



IN OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

September 2016

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my
mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully
and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well...
when I awake, I am still with you.

Psalm 139

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“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.”

Luke 5:10

1 Corinthians
3:18–23

Psalms 24:1–6

Luke 5:1–11

The preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus had attracted great crowds of people, and on this particular day the crowd had become so large that they were pressing Him against the shoreline. So the Lord Jesus decides to address them from a boat and used the shoreline as a natural arena. St. Peter was washing and mending his nets, with one ear on what the Lord Jesus was teaching.

The Lord Jesus' call for St. Peter to launch out into deeper water is an analogy of what He wanted to do in his life.

The Lord Jesus gives this calling to each of us. However, when we hear the call to launch out deeper we are tempted to compromise our obedience in several ways. We are tempted to be guided by our experiences, circumstances and fears. The Lord Jesus asked St. Peter to do something contrary to his own expertise in fishing. The best fishing on the Sea of Galilee was at night close to shore. But the Lord Jesus had asked him to launch out into the deep in the middle of the day. The Lord Jesus was asking him to trust His Word. We toil hard and do things to the best of our ability but most often it only leads us to more frustration and deep emptiness. Our knowledge and skills often fail us but God's power and Wisdom will never fail us.

This new revelation of the power and glory of the Lord Jesus made St. Peter aware of his own sinfulness and he asks the Lord Jesus to depart from him. The same happens to us when we experience the Lord in a deep and intimate way.

St. Peter had just confessed to being a sinner and testified to the greatness of His Lord. As a result the Lord Jesus responds in verse ten “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men.” And verse eleven says, “So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.” Must all disciples leave their vocations to serve the Lord Jesus? As the New Testament letters show, not everyone is called into full-time ministry. St. Paul kept working as a tentmaker while he ministered. The important element is that the call to walk with the Lord Jesus takes a priority, so that we are prepared to be whatever or wherever God calls us to be. Today the Lord Jesus invites us to join Him in a powerful mission to a lost world. Let us willingly accept this calling from the Lord.

Prayer: *Abba Father, grant us willing hearts to ‘yes’ to Your calling and follow You all the days of our lives. Amen*

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:1

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Psalms 37:3-6, 27-40

Luke 5:33-39

As I reflected on our theme, it hit me – can I really say I am a servant of anyone? Even of Christ my Lord? Of course, when I pray, I say Lord, let your will be done in my life, give me strength to do whatever you want me to do today, even if it is difficult and so on. At that moment I actually mean it. Yet the truth is, it is uncomfortable for me to consider myself as a servant.

If I prod a little deeper, the reason for that is my pride which dents my ego. Most times at a community event or retreat, I will not think twice about lifting chairs, sweeping the place, looking after children at the crèche and serving food to others. Yet would I sweep my office area instead of allowing the messengers to do it? Would I look after another person's naughty child while that person did something of her own? The service I would carry out is the same – yet my attitude and reaction, depending on the environment would be different.

St. Paul says "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court". Can I truly say I do not care if anyone judges me? On the contrary, I would be hurt if someone misjudged me. Especially if I did something good, and someone thought I had ulterior motives. My natural reaction would be to prove my innocence or good intentions. But what about when I judge others? Then of course I justify myself and say if this person acted in this way or did this particular thing, he or she definitely must be this way. But St. Paul cautions us not to judge anything or anyone, and reminds us that only the Lord has the right to judge us, at the appointed time.

So can I really be a servant of Christ, or would it be possible for me not to be bothered if others judge me, or will there be a day when I will not judge another person like how St. Paul advised the Corinthians? With my human nature, it is impossible. But the Lord reminds me in Luke 1:37 for nothing will be impossible with God. With self-effort it is impossible, but for the Holy Spirit of God which cleanses me from my sinful nature, everything is possible. So like the Psalmist I too can then say, The Lord helps them and rescues them; He rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, I give you the truth of my heart, my pride, haughtiness and judgement. Lord my hope is in you, let your unconditional love change me. Amen

“We are fools on Christ’s account ”**1 Corinthians 6:1-5**

1 Corinthians 4:6b-15

Psalm 145:17-21

Luke 6:1-5

The Corinthians feel rich in their faith and Christian experience. Many of them now consider Paul a poor itinerant preacher, below their level. They take him to be a fool, and in a way he is. However, even if considered a fool, he brought them to Christ. They seem to have forgotten that their lives must mirror the life of the Lord. St. Paul calls them to learn from him to walk in the Lord’s way.

He ironically states, the apostles are exhibited as the least important, like people sentenced to death. Fools on Christ’s account. We are lacking the basics; persecuted and slandered. A spectacle to the world that mirrors the opposite of Christian values.

We need to do a soul searching of our lives. Do we mirror the life style of the Lord or do we do everything possible to mirror the glory of this crooked world. This is probably unwittingly manifested in families and professions. Maybe even in Christian communities and churches. We are so inflated about our alma mater, positions we hold and power we’ve held; and ironically taught from a young age to do so, and be proud of it. If we don’t give ourselves to living like Christ, we will not have Christ building his kingdom; either in families, workplaces, society or in the world. We will succeed only in building a hell on earth. Most people do not want to share the experience of rejection like what the Lord Jesus had on earth.

Vincent Van Gogh had hardly any acclaim for his work. While alive he sold only one of his paintings and that was to a friend for a small amount. Despite this he continued working throughout his life. Never seeing success or fame. His paintings are now worth hundreds of millions of dollars. In the Gospel proclamation the apostles seem to be doing something objectionable. The Pharisees consider it a kind of foolishness going against norms and customs of that period. Living however with and like Christ supersedes and goes beyond every other requirement to rules and regulations.

Today is the Feast of St. Gregory the Great. One of the richest men in Rome. He gave up his great fortune to devote his time and life to doing God’s Will. Like the Lord he had a pastoral zeal to shepherd the universal church. Lord may I be a leader embracing my nothingness.

Prayer: Abba Father, in this furnace of fire I experience, may I see your glory and rejoice. Amen

***And who could ever have known Your Will, had you not given Wisdom
and sent Your Holy Spirit from above? Wisdom 9:17***

Wisdom of Solomon
9:13–18b

Psalms 90:3–6, 12–17

Philemon 9–10, 12–17

Luke 14:25–33

Today's First Reading makes me feel ashamed of myself. How often do I insist that my opinion is 'the truth', knowing I have a limited human mindset and a knowledge base!

The Gospel Reading outlines the cost of being a disciple of the Lord Jesus. The Lord says that we cannot be His disciples unless we give up everything we have. As we all want to be His disciples, it is important to explore what the Lord means by 'everything'. For St. Peter and his brother Andrew, and for James and John, it was the fishing boats and nets. For the rich young man, it was his wealth. St Matthew, and Zacchaeus, had to give up their careers as tax collectors. Saul, turned St Paul, had to let go his status as a Pharisee.

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus invited the apostles to give up something more internal, inherent and difficult too. The Lord lovingly exhorted them to give up their values and priorities, and their efforts to serve the Lord by their own strength.

They failed the Lord but the Risen Christ visited them and breathed His Holy Spirit upon them. The fearful and selfish men, hiding in the upper room, were transformed into selfless, joyful men, boldly proclaiming the Good News. They rejoiced at persecution for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and they scoffed at the death threats by the high and mighty of the society. Those who only saw the earthly realities like sending five thousand people away to find food for themselves, now started ordering sickness and demons away in the Name of Jesus, bringing a whole new order to this earth.

What is my "everything"? The Lord urges me to pray with the "Four Steps" right now. I bring my spirit to the Lord, thanking Him for my spirit, created in the likeness of His own. I repent that my spirit is often made dormant by my thoughts and emotions. While the Lord cleanses my spirit and awakens it, I choose to permit the Holy Spirit to take over my spirit totally. As He accepts my invitation I worship Him.

With an awakened spirit entirely possessed by the Holy Spirit, I bring my memories, cognitive mind, dreams and visions to the Lord. I thank Him for these faculties, which have made me who I am today, and give Him the truth that as good as they were meant to be, I have used them for my glory and not of the Lord. In repentance I ask the Lord

to cleanse my mind and using my will, I choose to allow the Word of God to become my sole truth. As the Holy Spirit takes over my whole mind, I worship my God.

Next I bring my emotional centre to the Lord in thanksgiving, for blessing me with this faculty. I give the truth to the Lord that my feelings, emotions, subconscious and unconscious nature, my drives and fears have only been revolving around my happiness. As I ask the Lord to forgive my selfishness and internal brokenness due to sinful nature, I choose to believe and accept that His love is enough for me. Being loved and reassured of His love and mercy, I worship the Lord of my life.

Then I bring my free will, conscience and ego to the Lord. I thank the Lord for His respect for His own creation, though I'm nothing but dust in His Hand. I weep for my stubbornness, pride and arrogance as He washes me in His Precious Blood. I choose to surrender my will to His, my conscience to His discernment and I ask Him to crush my ego under His Blessed Feet, no matter how much it may hurt me. I ask the Holy Spirit to guide me in everything in my life.

At the end of the Four Steps, the Lord has shown me so many things I need to give up. Saying 'No' to them and 'Yes' to His Will is the cross I'm invited to carry, believing that the Father knows what is best for me. No longer is it "my way", but now it is "His way" and "His will".

In the Second Reading, St Paul lovingly challenges Philemon, who was a committed disciple of the Lord Jesus. Philemon had all the right to punish his slave Onesimus, who had stolen from him and run away but had become a Christian through St Paul's ministry, and was now being sent back to his master. St Paul kindly shows Philemon what he had to give up, to remain a faithful disciple of the Lord. Isn't this a great challenge to me too? Do I seek justice or love?

The Lord knows well, that I cannot do what He asks me to do. Hence the Counsellor was gifted and given to the world before the Lord ascended to the Father. The Holy Spirit now lives inside me, filling me with the Wisdom of God to make this transformation complete. How can we be filled with the presence of the Spirit? One is today so many of us cannot live without our mobiles and chatting. We must choose to put off this necessary evil and then soaking ourselves in the presence of God we will grow in the presence of the Spirit.

Prayer: Abba Father, your Son had eyes, ears, and taste for You alone. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit today, to have the same reality. Amen.

"Is it legal to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil "**Luke 6:9**

1 Corinthians 5:1-8

Psalm 5:5-7, 12

Luke 6:6-11

Corinth was a place where sin abounded. Corruption, vice, sexual immorality & idol worship were rampant. It was in this context that St. Paul wrote. The fledgling church had to be protected against the invasive infection that surrounded it. If the letter sounds too harsh & drastic we have to understand the struggle he had against the heathen life style they were already accustomed to. To keep Corinth pure seemed an insurmountable task (surrounded as they were by a sea of paganism & heathenism). St. Paul is more shocked at the complacency of the church regarding the immorality of the man who married his step mother – an act forbidden by the law (ex: lev 18:8). When he says that the man should be handed over to satan (the world he dominated) he means a chastisement, so that he would be humiliated at the excommunication and be disciplined on his return to the church. Leaven in Jewish terms stands for an evil influence of Satan, it was fermented dough. The Passover bread was to be undefiled. He reminds them of the sacrifice our Lord Jesus made so that man could live a pure and undefiled life.

In the Gospel proclamation we see a glorious act of defiance performed by our Lord. Knowing of the hostility of Pharisees (he was facing), who were waiting to accuse him. He tells the man with a withered hand, "to stand in the midst" !!! Then he asks the question whether it was legal to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil. According to the Pharisees he had broken the law. But the Lord Jesus harks back to the scripture where God says "what I require of you is to do justice to love mercy..... Micah 7:8". He himself preached "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy" "the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath" Luke 6:5. So here he walks the talk! To him the traditional concept of following rigid laws, pitted against the overpowering law, (of the law of) love, - was irrelevant. After all, he came to demonstrate the love of his Father. The dignity and sanctity of life were more important than laws.

Today the church is fully established and is no danger of pagan inroads. Counseling and reconciliation programs are freely available. So St. Paul's drastic advice need not be followed. In this the year of mercy, we the church are requested to reach out in loving kindness and mercy to those who we think are living against the law.

Prayer: Abba Father, forgive me Lord and help me to reach out to others. Amen

***Let the faithful rejoice in their banquet,
With the praise of God in their mouths” Psalm 149: 4 – 5***

1 Corinthians 6:1–11

Psalm 149:1b–6a, 9b

Luke 6:12–19

There was a disturbance among the new converts in Corinth and St. Paul was distressed. Therefore he addressed this issue. The new converts from paganism to Christianity sought the assistance of the pagans in sorting out their day-to-day issues.

Personally for me this is a direction to sort out matters among ourselves. Christians and Catholics are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sisters and brother of the same family. Has not the Lord Jesus taught us to settle matters among ourselves in the Spirit? Obviously St. Paul was disturbed because he committed himself to bringing the Corinthians from darkness to light. When those who have come to light bring the practices of darkness into their lives the Shepherd of the flock is disturbed.

We are called to love compassionately but we take our mission quite lightly. Instead, we have become empire builders. Each person wants to live a comfortable and super rich life. We don't love but try to be charitable. Are we carrying out our mission of loving others unconditionally?

When we read this letter of St. Paul, he clearly says that we (Christians/Catholics) are called to be the judges of the world. In the Gospel of Matthew the Lord Jesus says, “Stop judging, that you may not be judged” (Matt7:1). Is the Word of God contradictory? No! We are qualified to judge another only if we are in the spirit and compassionate. Love comes first. God loves both sinner and righteous. We are called to win the world with love. Isn't that what the Lord Jesus did on Golgotha? St. Paul mentioned a list of different types of malpractices and said those who belong to these categories will not go to heaven. But he also said that all of us are now washed in the blood of our Lord Jesus. We are in the Spirit.

After much prayer the Lord selected twelve Apostles. He handed over the baton of His race to the Apostles. Through our obedience to the Apostles of God we are obedient to God. This obedience should lead us to unconditional love and unreserved serving.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant me the grace to be obedient to you by obeying your Apostles of this age and their teachings. Let me be a channel of your unconditional love. Grant me a compassionate heart. Amen

“Rejoice and leap for joy because great is your reward in heaven”

Luke 6:23

1 Corinthians 7:25–31

Psalm 45:11–12, 14–17

Luke 6:20–26

St Paul in the first reading urges us to remember that this world, with all its glitter, glamour and apparent stability is passing away. Everything in this world, everything that engrosses us, our jobs, our finances, our relationships – will one day pass away. If we try and base our happiness on these or look to each other for fulfillment, one day we will be disillusioned and feel let down. There is only one eternal and lasting joy – that comes only from the true bridegroom, the one true King.

This is why the Lord Jesus tells us that the poor, the meek, the hungry, the rejected – these will inherit the kingdom of God. If we consider ourselves rich by the world's standards, if we are satisfied with wealth and base our security on our finances then what we have here, what we gain here and strive for is all that we will ever have. The day we die, we will lose it all along with the Kingdom of God that could have been ours. But if we are hungry for more than what the world can give us, if we are poor here – poor in strength, poor in influence, poor because we refuse to give into the ways of the world and compromise our conscience then the Lord Jesus tells us to rejoice in the midst of whatever trials we may face – because one day we will inherit the Kingdom of God. Blessed are we if we are rejected because of our God, blessed are we if we weep now, if we have to go hungry – God promises us laughter, He promises us eternal satisfaction. He does not just talk about the hunger that comes from a lack of food – perhaps its hunger for love, hunger for acceptance, hunger for health – whatever it is that we are missing, that we are sacrificing because we believe in something greater – He will satisfy us. Our God is a God of infinite riches, abounding in love and He is the source of all that is good. He who created us, He who promises us eternal life – He will fulfill His promises.

So with the psalmist we honour Him, honour Him with the beauty of our lives given over to Him. We enter His throne room with joy and gladness knowing that this present sadness and suffering is but for a moment and that His joy will endure forever.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank you for the things in my life that I think are hurting me because You in Your mercy, grace and wisdom gave them to me. Lord Jesus, I trust in Your unfailing love for me. Amen

Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your 'Mother'

Micah 5:1-4a

Psalms 13:6

Matthew 1:1-16,
18-23

I opened the newspapers to two horrifying stories in India. One was about a family who was witnessed throwing a new born baby girl from a moving car. The infant was set upon by a pack of wild dogs and before people could rescue her was torn apart. The other was of a woman who claimed that her child was set upon by a cat when actually under interrogation it was found that she strangled her own baby girl since she already had two daughters.

Imagine if Mother Mary was not allowed to be born into the world, we would not have had the opportunity of salvation and the gift of a Saviour. It was a girl child who played a pivotal role in the salvation of mankind. God chose her because He considered her blessed among the people of the world. Our Lord Jesus could have come into this world in any other way but the Father had this plan. Hence we are called to venerate Mother Mary and acknowledge her role. It is said from a Book not included in the Bible, the Gospel of St. James that Mother Mary's parents St. Anne and St. Joachim were childless for many years but were later blessed with the gift of our Blessed Mother. Once she was weaned she was offered in the service of the temple and was loved by all. In the readings, the Saviour who is Jesus Christ has two beautiful titles; He himself will be peace - taken from Micah 5:4a and Matthew 1:23 says that they will call Him Emmanuel, a name which means 'God is with us.'

Though we are celebrating the Nativity of the Blessed Mother the readings reveal to us numerous promises and the struggles of the Holy Family. It also details the role of St. Joseph in the birth of the Lord Jesus. The Blessed Mother was able to fulfil her role due to the undying support of St. Joseph. The word says she was found to be with child, as though they never knew how she became pregnant. St. Joseph made up his mind to divorce Mary informally but in a dream he was told not to be afraid, about the role of the Holy Spirit, the name and mission of the child. Only such a dream could have convinced him. In our minds we may make many decisions but the Spirit of God must speak and convince our spirit of how we must live, like what was done in Mother Mary and St. Joseph's life. Let us not be afraid to take Mother Mary home as our mother and protector.

Prayer: Abba Father, awaken my spirit to the direction of the Holy Spirit and like the Holy Family let my life be surrendered to your will and mission. Amen

You yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye!

Luke 6:42a

1 Corinthians 9:16–19
22b–27
Psalm 84:3–6, 12
Luke 6:39–42

Every Christian is responsible for carrying the Word of God into this world. Our Lord Jesus says in Mark 16:15-16 “Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.” It is through His word the whole mankind can be saved. His word brings life to those who have lost their paths; it disciplines those who have wandered away; it brings comfort and rest in times of sorrow and it brings assurance and security that He is God and nothing is impossible with Him. It is His word that carries us through the storms of our lives. His word has power. The Scripture says, the word is God. Therefore, when we carry His word, we carry Him. However, as St. Paul writes can we boast ourselves because we preach/share His word? We need to be humble in sharing His word. I believe we are ought to carry His word because what the Lord has done in our lives through His word. It is His word that transformed us and made us who we are today. We carry His Word only to reflect Him and bring glory to Him.

The Gospel reading talks about judging others. We are so judgmental when it comes to others? The Lord Jesus says, how can you judge others when you, yourself have so many imperfections? I always wonder if God made a decision to judge me first; how good I am and then to love me, He would not have ever loved me. When I got close to God, I began to see how holy He is and how broken I am. But the Lord; out of His love and mercy, loved me for who I am. And it is His love that transformed me. Because Christ looked at everyone He met; a prostitute, a tax collector, a thief with love. He never judged them; instead He had compassion on them. It's only love that has the power to transform a person and change the world. If Christ loved me and accepted me with all my weakness and brokenness, I am also here to show His love to everyone.

St. Peter Claver is the patron saint of slaves. From a young age he had deep desire to serve the Lord. He wrote “I must dedicate myself to the service of God until death, on the understanding that I am like a slave.” Though in his 40 years of ministry he baptized many hundred thousands of people. In the last years, he was sick and was not treated right by the one who looked after him. Yet he made no complaints and accepted that from the hands of God. Let's learn from him.

Prayer: *Abba Father, like you do, help us to see the good in everyone and love everyone without judging them. Amen*

'Therefore, dear friends, shun the cult of idols'

1 Corinthians 10:14

1 Corinthians
10:14–22

Psalms 116:12–13,
17–18

Luke 6:43–49

St. Paul in today's first reading gives the Corinthians a command to shun the cult of idols. During the Roman rule Corinth was a city of wealth, luxury and immorality. "To live like a Corinthian" meant to live a life of pleasure. As for religious practices the most famous temple in Corinth was that of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. She attracted worshippers from all over the ancient

world. Therefore it seemed very clear that Corinth was a city of idol worship.

St. Paul's command for us today is the same. The same concern he had for the souls of the Corinthians is relevant to us today. How many among us are perceived as journeying with the Lord yet, in idol worship. As we are quite aware, idol worship is not just worship of images of other gods but the first love of money, job, pride, self-glory, lust and anything else that takes center stage of our lives. For someone who has committed him or herself to serve the Lord, the idol may become their own ministry work. St. Paul is strong in his teaching that we cannot serve God and demon both at the same time.

In the Book of wisdom, God gives us an eternal truth about the benefits of worshipping the only God. That truth is that even when we sin we still belong to God and acknowledge His power and that awareness of belonging to God gives us the power not to sin. (Wisdom 15:2) This word is given right after the writer of the Book of wisdom speaks of the origin and consequence of idolatry.

In the Gospel proclamation today our Lord Jesus teaches us that a true worshipper of God is one who listens to the word of God and acts accordingly and the one who does not obey the word of God is like a man who built his house without a foundation. The flood came and brought the house down. Where do we stand in the combination of the right foundation and true worship. Are we living a double life? Are we slaves to idol worship in the form of chasing behind worldly pleasures and human recognition. If we are, the Lord is reminding us today that a tree is known by the fruit it bears. Good begets good and evil begets evil. For a while people may perceive us as holy but sooner or later the real us will be revealed by the words that come out from our mouths and the lives we lead.

Prayer: Abba Father, let my true worth and happiness come only from you and make me a tree that bears good fruit. Amen.

There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents

Luke 15:7

Exodus 32:7-11,
13-14

Psalm 51:3-4,
12-13, 17, 19

1 Timothy 1:12-17
Luke 15:1-10

You would think they saw and heard it all. They saw the seven plagues in Egypt. While their slave masters watched helplessly, they simply walked out of Egypt. They were led by the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud through the desert. They crossed the Red Sea while the waters stood parted. They watched their enemy being defeated without them having to lift a finger. When

they camped out below Sinai they would have been reliving those moments; they would not have even noticed the absence of Moses until he was gone for some time.

Without Moses, they could not hear the voice of God; for they did not have an intimate relationship with the God of Israel. Even though God called them His people, no one except Moses knew Him personally. From the first moment that Moses returned from Midian until they left Egypt, they were riding on the relationship that Moses had with God. There were spectators to what God did among them. They became restless when Moses was gone for weeks. They came up with a solution through practices they knew in Egypt; a golden calf. Some say the bull worship came from a practice in Egypt. Others say they were actually worshipping the God of Israel, and they wanted an image to worship. Whatever the reason was, the golden calf displeased God. He refused to associate Himself with them anymore. He told Moses, "Your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt".

In the Gospel proclamation today we read about God dealing with corrupt people using a different approach. This time He has come as a magnet to sinners. They are drawn to him and He is giving them a personal relationship. He allows them to touch Him, and in turn they are transformed. This confuses the "righteous". They complained; "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." The Lord reveals a secret of the kingdom of God; there is "more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent".

The sinners acknowledged their sinfulness and repented before the Lord Jesus. That opened their hearts to the things of God. They started to follow the Lord and have a personal relationship with Him. The Pharisees and other religious leaders observed the rituals and

the laws. Therefore, they felt they were better than the others. They saw the speck in the eyes of others but not the beam in their own eyes. They could not understand the heart of God; for they did not have a relationship with Him. That moment while they sat there judging, there was rejoicing in heaven over the sinners who repented! I think, while they were condemning the sinners who were eating with the Lord, the names of the very people they condemned were spoken with celebration in heaven!

As I look into my own heart, I see that I am sometimes like the Pharisees and the religious leaders. My heart is set on observances, and because of that I have pride. I feel I am slightly better than the others. There is judgement and criticism towards others. I am impatient with those who do not think the way I do. I feel jealous when someone is appreciated or receives a breakthrough from God. I see a golden calf at the center of my heart. It is made up of my ego and my ideas that I feel are superior to those of others, and I expect others to worship my golden calf! I get upset when they do not and I condemn them in my heart. As I realize the truth of my heart, I am shaken to my core. In the battle between my flesh and my spirit, my flesh has tricked me into spiritualising its desires and has started to dominate my spirit.

In today's second reading St. Paul says; "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". I believe God has no sinner categories; He saves the good, the bad and the ugly. St. Paul who believed his ways were pleasing to God, had a moment of grace to see the truth; that he was the worst sinner! The words of St. Paul give me hope; "I was shown mercy... so that Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life". I may be lost in my ways, but Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners like me! He meets me at my Tiberias, where I am. He ministers to be through the Eucharist. He ministers to me so that I may minister to others.

He gives me an opportunity through confession to bring my failures and sinfulness to the foot of the cross. I am encouraged not to make excuses but declare my weakness. As I kneel in weakness I am sure to rise in strength. As my spirit submits in humility my spirit awakens to the presence of God. And the Father whispers into my ears, You are my child with whom I well pleased. Tears stream down my eyes and I walk away comforted, healed, resurrected and strengthened to continue my journey with my Lord and Saviour.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for sending your Son our Lord Jesus to meet me where I am and save me from my corrupt ways. Give me the grace to be open to your ways and your voice so that I will live a life pleasing to you. Amen.

No longer slaves but redeemed children of God

1 Corinthians 11:17–26,

33

Psalm 40:7–10, 17

Luke 7:1–10

Today as we reflect on the words of St Paul to the church of Corinth, we are given a glimpse of the Father's loving heart. The Almighty Father desires communion with his children through our Lord Jesus and for them in turn to enjoy a spirit filled fellowship with each other. However we see division in the church of Corinth where there were many divisions.

In an environment, that epitomizes selfishness how can we partake in the Lord's meal, how can we commune with him? This was the basis upon which St Paul rebuked the Corinth church and reminded them about the Christ's self-sacrifice on behalf of his people. As Romans 8:32 says "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all". He urges them to look at the fellowship as not as simply a place to come and eat and drink for themselves but a place where we remember that Our Lord Jesus took our unworthy life, sinful past and unholy nature to the cross and offered his body on our behalf.

In the Gospel proclamation we are reminded about the word of the centurion, a man with significant authority, with a number of soldiers reporting to him. He commands and it and it will be carried out by his soldiers and servants. He was a man who knew about power and the authority of a command and he directly relates it to the way the Lord is able to act into his circumstances and problems. Similarly the Psalmist in today's reading declares, "I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not delay" We see that they both, men of power sought the Lord with a heart of humility knowing well that he has the answers to their needs.

We may approach the Lord as unworthy, sinful people who were subject to the law of God, but now through Lord Jesus we have been redeemed and are us free. Therefore as we celebrate this great mystery of the Holy Mass and fall at the feet of the one who offers Mercy and Grace, let us sing out that Christ is enough for me, everything we need is in him. The Cross before me, the world behind me and therefore there is no turning back.

Prayer: Abba Father, so often we see the way you work through the eyes of our earthly parents and experiences. But today you have revealed your power and love is always available and we claim it by just saying a word. Amen

"...for the Lord is good and his love endures forever."

Psalm 100:5

1 Corinthians
12:12–14, 27–31a
Psalm 100:2–5
Luke 7:11–17

The Lord is good. In today's first reading St. Paul reveals extent of the goodness of the Lord.

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, by the power of the Holy Spirit we are being made parts of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Through His death and resurrection the Lord Jesus Christ, cancelled all divisions caused as a result of cast, race, wealth and poverty and gave us the opportunity to be one body in Him. He did this for us, so that we too could contribute, to save the world like another Christ. Thus in 1 Corinthians 12, 27-28 St. Paul says, just as parts of the body have different functions, we who are connected to the body of Christ are entrusted with different kinds of gifts to perform various tasks. These gifts are given to gather to Him many others, who do not know Him as yet.

The Lord Jesus receives these gifts through His baptism. The miracle mentioned in today's Gospel in a town called Nain, is a result of these gifts. But in 1 Corinthians 12: 31 St. Paul says, to eagerly desire the greater gifts. This greater gift is, "divine love". "His love endures forever." (Psalm 100:5) The Lord Jesus through each miracle performed by Him, proclaims this everlasting love.

When He saw the pain and sorrow in the heart of that widow His heart is filled with mercy and love. Those who do not have love in their hearts do not have mercy. Even if there is mercy it will be only mercy. Beyond that there will be no action. Yet the mercy that arose in the heart of Lord Jesus turned in to action and ended up in performing a miracle and giving life to the son of this widow because of the tremendous love that was within Him.

The Lord Jesus expects this same love us who are connected to the body of Christ. He was not only a teacher, prophet, miracle worker and a healer. In Him was mercy and love that surpassed it. This love is a gift that we receive freely. Being shareholders of this everlasting love that flows from the good Lord, the Lord does not expect us only to fulfill a task, a service or a responsibility. His expectation is mercy and love that flows freely from our hearts to the less fortunate. Thus today let us ask the Lord for this grace.

Prayer: Abba Father, envelope us in your love, give us the grace to draw thousands of others into your Kingdom who yet do not know you. Amen.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life John 3:16

Numbers 21:4b-9 or
Phil 2:6-11

Psalm 78:1-2, 34-38

John 3:13-17

I stand in awe when I read today's reading which reflects the love of God because it was one touch of His love that transformed me and made me the person who I am today. So my deepest awareness of myself is that I'm deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn or deserve it. When I realise and internalize this, it humbles me.

Our Lord Jesus, the Holy one who, being in very nature of God became the humble sacrifice just for you and me because His love for us and He wants to come and live inside us. His unconditional love and humility always fascinate me. I cannot imagine that the Son of God who has all authority over everything, who could have come as a king with army and chariot to conquer the world decided to take the very nature of a servant and humbled himself by becoming obedient to death on a cross! This was because the personal relationship He had with His Father made Him trust the Father's goodness and faithfulness till the end. By being moved by His humility and obedience, the Father exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above everything where in heaven and on earth every knee shall bow before His name.

Whoever tastes the love of God cannot remain the same. There are so many metaphors that are being used to express His love. But one of my favorite songs says 'your love is like a storm". It was like a fierce hurricane when I experienced His love in my life for the first time and I was just blown away. This experience brought a fire and thirst in my heart to know Him more; to enjoy His intimacy more, to have a constant walk with Him, and to remain in Him all through my life.

The feast of exaltation of the Holy Cross not only recalls three historical events; discovery of true cross by Saint Helena, the dedication of churches built by Constantine on the site of the Holy Sepulcher and Mount Calvary; and the restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem by the emperor Heraclius II but also tells us the significance of the Cross. The Cross which meant to be a curse turned into a sign of triumph and blessing because our Lord Jesus hung on it. When we receive Holy Communion, we do not simply unite ourselves to Christ, we nail ourselves to Him, die with Christ so that we might rise with Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, we thank you for your Son's cross by which we received eternal life. Amen

**'Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me,
O Lord, the God of truth.'**

Psalm 31:5

Hebrews 5:7-9
Psalm 31:2-6,
15-16, 20
John 19:25-27
or Luke 2:33-35

St. Matthew says, at Gethsemane the Lord Jesus was troubled and His soul was sorrowful to the point of death. Today's first reading reveals the prayer of the Lord Jesus at that point knowing of His betrayal and crucifixion. First, the Lord Jesus offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death. (Heb 5: 7) Was not the object of His prayer to change the course of the evil events (Matthew 27:38-40) and triumph over death?

Hebrews 5:7 also says that the prayer of the Lord Jesus was heard because of His reverent submission. Thus the key in the prayer of our Lord Jesus at Gethsemane was that at one point the will of the Son and the will of the Father become one. (Matthew 26:42) The Lord Jesus was certain of the goodness of the Father which He experienced throughout His life that He knew, even if everyone abandoned Him, the Father would be there for Him. (John 16:32) and He said 'Yes' to the will of the Father. Nothing changed externally at that point through a divine intervention. He suffered and died but the transformation occurred within Him, spiritually. Through His death and resurrection the world was saved from the bondage of sin and He came to live in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Like the Lord Jesus at Gethsemane in our crisis, pain, sickness and struggle we too can cry out to the Lord. But it is in the painful act of obedience and complete surrender to the will of God that our prayers are lifted up to heaven & bear fruit. We may not see immediate external results but true prayer leads to total internal freedom, hope and the strength to hold on to God to act externally.

In the Gospel proclamation the Blessed Mother is at the foot of the cross and today the Church celebrates the feast of our Lady of Sorrows. It reminds us of the seven swords that pierced the heart of Mary. She too was one with the Lord Jesus and in total surrender to the will of God throughout her life from the Annunciation to the foot of the cross and at Pentecost. Thus the Church teaches, she co-operated with her Son. We too are called to say 'Yes' to the will of God in our lives and draw others to the Kingdom of God.

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

**'And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless
and so is your faith.'**

1 Corinthians 15:14

1 Corinthians
15:12-20

Ps 17:1, 6-8, 15

Luke 8:1-3

In today's first reading, St. Paul clearly explains, that the Lord Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. Truly the Lord Jesus is alive. For the ones whom this is not real, the sad truth is all the time they live in darkness and misery for they have answers that are only available on earth. In struggles, issues and problems they have only worldly solutions. Thus when facing a crisis, sickness, problem, they live in untold misery, pain, fear and anxiety not knowing where to turn.

Hebrews 11:6 says, that without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

One day a fisherman related this story, "As usual I fishing in the boat. I got caught in a huge storm. The boat was thrown up and again crashed into the water. As I was drowning the words that came out from me were only, 'Jesus', 'Jesus'. Again another wave came. I was thrown. To my amazement when I opened my eyes I found myself washed up on the shore."

The Lord Jesus is alive. To all who seek Him in faith He will answer. Today's Gospel talks of such a crowd. Many of them did not find solutions on this earth, for their lives. They came to the Lord Jesus in faith. He healed and freed them. Once they were freed from places where they were imprisoned, they did not stop with that. That is what is most important. Even after they were healed and freed from their bondages they continued to follow the Lord Jesus. This is what He expects from us who are imprisoned in various addictions and bondages. We come to Him in faith. In His love we receive the healing, we receive deliverance from evil spirits and out of our darkness we come into the light. But we cannot stop at this point. We need to surrender our lives to the Lord Jesus and start a journey with the Lord. That is the most valuable and highest gift that we can receive in our lives. When we remain in Him daily and live in Him great transformation takes place in our lives. Then through us, transformation begins to take place in the lives of those who live around us.

Prayer: Abba Father, I thank and praise you for as I wake up in the morning, I remember your great love for me and I know that You are my refuge and fortress. Amen.

“When we die we have truly begun to live.”

1 Corinthians
15:35–37, 42–49

Psalm 56:10c–14

Luke 8:4–15

In these verses we will learn resurrection realities that will prepare us for our eternal existence.

What gives a widow courage as she stands beside a fresh grave? Why would anyone who is disabled be encouraged when they think of life after death? Where do the thoughts of young couples go when they lose their baby? What is

God’s answer to pain and suffering in this world?

The answer is the same: the hope of resurrection. We draw strength from this truth almost every day of our lives... more than we realize. It becomes the mental glue that holds our otherwise shattered thoughts together. Impossible though it may be for us to understand the details of how God is going to pull it off, we hang our hopes on the fragile threadlike thought, “Someday, He will make it right and thank God all this will change.”

Yet for us Christians’ death is disturbing. Death is a difficult reality. However in 1 Cor 15: 35-49 St. Paul declares, “When we die we have truly begun to live.” In these verses we will learn resurrection realities that will prepare us for our eternal life.

In verse 36-38 St. Paul writes “How foolish! what you sow must die before it is given new life; and what you sow is not the body that is to be but only a single grain, of wheat I dare say’ or some other kind; it is God who gives it the sort of body that he has chosen for it and for each kind of seed its own kind of body.”

St. Paul is not talking about the appearance of the resurrection bodies in terms of whether we will be recognizable. His point is the body that is planted in death is not the same body that is resurrected. When a seed is buried in the ground, a plant, not another seed, comes out of the seed. The plant does not look like the seed it came from. Likewise, when we are buried in the ground and resurrected, our bodies will not look identical to the ones we have now.

St. Paul made the last four verses so simple. His argument is: the heavenly is greater than the earthly. But to experience the heavenly body, one must first live in the earthly body triumphantly.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we cling to your promise, help us know the purpose of our life. Help us understand and live in your promises. Amen*

A call to live upright lives

Amos 8:4-7

Ps 113:1-2, 4-8

1 Timothy 2:1-8

Luke 16:1-13

In the world we are often tempted to go with the flow and behave as people do. Slowly we forget our values and respond to situations as we have learnt and seen others do. When stopped for a traffic offence it has become normal for us to offer a bribe if we are requested for one.

The readings for today speak from two angles. In the reading from the Book of Amos, we come across people who look forward to upcoming deals and opportunities to make money. As the deals progress they are inspired to adjust weights and measures to ensure that their profit is larger. They become insensitive to the poor and wait for opportunities to squeeze deals out of them so that what is got for a pittance can be sold at a whopping price. Their need for profit becomes so intense that even the sweepings of wheat are gathered to be sold for some profit. In the Ruth and Boaz story we are told of how when they picked grain, what was dropped was to be left for the disadvantaged. However, in this case, a person overcome by greed sees a profit even in sweepings. What does God have to say to such people - Never will I forget anything they have done. How do I conduct my business or deal with people. Is my song 'Gain, gain, gain'? Or am I able to show mercy and compassion.

In St Luke's Gospel reading we come across a crafty steward. When his job is at stake, he tries to win favour with the debtors of his master so that when he banished from the master's house he will have a safe haven at the debtor's homes. He is shrewd in his dealings. Our Lord Jesus uses this example as a teaching and a warning. It is common practice for businessmen to build relationships with powerful politicians by financing their activities or key projects. Through such donations they win the favour of such people and earn the power to influence their decision making. We are called to use such craftiness and invest in the kingdom of Heaven and thereby sow in the eternal kingdom through acts of sharing and mercy.

The Lord also shares of the struggle we will constantly have between Him and money. Most often we believe that the money we receive is a blessing from God. It is a blessing but there's a danger. As riches increase it becomes natural for a shift to occur where we begin trust in the riches more and God takes second place. Many lives and families have been shattered when an influx of money takes place.

There is no end to how much we can be in want and all we have will never be enough. Many people who have won large jackpots have seen their lives disintegrate in a few years after the lottery is won and generally become worse off. In Sri Lanka thousands spend to purchase lottery tickets on a daily or weekly basis with the hope that one day they will win the jackpot and all will be fine.

In Chapter 1 of Timothy we are called to a different kind of living where we become aware that the poor are privileged in the eyes of God. They are an opportunity for us to practice sharing and love. Instead of living lives in pursuit of money only we are called to offer up four kinds of prayer; petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving. In short we are called to turn from a self-centered life to other centered living where we begin to think of others needs. We are taught that what is right and acceptable to God is to live peaceful and quiet lives with all devotion and propriety. God's plan is for everyone to be saved and reach the full knowledge of the truth. To reach the full knowledge of the truth requires us to empty ourselves of our normal way of living and thinking and begin God's way of living which is to think of and pray for others. St Paul tells us that there is one mediator and one truth and the Lord Jesus has given us the best example of giving himself up as a ransom for all. We are called to lift our hands reverently in prayer with no anger or argument.

Recently, as I looked at my clothes, I noticed so many pieces that I never use. Some were even in a brand new condition and my mind began to work twice. But I simply picked up the lot and placed them on the road outside my house. Within a few minutes the bags were gone. But the miracle did not stop there. In a few hours from then a person landed up in my house from far away and bought a piece of equipment paying in cash, something that I had struggled to sell for quite some time.

Among our families, anger and pain erupts when money or property is not shared or divided. Even God is put aside since we see money as being so important and valuable. It exposes our total belief in money as being everything. The news papers this week have a story where a shopkeeper hacked a poor couple to death simply because they owed him Rs 15/- and they were not paying him but spending Rs 5 to buy a packet of biscuits. Later it was found that the couple had three starving children and they wanted to buy the biscuit packet for the children. This is our world. Let us change it by prayer and example.

Prayer: Abba Father, make me aware of my own blindness and love for money. If I have to do some soul searching I will discover so many opportunities where money was more important than generosity and love. Have mercy on me. Amen

Be Baptized with the Holy Spirit

Proverbs 3:27–35

Psalm 15:2–5

Luke 8:16–18

The first reading from the book of Proverbs can be taken as a list of instructions the Lord is giving us so that we may be able to live a righteous and pleasing life to God. Today's Psalm continues by telling us how a righteous person should live. When reading these I began to evaluate myself. Am I a righteous person? Do I follow these to the best of my abilities?

The truth is that I don't. I always find that I have the best of intentions to do something right and honest, but then get caught up in how the world thinks. I lose myself in doing something that is not acceptable to God, but the world says is okay. And once again I find myself fallen and reaching out to the Lord for forgiveness and mercy. I realized that my relationship with God was nothing more than the relationship the disciples had with Him during the three years of his ministry.

The Bible tells us the risen Christ spent 40 days with the disciples after his resurrection. It is clear that the relationship between the disciples and the Risen Lord was a human relationship. Even after the resurrection, the disciple's internal lives were not changed and they thought according to the world. Their desires and aspirations were of the world. In my life I too love the Lord, but my aspirations and desires are formed by the world. My solutions to problems are formed by my brokenness and I adopt strategies that are sinful and selfish. I am constantly going against what the Lord has spoken of in the first reading.

Acts 1:8 says "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The Lord Jesus is telling us that we are missing something in our lives and that is why we are unable to live a life pleasing to God. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can have a life according to the word.

The Lord gives us the Holy Spirit to primarily heal us, free us, and transform us to make us sons and daughters of God. That's why the Holy Spirit comes to fix our brokenness and to transform us and give us a beautiful internal journey.

Prayer: *Abba Father, I yearn to live according to Your Word Lord, I pray for your Holy Spirit, that all my weakness and brokenness may be taken away. Amen.*

**“Happy those whose way is blameless, who walk
by the teaching of the Lord”**

Psalm 119:1

Proverbs 21:1-6,
10-13

Psalm 119:1, 27, 30,
34-35, 44

Luke 8:19-21

Proverbs are a spring of wisdom, included in the Wisdom Literature of the Holy Scriptures. This book offers us direction to live right with God.

Proverbs provide us with a portrait of God's thinking. We discover His inner disposition which is made clear verse after verse. Isn't it wonderful to be in the hand of God to be moved according to

His Will? It also warns us. The greatest act that we could perform, the most charitable decision that we could make or the self giving move we make in life, can still be displeasing to God. Our inner attitudes should be clear when we make decisions in life.

When God calls us to serve Him, we should not use the opportunity to fulfill our desires. Such behaviour is an abomination in the eyes of God. What man does on the outward could be contradictory in comparison to the attitude he/she has deep within. Only God can see it.

We adopt certain selfish practices like using people to climb the ladder and kicking them off, behaving at our best to attract important people and be noticed, hurting those around us to be first in everything. These proverbs encourage us to cultivate holy attitudes within.

Our environment and circumstances have made us who we are. But when we come to the Lord, experience His forgiveness and are washed in His blood, we cannot continue to be the rotten people we used to be. God is calling us to be the people He planned us to be.

From the Gospel proclamation we are shown Who a family member of God is? He/she is the one who hears the Word of God and lives accordingly. Some people highlight today's Gospel passage to say that the Lord Jesus spoke less of His Mother which is a misinterpretation. The Blessed Mother heard the Word of God and lived it. The brothers mentioned here are not the sons of the Blessed Mother but the first cousins of Lord Jesus as in the Jewish culture. This also reminds us that Lord Jesus (Jesus of Nazareth) was fully God and man. He was a total human person with family connections. Today, the Lord Jesus is inviting us to surrender our lives to Him, so that we may cultivate holy attitudes rather than selfish attitudes.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pledge myself to thee today, to keep your teachings always, for all time and forever. Amen.

Ephesians 4:1-7,
11-13

Psalm 19:2-5

Matthew 9:9-13

Many of us are faced with the dilemma of the nature of “Sin”? We treat sin lightly while for some of us it seems as though our sin is an unsurmountable mountain that we are confronted with. Nevertheless, there is hope for us because in today’s Gospel, the Lord Jesus comes in search of us. The Lord Jesus reveals in John 16:9 that “Sin” is to “not believe in me...”. As we reflect on the experience of the calling of Matthew the Lord speaks to us and shares that our sin is to keep walking in our own ways of pursuing our own happiness and fulfillment in life. It’s as though we are following our own self prepared map, assuming that it will bring us to fulfillment, but actually which leads us to separation from God and to death. St. Matthew apparently assumed that collecting more and more taxes, and using his entire life to accumulate wealth at the expense of his soul was the map that would lead to happiness and fulfillment. Let us reflect on the map we are following today? What is the map we follow in our marriage and family? Is it leading us to eternal life, or is it leading us to separation from God and death? At this very moment, even while we are engaged in walking in the ways of our own sin, the Lord Jesus walks into our lives in the same way that He encountered St. Matthew in the Gospel. No matter how deeply we have fallen into walking in the wrong paths of sin, the Lord Jesus reveals that He is still the way, the truth and the life for me (John 14:6). My sin has led me to become closed up from within and everything on the inside has become rotten.

Today the Lord Jesus is giving me His master plan for my life through His word: “I am the vine; you are the branches... Remain in me, as I also will remain in you... If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (John 15: 4, 5). He calls me not to live in on my own, instead I am called to remain united to Him every moment of my life. The Lord Jesus will be the vine from which life will flow into the branches of my life. He invites me to allow my sadness and sinfulness to become a moment to turn to the Lord and to flow into Him. From the Lord Jesus shall power and peace overflow into my life.

Prayer: Abba Father, as I remain in the Lord Jesus today, lead me to give Him to the world that I am living in. Amen.

“Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

Psalms 90:12

Ecclesiastes 1:2–11

Psalms 90:3–6,
12–14, 17bc

Luke 9:7–9

“Everything is meaningless.” This is a sentiment expressed not only by the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes but also most or all of us at one time or another. Yet the question that follows close at its heels is, “Why would God create a life that is meaningless?” The answer is given in today’s psalm.

We see in the First Reading, a very dissatisfied mentality. Some Scripture scholars think it is the King Solomon who says thus, though he was considered the wisest man on earth. Whoever it was, it is clear that the author used his own wisdom to examine human life. His perspective was limited to what happens “under the sun”. His scope of study had a beginning (birth of a person) and an end (death), which is life within the boundaries of this world. Human wisdom, when it attempts to go alone, without God as its central point, cannot penetrate what is visible and tangible. Isn’t that what happens to us when we handle a situation in our own limited wisdom and strength?

The Gospel reading reveals the result of another side of human living in flesh and not in the Spirit. Herod, who ordered St John the Baptist to be killed just to please the mistress’ daughter, had come to the end of his wisdom. His power and authority proved utterly useless in his quest to know the ‘Truth’, while the unimportant and sinners, became His disciples and friends.

In the past when I lived by my own strength and resources, I saw life as meaningless. Into this confused state, one day the Lord Jesus walked in, as He baptised me in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who penetrated my horizons, revealing to me that I have come into this world from the heart of the Heavenly Father to fulfil His purpose and plan for me and through me for His Creation, and at the completion of this task. I will be going back to the Heart of the Father to live billions of years with Him. That changed my whole outlook of life. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me, planning my life and guiding me every step of the way. Each time I am tempted to go back to my old ways, the Spirit reminds me that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (cf. 1 Cor. 1:25)

Prayer: *Abba Father, it is nothing but Your grace that brought me out of a meaningless life to a life filled with Your love, peace, joy and freedom. today. Amen*

“The son of man must suffer and be rejected”

Luke 9:22

Ecclesiastes 3:1–11

Psalms 144:1–4

Luke 9:18–22

The first reading is written by an unknown sage; probably in around 150 B.C. It is a poem referring to the toil and labour of people. The author reveals that every living being has been given a specific task to perform. He questions the futility in understanding why we do what we do and then undo it. Or someone else undoes something and another does it up again. This brings on frustration that keeps pace with us wherever we go or in whatever we do.

I remember as a child I would go to the beach on Sundays. There I would painstakingly build sand castles with great effort and creativity. Then suddenly the waves would roll in and pull down my castle. I would cry and feel frustrated. Yet, I would go the next week and do the same. There was a sense of fun and fulfillment, though frustration too was there. It was better than being cooped up at home or experiencing nothing. Albert Einstein attributed his great achievements and discoveries to not being cleverer than most, but staying longer with frustrations and problems seeking answers.

Life is full of disappointments. Be it at academic pursuits, married life or other vocations; in the struggle of bringing up children or in every human relationship or other activities. Yet the world is changing though it all. History has a direction. Every generation works for the next; yet the fruits seem elusive. New problems surface from what we have achieved. I do something another messes up everything and vice versa.

In the Gospel proclamation St. Peter says that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah of God. St. Peter's proclamation denoted that if the Lord Jesus is such, then he would be invincible and all powerful. The Lord however 'rebukes' such a thought. He as God willingly wants to enter into the predicament of all humanity, to suffer greatly and be rejected. To even allow himself to be killed so as to rise from the dead in three days. The good news is that we are now privileged to share His glory. As we go through life's disappointing moments, praise the Lord! He is doing something beautiful through His resurrection he has unleashed into the world.

Prayer: *Abba Father, pick me up when I fall and be my strength and hope in failure. Amen*

Give them the Lord Jesus and you'll give them a future

Ecclesiastes
11:9–12:8

Psalms 90:3–6,
12–14, 17

Luke 9:43b–45

Today's first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes gives some wise guidance specially to the youth. In New Testament terminology we could say that unless we give our children Jesus Christ we are really giving them nothing. They may have wealth and property, high posts, powers and privileges in this life but unless they have a deep personal and growing relationship with the Risen

Christ everything becomes meaningless because they will not have the power to face a crisis when it inevitably hits them.

Christianity essentially is not so much dogmas and doctrines, church services and other rites and rituals but a person—the Risen Christ. As St Paul says in the Letter to the Corinthians if Jesus Christ was not raised from death then our faith is in vain and so is our preaching. We can meet this Risen Christ through acts of unity—love, forgiveness and mercy, sharing and caring. Like the Good Samaritan take a risk or face dangers. We may be called to put our necks on the block to go to the rescue of even an enemy when he or she is in trouble. When we do this, as the word of God says we receive the power to face any crisis in life, the power to get involved with others in facing and overcoming any crises in their lives and the power to overcome all types of fears. Some psychologists say there are about 300 types of fears—ranging from fear of cockroaches to the fear of death. When we have a dynamic and proactive relationship with the Risen Christ we will in times of crisis specially hear the inner voice within us saying, “Fear not I’m with you”. Bible Scholars say this assurance is given some 365 times in the Gospels. If we do not have this personal relationship with the living Christ, as Ecclesiastes says “vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” Everything would be meaningless like chasing the wind.

Perhaps Ecclesiastes summarized the essence of his thought in this verse in chapter 3: “God made everything fitting in its time; but he also set eternity in our hearts, though we are not able to embrace the work of God from the beginning to the end” (3:11-14; 8:16-17).

He encourages us to live the present moment fully by trusting the Lord and seeking the Kingdom.

Prayer: *Abba Father give us the power to reject thoughts of worry and fear. May we trust in you, live from moment to moment and seek the kingdom. Amen*

God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords**1 Timothy 6:15**

Amos 6:1a, 4–7

Psalm 146:7–10

1 Timothy 6:11–16

Luke 16:19–31

In times of trouble, we tend to come to the Lord, fall at his feet, and seek his intervention. Yet when our problems are solved, and life goes on smoothly, we tend to get complacent, and indulge in ourselves rather than continue to derive life and meaning through a relationship with the Lord. In today's first reading, the prophet Amos addresses a situation like this. He speaks to those dwelling

in Zion, not to others.

Those who dwell on Mount Zion are the people of God; those specially chosen by God to experience him and live for Him. So if we have been touched by the living presence of God, and as a result we have given our life to Him, the words of Amos apply to us as well. If we once lived for God, and we received His blessings, and now the blessings have taken the place that God once had in our hearts, the prophet Amos reminds us that if we indulge in the blessings that God gives us, without "grieving over Joseph" that we will be the first to be taken into exile.

What does grieving over Joseph mean? The people of Israel are sometimes referred to as Jacob, because they descended from Jacob. Joseph was one of Jacob's sons. To me grieving over Joseph means being unconcerned that some of the people of God are blind to God and His ways. When we indulge in the blessing forgetting the one who blesses, the blessing itself robs us of our happiness.

The Gospel proclamation speaks of the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. The parable does not explicitly tell us what deed put the rich man in hell, or what deed put Lazarus in heaven. It looks like the main reason why the rich man went to hell was his lack of concern for the poor. The very blessing of the rich man robbed him of his joy.

In the parable, the rich man had everything that he wished for. He was living the dream of modern man. As I read the parable, I find myself wishing that I was the rich man. Even Lazarus longed for the scraps that fell from his table. Yet, in the parable he did not even have a name. On the other hand, our Lord Jesus takes much pain to paint the plight of Lazarus. This speaks much about the heart of the Lord Jesus. He seems to be attracted to the poor, the helpless and the broken. He seems to have a special place in his heart for

them. God is on their side.

Contrary to this revelation, the world around us tells us that the rich and the powerful are the blessed. The learned and the talented are the blessed. So from our youngest days we are taught to strive for wealth, power, and knowledge. St. Paul, in the second reading urges Timothy to strive for a different set of goals. He goes on to urge Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith”. St. Paul recognizes the struggle between the world’s interpretation of blessings and the blessings of God. He says that Timothy inherited something called eternal life, a life beyond life. St. Paul goes on to say that Timothy inherited this when he confessed. St. Paul does not say what Timothy confessed to. Instead he tells us that it was a confession similar to the one our Lord Jesus made before Pilot. What was this confession? “You have no power over me unless my Father in heaven gave it to you”.

Getting back to the Gospel, the rich man wants Abraham to send Lazarus to his relatives to warn them about the illusion of riches. But Abraham says that they have Moses and the Prophets. Scripture has the power to break the hold that worldly riches have over us.

Looking at Lazarus while he was at the gate of the rich man, it would seem that God was ignoring Lazarus. It is not apparent that God was paying special attention to Lazarus, and Lazarus was the favoured one. Scripture reveals the divine perspective about things. It is this perspective that our Lord held on to and confessed to in the court of Pilot.

Our Lord Jesus refused to accept that His destiny was under Pilot’s control. Instead, He chose to accept the divine perspective. This drew supernatural power to his circumstances. God’s answer was not to save our Lord Jesus from the cross, but to make sure that He would continue to live. Pilot who delivered the judgement is dust. The authorities and religious leaders who manipulated the circumstances are dust. But the Lord Jesus continues to live.

The true blessing is knowing that our Lord in an intimate personal relationship. We “grieve for Joseph” and intercede for those whose pursuit of happiness is limited to blessings that apply only to the limited time span between birth and death. Let us pray for our spirits to be awakened to God’s perspective of things and God’s wealth. May we know and believe that all power lies in the hands of our God.

Prayer: Abba Father, open my heart to your word so that I may see things as they truly are and I will be set free from the things that rob me of my happiness. - Amen

Blessed be the name of the LORD!

Job 1:6-21

Job 1:6-22

Psalm 17:1-3, 6-7

Luke 9:46-50

The book of Job is one of the most challenging books in the Bible. The trials and tests that he endured speak volumes to us.

What was it like to be Job? What does it mean to be in the heart of a crisis, to have lost everything in life and still hold on to God. This is a testimony of a Job-like mother who, like Job, battled through various stages of life. She was from a wealthy family, living a comfortable life. Life was great for her and her husband. They were awaiting the birth of their third child. Tragedy struck during the ethnic conflict. Over a period of one month she lost almost everything. And with a week-year-old infant in hand, she, her husband, and their children moved to Colombo – forced to start life all over again.

The tragedy that struck her was similar to Job's. She knew too well the pain of losing everything, and having to start life from scratch. This incident happened 25 years ago and this is the story of my mother.

The most rewarding thing about my mother is that as a child I remember her holding on fervently to God. No matter how tough life got, she was not angry with God or his plans. As children we were always taught to trust God at all times – no matter the circumstances. I vividly remember her coaxing us to say our evening prayers even when there was no food on the table. Never did she complain about how cruelly she was punished. She rather, always had songs of praise. I could say without a doubt, that it was her zeal that instilled in me a deep faith in God. Her attitude of praise had such a positive impact over my life.

Today she lives a blessed life. All her needs and wishes have been met and her life is a blessing. It seems so obvious that the God she believed in proved to be faithful. Everything she lost is no longer relevant or important. The only thing that remains relevant is that even during the most hurtful period of her life, she listened, believed and held on to the word of God – which in-turn has blessed her beyond measure.

Prayer: *Abba Father, we pray for the grace to be patient in suffering, hopeful in loss and trusting in periods of silence when you call us to wait on your plan. Amen*

Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem

Luke 9:51

Job 3:1-3, 11-17,
20-23

Psalm 88:2-8

Luke 9:51-56

Job was a successful man; he had children, wealth, and good health. He lived a life pleasing to God. Then, one by one he began to lose it all. Overwhelmed by the loss and pain, Job started to curse everything that kept him alive. The story says that when Satan challenged God regarding Job's faithfulness, God permitted Satan to "test" Job. The question is; Did God really need Job to

be tested? Why put Job through so much heartache to prove a point to a fallen angel? The story does not make sense.

Everything changed when we gave our lives to the Lord. Our children's lives changed. Struggles in our workplaces ended. Peace and joy ruled our hearts. Then, we lost our main source of income. Sickness struck one of our family members. One of our children faced a personal crisis. By this time we had learnt not to accept our circumstances as final, but to put our trust in the Lord. We prayed with the five keys. (1) We praised God for the creative solutions He has for us and continued to be joyful. (2) We chose to be kind, especially to those who were responsible for our circumstances. (3) We refused to be anxious. (4) We prayed and interceded. (5) We remained thankful in anticipation of what God was doing. Suddenly we understood why God permitted all this; through them our faith and our relationships were being purified. How we served was being purified, and we saw the result in the ministry and the lives of the people we serve.

Two things stood out for me in today's Gospel proclamation. (1) Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. The Lord was going to face the cross "head-on". He was not going to let anything distract Him from His mission on earth. Calling down fire from heaven on the Samaritans would have revealed His true identity, and the cross would not have been necessary. Instead of applauding the disciples for the brilliant idea (2) the Lord Jesus turned and rebuked them. The Lord is reminding us we have two ways to deal with our circumstances; curse them and those responsible or resolutely walk towards the cross. He is giving us the 5 keys to unlock each door that stands in our way to the cross that ultimately brings victory to us and to those around us.

Payer: Abba Father, give me the grace to see beyond my circumstances and my solutions. Give me the wisdom and the strength to resolutely walk in your plan for me, the way your Son, my Lord Jesus did. Amen.

We are called to produce lasting fruits.

Job 9:1–12, 14–16

Psalms 88:10bc–15

Luke 9:57–62

In today's Gospel proclamation Jesus Christ tells us about the cost of discipleship. It is a follow up to his earlier command, "if anyone wants to be my follower let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. South Africa's widely respected Archbishop Desmond Tutu who played a major role in the peaceful reconciliation of the conflict in South Africa has written an inspiring book though the title at first glance may shock many people. The title is "God is not a Christian". But when we turn to the foreword the Archbishop clarifies it from one of the most quoted Biblical verses John 3:16—"For God so loved the world..." God is not a Christian neither did Jesus Christ call us Christians. That is a name we gave ourselves. Just carrying that label or name is not enough. As Jesus Christ tells us we need to deny ourselves. That means self denial—a gradual inner liberation from our slavery to selfishness and self-centredness, greed, jealousy and other vices such as desire for personal gain or glory.

When we come to the Risen Christ as we are, give the truth of our lives to Him and surrender our hearts and minds He fills us with the Holy Spirit. The Risen Christ fills us with the amazing grace, the unconditional love and the infinite mercy of God. After telling us to come as we are and transforming our lives He then tells us to go and be His witnesses, beginning in our homes, churches, communities workplaces and wherever we go or in whatever we do.

When we decide to follow the Risen Christ there must be no turning back. That is what the Lord meant when He said, "Whoever has put his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62)

As we sing in that inspiring song, "We have decided to follow Jesus Christ, no turning back, the world behind us, the cross before us. No turning back. Though none go with us still we will follow." That means that even if our family members oppose our total commitment to God and the values of the kingdom still we will follow. Let us pray that we will have the power not only to sing this hymn with confidence but to live it so that we will produce lasting fruits for the Kingdom.

Prayer: Abba Father give us the power to rise beyond self interest, take up our cross and follow you. Amen.

Thursday 29th September

*Feast of Archangels Michael,
Gabriel & Raphael*

*He was given authority, honour and power...
that all people... would serve him.*

Daniel 7:14

Daniel 7:9–10,
13–14 or Revela-
tion 12:7–12b

Psalms 138:1–5

John 1:47–51

Rooted and anchored in Scripture and tradition is the truth that there exists spiritual, non-corporeal beings called 'angels'. St. Gregory taught that 'angel is the name of their office not of their nature'. Angels are pure spirits and messengers of God. They always behold the face of God and exist to do His will and obey His word. They are the servants of those of us who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14). There is a hierarchy within the angelic realm and today we celebrate the role in salvation history of the chief angels, the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.

The following extract from the Catechism of the Catholic Church casts further insight on another reality: 'The whole of human history has been the story of our combat with powers of evil, from the very dawn of history until the last day. Finding himself in the midst of a battlefield, man has to struggle to do what is right, and it is at a great cost to himself and aided by God's grace, that he succeeds in achieving his own inner integrity (para 409) Today's reading from the Book of Revelation, which forms part of the Bible's apocalyptic content, points to and alludes to this cosmic battle between good and evil.

Lord Jesus promises Nathanael a vision of Heaven and in that vision angels play as prominent role of worship and adoration of the Son of man. Throughout his life the Lord Jesus, the Word incarnate, the Son of God was surrounded by the angels who gave him adoration and service. The author of Hebrews gives us a wonderful insight into the angelic and mystical reality: and again when (God) brings the first born into the world, He says, "Let all God's angels worship Him." (1:6). Today the liturgy invites us to celebrate the feast and to join in this worship.

As we go through the inner journey by the power of the Holy Spirit every message preached invites us from the life of the flesh and the world to the life in the Spirit. From 'Come as you are' to be filled with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the only reason and focus of our existence is to give God praise, glory and adoration and to serve the Lord Jesus in every way just like angels.

Prayer: Abba Father, we ask for the grace today to revere and respect the unseen and invisible holy world. We seek the intersection of the archangels and thank God for their faithfulness to the divine will and plan. Amen

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made..'

(Psalm 139:13-14a)

Job 38:1, 12-21,
40:3-5

Psalm 139:1-3,
7-10, 13-14b

Luke 10:13-16

It is beautiful to begin our prayer time with psalms which help us to look at our Creator for who He is, His unfailing love and His faithfulness. The verse in psalm 139; 'For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb' exhilarates me as I reflect because it reminds me of my Heavenly Father's unfailing love for me and how much care and detail He went through as He put me in my mother's womb. When I realise that I'm not here by accident, that my life has a beautiful plan and a purpose in His mind, it takes away all my worries about what tomorrow will bring. What kind of stress free life is this when I know that every moment of my life is already ordained by Him and nothing that happens in my life is a surprise to Him. It gives me an assurance that He will not send me into anything where He does not have an answer for it.

When I read Job, I used to have a question why did God allow Job; a righteous and blameless man to face destruction which he did not deserve at all. We all go through difficulties and things we do not understand. It's easy to get discouraged and think, 'Why am I having these problems?' But the scripture says, 'Rain falls on the just and the unjust.' Because God is more interested in developing our character than changing our situation or solving our problems. Thus He sometimes allows things to break us. Most importantly we become teachable when we hit rock bottom; we have no where to look but to God. When I look at my life, I consider being broken is a greater blessing. It is in those times I learnt to completely depend on Him; listening to His voice where He grew me, matured me, revealed the secrets of His heart and brought me a place of stillness where I became unshakable to the things that happen around me. The beautiful thing is when I come out of that I'm never the same.

Today's Gospel proclamation tells about the three Jewish cities; Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum where Lord Jesus performed many of His miracles. In spite of the miracles, the people of these cities refused to believe in Him. Why? They were preoccupied with judging Him based on His background, His parents and so they failed to recognize His true identity. The Lord Jesus says in John 20:29 "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Prayer: *Abba Father, thank you for opening our inner eyes to see and believe in Your Son. It's only through Him we have a life with all its fullness.*

Nehemiah's Prayer

1. Remember who God is.

In a crisis the first thing we should do is remember who God is. During prayer when we get a verse about who the Lord we should keep it and build a storehouse of the word of God. Jesus said to Satan, 'for man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'. If we hold on to the words of God inside our hearts, we will become rich in the currency of the Kingdom of God and soon miracles will take place in our midst.

2. Remember to repent.

We often repent for others in anger and judgment. Nehemiah shows us that we must repent for our own sins and our own contribution to the problem or situation. When we bring a problem or situation before God with a broken and repented heart, then He will forgive us. Once we have honestly repented, immediately the Spirit world opens to us. This is when we become aware of the peace of God inside us.

3. Remember the promises of God. Hold on to these promises.

Nehemiah held on to an ancient promise given to Moses. God promised Moses that He would scatter those who were arrogant and disobedient to the ends of the earth, but if the people repented God would gather them from the ends of the earth and bring them back to the land which He had chosen for them. Nehemiah remembered this promise and held on to it. We too can learn from Nehemiah and hold on to a promise from God.

4. Remember to intercede.

If we intercede at the start of our prayer, we are interceding without hope, trust and faith. In the intercession we can hold on to His word and expect a leading from God. A leading is when we begin to have a sense of what to do. God will reveal a breakthrough. When we do 1% God does 99%. All this happens because we went through the process of fasting and prayer. Suddenly doors we thought will never open become open. A break that we never saw comes our way. Suddenly the whole situation has changed because God gives us a breakthrough.

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