



# IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

October 2016

**Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing frighten you,  
All things are passing away:  
God never changes.  
Patience obtains all things  
Whoever has God lacks  
nothing;  
God alone suffices.  
-- St. Teresa of Avila**

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# On Our Knees In His Hands

*October 2016*

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## Saturday 1st October

*Saint Therese of  
the Child Jesus*

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven....” **Matthew 18:3**

Isaiah 66:10–14c

Psalms 131:1–3

Matthew 18:1–5, 10

Today, all the readings and the life of St. Theresa lay emphasis on being like a child as a child only knows to trust its mother, we too should trust in the Lord. In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus says; “Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.” We need a ‘child like faith’ to walk with the Lord and where there is no place for analysing, reasoning or doubting the things that happen in our lives. We are called to simply trust in the Lord knowing that He will work everything for our good when we do His will.

The first reading tells us that the Lord vindicates Zion; the city of God; His chosen people. We are blessed beyond measure because we too are chosen by Him and so deeply loved and cared for by Him. Therefore if we have ever wondered about the unfair things that have happened to us, we must know that suffering is part of life, we may have to suffer unjustly. But the moment we accept that situation from the hands of God and give an inner response, we can be assured that God will vindicate us for the wrongs that have been done. He will pay us back for unfair situations; in His way, in His time.

Today the church celebrates the feast of St. Therese of Lisieux (Little Flower), and we have much to learn from her life. Firstly, the spiritual dryness she experienced in her prayer life. She stated “Jesus isn't doing much to keep the conversation going”, yet, learnt to put all her trust in the Lord, despite her feelings. This drew her close to Him and she experienced His unconditional love. Secondly, she never sought recognition, instead quietly took every little chance to make sacrifices. She said, “Love proves itself by deeds, so how am I to show my love? Great deeds are forbidden me. The only way I can prove my love is by scattering flowers and these flowers are every little sacrifice, every glance and word, and the doing of the least actions for love.” Thirdly, she said, “I was determined to find a lift to carry me to Jesus, for I was far too small to climb the steep stairs of perfection”. She found a treasure in holy Scripture which says: “Whosoever is a little one, come to me”. She had this to say “It is your arms, Jesus, that are the lift to carry me to heaven and so there is no need for me to grow up: I must stay little and become less and less.” Let us also thirst for this

**Prayer: Abba Father, gives us a heart to be like little children in your Kingdom so that we may completely trust in you. Amen**

***“Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets, so that a herald may run with it”***

**Habakkuk 1: 2**

Habakkuk 1:2-3, 2:2-4

Psalms 95:1-2, 6-9

2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14

Luke 17:5-10

Externally everything seems to be going smoothly for him, but I know my son has lost his connection with the Lord. He is living in the eyes of those around him; pleasing them has become a top priority. We can see, he is on a destructive path, making questionable decisions one after another. As he is a young adult doing a responsible job, our fears about the choices he is making seem baseless to him. I cry before the Lord every day, and just like Habakkuk I ask; “How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save?”

When we go through a difficult period, we get hijacked by our fears and anxieties making it hard to wait upon the promises of God. Today's first reading comes as a balm to my troubled soul; “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets, so that a herald may run with it. A herald in the biblical terms is an official messenger proclaiming an important message. God says treat what He reveals to us, the promises that He gives us as an official message! What is the difference between an official message and an unofficial message? We take official messages seriously. We know it is going to happen. We prepare for them and we tell others about them.

The Lord says, have the same attitude towards what He reveals to us. Believe them, prepare for them and make plans around them. Communicate His revelations to others; live in anticipation instead of anxiety. “For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay”. There is an appointed time for the fulfilment of His promises; not a moment late nor a moment too soon. It will happen at the right time.

In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord says; “If you had faith as big as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Pull yourself up by the roots and plant yourself in the sea!’ and it would obey you”. Common sense tells us that to move a mountain we need something stronger than the mountain; perhaps explosives or heavy machinery. The Lord says, not really... all you need is faith as big as a mustard seed! He is saying that faith the size of a mustard seed has more power than explosives or heavy machinery. If that is so, why have we not seen mountains being moved by faith? Did He mean something

different? Was the real meaning lost in translation? Or is it that we do not have faith the size of a mustard seed? Often we explain it away with our lack of faith. We accept defeat even before the battle has started; “our faith is weak, after all we are human?” we say.

As I reflect on this with today’s first reading, I am beginning to realize that I had got it wrong all this time. I had tried to move mountains by wishing them away, and by having faith in my faith. I was not even surprised when they did not move! The reason was, my faith was anchored to myself, my fears and doubts. The Lord is telling us, that mountains move when we believe in what God has promised, in what God has revealed! His revelations will be fulfilled at the appointed time.

Today the mountain in our lives may be a sickness, a relationship problem, a weakness or an addiction that we cannot overcome, a financial crisis, or a loved one going on the wrong path ... whatever the mountain is, God says it can be moved by believing in what He has promised. The Lord did not say to move a mountain you need a mountain size faith, but a faith the size of a mustard seed. Why the size of a mustard seed? Because it is so simple, uncomplicated and even a child can do it, If his/her faith is anchored in what God has promised.

Today’s second reading says “For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control”. As long as our flesh is alive, it will fight against the things of God. It will tell us “be realistic, take matters into your own hand”. It will mislead us from waiting upon the leading of God. It will make us doubt the promises of God, and will leave us paralyzed with fear. The Lord is reminding us, mountains cannot be moved by flesh, but they can be moved by what God has revealed to our spirit. God is inviting us today to nurture the word He has revealed to our spirit, because it will fill us with power, love and self-control to deal with the crisis of our lives and those who are involved in it.

We were on our way to apply for visas and it looked at though we were going to be late. This would mean we would lose our appointment. I happened to glance at a paper and it said ‘Keep calm’. I took it as direction from God and clung to the promise. When we did reach the place it all happened without a hitch. Let’s trust in God. Let us not be influenced by the fears that surround us.

***Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for your revelations that you have revealed to my spirit today. Lead me, guide me and give me the grace to wait for the fulfillment of your promises. Amen***

*Go then and do the same***Luke 10:37**

Galatians 1:6–12

Psalm 111:1b–2,  
7–9, 10c

Luke 10:25–37

St. Paul's letter to the Galatians has been said to be a sword flashing in a great swordsman's hand.' Both St. Paul and the Gospel he preached were under attack. With characteristic boldness he attacked his listeners on both fronts. He proudly asserts that he received his mission from no less a person than the Lord Jesus himself. From seeking to please men, he preferred to be branded as a slave of Christ. Where the Jews believed that salvation was their prerogative, St. Paul understood God's plan of salvation for the whole of humanity. He preached a Gospel of free grace - that nothing a man did would earn the love of God. St. Paul sees a crisis in the fledging church. Certain Jews insisted new Christians should follow the Jewish laws and traditions. That we have been saved by grace regardless of race, was the clarion call of St. Paul, in all his letters. To him meeting the obligations of the laws of love and grace far superseded all other laws. His withering tirade against those who preached other gospels came from a direct revelation from Christ Himself.

Nowhere is the demand of love more amply demonstrated than in the Gospel reading of today. The Lord Jesus tears down the barriers between Jew & Gentile, friend and foe and presents a unique aspect of Agape love. The Lord parried the question put to Him regarding eternal life by a teacher who wanted to test Him by asking another question. The teacher quotes Deuteronomy and Leviticus. The Lord praises Him and when the Teacher asks who his neighbour was, the Lord Jesus takes the opportunity to overthrow tradition and concepts of Jewish norms and presents a beautiful parable. The Priest seeing the fallen man passes by, fearing he would not be able to perform his ceremonial rites, in case the man was dead. The temple and the liturgy mattered more to him than the man's desperate need. The Levite fearing his own safety ignored the man. A Samaritan considered as a despised outcast according to the Jews - thought of the victim's fate if left unattended. The Lord Jesus deliberately contrasted love with traditional beliefs.

We too should be careful not to make rites and rituals override the urgent need to love, as God loved. Rituals and laws are meant to steer us towards a personal relationship with God. Then we can be alive to the Holy Spirit as He leads us to love unconditionally.

**Prayer: Abba Father, pour out your Holy Spirit that we may live in love. Amen**

*Only one thing is needed***Luke 10:42**

Galatians 1:13–24

Psalm 139:1b–3,  
13–15

Luke 10:38–42

St. Francis of Assisi, though revered today, began his life as a confirmed sinner. His father was a wealthy cloth merchant. He was spoiled, indulging himself with fine food, wine, and wild celebrations. By the age of fourteen, he left school and had become a rebellious teenager. His dream was to become a knight. He fell ill with a nervous breakdown. One day while on a walk, he had a divine encounter in a cave close to his home. After this encounter he devoted his life to praying and helping the poor and nursing lepers. During this time, he heard the voice of the Lord telling him to rebuild the Christian church and to live a life of extreme poverty. A rebellious youth received the grace to become a saint.

In the same manner St. Paul who was the greatest enemy of the early church became its greatest missionary. A persecutor turned into a preacher. A miraculous transformation happened in his life when he was traveling to Damascus. He encountered the Lord Jesus and he heard the voice of the Lord. In the first reading St. Paul confirms this when he insists that he received the Gospel and the commission to preach directly from the Lord.

The Lord Jesus is teaching us through Martha's and Mary's lives, how our own lives too can be changed by encountering and hearing the voice of the Lord. Martha opened her home to the Lord but not her heart. This can easily happen even in our lives. We open our homes to the Lord by keeping a statue of the Lord Jesus and lighting a lamp. But if we have not opened our hearts to the Lord like Mary, we will not hear His voice. Martha served Jesus. In Mark 10:45 the Lord says "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. The Lord is not rebuking Martha's service but telling her not to be worried and upset about many things. Most of the physical and mental sicknesses of our present day are stress related. The Lord is more concerned about Martha's state of mind and priorities than serving Him. Our Lord Jesus says "only one thing is needed and Mary has chosen it". What is the one thing that Mary chose? Her first priority was to sit at the feet of the Lord. She had fellowship, intimacy and heard His voice. Every morning the first thing we need to do is to sit at the feet of the Lord and receive His leading.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, give us the grace every day to sit at your feet and experience that we are being valued not for what we do but for who we are. Amen.*

***“For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness  
of the LORD endures forever.”***

Psalm 117:2

Galatians 2:1-2, 7-14

Psalm 117:1-2

Luke 11:1-4

St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians contains an extremely prevalent viewpoint even today, on the workings of a community. Our human nature is such we judge the success of a community by the way the members act and behave. We then fall into the trap of judging others, leaving communities and losing our own journey.

We fall into the same category of such hypocrisy in our dealings with family, society and communities. It was none other than St. Peter who was called a hypocrite by St. Paul in the presence of many. The lesson for all of us today in this is that we run this race that the Lord has called us to run for His glory, while falling and rising up again to continue, a little better, stronger and mature than before. Though they had indifferences St. Paul and St. Peter became Christainity’s keystones that have stood the test of time through generation upon generation. This is the enduring faithfulness of our Lord God. (Psalm 117:2) This teaches us that we are also called to accept correction in love and persevere in holiness for the glory of God.

Today’s Gospel proclamation gives us the perfect aid to walk in holiness. This is prayer. The secret of the flawless journey of the Lord Jesus (even at a time in great despair when he sweated blood out of his utter human nature) was the connection that the Lord Jesus had with God the Father through personal prayer. It was through that connection through prayer that the Lord Jesus was able to climb the Mount of Atonement – Calvary.

We have a treasure in the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught us as a Christian communal prayer as well as a deep personal prayer. According to Bible scholars, the Our Father includes everything that could possibly be right for us to pray. Any prayer that contradicts the Our Father is invalid. For the Our Father is, above all, The Lord’s Prayer which the Lord Himself gave us. Today, let us be comforted that by the grace of God we have a prayer most powerful to pray daily. It will help us come closer to the Holiness of God. When we give glory to God, and look up to Him in every situation, when we totally trust in Him for our needs and live with an ever forgiving and compassionate heart, surely we will be made holy and kept away from sin.

***Prayer: Abba Father, help us run this race with faithfulness and obedience.  
Amen!***

... After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying  
to finish by means of the flesh ?

Galatians 3:3

Galatians 3:1-5

Luke 1:69-75

Luke 11:5-13

Most of us reading this reflection today are aware of the difference in being in the 'flesh' and being in the 'spirit'. When we are in the spirit, doing the seemingly impossible is not an effort. But when we are in the flesh, even the smallest task seems like scaling a mountain. When called to lead praise, my natural reaction is to shy away from the task. I would rather that someone else did it.

When I look deep down, the Lord reveals to me that this is because I am looking at myself – will my reflection be okay? What will others think of it? Will it sound spiritual enough? Those are questions that arise when I am in the flesh. Yet when I spend time in intercession before praise and allow the Lord to lead me, it does not make any difference what people think. Even if they feel that I said a meaningless reflection that does not become important to me.

In today's epistle, St. Paul admonishes the Galatians, and cautions them not to end in the flesh, what began in the spirit. Have we gone through, or we in similar situations like that? If we recall the first time we came for the prayer meeting, experienced the love of the Lord or felt the movement of the Holy Spirit, I'm sure that memory would bring so much beauty, joy & peace into our hearts. If we look at our journey today, can we say we have that same joy, excitement and fire? If the answer is 'yes' or 'more', then we are moving in the direction the Lord wants us to go in. But if the answer is 'no', then the Lord is cautioning us to examine what and where we need to change; that we need to get back into the spirit.

Maybe our hearts long for that first love-encounter with the Lord. We may really yearn to go there, but somehow even though we go through the motions of coming for the prayer meeting and praying everyday, 'something' seems to be missing. Maybe our hearts are thirsting, but our flesh is weak. Then it is time to sincerely ask the Lord to renew us through the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says "how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Let us ask the Lord from this moment onwards, to take us to where He wants us to be; to re-ignite the fire of the Holy Spirit within us.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I long to be lost in the Spirit. Lord, I want to experience that fire and zeal and have such a close relationship with you. When I look at myself, it seems impossible; but I know that with you, everything is possible. Amen**

*“Hail Mary Full of Grace”*

Acts 1:12–14

Luke 1:46–55

Luke 1:26–38

The feast of our lady of the Rosary was instituted to honour the Blessed Mother for the Christian victory over the Turks at Lepanto on October 7th 1571. Pope St. Pius the 5th and all Christians had prayed the Rosary for victory. The Rosary or the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary, was one of the best prayers to Mary the Mother of God.

Pope Benedict has invited families to pray the Rosary for the intentions of the Pope, the missions of the Church and peace. “It is as if every year Our Lady invited us to rediscover the beauty of this prayer so simple and profound. The Rosary, a contemplative and Christocentric prayer inseparable from the meditation of sacred Scripture is the prayer of the Christian who advances in the pilgrimage of faith, in the following of Lord Jesus preceded by Mary” said the Pontiff.

In today’s Gospel we see the response of the Blessed Virgin, “I’m the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said.” From the depth of her being she yielded to the will of God. With the Spirit of God upon her life and the power of the Most High, overshadowing her, the impossible became a possibility. The creator God, the everlasting one, entered the human history as “Jesus of Nazareth” through a simple “yes” of a hand maid of the Lord. It is thus that the alliance between God and mankind is finally realized. Every day, every hour there is a Divine invitation to see through the eyes of the Spirit, to hear through the ears of the Spirit and to respond to the One who has chosen us in Christ before the creation of the world. Note that Mary’s joyful claim that “all generations shall call me blessed” in no way takes away from her humility. If she seems to boast here, it is much as St. Paul does later on in Scripture when he says, “whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.” (2 Cor 10:17), that is to say, in God’s work being done through us.

In this regard, the Magnificat is more than a prayer of praise. It also reminds us about the essential link between humility and holiness. Just as God has, “regarded the lowliness of his hand maid” and “has done great things” for Mary in making her the Mother of His Son, so too “He has put down the mighty from their thrones (with His own might!) and has exalted the lowly.” Today let us join the Blessed Mother with the heavenly hosts to glorify our God !!

**Prayer: Hail Mary full of grace the Lord is with you, so pray for us. Amen**

*“Rather, blessed are those who hear  
the word of God and observe it”*

**Luke 11: 28**

Galatians 3:22–29

Psalm 105:2–7

Luke 11:27–28

A bird in a cage cannot know or understand the beauty of the surroundings or appreciate its own beauty. It would have never experienced its potential either. Similarly, we who are moved by the law alone can be compared to a caged bird. Though the bird may be fed, it would have never tasted true freedom.

St. Paul said that being under the law will not justify us, rather faith in Lord Jesus Christ. The law was given to us as a guideline. The simile used in the reading is as ‘a disciplinarian’. In the Greek world disciplinarian was a slave that escorted the children to school but never taught them nor tutored, but was only a guardian. That is the role of the law. St. Paul said that when faith came, which he referred to as Christianity that’s when we became children of God. In other words he said, when the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, the bondage of sin was broken and the heaviness of being under the law was lifted. Through the passion, death and resurrection, we are redeemed of sin and set free of the law; we are out of the cage. Alleluia!

There is no distinguishing among people in the Kingdom of God. In the world we certainly need law and order because we are all human persons. Human beings are naturally sinful. Therefore we need authorities and different norms and rules. St. Paul made it clear; in the Kingdom of God everyone is equal. No masters and slaves. We live with a beautiful attitude only if we put our faith in Lord Jesus Christ.

This beautiful life of freedom is available to everyone. It is by our freedom of choice that we choose it. The Lord Jesus had an amazing-dialogue with a woman. A typical woman praised the Mother of this prophetic Son saying “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” The answer of this extraordinary Son was astonishing - those who do the will of God are my mother and brothers. We desire to live the will of God and consult spiritual guides to discern the will of God. The Blessed Mother, heard the word of God and lived it, and she fulfilled the will of God in her life. For the Lord Jesus though it was easy to move away from Gethsemane, He remained there to fulfill the will of God. Let us strive to do the will of God.

**Prayer: Abba Father, author of our faith, grant us the gift of faith in your Son our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen**

*The Word of God is not chained.*

**2 Timothy 2:9**

2 Kings 5:14–17

Psalm 98:1–4

2 Timothy 2:8–13

Luke 17:11–19

In today's Gospel proclamation we see Our Lord Jesus passing through a village on the border between Samaria and Galilee. There are ten lepers waiting for him.

Being a leper meant that one was in a hopeless situation. Besides the horror of the disfiguring of bodies, leprosy was associated with loneliness and helplessness. Regardless of how loved they were, and like Naamaan in the first reading, no matter how rich or powerful they were, they would not be spared the curse of the disease. They were sent into the desert to live without human contact. They were forced to fend for themselves despite the pain and crippling circumstances of their sickness. It did not matter whether they were old enough, capable enough, or fit enough to look after themselves. The contagiousness of the disease was such that there was no choice. Lepers had to be sent to the desert. It must have destroyed their parents and loved ones as much as it destroyed them. I cannot even imagine the sense of helplessness and despair they must have experienced. For such a people, a visitation from Our Lord provides hope and a light like no other.

Those of us who are in desperate circumstances, like the lepers, are reminded that we can have the same experience of visitation of the Lord as we go for Mass, sit before the Blessed Sacrament, go for confession, or sit in silence and open our hearts to Him in personal prayer. Yet in reality how many of us do these things but continue to live in hopelessness and desperation. What did the ten lepers do differently?

Why did the lepers wait for Our Lord Jesus? They had probably heard of the miracles our Lord Jesus performed. This in turn generated hope within them. They were perhaps desperate enough to try anything without rationalizing what they heard. I learn that when I share testimonies of the goodness and power of our Lord, I provide hope for those in dire straits. I also learn that when I am in dire straits, activities such as listening to testimonies, reading scripture about what God is capable of, can bring hope to an otherwise hopeless situation.

Our Lord instructs the lepers to go and show themselves to the priests. This was decreed by the law of Moses for one to be certified free of

leprosy. Yet it was on the way to show themselves to the priest that they were healed. This means that when they left Our Lord Jesus, they still had the symptoms of leprosy. Whenever we take the Lord at His word, there is an initial period of darkness, where all we have is the assurance of His word. Our senses, intellect and emotions will not corroborate the word of the Lord. Yet as we act upon the word, the breakthroughs will come, and the reality of the world of the Spirit will break into the material world. Sometimes the action we have to take maybe as simple as treating a promise of God as though it has already been fulfilled and praising god.

So we learn what the lepers did differently. They approached the Lord with expectant faith. Then they refused to accept their senses, their understanding, and emotions as real. Instead they accepted the Word of God as real.

St. Luke does not stop his narration at that point. He tells us that one of the lepers, when he noticed that he had been healed, came back praising God, fell at the feet of Our Lord Jesus, and thanked Him. Our Lord Jesus asks “were not ten healed? Where are the others?”. If I was around I would have told Him, “they are on their way to show themselves to the priest, just like you instructed them”. Technically, they were following the Lord’s instructions. What’s more, they were fulfilling the law of Moses. Yet what the Samaritan leper did pleased our Lord Jesus much more than the others who were following his instructions and fulfilling the law.

I have seen many who have attend our meetings and retreats being blessed. Some have had their marriages restored. Some have discovered creative solutions to complicated impossible situations. Yet after receiving the blessing they revert to “practicing religion” and “fulfilling the law”, rather than walk in a relationship with Our Lord Jesus. In that they lose the greater blessing.

In the second reading we find St. Paul, who was once a respected figure in society, a respected Pharisee looked up to by good religious people, now chained and thrown into prison, and treated like a common criminal. Under normal circumstances, this would have been a curse like leprosy. However, for the one in a relationship with the Lord, the crisis is the very thing that opens the gates to a divine experience. St. Paul discovers “that the Word of God is not chained”, and because of the very suffering he endures “the elect” experience the saving power that is in Our Lord Jesus, the Christ.

***Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to go beyond the answers to my leprosy, and discover the true blessing, which is a relationship and journey with you. Amen***

Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore.

Galatians 4:22–24,  
26–27, 31–5:1

Psalms 113:1–7

Luke 11:29–32

The spirit of God points out something further, Hagar and Sarah were apt emblems of the two different dispensations of the covenant. The heavenly Jerusalem, Church from above represented by Sarah is in a state of freedom and is the mother of all believers who are born of the Holy Spirit. They were by regeneration and faith made apart of true seed of Abraham according to the true promise made to him by God the Father. So then brothers and sisters we are not children of the barren women but of the Free. If the privileges of all believers were so great according to the new covenant how absurd it would be for the Gentile converts to be under the law which could not deliver the unbelieving Jews from the bondage or condemnation.

In today's Gospel proclamation it is clear that God is referring to the state of the heart of the Pharisees, when he says that the inside of the cup and dish are filled with plunder and evil. When we reflect on the state of our hearts, how often do we ask ourselves whether it is free from ill intent, falsehood and insincerity? When we stop to reflect we realize that it is important to know and understand the state of our own hearts. Lest we steer away from the path of love, truth and honesty.

Sometimes we conclude and judge others from what we see in their actions. We can be hasty in passing judgment on another's action considering it good or bad depending on our relationship with that person. Today's Gospel reading reminds us that in as much as we use our sense to make judgments about others we also need to be cautious and recognise that perhaps the actions we observe may not always be reflective of the intentions of the individual. In matters of the heart only the person and God know the truth.

We who live only for a moment when compared to the life span of the universe, can never assume that we can comprehend the world, its people and more importantly the ways of God. Let us approach the Throne of Grace in humility and awe and seek the wisdom of God.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, please alert me when I'm tempted to judge others. My judgment may be based on another's opinion, on evidence or on past observations, without full knowledge of someone's situation and nature. Please give me the grace to extend impartiality and compassion to all others, friend, foe or stranger. Amen.*

***You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. Galatians 5:4***

Galatians 5:1–6

Psalms 119:41,  
43–45, 47–48

Luke 11:37–41

Through today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus speaks sternly to the Pharisees and the experts of the Law. The Lord warns them of living a life of external obedience to traditions and law but internally being tight fisted, wicked, and full of greed. Even today we find Pharisees and Experts of Law among Christians who obey external laws and traditions but are filled with jealousy, miserliness, wickedness, hard-heartedness and selfishness.

Simon the Pharisee who demonstrated holiness in his external living, in reality, was filled with ego and self-righteousness. Though he invited the Lord Jesus into his home, he judged the Lord inside his heart. The Lord tells him "You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness". (Luke 11:39) These words of the Lord awaken our hearts today.

We do not fail to attend Sunday mass, recite the Rosary, attend Praise and Worship sessions and pray Novenas and Holy Hours. But do we truly reflect to see to what extent we act in the love of God and faith. The external rituals should lead us to experience the love of God, the protection of God and to journey deep in a life of faith. In today's first reading today, St. Paul says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Galatians 5:6)

God allowed the Israelites who were redeemed from slavery to go through the wilderness for 40 years where it could have been completed in 14 days. God wanted to free them from the internal Egypt that was embedded in them in order to make them a people filled with the love of God and faith. Today, the Lord God takes us through that same wilderness in and through our struggles, illnesses and calamities. The purpose is to lead us into a life of Godly love and faith. But we are unaware of the ways of God and in the struggle we lose sight of God.

The Lord is inviting us today to cleanse ourselves within. St. Paul says in Galatians 5:4, "You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace". Therefore, today let us turn to God in true repentance.

***Prayer: Abba Father, May your unfailing love come to me and your salvation, according to your promise. Amen***

Galatians 5:18–25

Psalm 1:1–4, 6

Luke 11:42–46

In today's Gospel reading the normally meek and humble Lord Jesus lashes out in the strongest terms at Jewish religious leaders and law experts. They had heaped hundreds of laws on the people, specially the impoverished and marginalised, but would not lift a finger to help them. Stressing that if we are generous to the poor we will be clean inside (Luke 11:41), the Lord accuses the religious leaders of neglecting justice and thereby the love of God describing them as hypocrites, sanctimonious humbugs unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it." (Luke 11:44).

Last month on Monday September 5 the world marked the international day of charity and the United Nations in a statement says charity contributes to the promotion of dialogue, solidarity and mutual understanding among people. Poverty persists in all countries, regardless of their economic, social and cultural situation, particularly in the developing third world.

In recognition of the role of charity in alleviating humanitarian crises and human suffering, the UN General Assembly in a resolution designated September 5, the anniversary of the death of Mother Teresa, as the International Day of Charity. Significantly Mother Teresa widely respected as the Saint of Kolkata's gutters was formally proclaimed as a Saint in a ceremony at the Vatican on Sunday, September 4. Mother Teresa who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 for her work to overcome poverty gave the prize money of about 190,000 USD or Sri Lankan Rs. 27.6 million to some of the poorest people in India.

While more than 60 million refugees struggle for survival without basic needs, it is known that 62 of the world's richest super billionaires own more wealth and resources than half the world's population of about 3500 million. Thankfully some of these super billionaires including Microsoft founder Bill Gates and world business magnate George Soros are, like the famous Zacchaeus in the Bible, giving half their wealth to the poor. For instance the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has set apart about 45 billion USD to improve healthcare, reduce extreme poverty, provide educational opportunities and access to information technology.

**Prayer: Abba Father may the Holy Spirit inspire more prophetic figures in the mission of sharing, caring and justice. Amen.**

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God..”

*Ephesians 1:1*

Ephesians 1:1–10

Psalm 98:1–6

Luke 11:47–54

One common reality across the world is finding rich and poor people everywhere. The rich often have more, while the poor do not even have enough to meet their basic needs. Yet today's First Reading reveals a different reality.

St. Paul says that God the Father has blessed us with everything that we need for our spirit's wellbeing. Why for the spirit? Created in the image of God, our spirit has received God's own immortal nature. Moreover, the Father chose us in His own Heart even before the creation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him. We were created for the good pleasure of the Creator, to give praise to Him. Knowing our faulty nature, the redemptive river was also prepared for cleansing of our sin.

I try to digest this truth. My Heavenly Father designed me even before the Creation of the world, created me in His own image, adopted me as His son/daughter through the life sacrifice of His own Son. And now, He is revealing to me, the mystery of His will which He purposed in Christ; that I am the heir to all the riches in the Heart of God, His peace, love and joy. He tells me that blessing me and looking after me is His greatest joy. In return, my duty is to enjoy being in His love and care. This does not sound hard but I know only too well that it is impossible, because I want to do my will and control my life.

The Lord chastises teachers of the law who usually chastise others and inflate their ego up, to be seen prim and proper, pious and of high esteem. The Lord reiterates the importance of what goes on in the spirit as against what is exhibited through the external behaviour.

There is a difference between knowing 'about' the Lord and 'knowing' the Lord. The teachers of the law could not identify the face of God that was revealed through His Son, simply because they did not know God, though they knew about Him. The only way we get to know God is by having an encounter with His Son and starting a journey with Him to the Heart of the Father. The Lord Jesus is the key to all knowledge. All wisdom and understanding of God's mysteries are revealed to us only in Him and through Him. Therefore, we can praise the Father for our misfortunes and struggles and encourage others also to come to this joyful experience.

**Prayer: *Abba Father, You are so marvellous to me. Amen.***

**“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal,  
the promised Holy Spirit” Ephesians 1: 13**

Eph1:11-14

Ps 33:1-2, 4-5,  
12-13

Luke 12:1-7

I have been struggling with my broken nature for years. I have prayed, received spiritual counselling, expected a breakthrough at every retreat, but I continued to struggle. I have consciously tried my very best to control my sinful ways, only to fail miserably at the crucial point. Few weeks ago, when I least expected it, I received the breakthrough. I experienced liberation. The bitterness

and the reactions were all gone just like that!

“When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal; the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit...”

When we accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior, we were imprinted by the Holy Spirit. As a result, some are transformed instantly. Yet, for some of us, the transformation was not instantaneous. We continued to struggle with our broken, sinful, disgusting natures for a period of time. Looking back, now I see He did not leave me to find my way back to Him. He accompanied me gently. His presence made me want to change more and more, to please Him with every area of my life. Scripture says, the Holy Spirit guarantees our inheritance, until the redemption of those who are God’s possession...” He makes sure at the appointed time, we are liberated in the power of God.

In today’s Gospel reading, the Lord warns us about the yeast of the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew the law, they knew their religion, but they did not have a living connection with God. They fulfilled their religious obligations but internally they were separated from God. As people on a journey, this can be very real to us. We may serve the Lord externally, yet be caught up internally. The Lord goes on to speak about sparrows, five birds sold for two pennies. Their monetary value was little, yet the Lord says; “not one of them is forgotten by God”.

I may have been living a double life; serving the Lord externally but caught up internally. I may be falling into a sin that I have been struggling with for years. I could be like those sparrows that have little value to anyone. The Lord says, “Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” It is an invitation to keep coming back to Him; because to Him I am valuable and He has not forgotten me. At the right time, He will redeem me and guarantee my inheritance.  
*Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for the Holy Spirit who is accompanying me through my sinful, broken ways into fulfilling your purpose in me. Amen*

The Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say.

Luke 12:12

Eph 1:15-23

Ps 8:2-3b, 4-7

Luke 12:8-12

No one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will be forgiven. Why is the Holy Spirit taken so seriously and why would anyone choose to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit? We blaspheme out of ignorance. When we have a little leading from God, when we are chosen to occupy a place of importance or have an educational degree to our name, we assume that we have it all and know it all. Can we ever understand the working of the Holy Spirit who has been there from the beginning of creation, through billions of years and down to our age? If we think so, it is our pride and ignorance.

That is why St. Paul clarifies in the letter to the Ephesians about faith. There are degrees of faith and degrees of experience and knowledge. It is not two dimensional but multi-dimensional. St. Paul prays that the Lord will give us a spirit of wisdom and a perception of what is revealed to bring us to a full knowledge of him. This also implies that we can have a half knowledge or partial knowledge of the working of God. He prays, may He may enlighten the eyes of your mind. Yes your mind has its own set of eyes, for what reason, that you may see what hope his call holds for you, how rich is the heritage he offers his holy people. Then he mentions the extraordinary power He offers us believers which is the same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead. When we have such a revelation which happens through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, we will have the confidence and the boldness to declare our Lord Jesus to the world and as we make our defense it is only the Holy Spirit who will give us the words and confidence and we will not be relying on our human wisdom.

St. Teresa of Avila considered herself as a child of God and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Though she never spoke explicitly about the Holy Spirit she prepared with great fervor for the feast of Pentecost and was aware that she was rewarded with a remarkable mystical grace and more graces. On one occasion she heard these words, "My Father delights in you and the Holy Spirit loves you." In writing her books *Mansions*, at the fourth Mansion she seeks that assistance of the Spirit and prays. "I commend myself to the Holy Spirit and to beg Him henceforth to speak for me, that I may be able to treat these matters intelligibly. Let us depend on the Holy Spirit and not on self-effort.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, fill me with the Holy Spirit that I may be open to more knowledge, wisdom and the working of the Trinity in my life. Amen*

**Always pray and not give up.****Luke 18:1**

Exodus 17:8–13

Psalm 121:1–8

2 Timothy 3:14–4:2

Luke 18:1–8

Prayer is an integral part of the life of any believer, Christian or otherwise. How does a Christian's prayer differ from that of someone believing in other gods? Today's liturgy presents a broad and deep insight into Christian prayer life.

The First Reading paints a strange but beautiful picture of Moses standing up on a hill raising his hands while Joshua is waging war. This is exactly what we experience at different times in life, be it with family, workplace, parish or prayer community. While some members actively interact with people in society, others strengthen and maintain that deep link with the Lord, allowing the Power from on High to flow through that connection to that situation.

The importance of intercessory prayer cannot be stressed enough. My first memory of intercession was my mother and grandmother interceding for my class tests (not even major exams!). My grandmother would check the time of my tests and go to the church with oil for the altar lamp, and pray until my tests were over. My mother would finish her housework in advance and pray at home just the same way. As a child I faced all my class tests and competitions knowing that a lot of prayers were being offered up to the Lord on my behalf. My parents were involved in an unnecessary court case, which went dragging on for many years, and when my father and grandfather went to courts on the days of hearing, my mom and grandma gathered us the children and prayed at home until the court hearing was over. Naturally it became my habit as I grew up, being passed on to my children as well. Intercessory prayer saves us from anxiety and worry and also from useless discussions and assumptions, all of which would only pull us down. Instead it will help us lift our eyes beyond the situation and see the face of the Lord who is Almighty.

In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus highlights the need to pray with faith. We do not have a grumpy God, reluctant to hear our prayer but a loving Father, whose joy is to have His children come to Him. We need to use the currency of the Kingdom of God, which is faith in these heavenly transactions. Hence for us Christians, there is no question of running from one god to another, as we have only One God who is the Creator of everything that has been created, who reigns in heaven, above all our struggles.

Let's take a moment to reflect about our own way of praying. How deep is our faith when we go before the Lord in prayer? When we pray in faith, as taught by the Lord Himself in Lord's Prayer, we are totally lifted up from our fallen defeated state to the state of a beloved son or daughter of our Heavenly Father. He will let His good happen in our lives, ensuring that our temporal and spiritual needs are met in the best way. In prayer our relationship with the Father is renewed as we ask for forgiveness and mercy, while we do the same to those who hurt us. We are empowered with supernatural power to stand against temptation and to avoid the tactics of the evil one.

The prayer moves us away from self-glory to glorifying God in all that we say and do. Why do we pray? Often the answer is to receive what we need from the Lord. Yet St Paul reveals another purpose of prayer and he also gives us a powerful weapon to use in prayer, namely the Word of God. Since

I had an encounter with the living Lord and began this beautiful journey with Him through the Community of the Risen Lord. I have been so enriched by various tools for my prayer life. The Four Steps, looking at the wounds of Christ, Ten Rememberings, Nehemiah's Prayer, are some of those power tools which help me to cling to the Promises of God, which become so alive not only during prayer times but also in my day to day life. As time goes by, the selfish worldly person who sought favours from God is being gradually changed to a servant of God who can be used by Him for Kingdom purposes. For the Lord can use only those who are broken and being emptied of self worth and self will, those who no longer take themselves too seriously and admit that they are weak and sinful and can go wrong any time, if not for the grace of God covering them.

It is the Godbreathed Scripture that acts as the double-edged sword and cuts through our ego and arrogance and even the spiritual pride, strengthening our connection with the Lord Jesus day by day and empowering us to live a Spirit-filled life.

Therefore, Christian prayer is not just asking and receiving but a living connection with the living God who changes us to become more and more like His own Son, becoming a blessing to all around us just like Him. This living connection enables us to be in 'prayer' even when we are at work and interacting with people in different situations.

***Prayer: Abba Father, I thank You, for you are my Father who never sleeps or slumbers, watching over me always. Amen***

By grace you have been saved, it is a gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

Ephesians 2:1–10

Psalms 100:1b–5

Luke 12:13–21

To Adam and Eve God gave a commandment that they should acknowledge their dependence on Him as creatures through obedience. Because of their dependence on Him they were elevated to live not only in the natural human order, but were also given to share in angelic privileges and to the sharing in God's divine life. This entailed immortality, immunity from suffering and disordered passions and things we possibly cannot imagine. But they chose not to depend on God but themselves 'You shall be like God' Genesis 3:5. Thereby sin entered and contaminated everything.

Grace is a favour being bestowed upon a lower being by a higher being. We are now assured of being given our original status. The Lord by dying and rising has destroyed our death. Through His divinity He takes us back to the original state before the fall. Christ comes to show us the way back to dependence on the Father.

In the Gospel proclamation, a person wanted the Lord to speak to his brother to share the inheritance with him. He is however cautioned not to think that his security is tied up to the amount of riches he has. In my prayer time I seem to be aspiring for similar things. There are large amounts due to me as my just inheritance. Doing this reflection I am being made aware of this wrong attitude. I have even turned to the Four Steps to get results. From today I shall only praise the Lord for all He has been to me. It should not matter to me whether I receive my due or not, after all as a popular hymn states "I want you more than gold or silver only you can satisfy. The Lord depended on the Father and was able to feed five thousand people with five loaves and three fish.

Our Master whom we are asked to emulate said that foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head. Yet when He laid His head and slept on a boat that seemed to sink, the others panicked not the Lord. He entrusted it all to the Father. In that security He had to be woken up. In another instance we are told women disciples were looking after the material needs of the Lord Jesus and the apostles. Let us shift from the worship of money, power, position and prestige to total dependence on God.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, give us not only our daily bread but our eternal inheritance of Heaven. Amen*

**'Let thy Kingdom come, let thy will be done'**

**Matthew 6:10**

2 Timothy 4:10-17b

Psalm 145:10-13,  
17-18

Luke 10:1-9

In today's Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus appoints 72 disciples, gives them instructions and sends them to towns and places ahead of Him. Today, He has chosen us to spread the Kingdom of God and explains to us a few points that we have to follow.

1. Intercession – Intercede before God our Father in prayer. This prayer has tremendous power. As we intercede praising, thanking and worshiping God, through the Holy Spirit the Lord will lead us where to go, to whom to send and what is to be done. Few years ago four of us interceded like this. Through that, today the Lord has called more than a hundred servers to take the good news to a vast area. As we pray to the Lord of the harvest, He begins to open the doors to the Kingdom of God.

2. 'I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.' – It is dangerous to send sheep into the midst of wild animals. But the Lord says He will send us to unprotected places. Because He is living in us who are weak He strengthens us to walk through any persecution and in Him everything becomes possible for us.

3. 'Do not worry about your needs.' – He will provide for our needs. When we go into various places it is amazing the way God provides, vehicles, finance and even the minute things. Once we needed a sound system and started a small collection. One day after intercessory prayer we found an envelope containing Rs.100,000/- and mentioning 'use for sounds'. It was from an unknown source. In the next week we received the balance amount from abroad. With that sound system we conduct prayer services in countless places.

4. 'Wish peace' – If we wish for peace those we serve will experience peace.

5. 'Build friendship' – The Lord Jesus is asking to stay with them. This is important and is a good way of sharing their struggles and problems. They only know the way of this world and this will be an opportunity to influence their lives.

6. 'Healing the sick' – Before He preached the good news, the Lord Jesus healed the sick and performed many miracles. Thus they were convinced the kingdom of God was among them. Let us put these principles into practice and experience the Lord's power.

***Prayer: Abba Father, I pray let thy will be done, let thy kingdom come here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.***

**“You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect,  
the Son of Man will come”**

**Luke 12:40**

Ephesians 3:2–12

Isaiah 12:2–6

Luke 12:39–48

St. Paul knew the Jewish Scripture well, because of that he boldly spoke of the revelation he received that Salvation is for the entire human race and not limited to the Jewish community.

The Gentiles were not aware of the living God of Israel and totally ignorant of the Son of God. St. Paul knew the fulfillment of the scripture and the future of humanity was in the richness of Christ Jesus who is the Son of God. He took up his mission and became a faithful steward of God. In today's Gospel proclamation we are told about Stewardship. We who are baptized are called to be stewards of God's word. We come across some words of caution in today's Gospel reading.

Some have scriptural knowledge and know 'about' God, while others have scriptural knowledge and an 'experience' of God. Having an experience of God surpasses the knowledge of God. St. Paul experienced the forgiveness and love of the Lord while he knew about God. Knowing about God and experiencing God are two different dimensions. One may know God in the head and experience God in the heart. When we experience the love of God in our heart we are transformed. The adulterous woman or the woman who washed the feet of Lord Jesus with her tears experienced the forgiveness of God. The elders could not understand what that woman was doing or experiencing. Though we become critical of those elders, there are people among us today who think and behave in the same manner. Unfortunately we have forgotten that the Son of God came to seek and save the lost. We try to sit on the Mercy seat of God and become judges instead of serving God's people with the love of God.

Today is the feast of St. Paul of the Cross. He was born in 1694 in Italy. He experienced a life conversion at the age of 19. He was influenced by the book "Treatise on the Love of God" by St. Francis de Sales. He became a founder of a congregation and dedicated his life to share the passion of Christ. His mission was to preach and share God's love through retreats he conducted. St. Paul of the Cross became a faithful steward of our Lord Jesus. Let us pray for an internal disposition fully surrendered to God and transformed by Him. He died in 1775 by which time the congregation he founded had one hundred and eighty fathers and brothers,

**Prayer: Abba Father, make us loyal and merciful stewards in your vineyard. Amen.**

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 “The earth is full of steadfast love of the Lord”
 

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Ephesians 3:14–21

Psalm 33:1–2, 4–5,  
11–12, 18–19

Luke 12:49–53

Today’s Gospel proclamation is a perfect truth in every Christian family where at least one person is wholly set on fire for the Lord Jesus Christ. In my own family I see it happen just as the Lord proclaimed. Committed Christians turn out to be those who are castigated as abnormal and the families become quite divided unable to accept the fire that the Holy Spirit of the Lord had set upon such individuals. This is a division for the glory of God. Blessed are those who are responsible for this division in their families as it is for the fulfillment of the purpose of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world.

Today, both the writer of first reading and the psalmist speak of the love of Christ which is the fire that the Lord proclaimed through the Gospel. St. Paul, in his prayer for the Ephesians prays “I pray that you may have power, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” This height and depth of the love of the Lord Jesus is assuredly the highest form of love in the universe for in Romans 8.39 St. Paul tells us that neither the height nor depth nor any created thing could ever separate us from the love of God which is the highest power on earth.

We experience this highest love of God in many different ways. In praise and worship, in quiet times of prayer with the Lord, in life changing testimonies, in our trials and temptations and each time we meditate on the birth, passion, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and through the recitation of the Holy Rosary.

I met a young person at the Divine Retreat Centre and from her name immediately knew that she was not from a Catholic background. I was curious to know about her faith experience. She shared that through a colleague she had come to Divine and the experience had changed her life. Every night she goes to sleep holding on to the rosary and speaking to the Blessed Mother with whom she communes very deeply. She is uncertain about her future or family’s reaction but her love for the Lord surpasses anything I have seen. Let us pray for such people who do not have the freedom to openly love the Lord.

**Prayer: Abba Father, fill me with your love which you poured out for me during your passion so that I may be enkindled by your fire and bring more and more into your great love. Amen!**

## Who are the people who seek the face of God?

Ephesians 4:1–6

Psalm 24:1–4b, 5–6

Luke 12:54–59

As the Psalmist profoundly writes, we are all stewards or caretakers of this world which belongs to the Lord. As we are bound to be committed to proper management of everything that's created in the world, we are not to become devoted to anything that's created or act as sole proprietors, because this world will one day pass away and the only eternal thing is the Kingdom of God.

Hence in the first reading of today, we are instructed on what kind of life we should be living by loving our neighbour. God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives on earth. In light of this truth, St. Paul challenges us to live lives worthy of the calling we received, the awesome privilege of being called Christ's very own. This includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding and peaceful. People are watching our lives. How well do they see Christ in us? How well are we living up to the calling of being Christ's representatives?

We are a work in progress. Often, differences among people can lead to division and a hindrance to living up to our calling. But Christ is an example how we should focus on what unites us rather than what divides us. As the Gospel proclamation speaks today, people look at their environment, situations and resources to determine their future, yet are blind to the weaknesses within themselves. This can hinder their journey. Let us search deep within us reflecting on today's Word. How well are we living up to the calling of the Lord? Or are we like the hearers who predicted the weather but were not really able to decide for themselves what the present times meant for the coming of the Kingdom of God?

Only through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, can we become more sensitive to the move of God. We see the signs and we are given the grace to respond to them, well in advance. Lives are changed and bondages are broken as we live up to this calling.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we thank You for making us stewards of the world You created by Your power. You placed us here to take care of it and multiply in ways Your name would be glorified. But our self-centred ways have separated us from You and our neighbour. Lord give us a heart to repent and turn back to You, so we may live a life worthy of our calling. Amen**

But grace was given to each one of us according to  
the measure of Christ's gift.

Ephesians 4:7

Ephesians 4:7-16

Psalms 122:1-5

Luke 13:1-9

In today's reading from the Gospel of St. Luke, there is a conversation between a person who planted a fig tree in his vineyard and the vine dresser. The man to whom the vineyard belonged had every reason to be disappointed in seeing that the tree had not borne fruit. Was it unnatural for him to expect fruit? No, it was something that was expected by any person. If a seed is planted

then the natural order is that a tree should grow and bear fruit, if it does not then the next best thing that should be done is to cut it down.

Some of us are like this fig tree that was planted but has still not borne fruit. In some area or the other we have not prospered, the delay has been longer, we messed up our life and we hear a voice that screams to us "you are useless". The natural order says it out loud to us "because you messed up you ought to suffer". In this chaos can we hear the vine dresser's voice? "Sir let it alone this year".

We know that in this context the Vine dresser is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is confronting the law of natural order with mercy. Is this a platform with an easy escape to sin? No He is offering the gift of mercy, but this is offered to those who repent. Not only is mercy the gift of God but also repentance. As we truly repent, the Lord offers us the gift of Mercy. What can mercy do? I had a friend who would constantly argue with me about the law of Karma and goes on about how unfair the concept of mercy and grace is. Sometimes when we are filled with guilt we ourselves doubt the mercy of God. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ is able to offer us the gift of mercy. The reason and authority behind this is found in the first reading. The word of God says that the Lord descended to the lower regions. He who had no sin, he who was pure had to descend to the lower regions to a place reserved for sin and darkness. Well that does not seem right, that is like chopping a fig tree that bore a lot of fruit? It does not make sense, does it? But it was because the Lord Jesus Christ who had no sin, was considered to be sin, so that we who are sinners could be saved. The Lord worked against the natural order, he broke the law of reaction. He puts a stop to the circle of life that carried sin. So when I repent and turn to him, I receive forgiveness, the gift of life and mercy, because he bore the brunt of my sin.

**Prayer: Abba Father, give me the gift of holy repentance and fill me with your mercy and grace. Amen**

**The prayer of the humble pierces the cloud.****Sirach 35:14**

Sirach 35:12-14,  
16-18

Ps 34:2-3, 17-19, 23

2 Tim 4:6-9, 16-18

Luke 18:9-14

Humility is the quality of having a modest or low view of one's importance. The synonyms for humility are modesty, humbleness, modestness, meekness, lack of pride, lack of vanity, diffidence, unassertiveness. We tend to assume that we are generally humble but it is only when we are faced with a challenge to our ego that we become aware if we are endowed with the gift of humility or still need a long way to go. In the first reading from Sirach we read of the Heavenly Father's nature. In the second reading we are given an insight into St. Paul's nature and from the Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus speaks a parable about true humility and the nature He wants us to have.

Sirach tells us of the utterly impartial nature of the Father whose nature is compared to that a judge. There are a few phrases used to describe the Father's nature, 'He listens to the plea of the injured party.' In today's world very few people can actually listen. The moment a person starts talking there is judgement, advice and better ideas. As opposed to human nature, the Heavenly Father listens to the desperate plea of orphans and widows. These were the type of people who had no say in the times of the Lord Jesus. In the Jewish society, children, orphans and widows were despised and delegated to the background. The word says the Father does not ignore the supplication and petitions of the despised. Often such people are bowed down, subdued, taken advantage of and even cheated. Then there is a beautiful line in the word, 'The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds: and until it does, he is not to be consoled, nor will he desist until the Most High takes notice of him, acquits the upright and delivers judgement. Our prayers may not be answered due to our human pride and spiritual pride.

In his letter to Timothy, St. Paul writes of his readiness to die, now that he has finished the race. Often, we are not prepared to end our earthly journey. We are so attached to the earth and we want others also to remain with us. But our real purpose is a short stint on earth which should prepare us for eternity. Even though St. Paul was in the hands of people who were bent on dealing with him with cruelty, he was convinced that whatever he faced, the Lord would rescue him and take him to His Heavenly kingdom. Death always humbles us. The very posture people make when they pay their last respects

tells us that they feel humbled. If we live as though we will never die, we become puffed up with pride.

The Gospel proclamation from St. Luke is a clarion call to review our attitude. The word tells us that the Lord Jesus spoke the following parable to some people who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else. This is a trap we get into when we are too proud of being Catholic. Yes we love our faith and are convinced of our traditions but it should make us despise other people and assume we are superior. We must remind ourselves that the prayer of a humble person pierces the clouds and reaches the ears of the Heavenly Father. This was the case between the Pharisee and the tax collector. It is said that the Pharisee stood there and said his prayer to himself. Are we praying to ourselves or are we addressing the Father, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit when we pray. We could be offering self addressed and empty prayers. The Pharisee was focussing on himself and all the assumed failures of the tax collector. He felt that if he fulfilled all the requirements of the law, he would be acceptable to God. We also assume if we fulfil our Sunday obligation and sing in the choir and make a donation which is actually made to have a better say in the matters of the parish, then we are acceptable to God. But the Heavenly Father is looking beyond all of that and is looking at our hearts and attitudes.

What was the attitude of the tax collector? He beat his breast and stood at a distance. When we truly understand the greatness of God we will be able to see how small we are. He accepted his sinfulness and made a short prayer, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' When St. Peter saw the majesty and power of the Lord Jesus, he said, 'Depart from me oh Lord, for I am a sinner.'

If we cannot make the same prayer it is because we might not have experienced the greatness of God. We are so caught up with our achievements and greatness that we cannot see the greatness in God and the sinfulness in our hearts. The Gospel passage ends with the verse that says, 'For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, but anyone who humbles himself will be raised up. It is interesting to see the use of everyone and anyone. Anyone who humbles himself will be exalted. Today if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts. Let us look into our hearts and check our attitudes. It is more difficult to be humble to a person of a lower stature. If we have the constant expressions of 'Who do you think you are!' and 'Do you know who I am?' ringing in our heads then we know where we stand.

***Prayer: Abba Father, like the Lord Jesus humbled himself, help me to humble myself not only before your throne but even before people. Amen***

Ephesians 4:32–5:8

Psalm 1:1–4, 6

Luke 13:10–17

Today's readings tell us to turn away from the things of this world and turn to the things of God. For many of us today, reality is, the things of this world. St. Paul in the first reading is telling us that we must be Holy. Holy is to be set apart, to be different from everybody else. "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:3-5)

St. Paul is telling us that if we live according to the kingdoms of this world we will not belong to the kingdom of God. Living according to the kingdom of this world unknowingly makes us idolaters. Many of us even though we are Christian, attend mass and follow all the prayer meetings, live according to the kingdom of the world. We worship the God of money and the God of lust. Sometimes we may make a relationship or another person our God. St. Paul is telling us instead when we live in the kingdom of God, thanksgiving will be in our hearts. We will have the fruits of the spirit, Love, peace and Joy.

The problem is, our nature rebels against the things of God. As it is mentioned in today's Gospel proclamation when the Lord healed the woman those who were governed by the kingdom of the world took offence at Jesus. For they were governed by rules, rituals and traditions and the Lord was moved by love for the ones who were suffering. It is the same within us when we start to live according to the kingdom of God from within us will come the resistance, a resistance to pray, a resistance to read the word.

Then what must we do. Like it is mentioned in today's psalms the tree of our life must be rooted near the river. Our life must be where the presence of God is, in other words we must continually live in his presence and as it is mentioned in the psalms only then we will bear the fruits of the spirit. We have to enter into this presence today through the four steps and journey with the strength of the Spirit.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I am so attracted to the things of this world and I do the very things I hate. Give me the strength to live as you want me to. Amen*

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”

**Ephesians 5:21**

Ephesians 5:21–33

Psalms 128:1–5

Luke 13:18–21

“What is the Kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?” The Lord Jesus asks His disciples. I can almost imagine the eager looks of those poor fishermen, expectantly waiting for Him to tell the wonders of the Kingdom from where He came from – tales of grandiosity and splendour, of might and majesty, of angel warriors and beautiful seraphims. Instead He compares His Kingdom to a tiny mustard seed, to yeast – tiny and apparently insignificant.

In today’s first reading, St Paul urges us to submit to one another. This seems like an extraordinarily difficult thing to do, living as we do in a world where we are encouraged to assert our own authority and fight to prove our own worth. Sometimes we try and submit out of a misplaced sense of meekness. It becomes a determined effort to “be the bigger person” and with this effort all the while we are fuming within. The kingdom values are righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. The effort of submission usually takes away our peace and joy so how do we achieve this? St. Paul gives us the secret – “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”

When we keep Christ at the centre of our lives, when loving Him is our sole focus and desire and His love burns deep inside us, then our entire world view shifts. I submit then to my brother or sister, not as a sacrifice to be born grudgingly or as a heroic effort to be nice, but I submit because I love the Lord Jesus. Because He is at the centre of my world, it is no longer about my ego, it is not about proving myself and it is not even about my brother or sister – it is about my Jesus.

This was the secret the apostles learned – this was why they sacrificed their lives to further the Kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus became the centre of their lives and submitted even to death out of reverence and love for Him. They understood that this is the kingdom of the King who willingly sacrificed Himself for the salvation of the world. When a tiny mustard seed dies to itself, a huge tree can spring up. The world cannot understand but in the quietness of my spirit when I commune with God, this Kingdom becomes my home – the place where I came from and where I hope to one day return.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, help me to live out the Kingdom values in my home, in my workplace, in the society I live in. May your Holy Spirit guide me, may Your love burn within me and may Your grace cover me all the days of my life. Amen*

"Strive to enter by the narrow door;"

Luke 13:22-30

Ephesians 6:1-9

Psalm 145:10-14

Luke 13:22-30

Picture the Olympic athlete. He makes winning the gold medal the focus of his life. Everything he does is controlled by his goal of winning the gold. He will not eat anything that is not good for him, because it might hinder his muscles from performing at their maximum on the day of the race. He will not attend parties and stay up late the night before, because he wants to be rested

and ready to give everything to the race. His only focus is to win.

In today's readings, we are asked the very same question; whether we are ready to take the hard path in order to experience the greater glory. The Lord Jesus is asking, "Are you striving to enter the narrow door? What does it mean to enter through the narrow door? It means that we do what is pleasing to God in everything we do. It means that we go whatever distance to do the right thing, because we are more interested in eternal life, than in temporary benefits.

Salvation should not be a nice thing to think about every once in a while when we do not have anything better to do. It should be on our mind every day. It should govern everything we do. It should determine how we spend our time, our money, and our leisure hours.

I am reminded of a beautiful testimony. They were facing a major land dispute. They struggled to get the proper legal documents from the relevant government authorities. While everyone around them assured them that giving a bribe would be the only way to get their work done, they simply could not agree to it. They wanted to do what was right by God. And their faith in His providence and timing prevented them from taking the easier path. Day after day, they would go to the authority, with no positive result. As time dragged the temptation to give a bribe was stronger, but they did not succumb to the worldly ways of doing things. They kept focus on the "narrow path". One fine day, through divine intervention the problem got solved. Out of nowhere a different officer stepped into action and helped them sort their matter in the right way. That's why it is said we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Hope in God.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I pray that you open my eyes to seek your will in everything I do today. Give me the strength to swim against the easier options the world offers and to hold firmly on to your teachings. Amen**

***“Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for battle,  
my fingers for war”***

**Psalm 144:1**

Eph 6:10–20

Psalm 144:1b, 2,  
9–10

Luke 13:31–35

A lesson well learned by St. Paul is presented in the Word of God. The battles we fight are not ours but belongs to the cosmic battle between darkness and light. Did our Lord Jesus come to fight this battle and win it over for all of us? Are we not people of the light?

We need God's grace to understand our day to day battles, the battle between darkness and light. The fights in our families, political battles, racial disputes, and natural calamities could be fights between the principalities of this world and God.

As Catholics we are called to witness to the truth. For this reason we are baptized into the family of God. We are called and protected by God to fulfill His mission on earth. God has not simply called us but provided us with everything we need to accomplish His mission on earth. The general exhortation of St. Paul to the Ephesians' clearly explains this. We cannot win a battle without a proper shield or armour. Our foundation of life should be 'truth', 'righteousness', 'peace', 'faith', 'salvation' and life in the 'Spirit'. Our call by God is to win the world for His Kingdom. Therefore we need to be qualified to be diplomatic soldiers.

As people of God and we do not belong to the world, which is ruled by the rulers of this world. But rather, we are ambassadors of heaven. The prophet par excellence from God's Kingdom challenged the ruler of this world with the truth. No one could stop Him from fulfilling the mission He came for.

Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem, which annihilated many prophets, how would it not touch the prophet par excellence. The mission of the Son of God was to be the light of this world. He left His status as the second member of the Holy Trinity and came to establish the Kingdom of God in the world where darkness was ruling. The Lord Jesus said it clearly that His journey towards Jerusalem would never be stopped by anyone, because for that reason He came into this world. The Lord Jesus had to go to Jerusalem to be crucified. This is our mission too. We are called by God to carryout the race which the Lord Jesus has begun.

***Prayer: Abba Father, may we be covered by the precious blood of Lord Jesus when we set out for the battle field. Amen.***

***'In union with Christ you too are being built together...'*****Ephesians 2:22**

Ephesians 2:19-22

Psalm 19:2-5

Luke 6:12-16

What kind of blessing and privilege it is to have a union with Christ where God's Spirit binds us together. When we come to realize that we belong to Christ; we are part of Him, I do not think we can ask for anything more than internalizing and comprehending this truth. It leaves me in awe. It is through the Lord Jesus dying on the cross and God the Father sending the Holy Spirit that He fulfills His promise of union with Christ. St. Paul writes in the letter to the Romans (8:11) "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you." It is through the same spirit that we are made one.

As St. Paul writes about 'one in Christ' we realise we are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, the corner stone being Jesus Christ Himself. The twelve apostles were the foundation stones of His church, several even wrote portions of the Bible. In Revelations 21:14 we are told "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." It reveals to us the significance of the role of the apostles in Christianity. When the Lord Jesus chose His apostles, He spent the whole night in prayer because He wanted to know the will of the Father and His wisdom in choosing the apostles. I think the saying 'God doesn't call the equipped, God equips the called' must have started when the Lord Jesus chose the apostles. It still amazes me that knowing the great purpose and mission He had for the apostles, He chose ordinary people like fishermen and tax collectors. He called them first and equipped them to carry out the mission. Throughout the Gospel our Lord Jesus shows us that before He does anything, He always spends time in prayer in the presence of His Father to discern what the Father wants Him to do. Lord Jesus' mission is to do the will of the Father. Being in union with Christ, we are called to reflect and carry out the mission that the Lord Jesus started. That is the ultimate purpose of Christian life. Therefore, it's really vital for us as Christians, to have that personal relationship with the Lord. We are called to hear Him speak and then do what He wants us to do.

***Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for having a personal relationship with me as your son/ daughter and giving me the heart and mind to discern your will in everything I do. Amen***

## "Do not take the place of honor"

Luke 14:8

Philippians 1:18b–26

Psalm 42:2–3, 5

Luke 14:1, 7–11

The Pharisee invited our Lord Jesus, not to honor him, or listen and learn, but to check him out. They had already concluded that their own views and ways were superior to His, and were waiting to pick holes in His teaching and behavior. In that they lost the blessing that the houses of Zacchaeus, Mathew, Jairus, Martha, and Mary received by the visitation of Our Lord.

As I read this, I am led to question my own attitude towards other Christians. How often must I have been deprived of blessings, simply because I thought that my view and experience of God were superior to theirs.

Our Lord Jesus observes how some invitees claimed seats of honor. I am reminded that just like the Pharisees, I may be honored by others for the work I do for God and the role I play in church. However, if I get stuck with human honor, I may lose God's honour. Our Lord Jesus spots this and tells them a parable. St. Luke specifically says that this is a parable. This means that it is not only a lesson about self-promotion and humiliation, but it also carries a secret of the kingdom.

To me, the banquet is the life we are invited to with the awakening of our spirits. Many of us have come to this experience at an event such as the sacrament of reconciliation, a powerful prayer service, or a life changing retreat like the Four Steps Retreat. Yet as we go on, we may regress into seeking recognition and acknowledgement from others at the banquet. Our Lord Jesus stresses that it for the host to acknowledge or honour us. Disappointment and shame awaits those who seek the seats of honor. It is the inner responses, those acts of obedience we perform in secret, which no one else sees, that will call us from oblivion to the seats of honour at a banquet.

In the first reading we observe the change in attitude of a one-time Pharisee, St. Paul and currently one with an awakened spirit. It does not matter to him if Christ is preached for the wrong reasons – as long as Christ is preached he rejoices. It does not matter to him whether he lives on or dies. His faith and deliverance is a result of the intercession of the community, and the working of the Holy Spirit in his life.

**Prayer:** *Abba Father, I offer up to you all my inner responses. I pray for the gift of loyalty and obedience is the moments when I am alone. Amen*

You are merciful to all, for you can do all things,  
and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent. **Wisdom 11:23**

Wisdom of Solomon  
11:22-12:2  
Psalm 145:1-2, 8-11,  
13, 14  
2 Thessalonians 1:11-2:2  
  
Luke 19:1-10

Today's first reading is part of a beautiful prayer which reflects on how God sees those who are wayward. It reveals the heart of God concerning us. It reveals the heart of God concerning the people we detest and love to hate.

Tax collectors during the time of Our Lord Jesus were the modern day equivalent of drug peddlers.

They get rich and live luxurious lives by destroying others. They had the backing of the Roman army, and hence people were unable to stand against them. It is no surprise that people hated and detested tax collectors. Zacchaeus was not just a tax collector; he was a chief tax collector.

Our Lord Jesus was passing through Jericho. Passing through means he had no intention of stopping there. However, that day not only did Our Lord Jesus stop, but decided to visit the house of Zacchaeus and dine with him. How often Our Lord Jesus may have passed us by without stopping? What did Zacchaeus do to make Our Lord Jesus stop?

St. Luke brings Zacchaeus into his narration because Zacchaeus had this longing to see Jesus. St. Luke does not tell us why. Maybe Zacchaeus was just curious. Maybe he had a need such as a sickness or a deeper need such as a dissatisfaction despite having all the wealth that you and I could ever wish for. We too come to the Lord for some need or the other, and sometimes out of pure curiosity. But like Zacchaeus when we meet the Lord, we discover something far more wonderful than the blessing we came for. My own encounter with the Lord happened because I was in line to be retrenched, and I turned to Him in my helplessness. I discovered something far more wonderful; I discovered the pearl of great price. I know of others who walked in to one of our prayer meetings out of curiosity and found a treasure.

Zacchaeus, being the chief tax collector, was not a person that people would want to have around. However, his longing to see Our Lord Jesus was so much that he braved the contempt of the crowds. This is the first step that Zacchaeus took to make the Lord stop instead of passing him by.

St. Luke goes on to tell us that Zacchaeus was short in stature, and because of the crowd he was unable to see Our Lord Jesus. He does something that does not fit his stature as the chief tax collector. Knowing that the Lord will be passing by the Sycamore Tree, he climbed it. Often, we lose sight of Our Lord Jesus because he is “crowded out” by the things that pre-occupy our minds and the opinions of those around us. If we are to see the Lord Jesus, we too will need to climb a tree by the road where the Lord is known to pass by. Sometimes the act of climbing the tree may be attending a prayer meeting where the gospel is preached powerfully, even though praise and worship may not be our cup of tea. It also could be attending a retreat, such as the Four Steps Retreat, where many have testified to life-changing experiences. It could also be a sincere visit to the sacrament of reconciliation, or a time of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Climbing the tree was the second step that made the Lord stop instead of passing by.

When our Lord Jesus invites Himself to the house of Zacchaeus, the crowd started muttering. This time it is not the Pharisees who object but the people who have always been with, and listened to our Lord. They are scandalized that the Lord should dine with such a detestable man. They have not understood the heart of God revealed in the first reading.

Zacchaeus gets up and declares that he will give half of his wealth to the poor. Our Lord says that salvation has visited this house this day. The greed for money that Zacchaeus had was broken in a moment. Contrast this with the rich fool, who although had lived a virtuous life, went away saddened because he was rich. There is greater rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents than for 99 righteous who do not need to repent. The encounter with Our Lord raises us to heights not achievable by being good people.

In the second reading, St. Paul reveals that the encounter is not an end in itself, but a beginning. St. Paul prays that God will count us worthy of the calling (encounter) and that by his power bring to fulfilment every good purpose he began. He also prays that God will fulfil every act of faith. A journey of faith to the new promised land, experiencing the saving power of Christ as salvation visits our house daily, as we encounter him in our personal prayer and visits to the Sacrament, breaking the strangle hold that our brokenness and addictions have on us.

***Prayer: Abba Father, help me find that tree that You want me to climb, and may salvation visit my home as You decide to come and encounter me. Amen.***

“..in humility value others above yourselves..”

**Philippians 2:3**

Philippians 2:1-4

Psalms 131:1-3

Luke 14:12-14

What really stands out for me in today's readings is the message of humility, putting others before myself and considering their needs before my own. Many people have the wrong idea about being humble, as did I. St. Paul says in Philippians 2, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (v 3,4)

We assume being humble means groveling in front of others, being weak or passive. But nothing could be further from the truth. The picture of humility in the Bible is one of a strong person who loves others. Humility also is recognizing that we need God's help, knowing we cannot truly succeed with our own strength. It is being comfortable with who we are in Christ and seeking to build others up, not ourselves. It is gratefully walking in God's grace, love, and forgiveness.

I have realized that I spent most of my life being a self-centered person. I have always felt the need to get mine and defend my own. The needs, feelings and opinions of others had been secondary. I am ashamed to say that I have hurt many a person in the process, especially those in my family. Praise to our Merciful God who never allows us to remain in our weakness but gently draws us out to be transformed into His image and likeness. Through circumstances and people He began to show me that I had a false identity that I had constructed for myself, and when anything threatened to damage that identity happened, I immediately became reactive and defensive.

God began to lead me to search for my true identity in Him. I discovered I am precious and treasured in His sight, a beloved daughter and co-heir with Christ Jesus. This identity, no circumstance or person can ever take from me. Knowing this has secured me deep inside. I do not need to act like a big shot and put up a false front, the less I have to prove myself. The Lord Jesus Himself was meek and humble of spirit. (Matt 11:29, Phil 4:8) He was completely secure in His identity as God's Son. The verse "I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content." (Psalm 131:2) has taken on a new meaning for me.

**Prayer: Abba Father, continue your work in me, as you reveal to me my true identity, renew my mind and awaken my spirit. Amen.**

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