



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

October 2017

**O Lord, you are my love. You
are my honour, my hope,
and my refuge, my glory, and
my last end. O my love, my
happiness, my conserver,
my joy, my reformer and my
master! You are my father, the
spouse of my life and
of my soul!**

St. Anthony Mary Claret

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Turn to God and be saved

Exodus 18: 25-28

Psalm 25: 4-9

Philippians 2:1-11

In the first reading from Ezekiel, the Lord speaks to His people and tells them of His mercy. He says that if a person sins and does not turn back to the Lord, the person will die. But if a sinful person turns from sin and turns to the Lord and repents, that person will be saved by the Lord and live. To some people this may have seemed unfair. They may have thought that someone who has done wrong most of his or her life and then turned to the Lord in repentance to be forgiven by the Lord is unfair. They would have rationalised the situation and wondered "what about all the wrong he or she did before?" They would have wondered about the person who does a lot of good, but also sins against the Lord. They would have wondered "what about all the good he or she previously did? Is that worthless? Is there no reward for this?"

The Lord does not look at our lives the way we do. A man who turns from his sinful ways and seeks the Lord knows how weak and imperfect he is and therefore clings to the Lord for salvation. The Lord saves this man and gives him life. While, the person who has done good deeds but then turned away from them to sin, may have not known God at all. His good deeds may have been to show others and to receive appreciation from others. But in his heart he has not known the real God. Therefore, this man will die to his sin. Today, the Lord is asking you to examine your heart and see if you really know the Lord.

The Second Reading from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians tells us how we can overcome our sins and come back to the Lord and be saved. God the Father wanted to save us from our sins, but the only way He could do this was by sending His only Son to die for our sins. The Lord Jesus said yes to God the Father in everything He did. His humbleness made God exalt Him above everything.

The Holy Trinity's second member was given the name Lord Jesus and in His name there is infinite power. At the mention or thought of His name every knee in heaven, on earth and under the earth should bow down to Him. What immense power this name carries. He is above every problem, every struggle and every fear. It is by the name of the Lord that we can turn back from our sinful ways and receive life. He is above all the evil powers in the world.

When we carry Him in our hearts nothing can touch us. No matter how much the evil one tries to pull us down, when He sees the Highest of High living inside of us, he must bow down; for everything bows down to the Lord Jesus. Without the Lord Jesus we are weak and defenseless, but with Him inside us we are victorious.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus relates a story of a father who asks both his sons to work in his vineyard. The first son says no, but eventually goes out to the vineyard. The second son says yes, but does not go out to work. Today the Lord is asking us to look deep inside our hearts and to find out which son we can relate to. Do we hear the voice of the Lord calling us away from our sins to work in his Kingdom? Can we accept this calling and receive salvation? If we have not accepted the Lord into our lives, then today the Lord is calling us to come back to Him; to turn from our sin and be saved. How can we do this?

Romans 10:9 tells us "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." This is the basic Gospel we must believe to accept the Lord into our lives and receive salvation. First we must believe in our hearts that the Lord Jesus is raised from the dead. The problem is that without truly believing in our hearts that Jesus is Lord we can profess this. But our lives will not be changed and we will still be sinful.

This is what Ezekiel speaks of in the first reading. A person can be doing good things without really believing that Jesus is Lord. This kind of person cannot receive salvation. If we find it difficult to believe this we can do the Four Steps and ask God to give us the faith to believe that the Lord Jesus is risen from the dead.

Next, we must proclaim this to others. If we do not proclaim to others by word and deed that Jesus is Lord then what we believed in will only be an idea in our minds. That is why we must confess our faith with our mouth.

First we declare it to ourselves and hear it with our own ears. Then we can declare it to others. Thirdly, then the experience of salvation becomes ours. When we do the first two things, then the power of God is released into our own hearts, we will know the true God and be saved.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the faith to believe that Jesus is Lord and the ability to proclaim it to others so that we will be saved. Amen.

The Lord has put angels in charge of you
to guard you in all your ways

Psalm 91:11

Exodus 23: 20-23

Psalm 91: 1-11

Matthew 18: 1-5,10

To dismiss the belief in angels as being a childish fantasy is to miss out on a number of references in sacred scriptures. To be childlike – is that not what the Lord Jesus wants us to be? So let us discard our sophisticated attitudes and be open to what the Lord has to tell us. We meet an angel first in Hagar's encounter in the wilderness Exodus 33:12. The Old Testament abounds in reference

to angels from Exodus to Revelations. God reveals Himself in many ways and angels were one of them.

In the New Testament we have the awe inspiring encounter between our Blessed Mother Mary and Angel Gabriel. The Lord too refers to angels of God ascending and descending, (reminiscent of Jacob's dream Genesis 28:12.) forging a bridge between heaven and earth. So much for the belief in angels.

In the tradition of the Church we are protected by angels. (Psalm 91) They represent in a subtle way the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel proclamation once more the Lord turns the world view upside down. At a time when children were considered nonentities, the Lord Jesus sets them up as an example to be seen and not heard. But the Lord reiterates the fact that they are precious in the Father's sight. Later the Lord Jesus passes from children to the little people devoid of any worldly acclaim and are simple and humble. What about power and prestige, intelligence and intellect? Are these not the qualities that matter? In the world's estimation they are admired and valued. But God's thoughts often go contrary to people's thinking. Today a scandalous situation exists where children are exploited - from child labour to sexual abuse. The Lord Jesus condemns these crimes in the strongest of terms. Influence, money and power exert social pressures on the less privileged who are condemned to lead a life devoid of the basic needs for survival. The Lord Jesus gives the children and simple folk the highest privilege by identifying Himself with them.

Personally, I valued intelligence and intellect over the simple virtues of humility, simplicity and innocence. I thank God that after the Baptism of the Holy Spirit through the Renewal movement, I realised that my education, intellect and intelligence are a block to cross the barrier from the material to the supernatural.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to walk in the Spirit with the heart of a child. Amen

Tuesday 3rd October

Solemnity for Sri Lanka

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus

I tell you the truth, unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven **Matthew 18:2-4**

Isaiah 66: 10-14

Psalms 130: 1-3

Matthew 18:1-5

The disciples asked the Lord Jesus who the greatest was in the kingdom of God. I assume they asked this question with the motive to know if they were among the greatest.

The Lord Jesus called a little child and had the child stand among them. He said "I tell you the truth, unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:2-4)

We know that whatever the Lord Jesus spoke was only truth and nothing else. But if you noticed He emphasised that what He says about the kingdom of God is the truth in double portion. As soon as the Lord Jesus called that child towards him, the child came running without hesitating or thinking about the reason amidst an elderly crowd. If it was us, if we were called to come and stand amidst a group of people, we would have had many thoughts running in our minds. Some of us would not even have come forward. The Lord Jesus in other words is saying, if you are going to be all stuck up and keep thinking about what others think of us and do things only to make sure others appreciate us, being proud and hypocritical we cannot enter the kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus once again emphasizes the word "Never".

Recently, I noticed how a 30 year old lady was communicating with her 6 month old baby. I noticed she had to bring out the little child within her to communicate with this baby. Don't we do the same when we try to grab the attention of a baby? In today's reading the Lord is telling us it is not only when you communicate with children that we need to bring out your inner child, but especially when we associate with one another in the secular world. God wants us to be humble and innocent like little children. St. Teresa the little flower was a saint who only lived for 24 years. She lived within her convent walls, and it is said that she was able to convert an equal number of people as St. Francis Xavier did travelling half of the world. She was able to do this by offering every small act for the conversion of sinners. For example, if she saw a piece of paper on the floor, she would pick it up and offer that act to God for the conversion of a soul. By doing this on a daily basis she was able to change the world and is now one of the great Saints in the church.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to be innocent like little children. Amen

“No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God” Luke 9:62

Nehemiah 2:1-8

Psalms 137: 1-6

Luke 9th 57-62

We are familiar with Nehemiah and his prayer. Today we can learn more from Nehemiah. He remembered God always, he repented on the his personal sin and collectively of the sins of his nation Israel, he held on to the promises of God and he interceded for his fellow Israelites and for the work he was assigned to by God.

Nehemiah knew that the favour of God was upon him when he saw that the king was agreeing to his requests. God puts us in places that are important for the work of His Kingdom. Nehemiah was working for a pagan king. We read in the passage today that he spoke to the king and his queen with fear, but he won the favour of the king because God's favour was upon him.

Nehemiah had to be in an influential place like in the palace of the king to fulfill the task that he was assigned for by God. We may think that we are in the wrong place but God knows where He should place us, for us to fulfill the mission assigned to us by.

The contrast in the Gospel proclamation is when someone offered his service to the Lord Jesus that person was shown the cost of being a disciple. But when the Lord Jesus invited others, they gave different excuses, which were not worthy of the Kingdom and discipleship. The Lord Jesus would have easily accepted the person who already said that he would follow Him. Yet, the Lord Jesus made clear to him the cost of discipleship. We must keep this in mind when we set out to serve God. No possessions, power nor money should be of concern for those who wants to follow God. This does not mean that we cast out our families in the name of God. No! Our attitudes and the priorities should be set in place. For those of us who are serving God cannot be with the idea of gaining possessions, power or money. We should carry the attitude of total dependence on God when we serve Him.

Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. God gave this direction to him and his companions; the command given to the rich young man to sell his goods and give to the poor. Saint Francis lived the dream God had for him to the utmost. Let us desire to do the same.

Prayer: Abba Father, we need your grace to give up our worlds we have built into your hands and to say “it is in giving that we receive” like St. Francis said. Amen.

He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet.

2 Samuel 22:10

Nehemiah 8: 1-12

Psalms 19: 8-11

Luke 10: 1-12

The Lord Jesus is preparing His disciples for mission. He leaves them in no doubt about the challenges, obstacles and dangers which will await them. They will succeed, however, because the power of God is working in them. Accordingly, the seventy-two return with joy. Do I experience that joy when I do what the Lord wants?

This welcoming with joy and solidarity keeps us human and humble; we need each other to find joy in God. We do not go to God on our own. We have one God who is like a Father to us and we are brothers and sisters. God is our Father, welcoming and merciful. No matter where we have been or what we have done. God the Father invites us to follow The Lord Jesus laid importance on giving mercy, offering forgiveness, a common good for all, faith and prayer.

We recognise people by their footstep or their knock on the door; it's knowledge of the heart. This is like the intimacy of our relationship with God. It's an intimate knowing. The Church helps us through this journey and to be the community in love and for love. Pope Francis calls the church 'a love story'; the love of the Father God calls us not to Jerusalem but to the living God in our community, family, schools, colleges, work places and neighborhood. In our loves of friendship, of marriage and for the poor we are called to find this reign of God in love and spread it in works of justice, compassion and mercy.

The beauty of our relationship with the Lord is a life of faith and works. While we grow deeper in faith, the Lord also shows us ways where we can go beyond our boundaries and offer our resources to those in need. Till then the entire focus in on us, our families, our children and amassing things for our future. The things become our security and God. Whereas, in a true relationship with God, the opposite principles work, where God becomes our security and we release our hold on what we own. Most saints experienced the providence of God as they let go. When we begin to see the hand of God working after we have given and surrendered our lives, we are filled with true joy and satisfaction.

Prayer: Abba Father, my Lord and my God, may I know and become aware of your love for me Amen

Hardheartedness towards God

Baruch 1:15-22

Psalms 79: 1-9

Luke 10: 13-16

The Israelites were a people for whom the Lord had worked more miracles and wonders than for any other race or nation in the world. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, the Lord Himself reached down and set them free from the clutches of the Egyptians. Yet time and time again we read about how hard hearted they were. They forgot the Lord their God repeatedly, by rebelling

against Him and not following His commandments.

We see the same scenario in the Gospel proclamation of today. The Lord had performed many miracles in those cities but the people had not changed their ways. The more you invest time in a friend, the more painful it is to discover that you have no place in that friend's heart. It is outrageous and infuriating. I cannot understand it. It does not make sense how they could repeatedly rebel against the Lord. This was after all that He has done to prove His love and mercy towards them.

Whilst I was preoccupied with judging them for their ingratitude and stupidity, the Holy Spirit began convicting me of the similarities between the Israelites, the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida and me. I easily forget how enslaved, miserable and unable I was to save myself, before the Lord Jesus came into my life and started fixing everything that I thought was unfixable. With time, I took it for granted and forgot to remember. Everything became a distant memory. Ungratefully, I rebelled against Him by resorting to my own understanding and following my "perverted heart that had messed me up in the first place. I exalted other things above Him by serving "false gods". I made choices, that were not in line with His perfect will for me. No different from the Israelites, Chorazin and Bethsaida.

The sad thing is, God is helpless and weak before our exercise of freedom. Our free will, ties God's Hands. But the solution is to continuously remind ourselves of what He has done for us. We never let ourselves forget how the Lord delivered us and brought us to a place of freedom, where we can approach Him daily through the Four steps and be fulfilled and satisfied by Him. Let us ask the Lord to help us change our ways. Let us ask Him to show us even the seemingly insignificant things we do that are not in line with His will.

Prayer: Abba Father, bring my will under your submission completely. Help me never to forget the graces you have bestowed on me. Amen.

**“And Mary said: My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit
rejoices in God my Savior. Luke 1:46-48**

Baruch 4: 5-12,
27-29

Psalm 69: 33-37

Luke 10: 17-24

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

“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 Jesus, preceded by Mary,” Pope Benedict XV1.

“It could be said that each mystery of the Rosary carefully meditated sheds light on the mystery of humankind. Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you. Ps 55:23. To pray the rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and his Mother. The Rosary does mark indeed the rhythm of human life, bringing it in harmony with the rhythm of God’s own life in the joyful communion of the Holy Trinity our life’s destiny and deepest longing. Through the Rosary the faithful receive abundant grace as though from the very hands of the mother of the Redeemer”. These were the words of Saint John Paul 11.

Pope Francis says “the Rosary is the prayer that always accompanies my life: it is also the prayer of simple people and saints...it is the prayer of my heart.” My brothers and sisters, these great saints living among us and in heaven say it all. The profound beauty of a contemplative prayer that unites heaven and earth is so often rejected and contested by some. To some the Rosary is a prayer of repetition say some. Father de Foucauld said it beautifully. “Love is expressed with few words, always the same, always repeated.” The Readings today beautifully capture the heart of the Blessed Mother. The first Reading shows us from the Acts of the Apostles Mary in her quiet confident strength praying constantly with the apostles when they were facing tremendous persecution. Pray the Rosary in the spirit, contemplate on the mysteries and experience the power of intercession.

Prayer: Our Lady Queen of the Holy Rosary intercede for victory over our sinful attitudes and lead us to Jesus your loving Son. Amen

“And the God of peace will be with you.”

Philippians 4:9c

Isaiah 5: 1-7

Psalms 80: 9-20

Phil 4:6-9

Matthew 21:33-43

Today's liturgy invites us to review our Christian living seriously. Who are we? We are Christians, of course! The term "Christian" comes first in Acts 11:26 "...And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." The Scripture scholars define this word thus: "whether adopted by believers or invented by enemies as a term of reproach, it is an apt title for those belonging to Christ".

Today's Readings are about vineyards (property). The Church has chosen them carefully, to make us realise the nature of Our God—the One who owns us, and also to help us put our lives in correct perspective.

The First Reading elaborates the care and precision with which God created us and brought us up to this state. He lovingly expects us to glorify Him in and through our lives. Yet, when sin becomes more attractive to us, we choose to walk away from God. We don't realise that our security and wellbeing depend entirely on having God's protective hand upon us. God does not punish us but we expose our lives to all harm when we choose to move away from God. In a very poetic manner, God speaks through prophet Isaiah and explains how our lives are going to be a prey to the powers of darkness when we choose not to submit to the will of our Creator.

The Gospel proclamation is similar to the First Reading. We have experienced, being a tenant or a rental property owner at one time or the other. It is nothing unusual that the owner of the property rightfully expects his/her dues from the tenant at the appointed times. If the tenants refuse to do so, the owner can resort to necessary legal action. Yet, the owner of the vineyard in the Gospel Reading patiently tolerates the arrogant and defiant behaviour of tenants many times and finally ends up losing His own Son as a result of His mercy towards the wayward tenants. While a just annoyance wells up in us against the totally unacceptable behaviour of tenants, The Lord speaks to our hearts today that we are those cowards who treat Him the same way.

As stated earlier, we call ourselves Christians, belonging to Christ, declaring Jesus is Lord (cf Romans 10:9). If so, it is imperative that we obey the Master's will and follow His instructions, no questions asked. Let us take a few moments and reflect in our hearts today, if

we submit to our Lord's will. Or is it only when we face a crisis that we remember our Lord and Master, conveniently ignoring and doing our own will at other times? If Jesus is Lord, He has the right to our time, resources, talents and free will too. Are we ready to surrender all these areas of our life to Him? If we choose to do so, we will enjoy the protection and providence of our God.

What is the result? A life full of peace and joy, free of 'stress' (a commonly used word in today's society). Does it mean that we will not face sickness, poverty, disappointments and persecution from others? Certainly not! God Himself explains through prophet Isaiah, "...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour..." (Isaiah 43:1-3). Also the Psalmist explains it further in Psalm 18:10, 19 "He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind... He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me."

St Paul, in today's Second Reading, further elaborates a characteristic feature of a Christian, whose life is meant to be in the safe Hands of the Almighty Father. According to St Paul, we are not living a Christian life if we are anxious about anything and also if we cannot praise and glorify our Creator at all times. He says that the Peace of God will guard our minds and hearts even when our circumstances warrant anything but peace.

St Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio) is an excellent testimony of a life of utmost obedience, lived in total union with his Creator. His Biography states that once a woman who noticed his spiritual demeanor asked him, "When did you consecrate your life to God? Was it at your First Holy Communion?" and he answered, "Always, my daughter, always". Padre Pio suffered from poor health his entire life which reportedly declined since the age of nine. Although the cause of his prolonged and debilitating illnesses remained a mystery to his doctors, Padre Pio was not discouraged. "I am fully convinced that my illness is due to a special permission of God", he said. Although he received more than his share of spiritual gifts, Padre Pio never sought them, never felt worthy of them. He never put the gifts before The Giver. Therefore, let us do some spring-cleaning in our lives today, choosing to live for the glory of the One who has created and enriched us with every gift we enjoy. Let us not allow the God of Peace to pass us by.

Prayer: Abba Father, restore us and make Your Face shine on us, Amen.

Called to a mission

Jonah 1: 1-2: 1-2,11

Jonah 2:3-8

Luke 10: 25-37

God gives each of us a different mission to build the Kingdom of God on earth. We can either accept this mission, like some of the great prophets from the Old Testament such as Isaiah or Elisha or like our Lord Jesus Christ or His disciples, or we can run away from it like Jonah. The Lord wants us to accept this mission from His hands, but some may be reluctant to do so. The story of

Jonah shows us that no matter what we do in life, if we are called by the Lord for a mission, the Lord will make sure that we will one day fulfill that mission.

When the Lord calls us we may have a hundred excuses as to why we are not suitable for the job. The Lord does not want to hear our excuses. God holds all the powers of the universe and He will give us all we need to complete His mission. Hebrews 13:21 tells us, "God will equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever." Ephesians 4:12 says that Christ gives us gifts "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." God knows our inabilities and weaknesses. He knows what we can and cannot do. When He calls us, He will also give us the skills, abilities and strength to get the job done. We need not rely on our abilities because the Lord can give us abilities we never had before. He can give us the strength we never had before. All we need to do is be available to Him. When He calls us, our answer should be that of Samuel – "Speak, for your servant is listening."

The Gospel proclamation tells us how we can begin our mission for God. The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us that we must have a heart for other people. When the Lord Jesus is asked how one can receive eternal life, His answer is to do as the law of God commands—firstly to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, all your strength and with all your mind and secondly to love your neighbour as yourself. When we love the Lord our God with everything we have, we will become like the one we gaze upon. God will give us His heart to see others as He sees them. When we see others as God sees them, the second command will come naturally and we will be able to fulfill our mission to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to be able to say yes to Your call. Amen.

He will save his people Israel from all their sins”

Psalm 130:8

Jon 3: 1-10

Psalm 130: 1-8

Luke 10: 38-42

As I read the scripture for today I am reminded of the first Four Step retreat I attended. I came to help out with registration. In my mind I thought of many things that I had to do, but none of them had to do with sitting down and listening to the retreat. I was like Martha from today's Gospel proclamation. I was too busy doing things for God that I did not have time to hear Him speak to me.

However, before I could even sit down at the registration table I was told I should sit in the hall.

At the retreat, as Lalith Thaththa spoke of the first step-- Come as you are, I love you-- I remember thinking 'it's too simple to be true.' However, as the retreat continued, I learnt that God was waiting for us to come to Him, instead of waiting to become good people to come to Him. What great news this is for all of us!

The first reading from Jonah tells us how the people of Nineveh repented for their sins. The moment they heard the Word from Jonah the king and all his people turned from their wicked and violent ways by putting on sack clothes and sitting in ashes. They repented and asked God for mercy. Jonah 3:10 tells us, "God saw what they did; he saw that they had given up their wicked behavior. So he changed his mind and did not punish them as he had said he would."

This same thing takes place in the second step of the Four Step retreat. When we come to Him as we are then in the second step when we give the truth of our hearts to God, He forgives our sins. His precious blood washes us clean. The Psalmist echoes the sentiments of the second step "But you forgive us, so that we should stand in awe of you. Israel, trust in the Lord, because his love is constant and he is always willing to save.

He is always willing to save. As long as we are alive, the Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit is always willing to save us. It was with that objective that the world has found solace in the practice of the Divine Mary Chaplet. With this prayer we do not only pray for our own salvation but for the salvation of the whole world. So often we are selfish in our prayer, let us pray that He will save us from our sin.

Prayer: Abba Father, the truth of my heart is that I am a sinner. Please forgive my sins. I pray for Your compassion and mercy upon my life. Amen

“You are forgiving and good, O Lord

Psalm 86:51

Jon 4: 1-11

Psalm 86: 3-10

Luke 11: 1-4

In today's first reading Jonah proclaims to us how good the Lord is. When God saw the way the Ninevites repented from their evil ways, he had compassion and decides not to bring upon them the destruction he has threatened. The Lord, who looked at sinful Nineveh with merciful eyes then, today looks at every sinner with that same mercy. Through the Word of God, through sermons, through hymns, through sacraments, he invites sinners to repentance and to turn back from their evil ways. He saves everyone who comes to his feet with a repentant heart. Not only that, He turns them into a new creation. This is the heart of God. Thus David sings in today's Psalm, “You are forgiving and good, O Lord.”

But Jonah liked to see the punishment of God. In his heart, there was no love and mercy. This Jonah is in the hearts of many of us. How many of us like to see a sinner's life being destroyed instead of being saved? The loving and merciful heart of God is not in many of us.

Two months ago, a 4 steps retreat was held at a Church in the Chillaw diocese. In the worship, a word of knowledge was proclaimed. “The Lord is speaking to a person who went to a kovil and cursed one of his own. Take that sin of yours to the confession. The Lord Jesus is giving the power to forgive the person whom he curses and to bless that person.” One brother came and claimed the word. He said, “That word is for me. Not to one kovil, I went to three kovils and cursed my wife. My wife and my daughter left me and went away. I could not bear the pain and the shame. That is why I did it.”

Here is another Jonah. He requests a curse for the wife who fell into sin. Instead of praying for a change of heart in his wife, he wished destruction. Yet this is not the heart of the God. The Lord says, “Just as I love you who are doing what is wrong, I love your wife who has fallen into sin. Therefore, you are also called to forgive her and bless her.” That day this man did what God wanted. He confessed his sin, forgave his wife and went home with freedom, joy and hope.

Today let us also ask for that same power, from our loving and merciful God, to forgive all who have sinned against us and bless them.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank and praise you for filling us with your merciful love and forgiveness by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

**If a grumpy neighbour listens to an inconvenient request
how much more will the Lord listen to your pleas**

Malachi 3: 13-20

Psalm 1: 1-6

Luke 11: 5-13

Our Lord Jesus continues his instructions to his disciples about prayer. Today the lesson is one of perseverance. The Lord gives the parable of a man coming to a neighbor in the middle of the night looking for some food to provide hospitality to an unexpected visitor. The neighbor is not willing to get up and disturb his wife and children who are sleeping with him (which would be very common in a one-room house). But, the Lord Jesus says, if the man persists, the neighbor, simply to get some peace, will eventually get up and give the man all he needs. If a grumpy neighbor will listen to an inconvenient request, how much more will a loving God pay heed to the needs of His children?

In another example our Lord asks if a father would give his child a snake instead of a fish or a scorpion instead of an egg. If even a very ordinary father would not think of treating his children so callously, “if you with all your sins, know how to give your children good things, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him”.

Of course, a very pertinent question comes to mind: if God is such a loving and caring parent who will only give “good” things to us, why do we have to persist in asking? Why do we have to ask at all? The reason is not because God needs persuading (like the sleepy neighbor). Persistence in prayer is for our benefit.

The kind of prayer that the Lord is talking about is really something quite different. He seems to presume that what we are asking for is the gift of God’s Spirit – “how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” Is that what we normally ask for? To ask for the Spirit is to ask to have the same Spirit that inspired the Lord Jesus in his life and work. It is a Spirit which is totally at one with the will of the Father. In the parallel text in Matthew, it is “good” things which the Father will give. What could be more of a “good” thing than the very Spirit of God? When we establish ourselves in the spirit of God, he will guide us to the mountains to give us a wide vision of the reality around us and above us. We come to understand that there is something beyond our normal understanding.

Prayer: Abba Father, though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending. So help me Lord. Amen

The day of the Lord is near

Zephaniah 1:14

Jl 1: 13-15, 2:1-2

Psalm 9: 2-3,6&16
8-9

Luke 11: 15-26

In the first reading, Joel the last of the Minor Prophets speaks to a people devastated by forces that have ravaged the land. The insatiable appetite of the locusts is expressed in the most vivid terms. He says it is an object lesson; a warning of the terror of God's approaching judgment. The day of the Lord indicates a special intervention of God to suppress evil, accomplishing His own plan. He compares it to the sky black with insects - the scorched earth etc. In this desperate situation, he calls for a national day of prayer and repentance.

In the Gospel proclamation the Lord Jesus fulfills His Messianic role (Is.61) by casting out a demon. Beelzebub was the name of an ancient idol, a Jewish term for the devil. The strong one is the devil and the house is the possessed person. To plunder the house is to remove the authority of the devil. The Lord Jesus knowing their thoughts adroitly turns the tables on them, by asking them by whom the Jews exorcised demons. The Lord Jesus refers to the Jewish exorcists who cast out demons by certain rituals. (Acts 9:13) By referring to the 'finger of God' He uses the same expression in Ex.8:15, designating the power of God working miracles. He faces their scandalous attacks with convincing arguments, thus silencing them.

Luke11: 23 – "Whoever is not with me is against me" seems to contradict Luke 9: 50 "Whoever is not against you is for you." In the 1st instance the Lord Jesus (V 23) speaks of people once relieved of the presence of a demon, who go back to their careless ways, with no commitment to Him. It is said nature abhors a vacuum. So when the evil spirit seeks a resting place and finds one devoid of any virtues, he fetches seven others and the last state of that person is worse than the first. In Luke 9:50 the Lord Jesus says, that those who do not belong to the Church, but pursue the same goals should be regarded as friends, implying that His spiritual family goes beyond the visible groups of His disciples. Pope Francis made a plea for all Christians during the Golden Jubilee of the International Charismatic Renewal Service in Rome for the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Christians to come together in a spirit of love and unity in diversity. The Lord Jesus Himself prayed this prayer in John 17.

Prayer: *Abba Father, when the demons in my life are exorcised by the Sacraments help me to live a life committed to you.Amen.*

**“Truly blessed are those who hear the word of God
and keep it as well”**

Luke 11:27)

Jl 4: 12-21

Ps 97: 1-6, 11,12

Luke 11: 27-28

Today, through the first reading prophet Joel draws us a picture of the Day of Judgment, God is ready to judge the people of all the nations. He draws our attention to the state of the people filled with wickedness, full of sin that it overflows. As we read it, it reminds us of the present time we live in; the breaking news of the world is nuclear warfare, talks on abortion being legalized in our own country, corruption, murder and so many vices. Society is pushed to live in constant fear not of the Lord but the vices and the negativity of each other. How much have we contributed in our own ways if not directly, but by our thoughts, choices and words? How much is our own sinfulness? If the day mentioned by the Prophet is today, are we prepared to go before the Lord?

He draws our attention more to the great multitudes of people in the valley of judgment awaiting their turn before the Lord. Do we see ourselves in the multitude?

The picture he draws in our minds is vivid, as the God of creation speaks, His creation withers away, the sun and the moon lose their light, and the world that we know turns to darkness. The heaven and the earth are shaken. As the psalmist says even the mountains melt away like wax. All that we know and everything we know will disappear on this Day of Judgment.

Through this prophetic scripture our attention is drawn to another group of people, they do not see the devastation of this day as the multitudes nor will they be in fear. They are the people who have found rest in the Lord. Their refuge, their shield is the Lord. They are the ones who are intimately connected with Him, not for a day or two of the week or on special days or during retreats, but those who constantly find a dwelling place in His shadow. Do I have this intimate connection with the Lord? Do I find Him and sit at His feet every single day, reading and listening to His word? Am I baptized in the Holy Spirit and led by the Holy Spirit in what I do and in the decisions I make? If we are, then we will be truly blessed to see mountains dripping with wine and hills flowing with milk on the Day of Judgment.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the Grace to thirst for your word and the hunger to live by it, for we yearn to live with you always and forever. Amen!

For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain**Isaiah 25:10**

Isaiah 25: 6-10

Psalm 23: 1-6

Phil 4: 12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22: 1-14

In scripture, a mountain is a place of encounter. Mount Horeb (Sinai), Mount Zion, and Mount Tabor are all such places of encounter. St. Mark's Gospel says that the Lord Jesus woke up way before dawn and climbed the mountain to pray. The mountain is the place where we get away from the hustle and bustle of the travails of day-to-day living to spend time with the Lord. In today's first reading the Prophet Isaiah paints a beautiful word picture of something special that happens on the mountain. He paints the picture of an experience that is on par with several pleasurable experiences coming together at the same time.

In today's Gospel proclamation, our Lord Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a grand celebration, again a symbol of much joy and excitement. Yet, those who were invited rejected the invitation. If I was one that of the invitees, I would have gone for the feast, if not for anything else, just to score brownie points with the King.

I wonder why the invitees did not respond positively to the invitation. In fact, they not only rejected the invitation, but went on to provoke the king. Maybe they assumed that the King was weak and powerless, and hence would not be able to retaliate when they slighted him. Maybe they thought that the king would understand how important the other things were. Maybe they were "friends" and "court nobles", who were considered the inner circle of the King. Yet, it looks like they did not know the King as well as they should have. Isaiah reveals that there is a shroud covering us. It prevents us from seeing the true picture. When we are on the, mountain, Isaiah says that God is going to remove this shroud.

The Gospel proclamation goes on to say that after the King's invitation was rejected, he went on to invite anyone and everyone for the feast. As I look around me, I see many with me who had been through a conversion experience. Some of us were drunkards, others broken in the failure of their business or livelihood with no hope of restoration, some totally devastated in a broken relationship, others living in addiction. We lived a worldly life for worldly purposes. One day we had a divine encounter and our lives changed. We didn't deserve it. but God came looking for us to where we were and placed us at the table of the wedding banquet. But as I look at myself now, I find

that the saying “familiarity breeds contempt” has slowly but surely taken root in my life. I have started taking the King for granted, and have slowly but surely become more like the nobles who rejected the King’s invitation, than the ones who took their places. The Lord then sends messengers to call us back to the banquet. Sometimes the messenger is a direct invitation. At other times, the messenger may take the form of a problem or an injustice.

Isaiah goes on to say that on the Mountain, God will destroy death, and wipe away tears. When the messenger comes inviting us back to the banquet, if we turn to the Mountain, it will become our blessing. We can echo with Isaiah, “On that day it will be said “Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the LORD for whom we looked, let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!” For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

If I ignore the messenger because I have something better to do, or kill the messenger by focusing only on the problem and ignoring the call, I will not only lose my place at the banquet table, but will be destroyed because of the messenger who came to place me at the banquet in the first place. Like the guest who was thrown out because he didn’t have his wedding garment, we can come as we are, but we cannot remain as we are.

Lalith Thaththa once shared that during the time that the CRL faced many challenges, he had gone to preach at a large prayer meeting near Colombo. A person in authority at that place withdrew permission for the meeting and refused to let Lalith Thaththa preach. Lalith Thaththa became very disturbed, and he worried about the future of the CRL. He did not know what to do next. Returning home, he went into his office room, sat on his favourite chair (his mountain), and spent a while in prayer. It was a difficult prayer, but as he persisted in praying the Four Steps, a thought dropped into his mind. “Lalith, to whom does this movement belong?”. “To you Lord” he replied. “Then what does it matter to you if I let it prosper or let it be destroyed? Don’t ever forget that I have not stepped down from the throne.” That night he came down from the mountain with a different perspective. The shroud had been removed. He was consoled and strengthened. This episode influenced the way he reacted to the crisis. The entire movement grew deeper. The curse became a blessing.

Prayer: Abba Father, for many years I have prayed and nothing seems to happen. Give me the grace of knowing how to pray, know your consolation, and have that joy pleasure, and fulfilment that is found in the place of encounter. Make the prophesy of Isaiah come true in my life. Amen

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from
the Lord Jesus Christ”

Romans 1:7

Romans 1: 1-7

Psalms 98: 1-4

Luke 11: 29-32

In the first reading today, St Paul makes an interesting statement. He states that through the Lord Jesus, we received grace ...to obedience that comes from faith for His name's sake. The word obedience is always a hard concept to grapple with. It's hard to be obedient to our parents, our spouses, our employers and a thousand times harder to be obedient to God. This is perhaps

why St Paul states they we have received the grace to be obedient because without grace, it is impossible to submit our freewill to the will of God in obedience to Him.

The reality of our spiritual journey is that it is a struggle to seek God in obedience to His will, it's a struggle to wait upon His plans instead of jumping straight into action, it is a struggle to remember His goodness when the world around us says otherwise. So we try our best and when that does not work, we leave God well alone and try doing it on our own.

But St Paul reminds us today that we are given the grace to be obedient to God. It was God Himself who gave us our free will. And He knew better than us how difficult it would be for us to surrender this to Him. So He gave us the gift of grace. We only have to call on Him in our moment of struggle and He will deliver us, strengthen us. Jonah preached to the Ninevites and they had to turn back from their sin into obedience to God with their own power and self will. But the Lord Jesus says that something greater than Jonah is now come. The Word of God made flesh, son of God has come to dwell within us, strengthening us and delivering us from within.

Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, whose feast is celebrated today states that the “Sacred Heart of Christ is an inexhaustible fountain and its sole desire is to pour itself out into the hearts of the humble so as to free them and prepare them to lead lives according to His good pleasure”. God longs to be in us and from within us to guide us to live according to His will. And so we are reminded through St Paul today that we are loved by God. We are called to be His holy people. And He sends us His grace and His peace to guide us into this calling.

Prayer: *Abba Father, today I submit to you my struggle to be obedient to you. I acknowledge my weakness and surrender this to you. May Your grace guide me through today and lead me to Your heart. Amen*

I am not ashamed of the Gospel**Romans 1:16**

Romans 1:16-25

Psalm 19: 2-5

Luke 11: 37-41

In the letter to the Romans St. Paul says that he is not ashamed to proclaim the Gospel. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16)

The church of Rome very well knew that St. Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel and that is why even amidst many difficulties, ship wrecks and persecutions he continued to proclaim it to whoever he met and wherever he stepped foot on. But St. Paul wanted to lay emphasis on something through this to the Church in Rome. Most of us reading the On our Knees on a daily basis might have had some kind of a divine encounter supernatural experience which we knew was from God. It is the same with me.

When I had this Divine God experience a few years ago by the grace of God, I was able to overcome my addictions and I started off life as a new creation in Christ. Now in the early years of my conversion people around me, friends and family were surprised by my behavior. When anyone asked me the reason behind this drastic change I would always make it an opportunity to talk about God and share the good news. But as years passed by, this vibrant attitude reduced day by day. Even though I do not continue with any of those addictions, if someone asked me how I was able to come out of them, I tend to say as if I did it by my strength. I fail to talk neither about the miracle God did nor about the grace of God. Along time I have become ashamed of talking about God to a non-believer and even to a Christian.

I have lost the heart to evangelise and bring people to God. I was only worried of what the other might think of me if I said it was only by the power of God that I was able to change my life. I realised that I had become an actor. From the outside I looked all good and righteous but on the inside I was empty.

The Lord Jesus tells the Pharisee who invited Him for dinner "Fool! He who made the outside, also made the inside" (Luke 37:40). Today the Lord Jesus is asking us the same question. Are we going to continue as hypocrites or are we going to pull up our socks and start evangelising in every way possible.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to spread the word of God to everyone we encounter daily with renewed zeal. Amen

The Lord is trustworthy in every word and faithful in every work

Ps 145:13

2 Tim 4: 10-17

Psalm 145: 10-18

Luke 10:1-9

St. Paul's second letter to Timothy speaks of the hardships he faced. It is a blessing to become an instrument in the hands of God but it is also difficult if we are not equipped to face the hardships which come along with the blessings. This letter oozes with the deep sorrow within St. Paul. These emotions are familiar to those who serve God. They face rejection, persecution and abandonment. These warnings were given to all generations and every person called by God. The Lord Jesus mentioned that we will receive many blessings along with humiliation and persecution.

Due to our human nature we cannot stop feeling lonely and low but the words of our Lord Jesus encourage us to move forward. No matter who judges us and lets us down, if we are rooted in the word of God we will be able to pursue in the ministry of serving God.

The harvest is plentiful, therefore our Lord Jesus sent His disciples out in pairs before which He gave them instructions which are interesting. Set out without extra baggage and do not to stop to greet anyone on the way. We are called to follow these instructions when we set out on mission. The single-mindedness of the mission is important.

Our Lord Jesus knew how the human mind & heart worked. In moments of rejection and persecution, we are prone to distractions and discouragement. We can get carried away with familiar people. There could be disturbances to the mission. Therefore when serving God we should heed and adhere to these instructions because the mission of God is God's, not ours.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Luke's the Evangelist. He was a physician by profession. He was born a Greek and a Gentile. He accompanied St. Paul on his missionary journeys. The two volumes of St. Luke are the Gospel according to St. Luke, which is also called the Gospel of Mercy and the Acts of the Apostles. There are six miracles and eighteen parables unique in this Gospel where the marginalised, outcasts and Gentiles are outstandingly highlighted. The canticle of the Blessed Mother is only mentioned in this Gospel.

Prayer: Abba Father, we need your grace to continue to be your instruments. Help us never to abandon the mission you have set for us. Cause us to be your evangelists in this era. Amen

If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?

Psalm 130:3

Romans 3: 21-30

Psalm 130: 1-6

Luke 11: 47-54

St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans that the righteousness of God is revealed to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John 11:25 we hear God's voice; "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;" We can be Christians who sincerely follow the law and do the rituals and obligations. There is nothing wrong with it. The Gospel of Matthew 5:17 reads ""Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." But St. Paul says that alone is not enough to be saved. Unless we truly accept Jesus as the Lord of our lives, we will be still away from salvation. Without faith in Jesus Christ, following the laws and rituals will take us nowhere. In the letter to the Romans St. Paul beautifully writes "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Rom 10:9-10). It's only through believing in Jesus and making Him the Lord and Saviour of our lives, that we will have salvation. It's only through His blood that our sins are forgiven as the Psalmist says in Psalm 130; "Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins."

Having faith in Christ is not only trust Him when all goes well with us. It's to know and trust Him in our darkness, and serve him in doing his will. A couple of months ago, I had to face a difficult time in my life. I thought that everything around me was falling apart. I didn't understand what was happening. But I was sure about one thing; that's God is for me. All I believed was that God wouldn't have allowed this to happen in my life if He did not have a divine purpose. He will use this time of pain and incomprehension for something greater. As I waited in prayer trusting Him, two months later, now I can say that the Lord had taken me to a deeper place and a deeper intimacy with Him which I never knew before. In fact I thank the Lord for the suffering I went through because it is through that suffering that He has brought me to where I am today. For this I am eternally grateful.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for the gift of faith. I make Your Son the Lord of my life. It's only through Him that I am redeemed and saved. Amen!

Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Romans 4:3

Romans 4: 1-8

Psalm 32: 1-5,11

Luke 12: 1-7

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans teaches us to learn from Abraham. Faith was the shield to Abraham in all his trials. The flaming arrows of the evil one can be extinguished when you take up the shield of faith. The currency of the Kingdom of God is faith. What we require from the Kingdom of God can be received through this faith.

Abraham is the father of faith. Therefore, when God said, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I show you." he obeyed. He did not depend on logical explanations. He placed his total trust in God who can do all things. When Lot chose the fertile land, Abraham lived happily in the remaining land. He lived with peace in his heart. We think when we get what we like there will be peace in our hearts. Abraham dealt with God the Father in faith not by the values of this world. Therefore he had a real relationship with the Father. He heard the voice of God and obeyed it. He could see the God who dwells above all things. He did what was right before God. Then what was impossible happened in the life of Abraham.

When you fail to have a relationship with the Father in heaven and when we do not do what is right before God, we live in fear. Fear of the Lord is the deep respect for God and for the commandments of the God. It springs out of the willingness to not break the relationship. If we have this kind of fear, we will be able to conquer every temptation to sin that we face in our daily life.

We think when we do not have a problem there is no necessity for fear. But even if there are storms all around us the one who has an internal relationship with God will have no fear. We need to believe that our God is alive. He is waiting to bless everyone who comes in search of Him. The biggest problem that we have is not entering into a proper relationship with God and not doing what is right before God. Therefore the blessing of God does not come down and the miracles of God do not happen in our lives. Today the Word of God says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Therefore God's blessings came upon him and miracles took place. Let us submit our lives to God and pray for Abraham's faith in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, Be exalted, we will sing and praise your might. Amen.

Do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say,
 Luke 12:11

Romans 4: 13, 16-18

Psalms 105: 6-9, 42-43

Luke 12: 8-12

We take the words of the Lord seriously: "whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God". So we acknowledge Him with our words and by the choices we make. As a result, we are misunderstood, humiliated, rejected by friends, colleagues and sometimes even by family members. We expect God to act but He remains silent!

The Lord promises us: "When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say." When we get into trouble for acknowledging Him, we are certain heaven will open, thunder and lightning will strike, so that everyone will know we were speaking the mind of God. He remains silent. The angels remain silent. It feels like heaven itself has forgotten us.

We remember the martyrs... while they were being violated, tortured and sentenced to brutal death, God was silent. The angels were silent. It looked like everything was futile and heaven had forgotten them! Yet one after another they marched towards their death singing songs of praises to God. When one was killed, ten took his/her place. They were more encouraged than discouraged by the silence of God! This continues even to date. The church continues to grow on the blood of the martyrs. The Lord's promise to the person who acknowledges Him publicly is fulfilled in a spiritual realm. They experience the fulfillment of the Lord's promise here on earth, as they walk in the valley of death. The power of the experience liberates them from what any human being would cling on to at the point of death. They lose the grip of pain and death has over man. They sacrifice their lives joyfully, releasing a new anointing upon the church and the believers.

The Lord is speaking to us today. "Acknowledge me in the choices you make, in your thoughts, the words you speak when dealing with the spouse who betrays you, family member who continues to exploit you, the colleague who stabs you in the back"... When we experience death to our rights, the Lord says He will acknowledge and save us.

Prayer: *Abba Father, give me the grace to acknowledge you with inner-responses, and in the choices that I make. May you be glorified in my life. Amen.*

“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”

Matthew 22:21

Isaiah 45: 1, 4-6

1 Thes 1: 1-5

Matthew 22: 15-21

Cyrus was a Persian king. He did not know nor worship the God of Israel. Yet, Isaiah prophesied about Cyrus 150 years before he was born. The prophecy begins with God introducing Himself to Cyrus: “I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me”. The prophecy spoke about the favour of God upon Cyrus to subdue nations and strip kings of their armor. He was called “God’s anointed”. Why would the Almighty God strengthen Cyrus; a pagan?

This prophecy was fulfilled at a time when the chosen people of God were exiled from Jerusalem, to Babylonian captivity. Call it the anomaly of God; His people in captivity and the favour of God upon a pagan king!

A friend of mine recently shared: “I serve God; I try my best to be right with Him every day. Yet, my problems at my workplace remain the same. The non-practicing-Christian colleagues are flourishing. What is God doing?” Another friend joined: “I try my best to be a good Catholic mother and a wife, I fulfill all my obligations, yet at every opportunity he gets, my husband cheats on me. What is the use of God?”

It seems like the people who God should show His favour are “exiled” or in “captivity”. They struggle for years without answers or hope. Those who do not know Him seem to be flourishing. Or is it that the God revealed in the scripture is completely different to the God who we want Him to be?

God’s reason for His favour upon Cyrus is revealed in Isaiah 45:4. “For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me”. God raised Cyrus for His people, to set them free from the Babylonian captivity. The book of Ezra records the fulfilment of this prophecy. King Cyrus issued a decree for God’s people to return to Jerusalem, along with silver, gold and supplies to build the temple of God. Cyrus was chosen by God not for Persia but for His people.

Our circumstances may cause us to feel that we are in captivity and that there is no hope. It may look like our enemy is getting stronger

while we are losing our strength and hope. The Lord is reminding us, He will never abandon His own. 150 years before the Babylonian exile, God promised a Cyrus for His people in captivity. Hundreds of years before we were born, the Lord had spoken His solution to the problem we are facing today. His answer is already on its way to set us free and to give us a new beginning.

While we wait for Cyrus to rescue us, the Lord is speaking to us through the Gospel. The Lord says, "Give back to Cesar what is Cesar's". Fulfilling our civic duties and social responsibilities is giving back to Cesar what belongs to Cesar. Fulfilling our duties as an employer / employee is giving to Cesar what belongs to Cesar. Most of us give to Cesar even grudgingly, because there is a price to pay if we do not.

The Pagan king Cyrus sets the perfect example of giving to God what belongs to Him. Unfortunately, when it comes to giving to God what belongs to Him, we tend to take things easy. We delay our tithe or use it for our charitable works. The Lord is reminding us "Give to God what belongs to God"... be generous to the poor with your own money.

Until early last year, I always ran out of my salary before the end of the month. My husband paid for the groceries for the last two weeks of every month. Last year when he was laid off from his job, I knew I had to somehow manage with my salary. We have never lived an extravagant life, we managed with the bare necessities and I had no idea what I could reduce from my grocery list.

When I went to draw cash for the tithe I accidentally drew extra, and I felt the Lord was asking me to give that amount as tithe in the future. I knew it would be impossible to manage with what was left, without my husband chipping in. To my surprise, I found not only did I pay for the groceries that entire month but there was money left over to manage into another week of the following month, until my salary came in. I had worked for my present employer for nearly 10 years, and I had not received an increment or a bonus for more than in 8 years.

This year I received a letter from my employer saying that they have noticed my salary has not been reviewed in a long time, and that they had decided to give me an increment!

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for the solutions you have put in place for the problem that is overwhelming me. Give me the grace to know you intimately in the heart of my crisis as a good, good Father. Amen

*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
he has come to his people*

Luke 1:68

Romans 4: 20-25

Luke 1: 69-75

Luke 12: 13-21

The man who we see in today's Gospel proclamation probably had suffered an injustice at the hands of his brother. He must have expected his life to get better with the inheritance. But his dreams were shattered because his brother cheated him. What's more, his brother must have been there listening to the sermon, which may be why he asked the Lord to intervene. Maybe he came there with the sole purpose of getting the Lord to intervene in his situation. He must have had it all worked out in his head. He must have expected the Lord to get angry rebuke, the brother, and put things right. But the Lord had bigger things on his mind.

Recently, Lalith Thaththa shared the testimony of his sister. She lived a high society life and had achieved what many others aspire to. When Lalith Thaththa got married, she sympathised with the bride for she thought Lalith Thaththa was foolish not to pursue the dream of success as the world defined it, and took pity on Mercia Amma. A few years later she was diagnosed with Cancer. Suddenly it hit her that life was going to end. It shook her to the core. Jolted by the enormity of the many issues she was facing, she turned to the Lord. She survived that episode of cancer. She also fell head over heels in love with the Lord. She often regretted the wasted years she spent pursuing the high society dream. Some years later cancer struck again with a vengeance. Yet this time she faced it differently.

Once she went for an MRI scan, and started to panic as she became claustrophobic. As she prayed, a thought dropped into her mind "What do you do when you pray?" "I close my eyes and I talk to you" she said. "Do the same thing now". Her calmness surprised her doctor. During Chemo, she listened to worship music. She walked with the Lord every step of the way. During the last stages, her spine broken, unable to move, she looks at her doctor and says "Doctor do you know God is good?" Lapsing in and out of consciousness, she looks at Lalith Thaththa and says, "God is more real to me than to you". She bore witness that Our Lord walks with us to places where no other can accompany. She chose what was important. Like Abraham she pierced the cloud believing the word of God. She lived and died magnificently, bearing witness where others struggle for one more breath.

Prayer: *Abba Father, give us the grace to believe your word and penetrate the cloud, so that we may hold on to what is truly valuable. Amen*

**My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me
and to finish his work"**

John 4:34

Romans 5: 12-15,
17-21

Psalm 40: 7-10,17

Luke 12: 35-38

In the first reading today we read that death and suffering is part of our life because of sin. The psalm speaks of deliverance from great trouble. King David was in sin and was encountering God's displeasure. By the power and grace of God he realizes that God's mercy and grace is far greater than his sin. In the Gospel proclamation Jesus Christ speaks to His disciples to be

watchful for their Master's coming.

Our sin causes us to suffer and die. If we humans can bring upon ourselves such adverse situations by our sins then we are asked "How much more grace and blessing our Lord Jesus - the Son of God has gained for us through His passion, death and resurrection?" Some of us feel we are doomed for life! – It is definitely not so because of Jesus Christ our Lord who was obedient to the Fathers' will!! In doing so He gained victory over sin and death! We have life – life everlasting and life in its fullest. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10). What does this mean? Sin reigns in death. It is the death of our spirit and separation from the Lord. But in these moments grace reigns over our spirit, the grace of the Holy Spirit and draws us in like a magnet to be right with God. It is our choice if we want to attract or detract from the grace of God.

Many a times I detract from this call – as I feel it is going to be too long, too difficult and too much to give of myself for a result that I may not be satisfied with. I trust myself and my abilities/inabilities better than God who is the creator of the universe!! I continued this was for some time pursuing my goals and achieved some but it was such a struggle!!! I realised I had lost track and ended up making a mess of everything! It was when I came to the end of my tether that I started realizing that I needed help! When I looked around I realized that my help 'God's Grace' was right there with me all along the way and that I had decided that I did not need it. In order to tap into this grace I need to be close to God - to know what He wants of me and my time. I started a relationship with God the way we do as in any other relationship – spending time with each other, talking, listening and searching how I could make God happy. I began to read the Word of God and to listen to His direction and my life changed.

Prayer: Here I am Abba Father; I come to do your will. Amen

You must be ready

Romans 6: 12-18

Psalms 124: 1-8

Luke 12: 39-48

I just witnessed a video of the fury of a tropical storm that hit a certain city. Houses were picked up and thrown to the winds, people were blown off two wheelers and bystanders in a queue for a bus were thrown across the sidewalks, hitting lamp posts. I asked myself, 'Why are these people so foolish enough to be outdoors and face the fury of this storm.' Then I realised they were unprepared.

They did not know that it would come with such a vengeance.

This is what the readings for today are warning us about. I take them as a personal warning. If we sow in the flesh, we will reap in the flesh, but if we sow in the spirit, our spirit will come alive and we will rise to eternal life. In the readings from Romans 6 we are warned not to allow sin to have any control over our mortal bodies. In spite of all the warning and serious talk, we give in to sin so easily. This is specially with regard to sins of the body. My eyes are so often used to sin. If I never had eyesight a major portion of my sin would have been avoided. Alas, our eyes are always open, soaking in anything that we see. Even in prayer we cannot keep our eyes closed. Because our eyes are so open to the world, our spiritual eyes are so closed to glimpses of eternal life. Let us pause and ask the blood of Jesus to wash over our eyes and cleanse our mind from all impurity.

Just last night, a few polecats were caught in the roof of my house and the neighbours were disturbed through the night. I slept through the entire episode and blissfully awoke to a new day. My neighbour mentioned that if a rogue had come I would not have had a clue. The day of the Lord will be like that. We will not have a clue that the Lord chose that day and time. Even now I am thinking of it in the distant future. But we never know how close we are to eternity.

There is one problem that we face. Though we know all of this, we still cannot fight our impurity and wickedness. That is why we have a Saviour in our Lord Jesus who alone can rescue us from the pit of sin and wretchedness that we wallow in. Every morning let us go back to the foot of the cross and seek the graces that are found in the blood of the Lord Jesus. The psalmist says comfortingly, 'Our help is in the name of the Lord.' Let's call on the name of our Lord Jesus!

Prayer: Abba Father, for so long I have been sowing in the flesh and not in spirit. Today through the death of my Saviour Jesus, help me make a change. Amen

Freedom from being slaves to sin.

Romans 6: 19-23

Psalm 1: 1-6

Luke 12: 49-53

It is so easy for us to become slaves to sin, but difficult to become a slave to righteousness. Sometimes if we see an injustice we try to put it right and in certain instances, may even fight for it. But then most often that 'fight' becomes our fight and we want to win. In the end, righteousness or correcting the injustice becomes secondary to winning, saving face and not being put to shame.

A colleague of mine recently went through an unjust situation. When it was shared with me, I was surprised at the wicked thoughts that were coming to my mind, in the name of making right something that was wrong. The Holy Spirit convicted me in that moment and revealed the sinful nature that I carry inside.

St. Paul says in verse 21 'What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?' All of us have things we are ashamed of which we've done in the past. Maybe we even know for sure that we do not have the strength not to do them in the future, when we are tempted. We have all done things the Lord would not want us to do. But where is the fruit of that now? Has it really brought us any long-lasting happiness? But the good news is that in God, we can overcome every temptation. Maybe not overnight, but when we continue to focus on God and not the temptation or sin; when we increase our prayer life, ask the Holy Spirit and Mother Mary to help us, spend more time doing things that please God instead of ourselves and journey deeper.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus refers to the 'fire' which comes from the Holy Spirit. We know that when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, all worldly rationalization and logic is irrelevant. Everything that seemed to be a problem is no longer a burden. What seems foolish to the world is what the Lord leads us to do sometimes in the Spirit. This is evident throughout the Acts of the apostles, where many times the disciples preached the good news to the crowds despite being persecuted by the Pharisees and religious leaders. Even through many hardships they persevered because the Holy Spirit was leading them to do that. In our families, work-places and with friends we too are called to spread this fire. Our behaviour and journey should speak louder than words.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for setting me free from sin and giving me the gift of eternal life. Amen

The struggle with sin

Romans 7: 18-25

Ps 119: 66-68, 76, 77,
93, 94

Luke 12: 54-59

St. Paul present us with a significant problem - the presence of sin in our lives. Let's break down this passage.

For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.

The moment an injustice takes place, looking back we see an instant reaction which is bitter, void of all compassion and revengeful. This indicates to us that it is not good that resides within us but our sinful nature which wants the worst for the wrong doer. It is only prayer and our heart's reference to Holy Scripture that comforts us and directs us to give a more balanced and forgiving response.

St. Paul writes, 'For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.'

In one word we can term it utter helplessness. We have experienced the love and salvation of God. We have seen His goodness. But when faced with that attractive drink, the visual, a relationship, we just cannot resist. For months on end we might have fought off a temptation successfully but suddenly we fall and get ensnared. Where do we go with this helplessness and to whom do we go to?

We go back to the Lord Jesus, giving him the truth of our failure and pain. We give Him the truth of our helplessness. We give Him the shame of our failure. What will happen if people come to know of my weakness? What will the people who expect me to be holy and pure say when they learn of my failure? These fears should not drive us to repentance but the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

Alas, sometimes we do not have any fear of the Lord, till we are brought to our knees in repentance. What will free us from these bondages? It is the blood of the Lord Jesus. Lalith Thatththa shared that the Lord wants to give us a new heart. He does not want to repair or refurbish the stubborn heart but He wants to gift us with an entirely new loyal and lovable heart. As the Lord understands and forgives our struggle let us understand and forgive others.

Prayer: Abba Father, forgive me as I have forgiven others in their weakness. Amen

**“At this time, Jesus went out into the hills to pray,
spending the whole night in prayer with God”. Luke 6:12**

Ephesians 2: 19-22

Psalm 19: 2-5

Luke 6: 12-19

The Gospel proclamation today speaks to us of the choosing of the twelve apostles. The word proclaims that Lord Jesus went out into the hills to pray, not just for an hour or two, but the whole night through before he came down from the mountain and chose the twelve disciples.

There could be no better emphasis than this on the need to pray before any important decision. The decision before the Lord Jesus was an enormous one. The Father God sent Him to this world for the purpose of bringing salvation to human kind. God had already chosen those who were to be a part of that salvation plan here on earth. Our Lord Jesus being the Son of God chose to seek the mind of God in deciding the twelve disciples who was to carry the burden in the salvation plan. Being the divine Son if the Lord had to pray all night to discern the will of the Father, are we also not called to go into deep prayer to discern any major decision in our lives?

We come across numerous occasions where people question God for unanswered prayer or for something that had gone wrong in their lives. We cannot take decisions of our own free will and then blame God when things do not work out the way we expect them to be. More often than not, if we look back we will realise that there had been no discernment at all in the decisions we had taken.

In my spiritual journey, I have learnt now to seek God's mind and will in every decision that I have to take no matter how big or small. The Lord in His mercy has shown me the trials I had gone through because I did not discern His will and those were the very lessons from which I learnt. As I look back, I see that all major decisions I had taken in life in the past few years had been under God's favour for there was the peace and the blessing that came upon the decisions. Just as the Lord had to be patient and make a sacrifice to stay up and pray all night, I too at times had to undergo moments of long and patient waiting until His leading was crystal clear.

The book of Ephesians today St. Paul tells us that in the Lord, we are all being built to become the spiritual Sanctuary of God. Just as the chosen apostles and prophets. And we are called to carry out the message of salvation through all the earth.

Prayer: Abba Father, today I seek your will in every step I take. Amen!

Love not only your own people but strangers

Exodus 22: 20-26

1 Thes 1: 5-10

Psalm 18: 24, 47, 51

Matthew 22: 34-40

“You shall not wrong or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers.” We resort to oppressing people the moment we realise that we are more powerful than them. We also assume that they are weaker and hence we take the upper hand.

This practice of oppression has been practiced across cultures and across the world. In the Old testament times it was the Egyptians who oppressed the Israelites. It has been happening between ethnic minorities in Serbia, Africa, India and in our own country Sri Lanka. While it happened between nationalities it also happened within communities. It is said that children had no place in society and so it was with lepers, widows, the disease afflicted and the poor. It also happens between in laws and family members.

When we oppress we behave almost as if we have the answers. We begin to believe that we are superior to the inferior. We lose sight of God and become blind to our actions. Our incursions on the rights of people get greater and greater in proportion and we go to the extent of murder and ethnic cleansing. We play God though we do not reflect the true nature of God.

But the true leading of God is reflected in the reading when He implores us and warns us of His anger that will blaze on us. In another instance he says that if we cause a little one to sin it would be better for us if a millstone were fastened around our neck and we were thrown into the sea (cf Luke 17:2). Such is His fury.

The word says if you lend money do not act like a money lender and charge interest. I am going through an interesting experience where a person has bought something from me, not paid me, sold it to another and is paying me small installments. I wanted to respond by tearing his reputation to pieces by sending a message about him to all the people concerned. But I dropped the idea. Within a few minutes opportunities began to come by for me to get other ways of income. Therefore we are called not to act like money lenders but show compassion and love. Many of us believers can offer prayer support, love, and compassion but when we are slighted on a issue of money we decide that the worst has been done and we refuse to forgive. The beauty of the Father’s compassion is revealed when He

says -If ever you take a person's cloak as a pledge, you must give it back to him by sunset for it is all the covering he has for his body.

The same spirit is reflected in the reading from Thessalonians where we are encouraged to be models because when we were given the Gospel, God was showing mercy to us. We were not just given words, but miracles, signs and wonders and the Holy Spirit as a comforter.

Having experienced God's mercy and goodness, what should our response be. This response is reflected in the Gospel proclamation where the Lord Jesus declares, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

The love that is demanded from us is absolute love. We are to love with all our heart, mind and soul. But it does not become complete till we respond with love for our neighbour.

How important is this love? We are told in 1 Cor 12 about spiritual gifts. But in Chapter 13 we are told that love is indispensable. This is because we must begin with faith but end in love. In Heaven God will not ask us about the miracles and wonders we did but about the love we showed. We are reminded of the passage where Jesus says when I was in prison did you visit me, when I was naked did you clothe me and when I was hungry did you feed me. When you did it to the least, you did it to me. Many people are eager to do it to the Lord Jesus but less will do it for the sick and suffering.

In heaven, we will not need faith, because we will be experiencing God. We will not need hope because we will have nothing more or better to look forward to. The only thing remaining will be love. God is love and only love will suffice. St. Paul warns us that if we had all the gifts and no love we will be like clanging gongs making an empty noise and all our work will be as if nothing.

To make a change in our lives today let's read this passage from 1 Corinthians 13: 4 -6 like this, replacing love with I - I am patient, I am kind. I do not envy, I do not boast, I am not proud. I do not dishonor others, I am not self-seeking, I am not easily angered, I keep no record of wrongs. I do not delight in evil but rejoice with the truth. We are told that where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. Only love will remain.

Prayer: Abba Father, I need your love in my life. So far I have been doing, achieving, praying, preaching but not giving love. It is so easy to forget to love. I justify my bitterness. Today, wash me in your love. Amen

Discover your identity

Romans 8: 12-17

Psalm 68: 2-7, 20-21

Luke 13: 10-17

In the letter to the Romans widely acclaimed as one of St. Paul's most enlightened letters, the apostle gives us some important lessons for life. He says that if we allow ourselves to be led by the spirit of God, to do God's will we will grow in our awareness of our only lasting identity - that we are sons and daughters of God the Father through Christ Jesus and co-heirs with Him of the eternal kingdom.

We have many identities in life, our family identity, personal and professional identity and whatever other identities that the world may give us. But it is a reality that all these identities will end in the grave. That is why it is difficult to understand why so many of us give so much priority to these other identities, though we do not openly say it. The other identities in a subtle way could include a desire for power, prestige or popularity in the world or the desire for personal gain or glory. Sometimes, mainly at the religious level some of us sometimes commit the grave sin of stealing the glory from God. God gives us the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit and a special anointing for preaching or teaching, healing or other ministries. Unknowingly we sometimes seek compliments for these and get some pleasure from them.

We need to be aware that only our identity as sons and daughters of God will go beyond the grave to eternal life and therefore our No 1 priority should be to seek and do God's will by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus also teaches us some important lessons. We see in His life that when He was rejected or scorned and made to suffer, He did not get angry but offered it to the Father. But when injustices were done to other people, as we see in today's Gospel episode, the Lord became furious with the synagogue rulers and blasted them as hypocrites. We see this also in the Jerusalem Temple scene where he saw how innocent and poor people were being robbed by the religious leaders, He became so angry that He took a whip and drove them out of the Temple. So when some wrong is done to us, we need to ask for the grace not to get angry but to offer it to God but when injustice is done to the poor we need to seek God's guidance and take action.

Prayer: *Abba Father, may we grow in our awareness that we are your sons and daughters. Amen*

For in hope we are saved

Romans 8: 24

Romans 8: 18-25

Psalm 126: 1-6

Luke 13: 18-21

Anchors, which come in all sizes, shapes, and weights, are used to stabilise different objects in the water. When properly used, a 45-pound anchor can be used to stabilize a 4,000-pound ship. Today's readings speak about Hope – hope is the anchor of our lives.

When was the last time your hopes were in vain? You hoped that you will pass an exam, hoped your friends would be faithful, hoped that your marriage would last, hoped that a new business deal would come through – but you were let down, your hopes were shattered. As humans, we have the tendency to put our hope in things that are temporary and not eternal. Hoping in anything that is temporal is actually not hope at all; it is something called “misplaced hope.” Misplaced hope, when you boil it down, is really just wishful thinking.

When my husband and I started our business, we made a promise that we will operate on Kingdom principles. We made an extra effort to take care of our employees and we treated them with utmost respect and love. And we truly “hoped” that they would reciprocate in the same way. After about a year, we caught them betraying us in the most unthinkable way. I remember that day so clearly. Both us felt so broken, we honestly did not see it coming; we felt so humiliated and betrayed.

I remember not being able to sit in prayer for weeks, I felt betrayed. But slowly I started realising that I had misplaced my hope! We built our business on the promise God gave us 5 years ago. It was God who gave us the strength and courage to venture out on our own. But over time we had placed our hope in our employees - on limited and finite human! It was time to place our anchor back on the word of God.

Misplaced hope can be a dangerous, destructive thing, while right-placed hope is a necessary, beautiful thing. Unlike wishful thinking, biblical hope is based on the character of God. Nothing is more sure and certain. We get trapped in the wrong things of this world because we feel that they will “hopefully” fix whatever is broken in our lives. But they eventually let us down because they are not capable of fixing what is broken. Only God is capable of such a thing.

Prayer: Abba Father, I put my hope in your abounding love. Amen

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