With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

- Mark 15:37-39

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On Our Knees In His Hands

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Thursday 1st March

Those who are truly rich are those who enrich the lives of others

From the book of Jeremiah, today’s first reading speaks of trusting Yahweh. Jeremiah is saying that we need to be like trees along the bank that have a constant supply of water. These trees can withstand anything nature throws at it. In the same way, those who trust in the Lord are blessed because their roots are tapped into the stream of life. “They are not anxious in the year of drought.”

When we trust God, He can sustain us through anything. We are blessed because we have confidence in God’s prevailing presence and it is in that presence that we put our trust.

God wants us to be like the tree planted near the river. If we fail to nurture our spirits, it will shrivel up. The plant depends on its roots. As long as its roots are watered and the soil is fertile, it will grow. We can use a metaphor of a dying plant to illustrate what happens when a relationship does not have healthy roots. Relationships require security. A man and a woman need to feel safe and secure with their partner. That security is maintained with love and trust. When that trust is violated, the relationship withers and dies unless it gets help. Instead of barriers; our relationships need bridges. We need to secure our lives with trust in one another, not walls and fences or systems that enclose us. The same is true for our faith in God. We trust God by remaining open, in touch daily with God and entering frequently through the gates of God’s temple.

Today’s Gospel proclamation tells us of the parable of the rich man and the poor man. It is a reference to the Lord Jesus Himself and to the many Jews who refused to believe in Him even after His resurrection. There are people today who want some special signs from God to believe. We have the Good News of the New Testament and the living presence of the Lord Jesus among us. We do not need any more. We have all the guidance we need to lead the kind of life which will ensure we spend our future existence in the company of Lazarus.

Life is measured not by wealth, status, or power but in a life of caring and sharing relationships. In a world of extreme consumerism, hedonism and individualism, the scriptures have an important message. Those who are truly rich are those who enrich the lives of others.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to understand that true wealth comes only from the Kingdom of God and not from this world. Teach us to trust you fully. Amen.
In the First Reading, we see the sinfulness of Joseph’s brothers. Jealousy and anger fueled their behaviour towards their brother. They could not see him as their loving brother who would one day save their lives. Instead they rejected him and sold him for profit. They did not realise their sinfulness had taken away any humanness inside them. They acted like animals towards their own flesh and blood.

The Gospel proclamation speaks of this same sinfulness. The Lord Jesus recounts a parable about a vineyard that is leased to a group. The owners servants are beaten and killed by the tenants because they do not want to give the owner his share of the profits. The owner in the parable depicts God, the owners servants are the prophets, the owners son is our Lord Jesus Christ and the tenants are sinful people who do not believe in God. For many years God sent prophets to His people to warn them against their sinful natures and to lead them to God. But no prophet could fully irradicate sin from the lives of people. God decided to send His Son to get the job done. But the people did not listen and put Him also to death. But after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, His followers were fueled not by anger and jealousy but by His sacrificial love and mercy to go out and build on what He had begun. “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” Though the Lord Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders and many of the Jews of His time, God exalted Him higher than any earthly title and made Him the cornerstone of Christianity today.

Today, the Lord is calling us to identify and accept the sin within us. With each sin and addiction we fall away from the Lord’s love and mercy. Like Joseph’s brothers in the first reading and the tennants in the parable, we may not have realised our sinfulness. When we go to the Lord, He will reveal our short comings so our eyes will be open. Then even though we may reject the Lord, the plan God has for our lives will prevail and the One whom we rejected will one day become the Saviour of our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, I come to You just as I am. Lord, I pray for the grace to be able to see my own sinfulness and weaknesses that prevent me from truly experiencing You. Lord, in repentence I pray that the Lord I once rejected will one day become the cornerstone in my life. Amen.
Today we are lead to meditate on our own weak sinful selves and glorify the immensity of the goodness and greatness of our God. The prophet Micah blesses God saying, ‘Who is there like you a God that removes guilt and pardons sin, delights in merciful forgiveness’. We could exist oblivious of this power while being immersed in a world which ultimately destroys us sooner than later.

In the Gospel proclamation the parable of the prodigal son elaborates this beautifully. The prodigal son returned home out of necessity, since he had nothing left but pigs food to eat. When he converts this distress into prayer, he changes everything. He did not feel worthy of being a son. The deep realisation of his selfishness and sinfulness looms large. Even without articulating his thoughts the immense love of his father reaching out to him overwhelms him. This is the love the Father has for us. We just have to open our hearts to Him in surrender and He will be with us.

Without God’s unfailing love and power given to us on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ we would hardly dare to cry out from the depths of our exile in sin. The parable opens with a shocking display of selfishness and ingratitude. The younger son comes to the father and says, “Father give me my share of your estate that should come to me.” He claims the father’s generosity not as a gift but as a possession. But what is more disappointing is his clear demonstration of his unwillingness to wait even for his father’s death before claiming his inheritance. Three times he emphasizes himself as me, my, and me. The father stands for God who is love and whose very nature is to give. The son is you and I who do not know how to ask and what to ask and do not know how to access the divine love which supersedes every other form of possession.

St. John Paul II formulated a principle called ‘the law of the gift’, namely that our being increases as much as we give it away. St. John the Baptist said ‘I must decrease so that He may increase’. This is what will happen in our lives as we allow the Risen Lord to take control of our lives. We are glorified with Him. Then the robe, the ring and the fatted calf are permanently available for us.

Prayer: Abba Father, have pity on Your lost, injured and frightened children. Lead us all to safety through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
The first reading tells us of the Ten Commandments. The commandments are revelations of God’s love. It is because of His love for us that He wants to show us how to live a happy life. However, just like the Jews of the Old Testament, we too may know the ten commandments, but find it difficult to live them. This is because through our sinful natures we are internally pushed to do the opposite of what they tell us to do. The first commandment tells us not to have any other gods other than God. But unknowingly we may have made gods out of our careers, money and relationships. Without knowing we may have put these things before the Lord in our lives. God in His mercy devised a plan to break us free from our sinful nature so we will be able to fully adhere to the commandments. His plan began in the life of the Lord Jesus was and continued by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today’s Gospel proclamation relates the story of the Lord Jesus clearing the temple courts. The Jerusalem temple was the only place Jews could offer sacrifices to God, because they believed that God only resided in the Holy of Holies inside the temple. The Lord had travelled to Jerusalem with His disciples before the Passover. When the Lord saw how the businessmen and money changers extorted the people coming to the temple, He was furious. The businessmen had found ways to make money within the temple. Roman money, with the image of Caesar, could not be used because nothing with a human image could be used inside the temple. The money changers would exchange the Roman money for another kind of money on which there was no image. It is with this imageless money that people bought, sheep and doves to offer as sacrifices. Rich Jews who had money would buy sheep, while those that could not afford such expensive animals, bought doves as their offerings. The Lord Jesus was furious at the money changers and businessmen because they had made the Jews think the favors they could get from God were based on the amount of money they spent. The temple of Jerusalem was a place where a sinner could reconcile with God. But now the money changers and businessmen had put up a barrier between the people and God. The Lord Jesus knew the true nature of God the Father, and He wanted the Jews to get to know the true God.

When the temple was built, inside the Holy of Holies were kept the
Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for sending Your one and only Son as a sacrifice for my sins. Thank You for coming and living inside of me and making me Your temple. Amen.

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus comes to live inside each of us, making each person a temple of God. When we become the temples of God, He will give us the strength to keep the commandments and we will reflect the glory of God.

In the Second reading St. Paul tells us that the things of God cannot be understood through logic or human reasoning. But it is a gift from God. Verses 23-24 say, “but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” When we receive the Lord Jesus into our lives He comes to live inside of us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then we become the temple of God. Then who we were before Christ is no longer there because the presence of God completely changes us.

A spiritual journey with Christ is to grow in this experience. As we journey with God and have a relationship with Him we allow the Holy Trinity to become real inside. Then we no longer have to be focused on changing ourselves, for the Lord will slowly change us from within.

My husband is a great example of this change. I began my journey with the Lord 15 years ago but my husband encountered the Lord in 2014. He has not been journeying with the Lord for a long time, but I see the change the Lord is making in his life each day, and it challenges me. As we journey, the Lord teaches me through my husband, that when we become the temple of God, we are changed from our sinfulness into holiness. Even on my worst day, the Lord reminds me that He can do much more than I ever could. He calls each of us to this experience of His love on a daily basis.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank You for sending Your one and only Son as a sacrifice for my sins. Thank You for coming and living inside of me and making me Your temple. Amen.
Monday 5th March

“You are my God, my stronghold.” Psalm 43:3

“Great oaks from little acorns grow”. A nameless slave girl slips through the annals of sacred scripture displaying a boldness and courage worthy of emulation. The drama unfolds as it opens up a new world to a pagan nation. Despite his wealth and power Naaman was powerless against his sickness. Stricken with leprosy he was open to the suggestion of the slave girl, who asked him to consult the prophet Elijah. At first full of his own importance having preconceived notions on how he should be treated, he refused, but responding to his servants he obeys. Overwhelmed by the miracle he tries to gift Elijah with great wealth but this was scorned by Elijah. Naaman’s healing is a prefiguration of the Baptism that cleanses us from sin and equips us to be prophets, speaking the word of God, priests, interceding for others and kings and taking authority over evil.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus breaks through the preconceived ideas that the Jews had regarding the Messiah-- that He was to be their sole possession. They might have welcomed a stranger who conformed to their narrow way of thinking. But their pride fiercely rejected one of their own – a carpenters son – claiming to be the Messiah. Selfishly they believed that Gentiles were beyond the universal love of God. The Lord Jesus seems to be courting disaster. He had just proclaimed His mission statement when He quoted from Isaiah 61 daring to claim He was the Messiah. Now He quotes from 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 5:14 referring to the widow of Zaraphath and to Namaan the Syrian both helped by Elijah. But the Lord came to reveal God his Father and was prepared to risk His life by doing so. While the learned Jews blinded by selfishness and preconceived ideas rejected Him, the Lord Jesus’ teaching was based on the law of love reaching out to sinner and saint, Jew and Gentile – in short a universal love that left none out.

What is our preconceived idea of who He is? Is our familiarity with the Eucharist a block to understanding the immensity of His act? Can we say with St. Paul “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me”? Let us, like the slave girl, boldly proclaim the Good News of the Gospel and help to build the Kingdom. This is what God calls us to do.

Prayer: Abba Father, You have chosen me among millions to receive the revelation of Your love. Help me to co-operate with You to build Your Kingdom. Amen.
In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus tells His disciples about the Kingdom of heaven. The King in the parable decided to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him (Mt 18: 23-24). In this we can see that the king had not settled his accounts with his servants on a regular basis since he wanted to give them more time to collect whatever they had to return. The king has been very generous beyond measure by lending ten thousand talents which meant an enormous amount.

I remember a friend telling me that he was supposed to return some money to another and he was only able to return it in installments. As the months passed by the person who he had to return the cash to forgot about it and he intentionally stopped paying him. Little do we know that we will have to answer to God when He settles accounts with us. We know that our God is loving and merciful, but we should remember that He is a just God as well.

For the king ten thousand talents did not mean much to him since he had great wealth. As his servant pleaded for forgiveness he instantly gave it to him; to the extent of canceling the debt. How relieved the servant would have felt since he may have been guilty and worried about how he was going to pay his debts. The king valued the relationship with his servants more than wealth. We see that this forgiven servant comes across his own servant who had to pay him just hundred denari, a small amount, and demands that it be returned immediately. He had forgotten the mercy the king had shown Him. I believe this man would have come across this servant many times in the past but would not have pressured him before because he himself had a massive sum to settle. This shows us that at times it is good to be in uncomfortable situations. When we are comfortable we may tend to do something not pleasing to God.

This parable reminds us that God has forgiven us to the degree that we cannot imagine. In turn He expects us to forgive others. If we do not, we may end up like the king’s servant who was thrown into prison until he pays the loan.

*Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to forgive one another as You have forgiven us. Amen.*
The Israelites were a wondering nation. Beginning from Abraham they were called to keep moving until the Lord God of Israel would give them the land that He prepared for them. Obtaining a land was important to them to be a nation. God gave statues to them to live by to be a shining nation. By living so, they could glorify the one, true and almighty God. This chosen nation was blessed with wisdom. These people were chosen according to God’s plan for the Messiah to be born through them. God’s interest was not to give them a land alone but for them to be His people.

We are the chosen nation and the people of God in this present era. We too are on our way to occupy the land which has been prepared for us. This land which we live today called the earth is not where we truly belong. But there is the New Jerusalem anticipating our arrival in heaven. When we are a chosen generation and a holy nation our accountability needs to be more than other nations and generations. This was the call of the Israelites at that time to be the people of God to proclaim His love, goodness and faithfulness to the other nations. We too are called to be witnesses and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God.

The centre of Judaism is the Law of God. Hence, the Torah and Prophets are important to them. They would not fall away from the Law and every time they did they went through the rituals of purification. In the Gospel the Lord Jesus challenged the Israelites. The Lord Jesus came not to abolish the Law or the Prophets’ teachings but to fulfil them. We too are called to surpass the righteousness of the Jewish religious leaders. What does this mean? Christianity’s centre is love. God is love. Lord Jesus is God. The fulfillment of the Torah and the Prophets came as a person in the Lord Jesus. Everything God spoke to the people of God is in the person of Christ. The Ten Commandments and the promises were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Surpassing the righteousness of the Jewish religious leaders is to be God centric and not ‘I’ centric. Today we celebrate the feast of Sts. Perpetua and Felicity. They were asked to renounce Christianity and the Lord Jesus. Both these saints suffered and marched towards their martyrdom freely.

Prayer: Abba Father, cause me to live by Your Word and become a witness of Your love in the world by renouncing the fame of this world. Amen.
Thursday 8th March

Only a genuine heart can acknowledge the work of God

The Lord is inviting us to come back to Him and assures us of His protection. He recognises us as His own people. We see how the Old Testament people failed to do so. This is because they were too concentrated on themselves and wanted to follow God and obey the Law by their human strength. As many of us may have learnt on our journey with the Lord, this is not a journey that we can go alone. This is a journey that we need to go with the Lord. He is assuring us that He is holding our right hand among the fires and torments we will go through in the world. Life was never meant to be lived without God.

God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ showed us the way to live in God’s providence. The Lord Jesus is presented as a divine healer in today’s Gospel. He heals people from all kinds of sicknesses and deformities. Even the demon acknowledges His divine power and flees from His sight. The crowd acknowledges the revelation that the Lord Jesus has power and authority over everything. But the Jewish religious leaders did not acknowledge the power of the Son of Man. They would rather cast doubts on Him and take the opportunity to criticise and attack Him. Only a genuine heart can acknowledge the work of God. We have to shed away our masks to see the mighty deeds of the Saviour in our lives and to experience His healing touch.

Today is a day to reflect on our current spiritual journey. We can look back on our accomplishments and ahead to our yet unfulfilled goals. It will be fulfilling to examine our inner selves to determine if we have removed any of the devils from our lives. Have we continued to uphold our resolution and relied on the hand of God to direct us? The example our Lord Jesus gives of the strong and fully armed guard protects us from the advancement of evil powers which without God’s grace we are unable to conquer. In this regard, we have perpetual protection since the Lord Jesus promised that He will always be with us and that we need not fear the evil spirits because of the promise that He is on guard. Our lives are not lived under the influence of evil, but under our own free will and often sinful choices. But God’s strength and grace exist for our benefit. The Lord died and rose to save us by His blood.

Prayer: Abba Father, You have rescued us from the world of darkness and placed us in the Kingdom of Your beloved Son. I give You thanks. I trust in You. Amen.
Friday 9th March  

Straight are the paths of the Lord, the just walk in them  

Hosea 14:10

Straight are the paths of the Lord and the just walk in them. What is this straight path that the just walk in? The Lord Jesus says in Mark 12:29-31, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.” But when we look into our lives, do we walk in this straight path? Sadly we worship many gods and live self-centered lives that destroy our families, our society and the world.

The first reading reminds us, that these other gods cannot save us. Politicians cannot save us. Money gods cannot save us. Fame gods cannot save us. Our self-centered selfish ways of living cannot save us and the pleasure gods that we go after in this world - drugs, alcohol, prostitution and our own little pleasure trips cannot save us. But if we truly repent and turn back, the Lord promises to heal us from our waywardness and love us freely (Hos.14:5). In Hosea 14:9 the Lord says, “I am like a verdant cypress tree.” - the symbol of lasting life. It is only in Him that we can live a fruitful and lasting life.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Frances of Rome. Her life is truly a witness to this fruitful life. Born to a noble wealthy family in Italy, even as a child she loved God with all her soul, mind and strength and wanted to commit her life fully to God. Her father made her marry a good man of similar status. He loved her dearly. Though at first she resented this marriage, later after receiving a vision from Saint Alexis, she accepts it as the will of God for her life. She becomes a devoted wife and mother of 3 children. But she also makes it a point to serve in hospitals and visit prisons together with her sister in law. Tragedy strikes when her husband is seriously wounded in war and the deaths of two of her children. But her trust and devotion to God and charity to the poor continue. After the death of her husband she moves to the house of Oblates of Mary, the lay order she started and became the superior. The greatest commandment was fulfilled in her earthly life and she went back to her Heavenly Father at the age of 56. Let us ask for her intercession, so that we may repent of the temporary things that we hold on to in our life and turn back to what is eternal.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to listen to Your words and walk on Your straight paths. Amen.
In this third week of Lent, the first reading is a deeper call into our hearts to reflect if we have truly done what Prophet Hosea is asking us to do—“Come let us return to Yahweh”. There is no better time than this, the season of Lent, for us to obey this call from God the Father.

The first reading has an even deeper meaning and mystery. How do we return to the arms of our loving Father, when He seemed to have shattered our dreams and our hopes to pieces? When what once seemed like His perfect plan now seems like the morning dew that has quickly disappeared. The merciful Father gives encouragement to anyone who is going through such an experience today. The teaching says, “He who shattered us to pieces, will heal us as well; He has struck us down but, He will bind up our wounds” (Hosea 6:1).

Here lies the secret to receiving the healing after ruin. Return to the Lord our God with true humility and repentance. The Psalmist today speaks of his deep anguish for the grave sin of adultery and murder. These are mortal sins according to the church and does not make us worthy to come before the Lord or receive the Eucharist. Yet, we know how much greater the mercy of our God was when he heard the true repentance of King David.

In the Gospel proclamation today the Lord speaks of how not to come before Him. The Lord knew the self-righteousness of the people. So, He told them that when we come before the Lord and pray, it must be with utter humility. I listened to a prominent preacher who said we should admit to our sin as a Christian, before God, and make restitution where possible. He openly admitted how he stole books from a store before coming to the Lord and once He received the mercy of God, he went and admitted to his crime and returned the books to the owner though he ran the risk of being handed over to the police. The mercy of God was such that he was saved of the shame of his sin.

This is the same mercy that awaits us when we disobey His direction and sin against God. First, we are called to repent and return to Him and then we shall receive mercy.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me humility to admit and repent for my sin so that I may be redeemed forever. Amen.
Love is undoubtedly the word that brings the greatest joy to anyone. All created beings share this desire to be loved. Have we ever stopped for a moment to wonder how loving the Creator must be, if the created beings are capable of such love?

The First Reading describes how God continued to send prophets, urging the people to turn back from their self-destructive ways. Yet they mocked God’s messengers, just like what happens in today’s world. As I read through this passage, a righteous anger welled up inside me, towards the people of Israel, who were being so unfaithful and arrogant towards the God who brought them out of slavery to the land flowing with milk and honey. I was stopped in my tracks when those words spoke to me directly. A floodgate was opened in my heart as I remembered that I too had often not been faithful to the Lord in my life. I had chosen to be blind and deaf to the voice of the Lord, that came through different messengers in the form of sermons, reactions from others and various other ways. There had been times I was too attached to the things of the world and acclaim of others that I chose to ignore the warnings of the Lord to slow down in my plans and actions. I realise that the Lord had been extremely patient and compassionate towards me and faithful to His promises for my life. He did not give up on me but held me as I went through pain and suffering, mostly as a consequence of my own decisions and actions. My heart is filled with repentance and I am so overwhelmed by the mercy and love of my heavenly Father. I realise that we, human beings have not changed through the centuries, as it is our sinful nature that pushes us to be disobedient to the One who created us and is essential for our existence itself.

Today’s Gospel reading gives the core message that runs through the scriptures. It is indeed the Good News in one sentence. “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). God’s love for His people knows no boundaries, just as His power has no limits. God’s love cost Him His one and only Son, but the power of His love defeated the devil. God sent His Spirit into the dead body of His Son and raised Him in a glorified body, alive for all eternity. What does this verse tell us today? It tells us that God loves us with an everlasting love, which stands over and above any brokenness, sinfulness, addiction or weakness we may have. There is no sin greater than
the power of love and mercy of our God. The Lord Himself proved this when He took with Him to heaven, the thief who was crucified on His right hand and asked the Lord to remember him in paradise.

Today the Lord invites us to repent for our stubbornness to accept His forgiveness and mercy. He asks us to repent for having underestimated His love and power to save us from whatever that rules our lives. Let us choose to trust His words instead and go to Him as little children, with simple and humble hearts. If the Father says that we will have eternal life if we believe in Him and His Son, that is it. It is not our job to try to figure out how it can happen. We must remember we are limited beings with a limited intelligence and understanding. God is unlimited and Almighty. We are so willing to believe the lies of satan and the world, but are reluctant to believe in the One who has made us and sustained us. He asks us to believe in His love. This truth and realisation should be enough to make us so ashamed of our arrogance and ignorance and fall at His feet with our hearts torn open, allowing Him to cleanse us and enter our hearts and lives.

If we have any further questions about this Good News of God’s love, St. Paul clarifies it further in today’s Second Reading. It is truly mind-blowing to know that God planned this whole salvation process to allow His own Son to suffer and die for us, when we were not even trying to come out of our sin and darkness. God “made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions” (Ephesians 2:5). How can this be made any clearer or simplified than St. Paul’s words in Ephesians 2: 8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

The Church presents this amazing love of God for each of us at a very opportune time, right in the middle of this season of Lent. Let us not wallow in our guilt and misery but accept His love according to His Word and open our hearts to this grace. We are called to be the body of the Risen Christ. This automatically demands the same attitude of love that the Father and the Son have for us. God calls us to love and forgive, as He forgave and continues to forgive us. This is the challenge of Christianity. We cannot do this by our self-effort. Hence the Lord sent His Holy Spirit to us to be with us, empowering us to give the same inner response that the Lord gave and to live a victorious life in Christ. So, let us let go of our arrogance and allow the Holy Spirit to do what we cannot do.

Prayer: Abba Father, Your love is amazing, steady and unchanging. Your love is a mountain firm beneath my feet. Your love is a mystery, how You gently lift me, when I am surrounded, Your love carries me. Amen.
Monday 12th March

See, I will create a new heavens and a new earth.

Isaiah 65:17

In the first reading, God gives the Israelites a promise-- that He will change things forever. He will give them a new heavens and a new earth. The Jews thought this meant that God would send them a Saviour to rule their nation and to bring down enemy nations. This Saviour would make them a strong and powerful nation. The Israelites could only think of material things. They could not conceive anything beyond what they saw and they thought God thought as they did. They could not understand a life after death. Existing outside the human body was unknown to them. But God was prophesying about something much more than life in this world. He was talking about eternal life. He would give them a new heavens and a new earth- a new life after death. God wanted them to see something more than being limited to their present life. But they could not conceive such a thing.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus is called upon to heal an official’s son and save him from imminent death. The Lord Jesus speaks of faith. He says that miracles, signs and wonders should not be the base of one’s faith. He wants us to cross the threshold of moving from miracles, signs and wonders to faith in the Lord Himself. How can we move from a rudimentary faith to strong faith in God? It is through the Word of God. The bridge between miracles and faith in the Word of God. When we trust in the Word of God and let go of our past experiences and failings, and listen to what the Lord is saying, He will do a new thing in our lives.

God asks the Israelites, to believe in something more than what their eyes can see. The Lord is asking us to do the same thing. To look beyond this world of logic and reason and to follow the Word of God. Then the Lord Jesus will take us into a new place-- a new heavens and a new earth.

When the Jewish official took a step of faith and believed the Lord ‘s word he shifted the natural relm. He dared to believe in something that was bigger than what he could see in this life. In our lives, when we take a step of faith the Lord will change everything from old to new.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to look beyond my situation and circumstances. To be able to read Your Word and believe that it is true. Lord, I pray for the grace to take a step of faith and to shift the natural relm. Amen.
Tuesday 13th March

I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.

In today’s first reading the prophet Ezekiel speaks of flowing water. He speaks of a vision he had about water flowing from the threshold of the temple and flowing eastward. In those days, water symbolized life. There was no water in the desert. Everything was dry and dead. Ezekiel is telling us that without water that gives life, we would die. Where does this water come from?

From God Himself.

As I read Ezekiel’s prophecy, I remember the teaching given at the 50th Anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Rome. Fr. Cantelamezza explained that a flowing water current is a stream of living water. The current has power. In a river if the water current is strong enough it can take animals, buildings and trees. Nothing can be stopped by the water current. In the same way nothing can stand before the water current of the Lord. It is from Him that flows living water that will renew us and give life to our dead Spirits. After the death of our Lord Jesus, He poured out His Holy Spirit and the Church was born. It thrived and lived by the living waters of the Holy Spirit. However, now, after 50 years of the international Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement the current appears to have stopped flowing in some people’s lives. We must keep rediscovering the water current of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We will not get the Holy Spirit just by asking or crying for Him to come but we can get the Holy Spirit in a new way when we believe in the Good News; that the Lord died and was raised from the dead and is alive today. When we believe this in our hearts, the vision of Ezekiel will come alive in our hearts and God will pour living waters into our dead Spirits and renew us in Him once again.

The Gospel reading also speaks of living water. The man at the healing pool could not get into it because of his disability. But when the Lord came, he brought within Him this healing water. He healed the man without him having to move an inch. It is the same in our lives, when we feel so debilitated in our sin and addictions that we simply cannot come to the Lord for a healing, He comes in search of us. He brings with Him the living waters of the Holy Spirit and touches our sinful lives and makes us whole once again.

Prayer: Abba Father, I need Your current of living waters flowing through me each day so that I may live through Your power and not my own. Amen.
When my daughter was young we had this conversation often where she would make a distorting face and would say “Would you still love me if I looked like this?” and I would always say that I would. I could never fathom that I could love my daughter any more than I already do. Such is the love of a mother for her baby and that is the highest form of love in the natural world.

The first reading today says that even if a mother forgets her baby God will not. There is a known count of 153 million orphans around the world. Even if only half are abandoned yet it is a significant number of broken hearts. The Lord is speaking to such broken hearted people today. He is assuring them that He will never forget them.

In the Gospel proclamation today the Lord Jesus reveals His deep connection and communion with the Father. The Lord proclaims that He cannot do anything by Himself but only what He sees His Father do. This is a profound statement and is one that confirms that He and the Father are one and not that the Lord Jesus has no power. It also confirms that the Lord Jesus was always attuned to the will of the Father through deep communion and only did what the Father willed for His people.

The Lord Jesus also says the Father loves the Son. What is the kind of love that the Lord is speaking of? It is the agape love. It is the highest kind of love which is higher than the love of a mother for her baby. It is unconditional and everlasting.

As we complete a full month of the season of Lent, let us meditate on what the Gospel proclamation further says-- that the judgement day will come and on that day we will need to stand before Him, who is all good and all powerful, and answer if we have lived a life of goodness or evil.

First let us start from our own families and establish our deep connection with the Lord Jesus through whom is the only connection to the Father. Then, let us love our spouse and children with the agape kind of love-- unconditional and ever forgiving and merciful. Then one day, we shall rise to live and not to be condemned.

*Prayer: Abba Father, help us seek You first at all times so that Your will may be revealed to us through Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*
Thursday 15th March

“Our hearts were made for You, O Lord, and they are restless until they rest in you.” - St. Augustine of Hippo

Today’s first reading is taken from the book of Exodus. It speaks of the people making a ‘golden calf’. I would like to reflect on two key points. Firstly, when Moses had gone to meet the Lord, the Israelites, the very people who were brought out of Egypt, who had seen the faithfulness of the Lord and witnessed His miracles were making a golden calf, a false image and they worshipped it. Why did they make a golden calf and worship it instead of trusting in the Lord, His faithfulness and in His providence? This is because to have faith in the Lord requires obedience. It is only in obedience to Him and His Word that brings about faith in Him. Unfortunately, they failed to acknowledge that He alone is the Lord. Verse 9 says, “The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are.” They were not willing to obey the Lord. Rather in their stubbornness, they walked in the way they wanted; placing their trust in something other than God. How many of us have placed our trust in things and not in God? How many of us have made a “golden calf”? It could be money, career, relationships or people. Anything that is placed before God in our lives, anything that is given priority more than God is a ‘golden calf’ which becomes an idol in our lives.

Secondly, as we continue to read this chapter we see God was displeased with the people of Israel as they walked in their own way. The Lord said “Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation. But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people. Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.” Moses was able to turn God’s anger. He was able to intercede on behalf of the people of Israel and God heard him. This is because Moses had an intimate relationship with God and he obeyed God in everything He did. Therefore, God was pleased with Him and heard his plea. That is why we ask our Blessed Mother and all the Saints to intercede and pray for us. They are the greatest intercessors because of their intimate relationship with God and obedience to His will.

Prayer: Abba Father, may my heart desire You alone so that I may continue to journey with You; growing in an intimate relationship with You and walking in obedience to You. Amen.
Friday 16th March

“You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me”

John 7:28-29

While preaching to the crowd, the Lord Jesus says “You do not know him”. He reminds us of the importance of knowing who God the Father is and His true nature. Generally, we understand things by our past experiences, what we were taught by our elders including parents and what comes from inside us. The problem is that this understanding may not always be right. It may not be perfect or true. The biggest problem is that, many of us understand God the Father in the very same way. We cannot expect our past experiences, broken nature of our parents and our own broken nature to reveal the true nature of the heavenly Father. However, many of us are still struggling to understand God the father in this way. That is why the Lord Jesus says “You do not know him”.

When we lied in childhood, our parents said God will burn our mouth. When we told the truth, we were punished by elders. So we understood God as a punishing God. We did not see people forgiving each other. Instead we saw how people got revenge against each other. We were taught how we should gather things, gather knowledge and gather as much as possible to become rich. So when we became adults these lies were inside our hearts and minds. We understood God in the same way. Therefore, we continued lying, gathering things for own benefit and became more self centered. Today, we continue to live without forgiving others.

We spend our lives without understanding who God truly is. This is another major darkness that makes us blind to the truth. During this lenten season, the Lord Jesus invites us “to know God”. Psalm 34:18 describes in a beautiful way the true nature of God. “The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit”. Sometimes, this description of the nature of God may be totally opposite to our understanding of Him. Anyone can come to Him. That is why He says, ‘come as you are, I love you’. Maybe we are broken. Maybe we are sinful. Maybe we are rejected or wounded. We still have a chance. Our Heavenly Father is ready to accept us. Just as the Father accepted the prodigal son, the Father will accept us as we are when we come to Him. He will reveal His true nature to us, forgive our sins and clothe us with righteousness.

Prayer: Abba Father, cleanse our hearts and minds so that the true nature of the Heavenly Father may be revealed to us. We may know Him and live in Him. Amen.
Lent is a time to hear the voice of God

The Galilean Jews were culturally different and spoke a distinctive form of Aramaic. They were lax in their observances of rituals; a far cry from the observances in the temple in Jerusalem. They were known as trouble makers. No respectable Jew would associate with the Galileans. The Lord Jesus however, chose to spend most of His time around the Sea of Galilee among the Galileans. When He went to Jerusalem, people gathered around Him to listen to His teachings in the temple courts. They were amazed by how He gained “such learning without having been taught”. The Pharisees and the Chief Priests were convinced that He was just another trouble maker from Galilee. They were determined to arrest Him. When Nicodemus, a Pharisee, was against arresting the Lord, they argued with him; “look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.” They used their authority and scripture to silence Nicodemus.

The Priests, Teachers of the Law and Pharisees took pride in their knowledge of the scripture. They believed they were special and above others. While on the external they were observing the rituals and fulfilling the religious obligations, they were completely disconnected from God internally. Therefore, they were limited to what they understood. Their human understanding could not grasp the Son of God who was in their midst. As a result, they believed they were doing God a favor when they plotted to crucify the Lord Jesus.

We can easily fall into this trap. Just like the Pharisees we too could fulfill the religious obligations on the external but remain internally disconnected from God. We could observe the religious rituals, but not deal with the deepest and darkest secrets of our lives. As a result, we could easily become an obstacle to the move of God in us and through us. Lent comes to us every year as a season of grace from God. It is a time not just for external rituals, but a time to hear the voice of God and to return to the Father’s house. It is a time to reconcile with God and allow His supernatural power to transform us from the inside. It is a time to enter into the mission that God has through us in our families, work places and among those we have been sent to serve.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to hear Your voice, to live connected to You and to live this day in complete surrender and obedience to You. Amen.
Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. John 12:24

The default state of man is that of self interest and selfishness. No one has to teach us to act selfishly, it comes to us naturally. From the days of our infancy we manifest signs of selfishness and self-interest.

Today’s first reading highlights this state of man. The Lord says that He rescued the people from dire straits in Egypt. He says that He made a covenant with them. Yet, the people were not able to be faithful; they broke the covenant. Because of this fundamental flaw in people, we have devised laws, law enforcement agencies and court systems to deal with our nature. I currently live in a country that boasts of a low crime rate. Yet it is not because the people are good, but rather, it is because of a strict law enforcement system that makes examples of people caught breaking the law. Even though their behavior is impeccable, deep within, they still have the same propensity to act selfishly. Where the law is gray, they are as corrupt and self-serving as any other. Given a chance, when no one is looking, they act just like any other.

In today’s first reading, the Lord says that He is going to find another way of solving this fundamental flaw in people. Rather than writing the law in their heads and giving people knowledge of what is right and wrong, He is going to write the law in the hearts of people. The heart signifies the hidden area of our life that no one else sees. He is going to write the law in the core of their being, so that obeying the law will come naturally to them.

I remember a young man in our prayer group, an accountant at a big company just outside Colombo, who on returning from the bank, with the payroll of his office, discovered that the teller had accidentally overpaid him by a significant amount. Not even the bank was aware that this mistake had been made. He could have kept quiet and enjoyed his good fortune since no one but him knew about the mistake. But no, not he. He promptly returned the overpayment to the bank and probably saved the teller’s job. That is what happens when the law is written on a person’s heart. The person begins to obey the law when no one is watching.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, a group of Greeks seek an audience with our Lord Jesus. Phillip was from Bethsaida, a region where Greek was spoken. This may be why the Greeks approached him.
But when our Lord Jesus is informed of the presence of the Greeks, He starts on a topic that appears to be totally unrelated. Greek was the language of the intellectuals and the influential during the time of our Lord Jesus. He must have been acutely aware of the problem where knowledge of what is right and wrong does not necessarily translate into people living righteously.

Our Lord Jesus says “Anyone who loves their life will lose it”. What does it mean to love one’s life? It is to indulge in things that bring pleasure? We eat tasty food because it brings us satisfaction. Many hit the bottle to enjoy life. Some indulge in promiscuity to have pleasure. We use and abuse people to get what we want. Our Lord says that if the purpose of our lives is limited to seeking pleasure, we are going to be disappointed and unfulfilled. What is more, the day we die, or become invalid, everything ends. Our Lord Jesus says that there is another way to live. A life that is a result of the law being written into our hearts. Our Lord Jesus lived such a life and we look to Him for the signs of how this life is lived.

Our Lord Jesus says that the one who hates his life will keep it for eternity. What does hating one’s life mean? We look to the master for answers. “I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” He lets go of His defenses to do what God expects Him to do. He finds meaning to life by sacrifice.

He goes on to say “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.” When we also let go our defenses to do what pleases God, the experience and disposition of our Lord Jesus will be ours. What is this disposition? It is the disposition of one who has the law written on his heart. A disposition which results in hearing a voice from heaven, which shares an experience of God’s love, that you are special and valuable in His eyes. Those who are not in this disposition may hear the voice, but do not find meaning in it. It is like the sound of thunder to them, only noise, not an earth shattering experience.

“Now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” Who is the ruler of the world? It is the problem highlighted in the first reading, the drive to act in selfishness. The seed that dies bears much fruit; which results in many more seeds. Because of His sacrifice, He plants the law in our hearts so that we too may live like Him. And when we live like Him, the seed bears fruit among those we live with.

Prayer: Abba Father, I am by nature drawn to sin and self-indulgence. I thank You for the promise of the law to be written on my heart. Continue to fulfil this promise in all the areas of my life. Amen.
Monday 19th March

“Joseph, descendent of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife”
Matthew 1:20

Today the Catholic Church celebrates the feast day of St. Joseph, husband of Mary and earthly father of the Lord Jesus. The bible does not tell us much about St. Joseph but that he was an upright man and was open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on the life of St. Joseph, I wonder how he felt when he was initially told that he is to be the father of the Messiah that they had all been waiting for. Was he intimidated? Was he proud? Did it fill him with fear or swell him with arrogance? Did the job ahead seem too big or impossible? Was he tempted to give up before he began and walk away from the Holy Family he was called to lead?

I am no St. Joseph. The responsibilities I am called to are nowhere near comparable, but that experience of being called to do something that feels too big and too impossible does seem familiar. Often in this journey, there are moments when I am faced with seemingly unbearable situations where I think that the right thing to do is to quietly walk away. But God has ways of talking to me, just like He spoke to St. Joseph in a dream. He explains His purpose and role for me in this apparently incredible situation in front of me. “Do not be afraid” the angel told St. Joseph. “Do not be afraid” God repeats to me today. St. Joseph was open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. He who is often depicted as a frail old man, had the courage to stand up in boldness and faith to the task ahead of him. The more I think of it, the more impossible it seems. How do you bring up the Son of God as your own? How do you bring up as a child the eternal God Himself? But this was the plan of God and to this St. Joseph said yes.

Do I have the courage and boldness today to say yes to God the same way St. Joseph did? Do I have the sensitivity to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the strength to say yes to them, no matter what?

St. Joseph is considered the patron saint of a happy death as it is traditionally thought that he passed to eternal life in the arms of the Lord Jesus and Mother Mary. I think that he is also the patron saint of impossible situations-- when the call of God seems too big to bear but we say yes to that call anyway.

Prayer: Abba Father, may I be given the grace to say yes to Your plan, just like St. Joseph did. Amen.
Tuesday 20th March

“I AM” He and unless you believe in me you will die in your sin

John 8:24

In today’s first reading the Israelites became impatient and complained against Moses and God. “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the desert?” (Num 21:5). These were the very people who cried out to God for 400 years to set them free from Egypt. Since they had lived in Egypt for a long period, the culture of the Egyptians and their mind set had set into these Jews. They had become more Egyptian than Jewish. May be that was one of the reasons why God took 40 years to show them the promised land. He had to remove the Egyptian attitude that was planted into every Jew who left Egypt or they would start a new Egypt in the promised land. Even though they physically left Egypt their hearts had not left.

Does this not happen to us as well? Even though when we decide to repent of the past acts and choose to no longer go back to them, we tend to talk about how we used to do things in the past with our friends and at times we feel proud of it. Personally I have done that a million times. This shows that even though we do not act the same way as before on the outside, within us we still have not let go the sinful Egypt. Then what happened to the Israelites will happen to us when that hidden nature shows up. The reading goes on to say that the Lord sent venomous snakes among them and many died. But as they pleaded to Moses in repentance God instructed him to raise a bronze snake and all who were bitten, saw it and were healed.

In today’s Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus tells the people that “I AM” He and unless you believe in me you will die in your sin. The Lord Jesus is reminding them that He is the Lord that spoke to Moses in the burning bush when Moses asked “what is your name Lord?” and the Lord replied “I AM”. The Lord Jesus Christ goes on to say “when you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that “I AM” the one I claim” (John 8:28). When the snakes bit the Israelites and as they saw the bronze snake lifted up they were healed. In the same way we have salvation from our sin when we look to the Lord Jesus Christ who was lifted up on the cross and rose again.

Today we can look at the Son of Man as He is lifted up in the Blessed Sacrament and all that is not of God within us will be washed away.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace to walk through our difficult situation by gazing upon You and remembering what You have promised us. Amen.
During the brutal reign of King Nebuchadnezzar the Israelites faced immense hostility. They were taken into exile and whilst living in the diaspora, they were pressed to be unfaithful to the God of Israel by not adhering to the law of Moses. The king considered himself as a god and expected the people to worship him and his golden statue. The three young men from the first reading managed to keep away from breaking the law regarding food. In this case they were highlighted for not considering Nebuchadnezzar as god and refusal to worship the golden statue. An ultimatum was given to them, but they continued to remain faithful to the God of Israel. They marched into the fiery furnace victoriously.

In present day context we meet Nebuchadnezzars in different forms. It could be a government leader trying to play god or a boss in office who uses and abuses the authority given to him/her. Parents at home could be nasty to children by trying to cling onto them without respecting their views. Husbands and wives could be Nebuchadnezzar to each other. Our challenge in these situations is to either be faithful to God or compromise?

The Lord Jesus gave us a clear demarcation. If we make the Word of God our home, we will be set free of our false understanding of life. We are perplexed mostly because we do not know the correct dimension to live in. Either we become holier than thou and become a heavy burden to people or we go to the other extreme and become a slave of sin. In either of these ways unknowingly we will be worshiping a Nebuchadnezzar. Our self righteousness, our addiction or sin could become a heavy burden to the family, community and society we live in.

The Gospel proclamation tells us that when the Son sets us free, we are free indeed. The Son of God is also the Word of God. The only way to live in freedom is to make our home in the Son of God. Praising God in all circumstances elevates our whole being from the darkness we live in. When we are God conscious we can hear the voice of God and the Holy Spirit will lead us to life in freedom.

Prayer: Abba Father, let me be Christ centered throughout my life. Let me live in Your Word until I see You in person. Amen.
The Word of God is replete with instances where God demands obedience from us. In fact in God’s Word, we find the word ‘obey,’ appears 69 times in 66 verses. It appears 44 times in the Old Testament and 25 times in the New Testament. The word ‘obedience’ appears 16 times in 16 verses. They are split evenly in the Old and New Testaments.

The perils of disobedience are spelt out in many places in the Old Testament. With every covenant the leader was well-briefed on the benefits of obedience and the demerits of disobedience. The primary reason for Adam’s fall was disobedience.

This brings us to realise that our flawed human nature constantly yearns to disobey God. Why do we choose to disobey? It is because we always assume that we have better answers and that we know more than God. But if we step back and think of the majesty of our loving Abba Father, we will recognise how foolish we are.

There are many instances in my life where I disobeyed God especially when it came to dealing with impulse generated sins where I gave into lust and the flesh. But in God’s mercy I have a beautiful testimony where I was well-employed and was loved by my bosses but I felt the Lord urging me to resign from my job. There was no reason to give up but the urge was so strong that I gave in my resignation letter and gave up corporate life. Hardly two months later I was faced with a serious court case. If I was employed I would have had many complications to deal with. God was good.

Why do we choose to disobey? In our hearts we are so sure that we know better. In the same passage where the Lord Jesus declares the benefit of obedience which is a life with no death, He also declares that before Abraham was, He is ‘I am’. We are limited to time and space, whereas He stands apart able to dictate life across the moments of our life span-- past and future. The Jews were reluctant to entrust their lives to Him. Even Abraham after his encounter laughed at God’s promise. However God made him the father of nations. Let us take God’s Word seriously and choose to obey. It will be difficult but He will lift us up on Eagles wings and save us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I entrust my disobedient nature to You. I cry out for Your grace to choose obedience over my ways. Amen.
In my distress I called out: Lord! I cried out to my God. From His temple He heard my voice; my cry to Him reached His ears. Ps.18:7

In today’s first reading, we see how Jeremiah takes all his complain and worries to God. We are reminded of the Four Steps yet again. Jeremiah comes to the Lord as he is-- a grumbler (1st Step - Come as you are, I love you). Then he pours his heart out to the Lord (2nd Step - Give the truth of your heart to the Lord). Next, he entrusts his causes to the Lord (3rd Step - Surrender your Life to the Lord) and as he does this we see his unstoppable praises to God. This is possible only through the Spirit of God which works through him (4th Step- Be filled with the Holy Spirit).

We can picture the peace Jeremiah would have felt in his heart through the songs of the Psalmist. We are assured that God hears us when we call on His name. What more privilege do we have being the children of God and knowing that our Father hears us when we call Him.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord points to His works as the basis for faith in Him as the Son, “Even if you do not believe me, believe the works...” The greatest of all these works is His resurrection, which we will commemorate a few days from now. Works are always more powerful than words. Words may convince the mind, but works speak straight to our heart.

The Lord Jesus is surrounded with many questions, doubts and insecurities from the world just as it is for some of us today. How does He deal with the things coming from the world? He stays true to Himself and obedient to God’s will. The Lord Jesus goes out and crosses the Jordan going toward the place where St. John had baptised Him. In this way He indicates the continuity of His mission. He helped people to become aware of how God acts in history. The people recognise in the Lord Jesus the one whom St. John had announced.

We may be going through a similar situation today. Most of us may remember the instance where we encountered the Lord. Let us continue to live the will of the Father and do the work the Lord has assigned to us. The Lord Jesus still continues to do the works of the Father today, especially in the Eucharist and the other Sacraments.

Prayer: Abba Father, show me where my life falls short of what I profess. I pray that my heart transforms to be like the heart of the Lord. Amen.
Today’s first reading is a personal experience for me of the living presence of God and how the Lord speaks to His people through the Word of God. Having lived a life for almost 40 years only knowing God in a traditional Catholic way, in a severe crisis I came to meet the Lord face to face when His love and mercy rescued me from living and deciding my future on my own.

Throughout the last 10 years, my life has been a living testimony of trials and triumphs only through obedience to His leading and direction. However, as the human sinful nature in us drives us to times of complacency when things are smooth and running without trial, life came to a standstill when a major family decision had to be taken with regard to our future home. We were comfortable in the place we were living in for over fifteen years, with a good landlord. Unexpectedly, we were asked to vacate the place and we found that we neither had the finances nor a suitable place to shift to. All avenues of going where I wanted to go were closed and my husband suggested that we shift to his ancestral home which was his birth right where he was the fourth generation owner. I wrestled with this decision as I had no peace of mind to do so for many practical and personal reasons. I found all possible reasons not to agree to the decision. It is then that by the grace of God, I went into fasting and prayer for a week for the Lord’s leading. During this time I was led to go through some reflections done in the previous year by me and my husband as a preparation for another major decision we took. It was 19th September 2017 that I was led to open up the reflections done on 19th September 2016. Exactly a year before, and the reflection was on Ezekiel 37:23-28 and the Word became alive. It was the perfect leading that we must settle in the land of the forefathers and that God will make His sanctuary among us. As soon as I mediated on this Word, all my anxieties and fears disappeared and we were able to make the move in complete obedience to God. The promises and blessings that are assured through obedience is not just for this generation but for generations to come. What matters most is His promise of His presence in our new home. The Gospel proclamation reminds us that the Lord is alive for us, for one reason - to establish an everlasting covenant of peace.

Prayer: Abba Father, may Your presence never leave our homes and our hearts. Amen.
Today we begin Holy Week by celebrating Palm Sunday. We enter the church today in a procession with the blessed palms, remembering the Lord’s entrance to Jerusalem. He entered Jerusalem riding on a young donkey, with people celebrating and shouting Hosanna; giving Him a welcome fit for a king. The Lord’s entrance to Jerusalem in this manner had a symbolic meaning. Apparently, nearly 25,000 lambs were sacrificed during the feast of the “Pass Over,” but the lamb which was sacrificed by the High Priest was taken to the temple in a procession four days before the main feast day. Just like the paschal lamb, the Lord Jesus was also taken to the temple in a large procession, only to be slaughtered just a few days later.

In today’s first reading, we find the prophecy about the obedience of the Servant of God. He says the Messiah will be tortured, violated and humiliated in every possible way, but He will remain faithful to God. In fact, He will cooperate with those who inflict pain upon Him; offer His back to those who strike Him, His cheeks to those who pull out His beard and His face for blows, spittle and disgrace.

My mind is too small to capture the magnitude of the Lord’s inner responses. I cannot handle a little sarcasm or a little insult without “innocently” striking back. I do not get emotionally hijacked; I enjoy the ride until I am satisfied. I look at the Lord and I am ashamed of myself. Why did the Lord not react? Why did He embrace the cross? How was it that His concerns were on others till His last breath? How was it all possible to the Lord, when I cannot even give the smallest inner-responses in day-to-day issues?

The Prophet reveals the Messiah’s secret; “He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears”. Every morning, the Lord found the time and a place to come into the presence of God. There He rediscovered the heart of God. He heard the voice of God, that drowned the voices of the world.

“I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away”. As He opened His heart to the voice of God, He was empowered to carry out the mission. His own desires of the flesh; comforts, position, even protect-
ing His own life became secondary to the Lord. His priorities changed when He saw the suffering of mankind because of sin that separated them from God. He wanted them to have what He had—intimacy and a relationship with the Father. Thus, the Lord’s Passion for the lost sheep moved His heart to embrace the cross.

Today’s Gospel unfolds the last few hours of the Lord Jesus’s life on earth. First, we find Him before Pilate; the only man who was in fact looking for an excuse to release Him. The Lord, however was not interested in Pilate’s favor. His silence cost Him physical torture, mental abuse and crucifixion. He refused any kind of relief; the wine mixed with myrrh could have numbed His pain, made death on the cross a little easier, but He refused it. He goes through the entire process silently, making the payment for sin to the last cent. By doing so, He broke the power of sin with His last breath, tear opening the curtain that separated man from the Holy of Holies.

Today’s Second reading says that the Lord Jesus entered the world as a servant, humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross. He used His authority and power only to liberate others; never to escape from the mission that He came into this world for.

His attitude challenges me. Here I am trying to find excuses or escape routes when things get difficult. Instead of embracing my cross I dwell on how quickly I can get rid of it. Where the Lord journeyed internally in the power of God, I try to walk externally with the support of those around me. Embracing the cross and death to my desires in obedience to God horrifies me. As a result, I continue to be self-centered and sometimes even self-destructive.

The Lord’s obedience to the Father exalted Him to the Highest place and gave Him the name above every name. Seated on that exalted place, the Lord is waiting for me, morning by morning to share in His victory. At His feet, I will hear His voice, my eyes will open to the realities of God and His supernatural power will enter my life to walk as a true disciple.

Sitting at His feet, I allow these lyrics to open my heart to why the Lord did what He did—‘You didn’t want heaven without us, so Jesus, You brought heaven down, My sin was great, Your love was greater, What could separate us now, What a wonderful Name it is, What a wonderful Name it is, The Name of Jesus Christ my King.

Prayer: Abba Father, as I come before You this morning, speak to my heart the way You spoke to the Lord, morning by morning. Open my ears to Your instructions and my eyes to Your Kingdom truth. Transform my heart into the heart of a servant to please You with my life. Amen.
Monday 26th March

This is my servant who I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased

Isaiah 42:1

Today’s First reading tells us about the servant who is pleasing to God. What are the characteristics of this special servant after God’s own heart? First, God upholds him. It means that God sustains him and supports him when he acts in the name of God. He is chosen by God, not vice versa. This is probably why we see the most unlikely of heroes in the Bible. Next, God has placed His Spirit upon this servant. The servant does not act on his own but is propelled and led by the Holy Spirit. He has one purpose: “to bring justice to the nations”. A purpose given to him by God. He does not do anything outside the scope of his purpose, no matter how easy or trivial it is.

“The coastlands will wait for his teaching” the reading says. Although the promised land extended to the coast, the coastlands were never really occupied by the Israelites. To me the coastlands signify the people in whom the promises of God are yet to be fulfilled. The ones who rightfully belong to the Lord, but has not happened as yet. They are drawn to the teaching of this servant. Not only his teaching but “I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations.” God holds on to this servant, and teaches him and forms the way he lives and the way the servant lives will bring hope to the people. This is what makes the blind see and sets prisoners free from the dungeons they live in, not the teaching alone.

In today’s Gospel proclamation our Lord refers to the anointing of His feet as a preparation for His burial. He must have known what was coming. But He does not rest until justice is established. People flock to see Him, because He brings hope to a people for whom God seemed distant. We see the love that Mary had for the Lord, involved in an act that closely resembles worshiping the Lord. We also see the complaints of Judas who seemed to be getting disillusioned by the attitudes of our Lord Jesus. But to the servant of the Lord, things are not falling apart. “The Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spreads out the earth with its crops, Who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk on it” is grasping His hand and holding Him in the path of the purpose of His life.

Prayer: Abba Father, as I look to Your Son, I surrender my life, that You may teach me and form my life so that I become a covenant to those around me. Amen.
Isaiah presents us with the foretelling of the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ.

David probably in his great time of trouble writes a prayer of belief/faith that God would deliver and save him. He is confident in God. He is hopeful and is joyful in thanksgiving. We too should have faith in God.

Our Saviour Lord Jesus Christ is preparing for the final lap of His mission, a challenge that goes against His wishes. He turns to His disciples for support, who are the successors of His mission. Sinners turned saints in the experience of the love and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. He foretells who betrays Him and of His death and St. Peter’s denial.

During the Holy week as we ponder closer on this great love, we cannot help but see the Lord Jesus obedient to God the Father. His mission is to lay down His life for us so that the love of God will flood the earth and continue to do so through His disciples. Knowing that St. Peter and Judas were going to sin against Him, He still continues to go ahead and die for them. He denies His Godly powers and humbles Himself as a lamb that is taken to slaughter. The Lord Jesus loves the sinner so that they may be raised to become saints. It is with this love that He is reaching out to us today. We are sinners but His death and His love has set us free. Am I ready to do what the Lord Jesus wants me to do? Can I die for the Lord? Can I say no to what I want and think and be obedient to God? Maybe the truthful answer is “no”. It is okay. The Lord does not want brave soldiers to die for Him. He chooses us; sinful, weak, broken, lost and caught up in life just like the disciples. When we are weak He becomes our strength.

It is with the help of the Holy Spirit and by spending time immersed in the love of the Lord that we are able to take up our cross and walk. Not for us but for the redemption of our families, friends and even enemies. God needs at least one person to say yes to His will and surrender to His greater love. Then He can pour out His love and grace upon our homes, workplaces, countries and all around us. When we know that He is God our Father we have nothing to fear.

Prayer: Abba Father, as I believe in Your great love for me I believe that I am able to take up the cross and lay down my life for You. Amen.
Wednesday 28th March

Wednesday of Holy Week

Be transformed by the love of God

In the Gospel proclamation today the focus is on Judas one of the chosen 12 Apostles. He betrayed his Lord and Master for 30 pieces of silver. Some Catholic Bible scholars believe that while Judas was a greedy man he also believed that the Lord would work a miracle and save Himself from the religious leaders who wanted to arrest and kill Him.

Catholic Bible scholars also point out that Judas was shocked when he realised that the Lord Jesus was not going to work a miracle but would allow Himself to be arrested, tortured, stripped and crucified like a criminal. The Gospel tells us that Judas returned the money to the religious leaders confessing he had betrayed an innocent man. However, the Catholic scholars point out that when Judas realised the gravity of the offence he had committed, he went to the wrong people. He went to the religious leaders who scoffed at him and told him to literally go and hang. This he did. An important lesson for us is that when we are in a crisis we need to pray, discern God's will and go to the right people for guidance, counselling and repentance. Catholic Bible scholars say that if Judas had gone to the Blessed Mother Mary or even to Mary Magdalene they would have consoled him and told him of the Lord Jesus’ unconditional, unfailing, unending and ever merciful love which He freely received from God, the Father and freely gave to others.

This Judas episode, whatever the interpretation of different scholars, also needs to remind us of the vital importance of the last supper at which a dramatic episode with Judas takes place. Catholic Bible scholars and the church now agree that the Lord Jesus Christ died to show us how deep and wide is God’s love. Even when we betray, deny or desert Him; strip or whip Him and crucify Him like a criminal, God still loves us. That means the Triune God or the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Their love for us is beyond our understanding, imagination or expectation. When we accept that wonderful love we are transformed and filled with the fruits and the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that we can obey the single commandment that the Lord Jesus left for us, “love one another as I love you” (John 15:12).

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank You for the unconditional and unending love You give us. May we corporate with You in building the Kingdom. Amen.
Thursday 29th March

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

John 13:1

Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14
Psalm 116:12-13, 15-18
1 Cor. 11:23-26
John 13:1-15

Today’s Gospel reading is a pre-figuration of when the Lord Jesus gave us His precious Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist through the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. We also celebrate the Lord’s last supper and washing the disciples’ feet.

In the past when I reflected on this reading, what came to my mind was the Lord’s humbleness and how He, being God the Creator could wash His creation’s feet. In those days, a person’s feet would have not been pleasant to touch, or to wash. Most probably it was only slaves or servants who carried out that service. Yet the Lord Jesus carried out such a low and unpleasant action, being their master and teacher.

Today as I reflected on this reading, what struck me was the verse “he loved them to the end.’ The Lord showed me that it was much more than humility – it was all about love. The Lord Jesus loved each of His disciples to the very end – despite knowing that one would betray Him, another would deny Him and the others would ignore everything He taught them and go back to their old way of life after His death. The Lord Jesus could do everything He did and love unconditionally, because He knew and had experienced the Father’s unconditional love in His life.

When we love someone deeply there is nothing that we will not do for them. There is no sacrifice too great, no price too high or no amount of discomfort or pain we would not go through to make sure of that person’s betterment or happiness. The Lord calls each of us not only to love our immediate family or people who love us back. He calls us to love the friend who betrays us, the spouse who cheats on us, the child who does not care about us and the office colleague who always puts us down. Yet the truth of our heart is that at most times it is even difficult for us to look at them because we have been hurt so much.

So I ask my heavenly Father how can I even begin to love like the Lord Jesus? He shows me the answer – I need to be filled with His love first. When I am filled with that unconditional love and that love becomes more real to me than the human love or hate around me, then it will automatically flow to others.

Prayer: Abba Father, fill me with Your love. Do the impossible in me – like Your Son, help me to love others around me to the end. Amen.
We have journeyed to the climax of lent; God in His abundance of mercy for us has been calling us to repent and turn from our sinful ways through the prophets of the Old Testament throughout the season of lent. Yet, caught in the world we forget His calling, we forget that our Lord Jesus died for us, we forget that He took our place on that cross and shed His blood for us to give a new and everlasting covenant for our redemption and salvation.

In the First Reading we are told of the extent of His love— that He underwent brutality beyond words. Prophet Isaiah tells us that His appearance was disfigured, unrecognizable and that people turned their faces away, due to the beating and manhandling received at the hands of His perpetrators. Yet He did not open His mouth to complain or curse. He obeyed the Father unto death. Through the first reading we are challenged. How much do we grumble and complain at the slightest discomfort. When we are rejected, defeated and cheated - what is our response? We seldom remember what the Lord Jesus went through on a day as today for us. How can we give our life for our brother or sister when we cannot die to our selves, desires, ego and habits?

In today’s Gospel proclamation we see the passion and death of our Lord Jesus. Do we not also betray Him daily? Deny Him every minute and shout from our depths to crucify Him, scourge Him and mock Him? Do we see the Lord Jesus in our family members, our neighbors, our colleagues, people on the street or the beggar at the traffic light? The reality is that we do this to Him every day of our lives; losing sight of Him in our temptations and trials.

I have heard people say, “But Jesus was God”. However, in the second reading we are told that our Lord Jesus was tempted in every way, yet He did not sin. This is why the psalmist tells us that we need Him to come to our rescue and trust Him to strengthen and lead us to give that inner response. To help us to die to our sinfulness and addiction and let His face shine upon us in the darkest hour.

Prayer: Abba Father, the Lord Jesus willingly chose to obey You to reveal Your love and mercy. Reveal Yourself to me every day and baptise me in the Holy Spirit so that I may live in this experience all the days of my life. Amen.
Saturday 31st March

When God chooses to be silent.

The roar of dissent, the rush of the crowds and the shock of witnessing blood being shed violently had just ceased. An eerie calm pervaded the rough, scorching Roman landscape. It seemed like the end had finally come to the drama of the Messiah.

Just before that the Lord Jesus Himself had faced the stoic silence of the Father. During His agony it was almost as if Heaven had slammed its doors in His face. In the garden of Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus had wrestled with the Father, like Jacob had done. Jacob escaped with an injured hip while the Lord landed up crucified on the wooden cross.

This day was one of silence for the Lord Jesus’ loved ones. All the voices were silenced including the aching cries of the Messiah. Was it the end?

This is our recurring experience. We have moments when Heaven seems to shut its doors on us. No prayers or pleas are answered. We have decisions to make but no answers come our way and we feel abandoned by God. Instead of thanking God for all that has been and done for us, we embrace this moment of abandonment and sink into deeper despair.

Today the Lord is assuring us of His guidance and presence. In Proverbs 3:6 we are told to trust in the Lord with all our heart and not lean on our own understanding. Let us not assume that we know what the future should be. The Lord may be silent but He may be doing a thousand things which we are unaware of. Let us turn to Him and trust in Him because the Lord is our refuge and strength.

How can we wait in this time of silence? We can take the steps Nehemiah took when praying for an intervention from God. First, we must remember who God is. We must remember that He is above everything we face. Secondly, we must repent for our sins and our involvement in the situation. Next, we must remember His promises to us. The only way to hold on to God through a time of trial is to hold on to His promises. Finally, we can intercede for the situation. As we do this, at an unexpected moment God will act in our situations.

Prayer: Abba Father, in Your silence I pray for the grace to turn to Your Word and receive the assurance of Your love and presence in my life. Amen.
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