overcome struggles in my life. Amen.

“Be Holy for I, Your Lord am Holy”**Leviticus 19:2**

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

Psalm 18:8-10, 15

Matthew 25:31-46

Most of the Israelites' laws found in Leviticus contain laws that the Priests and Levites had to know, practice and preach. But the laws cover a gamut of principles reaching beyond their time. Eg vs 9, flows from the rituals to the Law of Mercy, vs 15. To social justice, ending in the supreme command – the Law of Love, the law which the Lord Jesus was to constantly reiterate.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord again demonstrates the core values His Father gave Him to preach. To inherit the Kingdom, one need not do heroic deeds or go down in the annals of history as a great performer. A simple heart to love and a desire to respond to human need is what is required. To help, not expecting in return, but simply because the love of God flows out to others is what is called for. One does not help to receive praise or recognition, not even with a desire to gain God's approval with the hope of ample rewards. It is only when one is fully immersed in the love of God that one can attain such a selfless attitude. If those on the left side of the King had known they were serving the Lord by reaching out to those in need, they would not have hesitated to help them. Little did they know that the Lord identified Himself with the poor and the needy. The Lord Jesus said, “Be perfect as my Heavenly Father is perfect” (Mth 5:48), one echo of “Be Holy” Whereas, the laws stressed mostly on the “Do’s” and “Don’t’s”, while the Lord Jesus focuses on the “Be”.

The parable from the Gospel proclamation tells us how to inherit the Kingdom. In the past I equated Holiness with moral values that ‘I’ had to perform to earn God's love. Now I know I am “Holy” since I have been set apart for God. Nothing I can do, can earn His love or lose it. To receive the unconditional love of God by spending time in His presence is my calling. As I read His Word and allow it to penetrate my inner being, my response to Him becomes automatic. The demand to ‘Be Holy’ and ‘Be Perfect’ is no longer a burden but a joy. When I repent in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and receive Him sacramentally, I am strengthened and empowered on my journey towards Holiness. Today ‘being’ has replaced ‘doing’. I am no longer imprisoned by the law but set free by His love.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You Lord for You have chosen me to be Holy and saved me by Your cross. Amen.

Tuesday 7th March

1st Week of Lent

My word that goes out of my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish its purpose for which I sent it **Isaiah 55:11**

Isaiah 55:10-11

Psalms 34:4-7, 16-19

Matthew 6:7-15

As we enter the 1st Tuesday of lent, the first reading reminds us about the power of the word of God in Isaiah 55:11.

Personally when I read this, I remembered as a kid my mom once said that if we recite two Our Fathers, a Hail Mary and a Glory be to the sacred heart of Jesus every day before we go to bed,

God will make sure He will guide us in the correct path and never let us end up in hell. I really did not understand why she said that but since that day I always made it a point to recite the prayers on a daily basis. Even after I grew up, and during days when I used to come home late and highly intoxicated. I did all this because I was afraid of hell. All those years of praying even though it did not make any sense makes perfect sense today. When I look back at my life I can say that God heard these prayers. Each prayer never returned empty but bore fruit and has saved me from my sinful life.

The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us in today's Gospel to use simple words because the Father in heaven knows what we need even before we ask Him. It was the basic prayers of the Catholic Church that saved me and made me the man I am today.

Today we celebrate the feast of two great martyrs of the church. St. Felicity and St. Perpetua. In the year 203 St. Perpetua made a decision that would change her entire life. The decision was to become a Christian. She knew it could mean her death because it was during the time Christians were persecuted. When her father opposed her decision she answered him with a beautiful question that we should ponder on. As she pointed at a jug, she asked "see that pot lying there? Can you call it by any other name than what it is?" He answered, "of course not". Perpetua responded, "neither can I call myself by any other name than what I am. I am a Christian." St. Perpetua ended up in prison and met St. Felicity. The two with a few others helped to increase the faith of other prisoners and even a few guards. On the day of their execution instead of being troubled about death, the martyrs turned around and laughed at the crowd for not being Christian and asking them to follow their example. St. Perpetua's final words were "Stand fast in the faith and love one another."

Prayer: *Abba Father, fill us with the grace to stand firm in our faith so that we will be able to experience the love and treasures You have in store for us. Amen.*

“Jonah’s preaching made them repent and turn from their sins”**Luke 11:32**

Jonah 3,1-10

Ps.51,1-2,10-11,16-17

Luke 11,29-32

According to today’s Gospel proclamation, Jonah was an ordinary Hebrew man. God’s heart stirred for Nineveh which was about to be destroyed because of the wickedness of its people. With a heart filled with mercy God called Jonah to take that message of forgiveness and salvation to the people of Nineveh. The first time God calls, Jonah refuses. God calls Jonah for the second time and says to him, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you” (Jonah 3:2).

Was it not possible for the Almighty God, to directly go to Nineveh and save it, instead of calling Jonah in between? Surely it is possible for Him. But the way God acts is different. John 4:24 says that God is spirit. The Lord who is in the spiritual realm (heaven) needs a person to act in the human world. In the Bible we see this starting from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It was always through a man that God brought down to earth the secrets and blessings of the Kingdom of God. Today, even among us, to experience His mercy and miraculous powers, we need a person.

If Jonah had not brought God’s message of mercy to Nineveh, the bible says the city would have been destroyed. Like Abraham and Moses, Jonah too, would have been a sinful and weak person. But it was important to the Lord. He looks for a person who listens to His voice and humbly obeys Him. It was the voice of God that Jonah carried to Nineveh. Therefore Jonah’s message was powerful and Nineveh was saved.

In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus is asking us to “Look now one greater than Jonah is here.” The voice of God was powerfully proclaimed through the Lord Jesus. People who listened and accepted and walked according to that voice were saved. Today there is someone greater than Jonah living with us and in us. He is calling us to be His voice to the world. The Psalmist says the only requirement for this is our broken and contrite lives. In Exodus 3:12, God said to Moses, “I will be with you.” Today He says to us, “I will be with you. You are not alone. Are you ready to host me in your heart and take my voice to the world?”

Prayer: Abba Father, we do not have the strength. We do not have the power. But we thirst to say ‘yes’ to Your call. Give us the grace to submit to Your will. Amen.

God can supply anything to the righteous who seek His purpose

Esther C: 12, 14-16,
23-25

Psalm 137:1-3, 7-8

Matthew 7:7-12

When I was a child I thought God answers every prayer. However, most times when I prayed for things, I did not get the material things I prayed for. It was easy for me as a young child to point fingers at God and blame Him for not giving me what I asked for. Sometimes we think God is ignoring our prayers but today's Gospel proclamation tells us that this is not the case. God answers our prayers and gives us what we need. God in His infinite and perfect wisdom, knows what we need and what we do not need. He may not give us everything we ask for. Most times what we ask may not be what we need or may not be according to His perfect plan. But God will not withhold gifts from those who desire and seek what is right. In many instances, when I prayed for His guidance to lead me, He gave me guidance. When I prayed for strength to get through difficult times He gave me His love and grace. Our Father will watch out for our true needs and will answer our prayers. Sometimes we just do not recognise it.

God answers in three ways-- He can say yes and give us what we want. He can say no and give us something better. Or He can say wait and give us what we prayed for. No matter what God is always looking out for our best interest and will answer our prayers according to His perfect plan. We just need to trust Him. While trusting Him, we also must pray. It says in Matthew 7:7-8, 'Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be open to you.'

This lenten season, we are called to take a little time out of our busy lives to sit in silence and pray to our Lord. To ask for what we need, to help us through these forty days. We are called to question ourselves. Have we taken time out of our day to sit and pray to God? How often have we sat in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament? Let us make this lenten season a period of prayer. Our God is a loving Father who operates on a principal of reciprocity. God is the perfect example of giving. How we treat others reveals our character and in turn our Eternal destiny with Christ. Today we are called to live out the golden rule, 'Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you'. God calls us to treat others with love and respect. We are called to question how can we help others in Christ during this season.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I pray that in every situation I may be able to say not my will, but Yours be done. Amen.*

“If you, O Lord, mark iniquities, who can stand?”

Psalm 130:3

Ezekiel 18:21-28

Psalm 130:1-8

Matthew 5:20-26

Recently I felt so disturbed over an incident that happened in my life. A person suddenly reacted to me and challenged my identity. I was taken by surprise. In an instant she realised her mistake and asked me to forgive her. Verbally I responded to her that it was alright and to forget the whole incident. But internally I was carrying so much of bitterness and hurt. I felt so angry and lost. I forgot the Lord Jesus who loved me and forgave me while I was still a sinner. I failed to look at the Lord who gave me so much of peace, love and joy even in the worst situation and continued to dwell on this incident. God seemed so far away and distant. What was real to me was this person, my feelings, my emotions, sadness, bitterness, despair and anger. About a month ago, after thanking and praising God while on an outreach program, we were led to pray with Psalm 130. Suddenly the words of this Psalm started to jump out to me, word to word. The Lord was telling me I should have cried to Him out of my depths. When I do this He will hear my voice and His ears are attentive to my plea. He never keeps a record of my sins or the sins of anyone. The Lord forgives every one - me as well as others who have hurt me. And now I need to wait upon God as a watchmen to wait for the morning. That I need to hope on God and not on others; not even on myself. God loves me as well as the one who hurt me and He redeems all of us from all our sins. As I prayed with the Psalm the anger and bitterness disappeared and the love, peace and joy of God enveloped me.

We have our own sinful nature and we live among brothers and sisters who may have never experienced the love and forgiveness of our Lord Jesus. Thus facing trials and temptations in our daily lives is inevitable. God has been faithful to us. When we do not forgive our brother or sister we become unfaithful to God who has already forgiven us and the consequence of it is spelled out in today's Gospel proclamation. The Lord Jesus tells us that if we are angry with a brother or sister we should not delay to make peace with that person. The Lord taught me that peace with another person becomes possible only when I first make my peace with my God, by waiting upon the Lord on a daily basis, with thanksgiving, praise, repentance, scripture reading and worship.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we ask for Your grace to seek Your face, Your peace, love & joy in our lives on a daily basis. Amen.*

“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”**Matthew 5:48**

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

Psalm: 119:1-2, 4-5, 7-8

Matthew 5:43-48

In today's Gospel proclamation, St. Matthew speaks of one of the Lord's teach which we may find hard to keep. Is it humanly possible to love our enemies? One might say it is impossible but we only have to look to Lord Jesus for an example. From the moment of His passion where He was arrested by the soldiers, up until His very last breath, through the most gruesome atrocities dealt out to the Him, our Lord Jesus never once demonstrated anger or animosity towards any person who ill-treated Him. Instead the Lord Jesus forgave all those who nailed Him to the cross and hurt Him severely by saying the words “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.”

Today we are challenged by this example of our Lord. Can we forgive those who want to murder our character? Or can we forgive someone who has severely harmed us or a loved one? I remember more than fifteen years ago when my then marriage ended at a time I did not know the Lord the way I do today, even though by the grace of God alone I was able to forgive fully those who hurt me, many of my family and my friends could not forgive and it took a long time for people to accept it and move on. Every time we sin this way, we nail the Lord again and again to the very cross of Golgotha. Yet, His unfailing love keeps coming back looking for us and He waits patiently to forgive us.

In the first reading we are taught to keep the commandments of the law with a beautiful promise. The bible says, “He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised” (Deuteronomy 26:18). How blessed is it to be a people Holy to the Lord our God? The Gospel proclamation today speaks of the same thing. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). There is a way we can achieve holiness. By following in the ways of our Lord and Saviour.

St. Pope John Paul II showed us how to love our enemy and achieve this perfection when he went to the prison and visited the man who attempted to murder him and forgave him with genuine love. Let us follow the example of this saint and travel the road to holiness.

Prayer: Abba Father, we desire to be perfect as You are perfect but we are weak and driven by emotions. Take control of our minds, bodies and souls. Amen.

Go, climb the mountain

Genesis 12:1-4

Psalm 33: 4-5, 18-20,
22

2 Timothy 1: 8-10

Matthew 17:1-9

On this 2nd Sunday of Lent, we receive a glimpse of yet another facet of the nature of our God, whom we are asked to call Abba Father. Why was Abram chosen? God only knows. It was certainly not because Abram-- who was to become Abraham later on-- was greater and holier than others. God simply chose to bless him and make him a great nation. It was absolutely undeserving

favour that was offered to Abram-- but on one condition; he had to go.

Abram was asked to leave his comfort zone and go to an unknown land God was going to show him. Those who have migrated to another country would have had a taste of this experience. Most often, they would get in touch with a relative or a friend who is already settled in the new country. A new communication is established and information is exchanged. This relative or friend, who was not important before, becomes a valuable person, even more than one's own siblings.

This is exactly what God was aiming at when He called Abram out of his country, away from his people and his father's household. God knew that Abram would not be distracted by his familiar priorities, but would give his fullest attention to God who alone was going to be his new companion on his journey to the Promised Land. In response to Abram's decision to leave his comfort zone, God promised him a whole new inheritance and a great blessing that seemed too good to be true.

The Gospel proclamation confirms this. The three main disciples were being taken out of the company of the others and led up a high mountain-- uncomfortable terrain-- by the Lord, to have a supernatural experience. What they saw on the mountain changed them from deep within. Though it seemed to have had no impact on them at the time, it became a strong foundation in their lives, especially when suffering and death glared at them in face (cf. 2 Peter 1:16-18). The three disciples would not have had this supernatural experience of seeing the face of the Lord Jesus shine like the sun and His clothes becoming as white as the light, if they had not left the others and accompanied the Lord.

This is the experience of most of us who are now on a faith journey. It is often through a loss or deprivation or a disappointment that most of

us are drawn into this journey. Though it did not seem so at the time of the crisis, now we know that the crisis was God's loving nudge to move us from our lives in flesh to a life in the Spirit. The Mount Tabor experience can be compared to our own personal prayer life experience. Prayer is when the Lord gently leads us out of our day to day activities to spend some time with Him and in the process reveals His loving plan for our own life and for others through us. We start seeing the glory and the holiness of our God. This in turn reveals our own hidden sinfulness, resulting in true repentance in our hearts. It also gives us the grace to show mercy to those who have hurt us. We also receive the freedom and desire to remain more at the feet of the Lord, like St. Peter expressed to the Lord. As we choose to climb the mountain each morning with the Lord, His nature gradually rubs off on us changing us from within.

I know of a non-Christian wife who had no choice but listen to the CDs of Mabole Prayer meeting being played in her home from morning until evening. She started praying the Four Steps as that was all she knew and also because her family life was in utter chaos. Each word in the scriptures became alive for her and it was amazing to watch her nature change from an angry reactive wife to a woman of faith with immense patience and kindness. A few years later, her neighbours and even their friends and relatives, themselves non-Christian, started seeking her counsel and prayers. She was shocked when people started enquiring the reason for her change. She was unintentionally witnessing and becoming an instrument of the Lord. She had tears of sheer joy and amazement in her eyes as she shared how her prayers were being answered. This was a woman who allowed the Lord to lead her out of the 'group' and chose to climb the mountain each morning to be with the Lord.

In the Second Reading, St. Paul makes it clear that this calling we have received to a holy life is not because of anything we have done, but because of God's own purpose and grace (cf. 2 Timothy 1:9). Further, it is freely available for every believer, saved by the precious blood of Christ. Without a prayer life, we cannot expect to live a life in the Spirit, filled with inner peace and joy and where supernatural experiences flow through. In short none of us can be of any use to the Lord unless we have an active prayer life. So let us be excited about this invitation of our Lord to leave the world and flesh and "climb the mountain" each morning and night. In return, He promises to bless us and make us a blessing to others and to bless all people on earth through us.

Prayer: Abba Father, You are faithful to all Your promises and Your eyes are on those who fear You. Our hope is in Your unfailing love. Amen.

Host the presence of God in Your life

Daniel 9:4-10

Psalm 76:8-9, 11, 13

Luke 6:36-38

These days we are learning about hosting the presence of God in our lives. How can we make room in our sinful hearts and lives to host the presence of God? We are first called to begin a relationship with God through personal prayer. Next, the church has provided us with 3 steps to host God. Firstly, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Second, the Holy Eucharist and finally, praise

and worship.

Today's first reading is about how Daniel makes a confession of the sins of the people of Israel. He comes to the Lord in guilt and shame but gives the truth to Him. He does not give excuses or try to hide any part from God. In the same way, we have been given the Sacrament of reconciliation to be able to give the whole truth of our sinfulness to God. We are like jars filled with dirt. When we come to Him without excuses or reasons and empty ourselves in front of Him, He is able to forgive us and cleanse us with His blood. After confession, we become clean vessels ready to be filled by the Lord.

Second, we must receive the body and blood of our Lord through the Eucharist. When we have a contrite heart and have created a space within us, He will come to live inside us.

Third, we can praise and worship the Lord. Sometimes, we are unable to see God. Then we must use the gift of praise to lift our eyes to the Lord. As we praise God we will break through the cloud and make a connection with Him.

The Lord Jesus says in today's Gospel that we must be merciful to others as they Lord was merciful to us. For the measure we give will be the measure we receive. The Lord is telling us that we should be a reflection of what we would like to see in others. If we want love, we must give love. If we want honesty, we must be honest ourselves. If we want to be forgiven then we must first forgive others. When we host the presence of God inside us, obeying the commands of God becomes easier. We are able to love others, show mercy and give God to people because He has first done these things for us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that I will be able to host Your presence within me. I pray that I may be able to become a reflection of the love and mercy You have given me. Amen.

Tuesday 14th March

2nd Week of Lent

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. **Isaiah 1:18**

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20

Psalms 50:8-9, 16-17, 21, 23

Matthew 23:1-12

In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus confronts the Pharisees because of their lifestyle. The lifestyle of pretense. Though they did everything according to the law, they were far away from God. The question that needs to be asked is-- did they know they were far away from God? Did they know that God detested their actions? If they did would they have not acted so. In their worlds they thought they were righteous.

Today it is a good time to ask ourselves the same question-- what about our actions? Is God pleased with them? The danger of the spiritual journey is that sometimes we mistakenly thank ourselves and not God. We take pride in ourselves and not God. It is easy to think that it was only the Pharisees who did not have an experience of the Lord Jesus. But what about St. Peter? He idolised himself and not the Lord Jesus. The dangerous thing is that St. Peter never realised he idolised himself and not the Lord. He considered himself an obedient servant and a loyal disciple until he betrayed the Lord.

Some of us may have been on this journey for a long time and may be doing things that are not pleasing to the Lord. It could even be false humility. Some of us categorise ourselves as the "good Catholics" and so we in return think that is why God loves us. When the Lord Jesus called St. Peter, He loved him knowing he will betray Him. Some of us learn this the hard way but this does not justify the sin. Even while we are doing detestable things the Lord is showing us His love and He wants us to accept it. It is only when we know we are loved that we can love back. No one who has a bad day at work comes home happy. We tend react to our family members. It is a reciprocating feeling. When we know we are deeply loved nothing else matters. We will surely end up loving the unlovable. The Psalm and the Gospel both say that the Lord Jesus is not waiting for our offerings to Him. He wants us to love people like He loved them.

Today if we have fallen, we need to thank the Lord, for we have realised that we are nothing but a mere human and God sees us as vulnerable and loves us for who we are.

Prayer: Abba Father, today I come to You as I am with all my faults and failures. Help me believe in Your love, that I too may be able to love others as You love them. Amen.

“But I trust in you, Lord; I say, “You are my God”**Psalm 31:15**

Jeremiah 18: 18 – 20

Psalm 31: 5 – 6, 14,
15 – 16

Matthew 20: 17 – 28

Today's first reading tells us of the never ending game of plotting against the prophets of God. Jeremiah was chosen to speak and act on behalf of God. The voice of God could be overruled when the majority and the leadership are misled. Often we see the leadership would be misled by people who have hidden agendas. Jeremiah did not speak a word of his own but spoke and acted on the instructions of God. This agitated the rulers and the false prophets.

Hidden within Jeremiah is our Lord Jesus. This was the same struggle the Lord Jesus went through. The leadership plotted against the Lord because they misunderstood Him. Jeremiah's cry was the same as the cry of Lord Jesus. The Lord's good deeds were ultimately projected as actions against God. Good was repaid by evil. The leaders were fueled by their envy or jealousy. This is an eye opener for us. We should check our own feelings and thoughts, when we have to witness against others. We could be moved by envy or jealousy.

Interesting conversations took place between the Lord Jesus and His disciples. They were in different mindsets. The Lord was specific regarding His passion, death and resurrection. Having listened to this distressing prediction, the two brothers were bold enough to ask for high positions in the Kingdom. This incident clearly shows that Lord was operating on a different wavelength than the disciples. The disciples had personal agendas. Their outburst projected it.

St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Hebrews, in 4:12 that the Word of God is alive and active. It is a double edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, joint and marrow to cut into our hearts. We could try and identify our internal disposition by looking at the twelve disciples and Lord Jesus. Where am I? Am I in the wavelength of the Lord Jesus or am I in the position of the disciples? To be specific we could search; are we amongst the twelve who wanted to use influence to gain position? Or are we obedient to the call of God like Jeremiah and the Lord Jesus? Or are we on the side of the plotters? We should not settle to be lukewarm Catholics or Christians. Many allegations may come on our way; we need to be obedient to God's call with a pure and a contrite heart.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray, just as the Lord Jesus said, “into Your hands I commend my spirit” and do Your will. For you are a faithful God. Amen.

“Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by the water”
Jeremiah 17:7-8

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalms 1:1- 4 & 6

Luke 16:19-31

The word of God says, “cursed is the one who trusts in man” (Jer 17:5). “But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him” (Jer 17:7). Henri Nouwen used to say that 98% of our life is spent in waiting. At a superficial level we experience this in the amount of time we spend waiting at check-out counters, bus stations or airports. But rarely do we have what Nouwen calls “a fully pregnant moment”, namely a moment when we can say to ourselves: “Right now, I do not want to be any other place, with any other persons, doing anything else than what I am doing right now.” But how do we grow to a place of being perfectly content with the Lord? We can come to that state when we place our hope in the Lord alone.

Lalith Thaththa reflected some time ago that hope is a joyful anticipation. We can have a joyful heart irrespective of our circumstances. To place our hope in the Lord alone and to be content with Him, knowing that He has it all, can be done if we have a relationship with Him. It is through that personal relationship with Him that we will come to know who He is, how powerful He is and how great He is. Until then we will not be able to place our hope in the Lord alone and be satisfied with Him. Psalm 33:20-22 says, “Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.” Our hearts will be glad as we place our hope and trust in the Lord and wait upon Him. Those who place their hope in the Lord are like trees planted by the water that send out its roots by the stream. They shall not be moved, not be afraid when heat comes or a problem or crisis hits because they are rooted in the Lord and He equips them and strengthens them to face the battle that life throws at them.

Today’s Gospel proclamation reflects on sharing what we have with those who are in need. It is not only about sharing wealth and food but also our time, our kind words and God’s presence. This is because we are chosen by God to reflect Him in what we do. There is not an act of kindness, generosity, act of sacrifice done or a word of peace and gentleness spoken that does not sing hymns to God.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for filling our hearts with Your joy and peace. We place our hope and trust in You. Amen.

“...the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”

Matthew 21:43

Gen. 37:3-4, 12-13,
17-28

Psalms 105:16-21

Mt. 21:33-43, 45-46

Joseph's brothers hated Him. When they saw that their father loved him more than them, hatred built up within them towards Joseph. This anger developed to an extent that they decided to kill him. However through the intervention of one brother he was put into an empty cistern and thereafter sold for twenty shekels of silver to some merchants on the way to Egypt. The brothers

thought this was the end, but God the Father who reigns from above takes Joseph to the palace.

Committing sin will have its consequence. Joseph's brothers did this act to get more privileges. But the result of their actions was unexpected hardships-- huge famine and suffering. Instead of happiness, mere existence became a huge struggle. This shows us that selfish thoughts, hatred, jealousy and vengeance can lead us to destruction. The protective hand of God will be upon the life of one who is submissive to Him and is righteous before God, in whatever the calamity he has to face.

In today's Gospel the Lord speaks through the parable of the vineyard and landowner. "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit" (Mt. 21:43). The tenants beat the servants that were sent to collect the fruit. Finally when the son was sent, they killed him. This is the way of the kingdom of this world. When the owner of the vineyard comes the wicked tenants will be destroyed and the vineyard will be rented to other tenants.

If the kingdom of God has moved away from us, what remains is only doom and destruction. According to the Holy Scriptures the Kingdom of God is a treasure. In this Kingdom God reigns. When God sent His Son into this world people killed Him. They thought it was the end, but God the Father resurrected the Lord. To everyone who is righteous before God and is submissive to Him are apart of this Kingdom.

As Christians we are privileged to live in the Kingdom of God. However, it is said that it will be taken away from us and given to others if we live a sinful life. Today let us decide not to get caught up with the ways of this world and to the kingdom of darkness. Let us decide to live a life submissive to the will of God, based on the Word of God.

Prayer: Abba Father, through Your Son give us the grace enter into a life where You reign completely. Amen.

“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them”

Luke 15:2

Micah 7:14-15,18-20

Psalm 103:1-4, 9-12

Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law had standards; welcoming sinners and eating with them was not acceptable. God has a problem with that standard. He is attracted to the one who is not attracted to Him.

The son in today's parable had everything he wanted in the father's house. His heart however, was restless. He could only think of the "pleasures out there". They were calling out his name. Their attraction and excitement were so great, that he left the comfort and security of the father's house. We are no strangers to such longings. They could be innocent as buying an item on sale or as dangerous as giving into a sinful desire. The longing for that experience could be so strong that we too would happily walk out of the Father's house. We too would temporarily become deaf and blind to the heart of God, so that we could just indulge.

When our son was in his early twenties, we realised the "pleasures" of the world were getting his attention. We could not understand it. How did this happen to our child? Where did we fail? As I sat before the Lord, I started to realise at some level we too were responsible. As I turned to the Lord in repentance and intercession, my husband reminded me that our son has the advantage of the prodigal; he has tasted the food in the Father's house.

God who does not touch our free will, watches us as we pursue a "dream" that will eventually become a nightmare. The merciful famine that God permits into our lives brings us back to our senses. The day we realise that our answers were illusions is the day we receive the grace to return to God. Today we see our son slowly, but surely returning. We also see the Father's excitement. He is sending our son people who are guiding him back.

The Lord is reminding us that there will always be things out there that can distract us from Him. He is inviting us into His presence, so that we can experience the food in His house that will satisfy us in our depths. As we continue to host His presence, through His word, through worship of God and the sacraments of the church, the attraction to sin is replaced by the great desire for the presence of God in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, let Your love break every chain and every attraction to sin in my life. May I have the grace to remain in Your presence all my life. Amen.

If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you
would have asked for living water

John 4:10

Exodus.17:3-7

Psalms 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

John 4:5-42

The Hebrews witnessed God performing mighty signs and wonders. They saw how God shook nature when the Red Sea parted. They saw God leading them as a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. When they saw all these miracles they must have assumed that life would come easy to them. They did not bargain for the life threatening situation before them. Like the Jews, we may have seen the saving hand of God and witnessed miracles. We probably never bargained for problems. When we look at the Hebrews, we discover that a walk with God does not mean a trouble-free life. The problems they had to face were so grave that they began to doubt whether God existed among them.

In their time of trouble, the Hebrews went to Moses and acted as though it was Moses' fault. Moses on the other hand went before God. It looks like the Hebrews did not have a personal relationship with God. Perhaps it was only Moses who had a personal relationship with God. If ever the Hebrews heard the guidance of the Lord, it was only because Moses heard the voice of God and shared the leading with them.

We too could be like the Hebrews. Rather than having a personal relationship with the Lord and hearing His voice in our hearts, we could be hiding behind the God experience of another person. If so, when bad times come, the circumstances will destroy us. What is more, we may turn against the very ones we hero worship.

When Moses turned to God, God asked him to gather the elders at Mount Horeb (Sinai) and then take his staff, and strike a rock. Why did God require Moses to strike the rock? Could not God have made water flow from the rock and then lead Moses and the Hebrews to the water?

We learn God's style. He works in cooperation with a person who has a relationship with Him. The Hebrews had a relationship with Moses, not with God. Because of this they were subject to natural laws. Moses had a relationship with God. God worked together with Moses. The simple human act of striking a rock brought supernatural intervention, which defied the natural laws.

Why did God choose Mount Horeb as the site for the miracle? I

think it is because Horeb was the Holy Ground on which Moses first encountered God. Right now, Moses was in an unenviable situation. The threat of an angry mob was very real. What God had asked him to do seemed foolish and impractical. Going back to Horeb must have brought memories of that encounter and helped Moses trust God more readily. I learn that when the going gets tough and I find it hard to trust the Lord, going back to incidents where I have experienced the touch of the Lord and His divine intervention helps me trust the Lord more readily.

The Gospel reading speaks to us about what happens to people when they encounter someone who has a relationship with God. The physical need of our Lord Jesus (thirst) becomes the means of a breakthrough. It is as though the Lord is saying, when you interact, serve and help one who is in a relationship with me, you will have a breakthrough in your own life.

The conversation at the well shifts to living water. The woman retorts that the Lord has neither a rope or bucket. Much of the time it looks like God does not have the answers for our needs. Like the woman, we do not know the gift of God and who it is that asks for water. Our perspectives are earthly and different to that of God. Hence, we are blind to the blessings that are on offer.

Our Lord goes on to explain, that the water He will give will not only quench thirst, but turn into an inexhaustible spring. Now the woman ascends to a higher plane. Instead of saying "If you possess such water, why is it that you are asking me for water?" she wants this living water. As she listens to the Lord she is attracted to what is on offer and her perspective begins to change. Yet, her motive is still earthly. All she wants is to be spared the hassle of coming to the well daily. Change is a process and with the encounter it has just begun.

Then there is divine intervention, a word of knowledge, which bowls the woman over. Just like how water flowed from a rock when Moses hit it, when one with a relationship with God ministers, something more than human thoughts and ideas is communicated. Those with a personal relationship with God, those who cooperate with God, become a blessing and a source of divine intervention in their environment.

The second reading tells us how to enter a relationship with God. By accepting in faith that He died for us while we were still His enemies. Then by accepting His forgiveness and through the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we enter a love relationship with God.

Prayer: Abba Father, bless me with a living relationship with You, so that I may hear Your voice and change. Make me a blessing to my environment. Amen.

Monday 20th March

*Feast of St. Joseph, husband of
Mother Mary*

**“When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord
commanded him”**

Matthew 1: 24

Romans 4:13, 16-18,
22

Psalm 89: 2-5, 27, 29

Matthew 1: 16, 18-
21, 24

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Joseph, the husband of Mary and the foster father of our Lord Jesus. Many of us believe that St. Joseph was a frail man, thrown into the shadows by the splendour of the Lord Jesus and Mary. But St. Theresa of Avila, who was devoted to St. Joseph once commented that she could not imagine why anyone thought that God would choose a frail old man as the protector of His Son. She believed St. Joseph to be a strong, sturdy and capable man. She said “To other saints the Lord seems to have given grace to assist us in some of our necessities but of this glorious saint, my experience is that he assists us in them all. The Lord Jesus wishes to teach us that as He was subject to St. Joseph on earth (being his father and guardian), it is the same in Heaven and He still does all that St. Joseph asks.”

St. Joseph was a man of faith. By faith he believed the angel when he was warned in a vision. By faith he took his wife and baby and fled to Nazareth to escape Herrod’s men. By faith he performed the greatest task that was given him-- to protect and bring up the Son of God.

Today’s readings also talk about Abraham, the great father of faith. His faith was reckoned to him as righteousness because against all odds he chose to believe God and hang on to His promises. He was not a great man by any worldly means. Nor are we told that he was in particular a very holy or spiritual man. But he encountered God and trusted in Him. He chose to believe that God would do what He promised to do – and now, centuries later, Abraham is the father of many nations – the father of all who share in the same faith he had.

As we celebrate the feast of St Joseph today, let us ask this glorious saint to pray for us so that we too may have the same faith that Abraham did. That our faith will be credited to us as righteousness. All that God asks is that we hold on to His promises and walk with Him. Perhaps our faith is not strong and maybe we are struggling to trust God. Let us give God the truth and rely on His grace to meet us where we fall short. He has already promised us that His grace is sufficient for us; that His power is made perfect in our weakness.

Prayer: Abba Father, we lift up our faith to You today. We pray that You will give us the grace to strengthen our faith and to continue to hold on to You. St. Joseph, pray for us. Lead us to your son and master, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother? Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven” **Matt. 18:21-22**

Daniel 3:25, 34-43

Psalm 25:4-9

Matthew 18:21-35

Today's Psalm says, "Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your path. Guide me in your truth and teach me for you are God my Saviour and my hope is in you all day long (Ps 25:4-5). Personally when I reflect on the Psalm, I remember a few years ago during the Lenten period how the Lord in and through a major crisis saved me from the sinful life I was leading. I remember during the 40

days even though I was going through so much pressure at work I had so much peace at the same time. This is because I was convinced that God was working out a great plan for my future. Today as I look back I know that God permitted that rough period in my life so that I would become a mature Christian.

Trials can be an asset to our lives if we see them from a broader perspective. Trials sharpen our wit and transform us to face any situation. We need to face our trials face to face. When we look back we will see that we have grown stronger, bigger and better. The Lord made me stronger through that trial so that I could surrender myself to Him and He could mould me and use me according to His purpose. God usually calls surrendered people to battle on His behalf. The more we let God take over our lives, the closer we get to becoming the person He wants us to be. He knows what we can become because He made us.

Today's Gospel tells us how we need to live if we are to inherit the Kingdom of God. In this parable of the unforgiving servant we come across two characters that we need to consider to live a life pleasing to God. The character of the King who forgives his servant is a perfect example in how we too need to treat our fellow brothers and sisters who have offended us. At the same time the unforgiving servant is a perfect example of how we should not treat others.

Today let us ask ourselves what character have we been following and ask the Lord for the grace to forgive all who have offended us and love them as the Lord loves us. The bible says, we need to forgive others not just seven times a day, but even seventy times seven. Therefore we need to forgive one another until the very end.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray, that Your holy presence will guide, lead and mould us in every situation of our lives and we would become the mature Christians You intended us to become. Amen.

He has revealed... his laws and decrees to Israel**Deuteronomy 4:1**

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9

Psalm 147:12-13,
15-16, 19-20

Matthew 5:17-19

What a God we serve! A God who loves us, cares for us and communicates with us. God has not been a God who has remained aloof and lost in the heavens. Instead through prophets, leaders and inspiration, He has given us commandments and laws to live by. These relate to our relationship to Him and among ourselves.

Every nation is governed by laws. It ensures a fair and level field for people to thrive and live. When there is no rule of law and anarchy reigns, people suffer and are consumed by fears and hurts. In Deuteronomy we are instructed to listen to the norms and laws we are taught so that we may live and take possession of the land. We are told to teach them to our children.

While we have been given laws and guidelines to live by, in reality we are aware that we fall short every day. We find it so difficult to follow the Ten Commandments. Young people struggle with honouring their parents, others commit adultery of the mind almost every day and stealing and envying our neighbour happen at the drop of a hat.

The Lord explicitly tells us that every word of the law remains and if we teach others short cuts around the laws we will have to answer.

What do we do? While we must be aware of the laws, it is best to surrender our lives at the feet of the Lord and allow His love and Holy Spirit to transform us. We cannot fulfill the requirements of the law by our own efforts. That is why we have the sacraments which are channels of God's grace to sustain us and take us forward.

Recently, I my mind was a playground of lustful and impure thoughts. While I knew it was sin, I was not able to pick myself out of it. There was no hope. It so happened that I was at a meeting and I was walking by the priest who was hearing confession. Without thinking I went up to him and began confessing my sins. I took the blame for my sinfulness. I walked away without any emotional experience. But as the days went by I realised I had been lifted out of the pit of lust by the grace and love of God. Humanly, I failed the law, but the grace of God restored me and replaced my sin with a deep fulfilling peace.

Prayer: Abba Father, I am thankful for Your laws and direction for my life and yet I am more grateful for the grace You pour out upon us through the Spirit. Amen.

“Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you.”

Jeremiah 7:23

Jeremiah 7: 23-28

Ps.95:1-2,6-9

Luke 11:14-23

Throughout the bible there is one pattern that is evident; God reveals Himself to His children, blesses them with many spiritual and material blessings, delivers them from enemies and perils and does wonderful things for them. Yet the majority listen to Him only for a little while, but after some time they turn back to their own ways and forget God. But even though they fail Him, God does not abandon them but continues to love them. He finds many ways to draw them back to Him. He shows them the way through prophets and continues to go after them despite being hurt and rejected by His chosen generation.

The Lord also gives His children rules and regulations to be followed. Not to control them or punish them, but to help and guide them to do what is good for them. What more could a Father do for His children to show them that He loves them? What will He not do to draw His children into a closer relationship and experience of His love? However, despite everything the Lord does, only a few remain faithful to Him.

The Father went further. He sent His beloved Son to save us. In today's Gospel proclamation, we see how the religious leaders rejected the Lord Jesus and accused Him of doing things by the power of satan.

Where do I stand in all of this? Am I a Pharisee who thinks that just because I come for prayer meetings and read the bible more than others, that I am superior to them? Though it makes me sad and angry to read about the many times people abandoned God, despite seeing many wonders and miracles, do I do the same in my life? During this blessed season of lent have I made maximum use of these days as I planned? The Lord never stops giving us opportunities to come back to Him. He has never turned away a beloved sinner who has repented of his or her sin.

Today the church remembers Saint Toribio de Mogrovejo. In 1580 he became the archbishop of Lima in Peru. He demonstrated a deep zeal to reform the archdiocese and a determination to do all he could to aid the poor and defend the rights of the native people who were suffering severely under Spanish occupation. He founded schools, churches, hospitals, and a seminary. He was canonized in 1726.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to always have a repentant heart and the grace to come back to You, who will never leave me nor forsake me. Amen.

**“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,
with all your mind and with all your strength” Mark 12:30**

Hosea 14:2-10

Psalms 81:6-11, 14, 17

Mark 12:28-34

Throughout the scriptures we see people's hearts hardening. This means they were following their own ways and understanding without listening to God. Our God always wants us to listen to Him because He knows that His children need His guidance and wisdom to walk on the path that He has prepared for them. When we walk away from Him it grieves His heart and He longs for us to come back to Him with the heart of repentance. He assures us that when we do He will forgive us. The Word of God says “The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father disciplines the son he delights in” (Pro 3:12). We may think that God is punishing us. Certainly not. He is a merciful and loving Father who always watches over us. It is in His love and mercy that He forgives us and embraces us, no matter how miserably we fail Him. It gives Him much delight when His children return to Him in repentance. Like the prodigal son, when he returned to his father. The father could not wait for the son to come to him, instead he ran to the son and embraced him. “But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). That is our Heavenly Father.

Today's Gospel proclamation reflects on the first commandment; “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). When I look into my personal life I see that the reason why I gave the first place in my life to the Lord is because He loved me first. When I was unlovable; broken, rejected and lost in my life, my God found me. He came seeking me out and loved me, made me whole, set me straight, accepted me, adopted me, healed me and lifted my face to look upon the Lord Jesus. Now He takes me all over to shout His praise everywhere. I do not know why He chose me. All I know is that my eyes are forever on Him. If He did not love me first and brought me to where I am today, nobody would have been able to love me today. Today I am lost in His love and fully surrendered to His will. I am here to respond to His unconditional love. I, a person who is ravished by my Father's love can tell you that when you give your life to the Lord and fully surrender to Him and His love and will, He can do more than words can say in Your life.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for Your unconditional love that found me, lifted me from the pit I was in and brought me to a life with all its fullness. Amen.

"It is written about me in the scroll - I have come to do your will, my God"
Hebrew 10:7

Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10

Hebrews 10:4-10

Psalms 40:7-8, 8-9,
10,11

The Gospel Proclamation today takes us to a little village in Galilee, Nazareth. For the Jews this place was insignificant. To them it was just a shoddy halfway stop between the port cities of Tyre and Sidon, overrun by Gentiles and Roman soldiers. Yet, the angel Gabriel was sent to a humble village home in Nazareth where a young and innocent virgin lived. There was made an announcement that changed the entire history of the world.

There are valuable lessons in the teaching today. Imagine the fear and confusion in the mind of young Mary when the angel Gabriel appeared to her out of nowhere. There were two statements of importance that the angel Gabriel said to her. "You are highly favoured, the Lord is with you" and "You shall conceive and have a son and you shall call Him Jesus".

Can we even conceive the confusion in Mary's mind? It could have completely clouded the plan of God for saving humanity. Here is the angel Gabriel saying to Mary you are highly favoured by God and in the same breath implying you are to go through immense shame in the little village as a result of this favour from God. Being with child out of wedlock does not seem like a blessing from God. What did Mary do?

The scripture teaches us in many instances that Mary pondered everything in her heart. She was deeply filled with the Spirit and had the wisdom to always contemplatively look at matters at hand. This is why she was able to say "Let it be done unto me as you have said". No rationalisation and little hesitation. Are we able to do the same? When the Lord asks us to do something difficult do we contemplate all that has been said and surrender to God?

In the first reading from Isaiah we see the prophecy where the birth of the Lord Jesus through a virgin mother is foretold. It could be that Mary knew her scripture well and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit made her understand and say yes to her role in the salvation of humanity. In the same way, we are also called to ponder on the Word and the life of the Word which is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. In doing so, we will never let go of a blessing for the world planned through our saying yes to the will of God.

In the Psalm today we see a beautiful truth of God. The Psalmist

understands what truly pleases God. "I desire to do your will, my God; your law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). All that a follower of Christ needs to do to please God is to be able and willing to do His will. In other words, what pleases the Lord is our obedience.

The original sin originated because of the disobedience of the first Adam and the first Eve. Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. In a world where everything was perfect and was a paradise on earth, deception crept into the world because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

Such disobedience was not pleasing to God. This resulted in the toil and turmoil that followed every generation from Adam and Eve to all our forefathers. We see the grief of God about His creation when we read the account of the story of Noah and the destroying of the earth and we also see His love for His creation as we understand the lesson in all the divine messages in these stories. He is a loving Father who disciplines His children for the good of all.

I can think of my own life when the Lord had to discipline me severely for the numerous times I had been disobedient to His will for me. Once I came to know the Lord in a deeper way, through the teachings of CRL, and was beginning to question and seek answers from the Lord about His ways and His will for my life, the Lord never failed me. Every time I had a decision to make in life I would sit at His feet and meditate on the Word of God. He would always give me answers through the scripture.

Yet, when I could not accept what the Lord willed for me and I saw His will in the negative and I disobeyed Him, I fell into so much of turmoil in that situation. I am still learning the power of obedience and cannot emphasize enough how much I cherish what I have learnt from the life of the Blessed Mother and the Lord Jesus on obedience. The deepest joy and satisfaction I received in life was when I was able to say Yes to His will.

How fortunate are we that the Blessed Mother was given the grace to accept the annunciation and carry the Prince of Peace our Lord Jesus Christ in her blessed womb. What love the Father in heaven had for us His sinful children that He sent His beloved Son to redeem us from our Sin and give us an everlasting life.

Prayer: Abba Father, use us for Your purpose. Help us remember through the life of the Blessed Mother and the Lord Jesus, that the only way to know and obey the will of God is through a connection with God through constant meditative contemplation of the scripture. Amen.

"I have come into this world, that the blind will see and those who see will become blind"

John 9:39

1 Sam 16: 1, 6-7, 10-13

Ephesians 5:8-14

John: 9:1-41

Saul was the first King of Israel. He was chosen by God and anointed by Prophet Samuel. He was the answer to the people who wanted a king. With time however, Saul started playing games with God. God's instructions were tweaked and twisted for personal reasons. The result -- God rejecting Saul as the King of Israel and finding a replacement. In today's first reading we find Prophet Samuel anointing David, a young shepherd boy as the King of Israel. The scripture says immediately the Spirit of God took hold of David.

There are many similarities between Saul and David; both were minding their own business when God chose them to be kings of Israel. With the favor of God, both kings ruled Israel victoriously. Both of them messed up pretty badly as well. While David repented and turned to God, Saul justified his actions. As a result, David remained the "man after God's own heart" hosting the presence of God, whilst Saul ended up as a man who was tormented by an unclean spirit.

In today's Gospel proclamation, everyone has one question in their minds-- who is the sinner? The disciples were curious-- was it the man's sins or the sins of his parents that made him blind. The Pharisees questioned-- who is the sinner who healed on the Sabbath? The Lord today speaks to us of spiritual blindness, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

The spiritual blindness of the Pharisees prevented them from recognising God who was in their midst. Their own insecurities distorted their vision. While it is so tempting to analyze the sinfulness of the Pharisees and the questions of the disciples; today the Lord is speaking about our own spiritual blindness.

When we were told that the church hall we were using for our prayer meetings will no longer be available to us, our first reaction was disappointment with the decision makers. I thought we were being righteous when we went before the Lord in fasting and prayer. As we waited upon Him, He spoke to our hearts. What was happening on the outside is nothing but a sign of what was happening in the hearts of those of us who served in that place. We had fallen into a routine. Convenience and self-interest had become our priorities. We

had started playing games with God. We had become arrogant and spiritually blind. We had become lukewarm for Him. Our own actions, individually and collectively, had moved God out of our own hearts. In His mercy He moved among us and ministered to the people who attended the meeting, but through the “crisis” God was calling us back. We started to see the crisis as a second chance God was giving us to repent and to find our first love for the Lord, when our hearts burnt with passion and love for His mission. I felt He wanted us to host His presence first and foremost, even before we “serve” in the ministry.

When David was anointed King, Saul was still ruling Israel. No one, except Prophet Samuel and Jesse and his sons knew what had taken place in their home. Saul had no idea that he was lost in his ways and God had replaced him. Similarly, when the Son of God walked among them, the High Priests, Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees had no idea who they were calling a sinner. They, just like Saul, had lost the intimacy with God and they no longer knew the secrets of His heart.

The Lord is inviting me to look into my own heart. Is hosting God the highest priority of my life or am I merely using Him to get what I want? Do I serve Him when, where and how He wants me to? Or am I playing a game of fulfilling my own desires and needs? Is my heart taken over by spiritual pride, arrogance, self-interest and self-righteousness? Have the things of God become so distorted that His leading seems like a threat and the people He is using to get my attention as enemies?

Today’s second reading hits the nail on its head. “Live as children of light and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.” When we host His presence in our lives, it becomes easier to hear His voice. When we are moving away from the Lord and into our sinful nature the Lord calls us back to Him. Sometimes, we may not even realise we have fallen away from the Lord, but because of our relationship with Him, we are able to seek His mind, return to His feet and do what is pleasing to Him.

The theme for this year-- Hosting the Presence of God is the answer to overcoming our spiritual blindness. As we open our hearts to His Word in the Holy Scripture and the Sacraments of the church and as we continue to worship Him, the Lord Himself will restore our sight. He says, “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Prayer: Abba Father, give me sight in areas where I have become blind to Your ways, so that I may host Your presence with all of my being. Amen.

“Lo, I am about to create a new heavens and a new earth”**Isaiah 65:17**

Isaiah 65:17-21

Psalm 30:2, 4-6, 11-13

John 4:43-54

As we start the fourth week of Lent, the church shares with us a word of hope originally delivered to the Jews in Babylonian exile. While in exile, they lived among people who had different beliefs and values. Most probably some of those beliefs and values rubbed off on the people of Israel and Judah. Being exiles they must have lived subservient to the people of Babylon.

Are we not like the Jews? When we go to work or school, do we not live under similar circumstances? Have not the values of the world rubbed off on us? Today the Lord is telling us that He can work in our circumstances.

We usually accomplish things using whatever resources are at our disposal. If what God is doing is something new, it means that we are not accustomed to how He is getting things done. The Lord is reminding us that He is not restricted by our resources or the lack of it. He says that the former things will not be remembered because He is able to turn our blessings into curses and curses into blessings. When He enters the scene we will not remember the former things as curses, but as the source of a blessing. Life itself will take a different perspective and living painfully will cease.

The Lord is also telling us that Jerusalem, the place of worship, will bring joy. Today the Lord is reminding us that He is able to make us joyful and happy when we turn to Him. He can provide all that we have been looking for in the world.

In today's Gospel proclamation we are introduced to a royal official who takes the Lord at his word and goes back home. Later, when he discovers that his Son was healed at the very moment our Lord Jesus declared the healing, he and his family believe. When the man took the Lord at His word and went back home, he was looking for our Lord to solve a problem for him. When he and his family believed, it was not just for an to answer to a problem. Now they knew that the Lord could provide all the answers they would normally look for in the world.

Prayer: Abba Father, I have restricted myself to coming to You for favours, while going to the world for enjoyment and answers. I now believe You have all the answers, so I am returning to You today. Fulfil Your promise in me. Amen.

“Do you want to get well?”

John 5:6

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12

Psalm 51:12, 14

John 5:1-16

The first reading about Ezekiel’s vision of the flowing water from the sanctuary speaks of a river, that runs constantly; the further it goes the fuller it grows. This is like the church. The church was very small in its beginnings, many were added to it daily, and the grain of mustard seed grew up to be a great tree. The gifts of the Holy Spirit increase by being exercised and bear fruit.

When we search God, we find some things very plain and easy to understand, while others are difficult and some beyond our reach and we cannot penetrate into them. We may feel it is too late, too hard and too deep to be cleansed by the living waters. But God’s promise and divine grace assures us that our lives will be transformed. We who have no life source in us, like the Dead Sea, are circum to sin. When the living waters flow in and through us washing and purifying us, we come to life and begin to live again. This water is the Gospel of Christ and gives us the gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit to spread and bear fruit.

The Psalm is a record of David’s repentance for his sin in the murder of Uriah the Hittite. It is the most eminent of the penitential psalms and most expressive of the cares and desires of a repenting sinner. We must come to the throne of grace in penitence, to confess our sins, in search of the grace of God to sin no more and in the assurance of a renewed relationship with God and to live for the glory of God.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we see the Lord Jesus perform a miracle and heal a man who had been diseased for 38 years. Angels are God’s servants and our friends; as the waters of the sanctuary are healing when they are put in motion, so are ministers who should stir up the gift from God that is within them.

It was a struggle for the cripple man to get into the water first for him to be healed but he kept trying. Therefore the Lord Jesus had compassion on him. It is Christ’s desire to side with the weakest and bear up those whom He sees run down. Even in our lives, we are crippled by our sin. If we are willing to be healed, the work is half done, for Christ is willing to heal (Matt. 8:3).

Prayer: *Abba Father, I believe that the living waters are cleansing and healing me today. Amen.*

“I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.”

John 5:30

Isaiah 49:8-15

Psalm 145:8-9, 13-14,
17-18

John 5:17-30

Today's readings highlight the beautiful relationship the Lord Jesus had with the heavenly Father. Reading the passages I am reminded of a saying "you can never truly love someone you are afraid of."

From our youngest days we are trained to love God. But most of the time, this love sprouts out as a result of an obligation or a guilt. At the bottom of it all, is a certain sense of fear- that somehow God is this distant angry person who needs our prayers and offerings to keep calm. We equal him to the beasts in our fairytales; as someone who awaits offerings and will snatch anyone who fails to do so. The consequence of this is a loss of a deep and intimate connection and the supernatural power that flows as a result of it.

The relationship Lord Jesus has with His heavenly Father is so intimate that He is able to say, "the Son does only what the He sees the Father doing". He makes it clear throughout the passage that all He does is because the Father has shown Him what to do. His love for His Father enabled Him to have absolute trust in His ways. That is how He is able to heal and forgive even those who are about to persecute Him.

A few years ago, I had to face an upsetting situation caused by my house owner. I thought she was being unreasonable and inspite of all the smiles and the heartwarming conversations we had, she was posing unreasonable demands, causing me to find an alternate accommodation at short notice. Truthfully, I was not seeking the will of God. I was completely unforgiving and was determined to give her a sour face during the rest of my stay as a tenant. It took me a while to realise that God expected me to behave otherwise. Reluctantly I gave the situation to the Lord's hand and asked Him to show me what I needed to do. Today I live at a better house and I share a good relationship with my ex-house owner. I can still smile with her when I meet her at church.

This lent let us fast from the things that prevent us from having an intimate relationship with the Lord.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I pray this lenten season may be a time for me to develop and cultivate an intimate relationship with You. Amen.*

Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful

Exodus 32:7-14

Psalm 106:19-23

John 5:31-47

In today's first reading the writer outlines the power of intercessory prayer—praying or pleading for others. In his dialogue, which should not be taken literally God is quoted as complaining to Moses about “your” stiff-necked people who are worshipping other gods. Moses responds by saying they are not his people but God's people whom God liberated from slavery in Egypt.

In the New Testament the Lord, who is God and was with the Father from the beginning tells us that the steadfast love of the Father never ceases and His mercies never come to an end.

In the Sermon on the Mount, as quoted in the gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, the Lord tells us that we need to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Different people may have different opinions as to what perfection is. Some may say it means going to church every day and following the rites and rituals. But to get the divine meaning of the word perfection we need to go to the Lord.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love only those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mathew 5:43- 48).

St. Luke in his gospel puts it more precisely. He says “Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful”. It is mercy that is the measure of our perfection. To err is human, to forgive divine. That is why the Lord Jesus told St. Peter that he must be ready to forgive not just seven times a day but even 70 times seven. Every time we forgive we become more like God. The Lord Jesus also tells us that in situations of evil and injustice, when we are merciful and forgive, God takes control of that situation and brings about justice according to His will and for the common good of all.

Prayer : Abba Father, give me the power of the Holy Spirit to be perfectly merciful as You are merciful. Amen.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted

Psalm 34:18

Wisdom 2:1, 12-22

Psalm 34:17-21, 23

John 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

'Christianity is a Cancer' - this was the cry of a political leader in India when she found statues of the Lord Jesus at certain traffic junctions. She was leading a protest as an agnostic because the representation of the Lord was not putting her at ease but stirring up emotions of hatred.

Did she know the real Lord Jesus? This was the same problem the Jews and the people the reading from the Book of Wisdom had. For some people their cry is life is short and sad and there is no cure for death. Hence life should be lived in the here and now. Therefore all their bitterness is aimed at those who have a life of faith. The example of the good people gives the unbelieving ones a feeling of guilt, hence they want to stamp them out so their conscience can be put at ease.

Extreme opposition, hatred, killing and anger were oozing out of the hearts of the Jews and such people. It happens to them because they are looking at the Lord Jesus and spirituality from their own perspective. With our human minds and limited wisdom, we will never fathom the deep love of God or be able to encounter His love.

When we encounter His love, everything else changes. We see things in a different way. We do not feel threatened by God and we do not have the need to preserve our life. We are able to abandon our future into the hands of God. We receive a new freedom and liberating joy.

Just yesterday, a person who has been serving in the CRL community actually had the experience of being loved by God. His whole world was turned around. Another man who was facing a divorce after 30 years of married life was overwhelmed by the love of God. Yet another gentleman who had come for the Four Steps retreat for the first time was touched by the love of God he had encountered. They had met the real Lord Jesus.

We are called to pray for those who misunderstand us and persecute us. We do not need to understand their hatred but offer the love of the Father. The truth is such people are brokenhearted and the Lord is close to them in their struggle. We are called to offer God's love.

Prayer: Abba Father, I stand in the gap and pray for all the people that do not know You yet. Lord, I pray that they will experience Your love and start a journey with You. Amen.

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