"Go to the poor: you will find God."
— St. Vincent de Paul

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On Our Knees In His Hands

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Saturday 1st September  

21st Week in Ordinary Time

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us the wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

1 Corinthians 1:30

St. Paul in today’s first reading speaks of the most powerful truth which is in God’s grace. We are in Christ and have become the wisdom from God, who makes us holy and free.

St. Paul glories in the fact that the church was composed of the humblest and simplest of people. Christianity made ordinary men and women into sons and daughters of God. It told people even if they did not matter to others they mattered intensely to God. It told people who in the eyes of the world were worthless, that in the eyes of God they were worth the death of His only son. Christianity was and still is the most uplifting faith.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus relates the parable of the talents. The attention revolves around the useless servant. There is little doubt that he represents the Scribes and Pharisees and their attitude to the law of God. The useless servant buried his talents in the ground so that he could hand it back to his master that talents exactly as it was. The aim of the Scribes and Pharisees was to keep the Law exactly as it was. Any change or development was sacrilegious to them. This paralyzed the truth about the faith.

A Polish priest & professor in theology in Warsaw said it beautifully, “You must look at your faith differently - you must look at it with eyes of faith. Then you will see God’s endless giving of graces... You will come to realize that everything is grace. It seems that God granting difficult graces is forcing his gifts into your hands, but you resist and did not accept them. Yet difficult graces are the most valuable talents of your life.”

Does this seem familiar in our lives? We go against the plan of God and make our choices and then complain when we fail. Let us look at life differently and embrace the challenges we meet and accept them from the hands of God. We will then experience the tangible presence of the Lord. We will experience in Christ Jesus the wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray through the intercession of Mary our Mother who received the word of God in humility and love, that we may experience its power in our lives. Amen
A call to be agents of change

Why should Christians who have been set free be obedience to laws? It is a question that the Pharisees asked the Lord and the world around us can continue to set before us. This is caused by an incorrect understanding of freedom. Freedom has been given to us as a fruit of God’s love for us. He has given us freedom, but He wants the best for us, so He will not stand by and observe while we destroy ourselves. We have been given laws as boundaries to keep us safe. It is like a parent who puts a screen in order to block a door, so that a child will not crawl out into physical danger.

We are called to put into action what the Lord speaks to us. It is not enough to be simple listeners who do nothing. The image of the Dead Sea is a great analogy. The waters keep flowing into it, but since it has no outlet it becomes salty and deadly. As the Lord reveals his heart to us, we are invited to put it into action. The laws that have been prescribed are there for a purpose. It is essential that we understand or try to understand the meaning behind it. If not, we would become like animals under a whip. We will do all the external things according to the letter but be resentful and angry in our hearts. In the first reading the Lord says that His laws display the greatness of the Lord and of His people.

Often it is easy for us to come up with a checklist in terms of morality or other good deeds, and to think that as long as we tick the boxes, we are good disciples. Actually, it is the heart, the thoughts and intentions that are more important. I might fail in some way, but as long as I have the right intention the Lord will reward me for it. As Catholics we have a great treasury of symbols and rituals in our worship and daily lives. The readings today are an invitation for us to take a look at such actions and to find the Spirit behind it. The more we are grounded, the more our actions will bear fruit.

It is easier for any reform movement to change the externals than the internals. A country can change laws, an institution can do likewise, but if the people are not changed, if their thought patterns are not addressed, all efforts at reform will be futile. As the Lord leads us closer to His heart, this is His desire for us: to fall in love with Him increasingly and as we increase in love the actions will flow easily.
As Jesus says in the Gospel today, the state of our heart is revealed through our actions. Our lips could be praising God while our hearts might be judgmental. This kind of lip service is something which the Lord continues to detest. However if our lips utter praise when we are judged, humiliated or laughed at, it is an indication of the Lord’s work in our hearts.

It is important to “be” Christians before we “act” as Christians. Once I have encountered Christ my actions will display it more brightly.

The Second reading says that pure religion consists in caring. We could widen it to say that this kind of caring also includes caring for our own self. It is said that one of the few commandments that we observe perfectly as Christians is “Love your neighbor as yourself”. This means that when we irritated, annoyed, frustrated with our neighbor it is because that is how we treat ourselves. If I am a perfectionist who beats myself up for every little imperfection in my life, I will have no compassion for the failings of others. In contrast, if I am patient with myself I will be patient with others.

This is not an invitation to selfishness, but to self-care. As we take care of ourselves we will be better disposed to love and care for others especially for the weak and vulnerable people in our society. As we come before the Lord, in all our broken realities, let us hand them all to Him. He will then transform everything for His greater glory in the power of His Spirit.

Let us reflect on the state of our hearts today. We begin by observing the external actions. If we have been able to abide by God’s laws let us be thankful. Because it is only the Lord who can empower us to do good. For the times that we have failed in keeping His commandments let us ask for forgiveness and seek reconciliation with our brothers and sisters. Next, let us look at the thoughts that went behind these actions. Did we do them out of fear? Or a sense of obligation? Or were we inspired by God’s love and our hearts were moved in order to please Him? Let us surrender it and beg the Lord to purify our intentions so that in all we do His glory will shine. And when we fail, the Lord will forgive us and encourage us to go beyond the externals and to seek Him from the depths of our hearts.

May the spoken words of my mouth, the deeds of my life and the thoughts of my heart, find favor in your sight O Lord.

Prayer: Abba Father, may the spoken words of my mouth, the deeds of my life and the thoughts of my heart, find favour in your sight. Amen
Monday 3rd September  

“St. Gregory the Great, pope and doctor”

“The Spirit of the Lord has has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor.” Luke 4:18

In today’s Gospel proclamation we see the ancient prophesy given to prophet Isaiah which has been fulfilled through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus comes to the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day. Within Him is an awakened Spirit and His divine sonship as the Fathers promise at the river Jordan echo’s in his heart “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mk 1:11 NIV). As He reads from Prophet Isaiah and speaks to them about the Father’s promise being fulfilled before their very eyes, “This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen” (LK 4:21). Though they were astonished at His words they never saw the Lord Jesus as the Messiah but only as Joseph the carpenter’s son. When the Lord reminded them of the Old Testament and how the Prophet Elijah and Elisha were sent to the pagan nations they were enraged and wanted to hustle Him out of the town.

Let us open our inner eyes and see how this promise has been fulfilled in our lives. As the Lord comes to live in our hearts through the Eucharist, He shares his divinity with our broken humanity, gives his Body and Blood to be the food for our earthly journey and baptises us with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Are we the people of Nazareth holding on to our rituals, astonished at his words but holding onto our own truths and trying to hustle Him out? Or can we truly believe, claim and live the promise “The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me” and thank and praise Him for His Spirit living inside of us and carry the same Spirit that brings the Good News of salvation, freedom, new sight to the world we live in? As St. Paul says in today’s first reading “your faith should not depend on human philosophy but on the power of God” (1Cor2:5).

Today let us live a life in obedience to Him and filled with the Holy Spirit. Instead of pushing Him out of our lives, let us make room for Him in our busy day by sitting at His feet and hear His words. When we do this every day, one day the Father will speak the same words He spoke to the Lord Jesus at His baptism to us – “You are my Son/daughter, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for baptising us in the baptism of your Holy Spirit and anointing us and giving us the grace live in your power all days of our lives. Amen.
Tuesday 4th September  

22nd Week in Ordinary Time

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

1 Corinthians 2:10

The first reading speaks to us about the Spirit of God revealing the secrets of God to those who are filled with His Spirit.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, God is able to reveal the plan He has for us and is also able to show us the deep secrets of His heart. However, receiving the secrets of God also means accepting great responsibility. A CEO will not give a trainee the responsibility of heading a major project. Similarly, unless we sit at the feet of the Lord on a daily basis, read His word and apply it to our lives, it will be difficult to become mature Christians in the eyes of the Lord.

Consistency in prayer is the key to attaining a holy life. This consistency in prayer is the easiest thing to do and the hardest. It is easy because if we wake one hour early we have an extra hour in our day for God. The hardest part is when the alarm rings a voice within says, “I will sleep today and from tomorrow I will wake up early and pray”.

Waking up daily and participating in the Mass and then spending time in prayer was the hardest thing for me. I used to keep 3 alarms and still say to myself “Tomorrow” and go back to sleep. But one day after trying for more than two years, I prayed to God to give me the grace and I challenged myself and woke up while the others were asleep. After attending mass, while praying I would fall asleep on the church bench. But I still made it a point to go to church.

One day I asked myself, “Is it worth it, me falling asleep at church?” Then I came across a book written by a great woman of God. She says that her husband used to be a very lazy man and inefficient. One day he decided to wake up before sunrise and prayed, but fell asleep on the chair. But as he continued to make that commitment to God even though he fell asleep while praying, God changed his life dramatically that he became active and efficient in what he did.

The one who truly seeks the Lord will find Him and in that personal relationship they will radiate the divine life and freedom that it brings.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to create time by waking up and having that personal time with you before starting each day. Amen.
The first reading today demarcates the levels of one’s journey in the spirit. Most of us have encountered and will encounter the Lord through a crisis or in a state of sinfulness. Then our whole perception towards life changes and we start to see things in a new way. Eventually we experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is exciting when we experience these gifts because we become aware that God Almighty speaks to us. At this point we become self-conscious. Then our focus which was on God and His goodness shifts to ourselves and slowly our fleshly desires come out. That’s when we start to be judges and critics.

The Church of Corinth may have been in this state when St. Paul wrote this letter to them. What has been started in the Spirit has quietly moved to the flesh. St. Paul’s advice to the Corinthians at that time is appropriate to us today because we too experience the same Lord and are given gifts by the same Holy Spirit. Most importantly we need to be aware of our selfish qualities which divide us.

We see this division in the Church and in other communities. Division starts with jealousy and strife. If one person is used mightily by God then others find it difficult to accept. St. Paul says that we should not be like that. Everyone is chosen by God to do a mission.

The Gospel proclamation reveals the power of the Lord Jesus. The mission of our Lord Jesus had come to a flourishing moment. The Lord cannot be limited to one place alone any longer. The interesting part is that the demons identified the power in the Lord and His true identity, while some accepted Him because of the miracles He performed.

Our call is to share the love and the power of the Lord among fellow human beings. People are chosen to be catalysts of God’s love and power. This is what the Saints did over the years and what the chosen people of God are doing today. Hence we should not divide because God works through people?

Prayer: Abba Father, may your grace and mercy make me aware when I create rivalry amongst your chosen people. Shower down your compassion on me to forgive those who envy me when you work through me. Amen.
For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness.” 1 Corinthians 3:19

In today’s first reading St. Paul warned the Corinthians not to trust in men; now he warns them not to glory in men (v. 18-23). Why must we glory in people when, in Christ, we have all things? All that we have comes from God, whether it be gifted men and women, the blessings of life, or things yet to come. And, if these blessings come directly from God, we should give the glory to God and not to people. I give God praise for all the people in my life who He has used to draw me closer to God. But the glory does not go to them, since the work they did was done by God’s power and wisdom. In God’s hands, any person can be used to help me grow because God is the only source for true transformation.

In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus is teaching God’s word, but Peter is working at his fishing business. The Lord’s words in verse 10 are the key for understand and apply this story: “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” The word ‘catch’ literally means “to capture alive”. Although in their vocation, the fish they caught would die, in their new focus, spiritually dead men would be caught and come alive for the Lord Jesus. The story shows us how the Lord Jesus transforms everyday people - even sinful people like us - into his servants, involved in his great cause of catching people for God. It teaches us the greatest purpose we can have in life is to follow the Lord in catching souls for him.

Think for a moment, “Are we living for the Lord’s purpose for your life?” It means that at the end of our lives, we will not measure success by whether we have accumulated a lot of money or by how high we have climbed on the corporate ladder. We will measure our lives by whether we have faithfully used what God has entrusted to us to further His kingdom. Whether directly through our verbal witness or indirectly through our example, our giving, our good works, our service, there will be people in heaven because we did not live for ourselves, but for Jesus Christ and His kingdom. We have to make this fundamental shift in focus if we want to be used in catching people for Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me diligently follow You as I lead others, and let me get my self-worth and encouragement from You rather than others. Amen.
Friday 7th September 22nd Week in Ordinary Time

“The Lord Jesus is speaking about the old and the new in today’s Gospel proclamation. The Pharisees were the ultimate religious people among the Jews during His life on earth. They had devised an intricate system of oral tradition to keep them from breaking the Law of Moses. To the Pharisees, external obedience was all that mattered.

For our Lord Jesus, God looks at the heart. That is why, for example, the Lord would equate the lustful look, which shows the desire of the heart, with the committing of adultery (Matt. 5:27–28). So, the Lord went ahead and healed people and picked food on the Sabbath, associated with those that were thought to be unclean and called the Pharisees hypocrites in public for their religious practices. This was because, to Him, these external observances meant nothing if one’s heart was far from God.

The Pharisees could not stomach the Lord and His “new” ways because they were so stuck in their “old” ways of doing things. The Pharisees’ old wineskins were bursting from the new wine the Lord was pouring out. Are we like this? Sometimes we are comfortable with the way we have been doing things, that when something “new” comes along threatening to change our status quo, we are offended.

The Pharisees were resisting the change the Lord was bringing about for three reasons. 1) They were living in the past; 2) They were comfortable in the present and 3) They were fearful of the changes the new way would make to the future. This is still the case in the context of the present day Church. We see a clash between the old and the new. The fight to hold on to the old way of doing things and the resistance to anything new that seems to jeopardize the old.

Today, the Lord is telling us that He is waiting to do a “new” thing in our own lives and within the Church. It is a renewed and transformed mind that has the capacity to welcome and embrace the entirety of the Gospel of the Lord and thereby experience the new life that He is calling us to live. Let us ask the Lord to bring about His change, and make us into “new wineskins” that can fully contain His “new wine”.

Prayer: Abba Father, transform our minds that we may be able to experience the new wine you are pouring forth. Amen.
Today we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mother Mary was instrumental in the salvific plan of God, and thus she was brought into the world.

The readings of today reflect beautifully on the life of Mother Mary, as the first reading in Romans 8 says that all things work for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose - and that is what happened in her life. What seemed like a terrible tragedy worked for her good because her son, God Almighty, was risen and glorified over all.

Mother Mary truly loved the Lord and that is why she was blessed amongst women to carry God Himself in her womb. As we ponder on the life of our Blessed Mother, it is important to note her reactions to situations.

The Blessed Mother was made aware at the time of the Lord’s presentation in the temple that a sword would pierce her own heart. However, she did not know when the attack would come. Was it when he disappeared into the desert for forty days? Was it when he was ridiculed by the Pharisees? Was it when he was challenged and mocked by the leaders of the temple?

Mother Mary held these instances close to her heart and pondered on them all, knowing that her spirit had to continue rejoicing in God her Saviour - just as it had done when she received the news that she was to be the Mother of God.

As it was said in a preaching I heard recently: “So God, a spiritual being, took on a body. For that miracle to happen He needed a woman and that is our Blessed Mother. Heaven and earth met in her womb, and she had the soil of holiness for the seed of heaven to take root.”

The Blessed Mother is the epitome of holiness and we are blessed to have one of the greatest intercessors for our own lives - the Holy Mother of God, pleading all our cases to the Lord, her Son.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us believe that all things will one day work for our good because we love you and are called for your purpose. Amen.
In today’s First Reading, prophet Isaiah conveys to us the heart of God. We are encouraged by the words of assurance as he says, “your God will come… with divine retribution He will come to save you.” (Isaiah 35:4). We could be Catholic for generations, but at this present moment, we might be going through a stage in life when our hands feel feeble, our knees give way and our hearts are gripped with fear, facing a situation with no solution. God is speaking to us today, that He is the God of the impossible, making the blind see and the deaf hear. He will make streams in the desert. Are we open to receiving this miracle today?

Throughout scripture, there is a truth that runs like a golden thread: Our God has a special affinity for the weak, lost and broken people. In Jewish society at the time of the Lord Jesus, physical handicap was equal to being cursed by God. They were pitied but were totally excluded from human interaction. They belonged nowhere, they had no worth. Yet the Lord, who had the heart of the Father, never lost an opportunity to bring health and new life back to them. Today’s Gospel proclamation reveals such an instance where the Lord opens the ears and loosens the tongue of a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. The Scripture says that Lord Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed deeply before He spoke the word “Ephphata” which meant, “Be opened”! (Mark 7: 34). I often wondered why He sighed. As I realise today, the deep sigh of our Lord must have originated in His depths, thirsting for the restoration of the life initially planned by The Creator.

Each time He was faced with a sick, broken individual He would have realized all the more, the necessity for the ultimate sacrifice He was expected to make with His own life. The Lord would have looked at the deaf and mute man, and seen a beloved child of The Father, who was created to live a free life, but was actually living a life of bondage.

He knew that the Father desired this man to be restored. Thus, out came the words, empowered by Father’s will, Ephphata! (Be opened!), and the closed ears had to open, the tied tongue had to be loosened! It didn’t matter if the man was disabled since birth, with no cure for him as per the medical advice. The law of this world had to submit to the command from heaven.
Isn’t this good news to us too? Today, we receive a new confidence and hope, as we are called to come to the One who can do the impossible. It does not matter to Him that our problems are chronic and longstanding, or the fact that we are powerless to help ourselves in our bondage to sin and addictions. What is needed, is to come to Him, to be touched. If we are unable to do even that, let us ask those around us to take us to the Healer.

This is the power of Intercessory prayer. In today’s Gospel proclamation, the man who needed healing did not come to the Lord on his own accord, but was brought by others. Therefore, when we are aware of anyone’s need for physical, emotional or spiritual healing, we too have a duty and a responsibility to bring them to the Lord in prayer, and also through whatever means available to us. Otherwise we might face an embarrassing situation on the Day of Judgment, when Christ the King, tells us, “For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat…. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.” (Matthew 25:43)

The Second Reading challenges us to test our own behaviour. Do we have favourites among our children, or our siblings because they are smarter or richer than others? Do we tend to favour the more affluent neighbours, colleagues, members of our prayer groups or parish communities? St James says, “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom He promised to those who love Him?” In the world we live, we might be laughed at when we act according to this advice, but we do not live just for this world does, but for eternity. How we live in this world certainly decides where and how we will live in eternity!

Let us review our realities today. How real is God in our lives? Is He more real than the ground we stand on, and the air we breathe? Can we see and hear Him in every word in the Bible? As our Lord Jesus said in John 14:16, He has sent the promised Holy Spirit to live with us and in us forever. Do miracles happen today? Yes of course, all the Lord Jesus did and much more continues to happen today and we witness these healings where blind see, deaf hear, people are delivered from sin, and lives are transformed miraculously. As we trust every promise of God given in the Bible, we will be changed from defeated, enslaved people to victorious children of the King of the Universe. This is what the Lord Jesus won for us on the cross, and it is about time we start living it.

Prayer: Abba Father, You come running down my prodigal road, with a ring and a robe. I collide with Your Grace, as it comes crashing onto me and I fall into Your Arms, that won’t let me go. Amen.
Monday 10th September  

23rd Week in Ordinary Time

Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favour as with a shield.  

Psalm 5: 12

How do we identify our sins? Is it through our own understanding or by the things we learnt as kids? The light that can show all our sins is only the Word of God. We need to sit at the feet of the Lord so that Jesus can guide us to identify all the sins we commit knowingly and unknowingly.

As I prepared myself for confessions in a retreat few days back, I had identified three sins that I need to confess. I looked at myself as a very righteous person but as I sat in front of the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus started showing me my sins, what I have been justifying for years and months and also the sins I have not surrendered to God - not confessed completely but sugered it up to the priest. The Lord guided me to write down all my sins and I ended up writing six pages of sins. I was amazed at how these things were inside me and was hesitant to go and say all these to the priest but as I surrendered to the will of the Father, He gave me the strength to confess completely, concretely and concisely.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us, He will reveal the Fathers will to us and work in and through us and lead us to it. All we need to do is to surrender ourselves. If we do not choose to come back to the Lord, we too will be like the man in the first reading, proud in his own sins. Are we too proud about our sins today? Do we spend months and years justifying a situation because we are not strong enough to let go the control from our hands? This will only keep us away from the healing hand of our Lord.

We are too engrossed in this world that we see the wrong done to us. But let us be aware to the bigger picture today. It is the darkness that rules this world and the principalities that’s against us, which tries it’s best to shift our gaze that is on the Lord. Let us be firm and hold our ground today. “In all circumstances hold faith as a shield, to quench all flaming arrows of the evil one and take the helmet of Salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the WORD OF GOD”. Eph 6:16-17. Forgiveness is a characteristic of God. Therefore, as sons and daughters of the Almighty Father, let us forgive. We all know it is not easier said than done. But we have a living God who always lives in us and is willing to help us today.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the strength to be a little more like you today. Lord, let your light shine upon me today as I come to your feet today. Amen.
When we are wronged or cheated of what is rightfully ours, our response is to resort to legal aid. We are advised by the world to take this route when solving such issues. In some instances we have to respond in this way and in other cases we are advised to try and solve the problem without resorting to the law.

But the entire discourse of St. Paul is not about court cases or only living immorally, it is about whether we are living in the grace and love of God. When we live carrying the presence of God, we automatically become peace makers and choose to live in purity and holiness.

I was blessed to spend time with a priest who before every service and mass spends time inviting the anointing of God over his work. Before the retreat starts for the day, he spends time in the sacristy waiting for the Lord to send him out to join the praise and worship. He waits on the Lord for the move of the Spirit until he feels the presence of the Lord leading him.

This was the life that the Lord Jesus led as he ministered to the countless people who came to Him in desperation. It is said in the Gospel proclamation that He spend the whole night in prayer talking to the Father. Most often he went to the hills to pray and when daybreak came He would emerge to make important decisions like the choosing of his twelve apostles.

Not only did He have the wisdom of God, but He was also carrying the presence of God and the power of God. The Gospel tells us that power was going out of Him as people touched Him and ventured close to Him.

We are invited to live such lives. How do we carry the power, presence and glory of God. It can only arise from our intimacy with God. When we spend time with the Lord, we are charged with the Holy Spirit and the authority of God becomes ours. As we wish and pray for the power of God to unfold, our words are filled with power and the authority to speak to the powers of nature become real. Let the word of God teach us to live like the Lord Jesus and love like Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, your dream for us is to live in peace and love as you loved your Son. We pray for the grace of such intimacy and responses. Amen.
Wednesday 12th September

Holy Name of Mary

“Fortunate you who weep now for you will laugh”

Luke 6:21

Tears! For 35 years my best friend was my tears. My every hope, every plan and every desire ended up in tears. When all hope and desire crumbled down it all became an unbearable burden to me. Financial crunch, endless family issues, burdens of the children and relationship struggles all fell onto my shoulders. I ran from one place to another looking for solutions and begging for answers and financial help from people. But all those answers became a temporary solution. Nothing or no one could relieve me from the burdens I carried. When I was defeated from these burdens of life, the only consolation I had were my own tears.

With tear-filled eyes I fell at the feet of the Lord and Mother Mary. I begged them to change the hearts of those who were causing me pain. I begged for financial breakthrough and blessings. I begged for ways to become successful. I believed once the Lord gave me all I was asking for I would be free of my burdens and on that day I would smile with great joy.

In the first reading today, St. Paul says, “The order of this world is vanishing.” I begged for answers to my problems from this world. I did not receive any answer. In Matthew 11:28 it says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” I asked the Lord Jesus for relief but I did not give my burdens to Him. I kept all my burdens in my hand and went begging for answers. Day by day, the smile left me. I felt that God could not help me and I lost faith in God.

In April 2005, I attended a prayer meeting conducted by Lalith Thatha at St. Peter’s College. I came there yet again looking for answers. But on that day, the love of the living Lord Jesus spoke to me through a word of knowledge. “Give me the burdens of your life. I will make you a blessing.” That spoken word felt like a burning fire inside my heart. I surrendered all my burdens into His hands and I experienced an immense peace and a lightness of heart.

I who was weeping once became fortunate that day because of the living Lord. Today I am an heir to what St. Paul preached: “Fortunate are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to believe that the answer to every burden of our life is only You. Amen.
Thursday 13th September

St. John Chrysostom, bishop and doctor

Don’t give away your joy

How we treat other people can have a great impact on the degree of favour of God we are experiencing. Are we good to people? Are we kind? We must remember we cannot be rude and inconsiderate and expect to live in victory for God to bless us.

Today’s Gospel proclamation says love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who treat you badly. Through these words God is asking us to share His mercy and goodness with people. We are called to be kind to people even when they do not deserve it.

Anybody can return evil for evil, but God wants His people to help and heal wounded hearts. If someone is not treating us right today, we need to go out of our way to be kinder than usual to those people. The word of God says “It’s the goodness of God that leads people to repentance”, if you will be good and kind, before long God’s goodness expressed through you will overcome that evil.

If anybody had a right to return evil instead of love, it was Joseph with the coat of many colours. His brothers threw him into a pit and were going to kill him, but out of the kindness of their hearts they decided instead to sell him into slavery. Years went by, and Joseph experienced all sorts of troubles. But Joseph kept a good attitude, and God continued to bless him. God promoted him to the second highest position in Egypt. Joseph was in charge of the food supply when a famine struck the land, and his brothers traveled to Egypt to buy some food for their families. At first they did not recognize Joseph until Joseph told them he was their brother, who they threw into the pit and sold into slavery.

Can you imagine the thoughts that may have passed through the brothers’ minds? This was Joseph’s opportunity to pay back his brothers for the years of pain and suffering they had caused him. But Joseph said, “Don’t be afraid, I am not going to harm you, I am going to do good to you.” It’s no wonder God’s hand of favour was on him in such a strong way, for Joseph knew how to be merciful and how to treat people right.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me hold on to my joy as your word says love doesn’t hold a grudge, love doesn’t harbour unforgiveness. Amen.
According to a World Health Organization study in 2016, the life expectancy of a person is confirmed to be 72 years. Even if we add another few years, an average person will live on earth only for about 80 years. Death is certain to all creatures of the earth. Many of us have already completed more than half of our life expectancy here on earth. Therefore, today’s readings are the perfect reminder that we need to take a deep look within ourselves.

In our life time we will be called to carry many crosses for the glory of God. How many of us have truly understood our true calling? Our calling may not be to travel far and wide and preach the gospel and save souls in thousands but simple saying yes to the will of God in our daily sacrifices for the love of God. In other words, dying to one’s self.

I once came upon a beautiful poem on dying to self, where the author was unknown and I understood the beauty of our calling through this poem. I realized that this was a way of life for many of our forefathers who are saints today. This is what the poet unknown wrote:

When you are forgotten or neglected and you don’t hurt with the insult, but your heart is happy—that is dying to self.
When your advice is disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart, and take it all in patient, loving silence—that is dying to self.
When you lovingly and patiently bear disorder, irregularity, tardiness, and annoyance…and endure it as Jesus endured it—that is dying to self.
When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or record your own good works, or itch for praise after an accomplishment, when you can truly love to be unknown…that is dying to self.
When you can see your brother or sister prosper and can honestly rejoice with him, and feel no envy even though your needs are greater—that is dying to self.
When you are content with any food, any offering, any raiment, any climate, or any society—that is dying to self.
When you can take correction, when you can humbly submit inwardly as well as outwardly, with no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart—that is dying to self.

What relevance does dying to self have on all the reading of today. Today we celebrate the great feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This
is the epitome of Christianity. It is not abstinence from immorality – but an immovable, uncompromising and incomparable devotion to Christ.

What does it truly mean to be devoted to Christ? This is what the scriptures today teaches us. In the first reading we come across the wilderness experience of the chosen people and the attitude of complaint of them. There was no dying to self. Because of their unteachable spirit God had to teach them through severe trials. But prophet Moses mediated for the people and God commanded that a fiery bronze serpent be erected so that anyone who looked toward the bronze serpent shall not die but live. The people of Israel only had to look ‘toward’ the erected serpent and God took his wrath off them. It was the humbling of heart to decide to look at what was going to save your life and God’s mercy was poured out on them.

It was this same mercy of God that is unfathomable that sent His only begotten Son as a living sacrifice to this earth to give all mankind life eternal. The Gospel proclamation today sums up the reason why we need to devote ourselves to Lord Jesus Christ and make it our daily habit to look toward the Lord in everything we do. It is in order that we shall go beyond this earthly life of mere seventy to eighty years and look forward to eternal life with God.

In the old Testament, prophet Moses was the mediator for the salvation of the people of Israel from slavery and their hard and complaining hearts as they journeyed through the wilderness. On God’s command, he erected the bronze serpent that whoever turned towards the erected serpent was saved. In the new Testament it is God’s only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate mediator for He died to Himself on a cross erected to hang Him in the most cruel manner. The Lord Jesus gave His life on the cross to give us eternal life.

Therefore, there are two ways that we can gaze at the cross that the Lord Jesus hung on to save us. One is our prayer life. We should take our daily life into His hands through our prayer connection. The other is to realise that in this world we will always have trials and temptations and each time we come across a trial that seems to heavy for us carry, just look to the cross. As Catholic faithful we are been blessed with the living Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Let us sit before the Blessed Sacrament which will pour out graces that we need to face any grave situation so that we may not despair and die but live a joyful life on this earth and enjoy life eternal one day.

Prayer: Abba Father, you know how weak we are and how trials bring us down. Give us the grace to look to you in hope and when a storm hits our life. Amen!
Saturday 15th September  

Our Lady of Sorrows

“Near the cross of Jesus there stood his Mother”

Heb 5:7-9 or 1 Cor 10:14-22
Ps 30:2-6, 15-16, 20
Jn 19:25-27 or Lk 2:33-35 or Lk 6:43-49

John 19:5

September, is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, and following the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross commemorating the passion of Christ, the church marks the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. This feast is dedicated to the spiritual martyrdom of Mary, mother of God and her compassion with the suffering of her divine son, Jesus. Both Jesus and Mary went through the passion and carried the cross in their own ways that is why the church felt the need to give the title, Co-redemptrix to our Blessed Mother because of her intimate association with the suffering and passion of Jesus Christ our Lord.

In our present time and culture many of the Christian denominations are preaching the prosperity Gospel and leading people to believe that as a Christian they are not required to suffer because the Lord Jesus paid the price at the cross of Calvary, so financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them. Prosperity theology views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity.

When I reflect in my own life, I have found it difficult to accept pain and suffering and like most of us I have questioned God wondering where he was in my suffering, why He allowed the suffering in my life when he had it in his power to remove it from my life. For a long time I had a bitter anger and vengeful relationship with Jesus even though I was a professing Catholic attending Sunday mass and a weekly prayer meeting.

When I reflect on today’s first reading the Lord submitted humbly to God who saved him out of death, likewise Mary also submitted humbly to God and stood at the foot of the cross of Jesus and identified with the suffering of her son. We see in the life of the Lord Jesus and Mary a complete abandonment to the will of the Father, because they trusted God and clung to the Father as they knew the heart of the Father, even though they did not understand in their human nature why they had to go the agony and sorrow of the cross. They set an example for us to handle our own suffering and to completely trust in God even when we cannot understand suffering and sorrow in our lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, I ask you to bring this conviction to my heart like Mother Mary and our Lord Jesus to trust you completely. Amen
The book of Isaiah contains four servant songs, which describe the characteristics God desires of a person who acts as His partner, carrying out His work among the people. In today’s first reading we are introduced to a part of the fourth song.

The first thing I notice is that God has opened the ears of His servant. He has started to hear the voice of God. Despite hearing the voice of God, it looks like the servant’s troubles have not disappeared. The people he Lord has sent treat the servant terribly. However, because he hears the voice of God, he reacts differently. He does not engage in reactions nor does he act in bitterness. Instead, he willingly allows his tormentors to do their bidding. His troubles are miracle opportunities that manifest the power of hearing the voice of the Lord.

Often our tormentors are the ones we live with - our family, members of the community, our colleagues and so on. I typically react in two different ways, depending on who my tormentor is. If my tormentor is someone who has power and authority over me, I eat humble pie and let them have their way, but I harbour bitterness in my heart. If I have authority over my tormentor, or if my tormentor is my equal, I try to advise the person and try to get them to change their ways. Today, the Lord challenges me to accept my troubles from His hands - not to listen to my sense of entitlement, but to listen to His voice.

What did the suffering servant of the Lord hear? “The Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced.” The first word he heard is that God is sovereign. Sovereign means that He has authority and power over all people and all circumstances. To me, this includes people who have authority and power over me, and circumstances that I have no control over. I learn that no one can defeat God; He will always have His way, no matter how difficult the circumstances are.

The second reading tells us that what we believe is reflected in the things we do. This is what seems to have happened to the servant of the Lord. He hears that the Sovereign Lord is helping him and is not going to let him down. Thus, he does not need to take matters into his own hands. If his tormentors seem to have an upper hand, it is not because God is not helping him, or God is powerless but because God is doing something special through His tormentors.
In today’s Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus asks his disciples about who the people think He is. “The people” are those who had heard Him preach and had seen and received miracles, but did not know him personally. He then asks His disciples “who do YOU think I am?” He is expecting those who have a personal relationship with Him to have a different perspective. In the corresponding section in the Gospel of Matthew, on hearing Peter’s reply, the Lord proclaims, “This was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven”. The key to hearing the voice of the Lord seems to be a personal relationship with the Lord.

After this, the Lord starts painting a grim picture about the future. However, in Peter’s mind, such unfortunate things should never happen to someone who enjoys the favour of God. Peter was listening to the voice of logic and reason. Our Lord Jesus addresses Peter as Satan, as one who is opposed to the work of God, as one who destroys the work of God.

In late 2009, the Church hierarchy issued a circular relating to Various Movements and Services in the Church. Many who read it assumed that the Community of the Risen Lord (CRL) would faced hardships. At a certain parish in the suburbs of Colombo, a CRL meeting was interrupted while in progress, and permission to hold future meetings was withdrawn. Lalith Thaththa was very disturbed. He returned home and sat down to pray. He prayed the four steps. It was not easy to pray and often he got sucked into thinking about the problem and anxiousness would overwhelm him. Each such time he would go back to “Come as you are” and “Give the truth of your heart”. About 4 hours into the struggle, a thought dropped into his head. “I have not stepped down from the throne as yet”. It was the Lord comforting him in his hour of struggle and assuring him that He was still in control.

We firmly believe that when we do the work of God that we will not face hardships and blocks, But the reality is that sometimes we will have to face misunderstanding and pain. Sometimes we are the cause, in other instances it could be the Lord allowing us to face such ordeals and in certain areas we could be fighting the powers of darkness and oppression. We must pray for the wisdom to give the right responses and discern what we are fighting against and be humble enough to accept the leading of the Lord in every area of our ministry

Prayer: Abba Father, you opened the ears of the suffering servant. Open my ears that I may carry out your work in the world. Amen.
Monday 17th September  

“Proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes again”

St. Robert Bellarmine, bishop and doctor

1 Cor 11: 26

In his letter to the Corinthians, St Paul urges them to proclaim the death of the Lord Jesus until He comes again. This was the crux of the message of the Apostles. This was the message shared by the early church and it saw the church expand exponentially despite the persecutions and hardships it faced daily. But what does this really mean? I’ve always believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through my intellect. But it is only in the recent months that the Lord Jesus has given me the grace to try and understand this in my heart, to believe in it with every fibre of my being. This is something I am still in the process of understanding, something that I am letting wash over me until it gets absorbed into the very essence of who I am.

When Jesus walked to Golgotha carrying that heavy cross, He did not just carry some unknown person’s sins. It was not just an abstract concept or idea. He physically carried every bit of my brokenness, my tiredness, my pain, my inability to believe and my selfishness. When He died on the cross, He put to death those struggles. When He rose from the dead, He conquered them. And through His death and resurrection, I am now free.

So when I feel frustrated about my sickness that is not yet healed, when my heart whispers that maybe I deserve this punishment, when my mind justifies my ongoing sinfulness, I will proclaim the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus over myself.

To my pain, I proclaim that the Lord Jesus has conquered it through His death. When I am unable to love with my own strength, I proclaim over that relationship that Jesus Christ died for me and rose again conquering my selfishness. Over and again, I am asked to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ until it becomes woven into the fabric of my being. Until I live resurrected. In the Gospel proclamation we are told that the Lord Jesus was amazed at the faith of the Centurion. Can you imagine the face of God lighting up with a smile because here was a child who dared to believe in His Word? What a wonderful thought – to delight God by our faith!

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to proclaim your death and resurrection over my life, in a real way today. Amen
Tuesday 18th September  

24th Week in Ordinary Time

The only way you can serve God is by serving the other

In today’s first reading St. Paul reminds us that we are a part of Christ’s body. He uses this analogy in his writings since the church of Corinth faced many internal conflicts. The fascinating fact of this reading is that each Christian has a role to play in the body of Christ for the plan of God to be fulfilled. He says, “In the Church God appointed first of all apostles, second Prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, those who have the gift of healing, gift of administration and those speaking in other tongues.”

Most of us assume that it is more than enough to attend Sunday Mass and may be attend a prayer service. We are called to do something more. God created us and planted a master plan in our hearts before sending us to this world. This can only reach its goal when we play our role in the body of Christ. In other words it is only when we serve God that He is able to unleash His grace on us to accomplish His plan in our lives. St. Paul reminds us that not everyone is called to preach or perform miracles but there are other equal roles which God has called us to perform such as administration work in the church, cleaning, organising spiritual programs and much more.

Most of us are used to receiving from God and we have no idea how to give back to Him through our service. If God has created us for a great purpose, the moment we die and stand in the presence of God, He will look at us and then peep behind us to count how many souls we were able to bring to Him during our lifetime. When He designed His plan for our life God might have put a particular number of people that we need to bring to Him by our actions.

A soul can be saved from entering hell by a small act of love. If we arrange chairs at a prayer service and a sinner comes and sits on one of those we become a part of their conversion. If we were busy with work and did not play the role we were supposed to play by God, another person would have surely arranged the chairs and the visitor to the meeting might have had to stand and would have stayed a shorter time at the meeting and left. The opportunity for him to enter Heaven would have been lost since we did not play our part.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to be obedient to your word and submit to the plan you have for us by serving in your Kingdom. Amen.
The first proclamation mentioned the essence of Christianity. The noun “Christians” was first said in Antioch. Prior to this the followers of Christ Jesus were called ‘people of the “way”’. Therefore “Christian” shouldn’t be a noun but a verb; because a person becomes a “Christian” because of their love for Christ and fellow humans. Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity as a legitimate religion and “Christianity” became “Catholic”, which means universal; because Christianity became the universal religion.

According to St. Paul, the greatest spiritual gift is love. If anyone claims that they have Christ Jesus in them, that person has love in their life. That is why claiming to be a Christian is not a noun but a verb. The essence of Christianity is love.

Surely we need the gifts and the charisms of the Holy Spirit to minister to the world. But if we do not have love we will not be able to bring people to Christ Jesus but rather draw people away from Him. We should look into our hearts and try to identify who we really are. If Christ Jesus could accept and love me, can I give excuses to God not to accept and love others?

In the Gospel proclamation the Lord explained our inner struggle. Two groups of children proposed two different types of entertainments but none was accepted. John the Baptist who lived in solitude and Lord Jesus who chose to be amongst people were judged. Both John and Lord Jesus are children of wisdom. The foolishness of this world cannot recognize and accept these differences. The pride of humanity, which flowed from the first parents, blindfolded the people not to see and recognize the Messiah.

We too could be victims of this blindness. We could fail to recognize Christ in others. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them”. The symbol of love is the Cross. St. Januarius, Bishop and martyr loved Christ and his fellow Christians and was brutally killed during the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian in 305. We commemorate this great Saint today who embraced the Cross of love.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to embrace the Cross as true symbol of love rather than jewelry. Amen.
In today’s first reading we see how St. Paul was doing his mission in carrying the Good News to the world. He himself acknowledges that he does not deserve to be called an apostle because he persecuted Christians when he was Saul. Yet, a divine encounter with the living Lord changed everything. It changed his identity, personality and his entire life where he was called to preach the Good News. St. Paul would have never thought about such a transformation as this. Most of us would have felt the same. Our lives are changed because of Him. We too are not worthy to be loved by Him. Yet, He loves us anyway. Out of this unconditional love, He gave Himself up for us. But what we have to do now is to believe in this love, believe in His word. That is where our salvation comes, and we find the purpose of our existence.

The same theme is reflected in today’s Gospel proclamation. The Lord Jesus visited a Pharisee’s house to have a meal. While he was seated, he saw a woman who was caught up in sin kneeling at His feet. Others murmured as how she could touch him because she was a sinner, isolated and rejected. Yet, she kept on coming towards the Lord. She would have known the love of men, she would have known the touch of men because she spent her life in that way. Yet, when she saw the Lord Jesus, she saw something that she never saw in her life before. It was the love that does not expect anything in return but it simply gives everything. It was a consuming love. Just one look of the Lord Jesus consumed all her sins and made her clean. She found her salvation at his feet.

She made the choice to go to the feet of the Lord. Maybe some of us are still struggling with our addictions, bondages and sinful nature thinking how we can get close to the Lord. But do not get into that self-pity. The Lord Jesus is inviting us, ‘Come as you are.’ Of course, He knows our weaknesses, He knows our sinfulness. Yet, still He invites us to come to Him. Do not wait for the perfect time to come. This is the moment the Lord is longing to show His love to us. Just run to Him and experience His unconditional love. Our lives will be changed forever.

Prayer: Abba Father, I come to you as I am. I want You to cleanse me and make me whole. Lord, I want to experience Your love in my life so that may I live for the purpose You have destined for me. Amen!
Prayer: Abba Father, I come to you today and I want to follow you. You are the light for my path and may your light shine upon me. Amen.
The theme that flows through the first reading and the Gospel proclamation of today is the planting of seeds. In the first reading, St. Paul uses the imagery of a seed being planted in the ground to explain death and resurrection. Thus, we have a sure hope that the ground is not our final destination, for just as a seed does not grow into a plant until it dies, our natural bodies need to go through death for us to experience eternal life.

One day we will have to enter the Kingdom of God, not with our earthly bodies but with the spiritual body we receive when we are resurrected with the Lord. For us to receive this spiritual body, there are prerequisites that have to be made, and this can be found in the gospel proclamation of today.

The Lord speaks to his disciples through a parable of a farmer scattering seed. Four instances are illustrated by the Lord – seed that falls on a footpath, seed that falls on rocky soil, seed that falls among thorns and seed that falls on fertile soil.

When the Lord explains the parable, he says that the seed is the word of God and where it falls refers to the situations of our lives. When we read the gospel proclamation, we will surely identify with one of the four instances. Most often, we are stuck between the seed that falls on rocky soil, where the message is heard and received with joy but quickly falls away in the face of temptation, and the seed that falls among thorns, where the message is heard but immediately drowned out by the pleasures of the world.

It should be our heart's desire to reach the level of the seed that falls on good soil. It is only when we reach this place of maturity that we can be sure the spiritual body that was spoken of in the first reading can become our reality. We should not only desire heaven for ourselves, but also for our family, community, the church and the whole world. Thus, we must make every effort to preserve the word of God that is preached to those around us and ensure that the word remains in their hearts and becomes fruitful.

Prayer: Abba Father, let your word fall on the soil of my heart and root itself in my depths that I may act according to what pleases you. Amen.
I was fascinated by the beautiful, gentle female character in a TV series, until she turned into a fire breathing dragon when she was threatened. Even though it was just a fantasy movie, it is not far from the truth. Most of us when threatened, unleash the beast in us. As I was speaking to another server about giving inner responses to a difficult person, I highly doubted myself if I would be able to do the same if it was me in that situation. The truth is, it is not easy to turn the other cheek when we are threatened or attacked. It is impossible to turn the other cheek when we have lost God’s perspective in the situation.

Today’s first reading speaks to us about a plot to attack the righteous; “So let’s put them to the test. We’ll be cruel to them, and torment them; then we’ll find out how calm and reasonable they are! We’ll find out just how much they can stand!”

Even though we may not have people plotting to put us to the test or to be cruel to us, life is full of challenges. What we need is the right conditions to unleash the beast; to react or manipulate to get the results we want. Externally we may continue to keep the appearances, but when all we can think of is how to manipulate the situation, we know that we have fallen internally.

Most often, the “plots” or the problems that we face just do not drop out of nowhere in to our lives. We see the signs and the changes that are taking place long before a crisis hits. We see the signs of a marriage beginning to fail, we see signs that would lead to sicknesses in our own bodies, we see signs of troubles in our finances, businesses and jobs. Instead of seeking the heart of God, we try to control, manipulate or even justify our own actions.

The good news for those who are on a journey with the Lord is, even if we fall, the period we stay down continues to decrease. When we turn to God from the depths that we have fallen into, we receive help from heaven. We find internal rest in the middle of the chaos. We begin to see our contribution to the problem and we become internally free to give inner responses. We see the hand of God in the situation and suddenly we realise being right with God is the greatest victory and the greatest treasure.
We see the plot against the righteous in the first reading unfolded in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. In today’s Gospel proclamation we find the Lord dealing with the plot on his own life. Instead of taking some measures to control the situation, he prepared the disciples: “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” The Lord knew exactly what was going to happen to him, but instead of running away he prepared himself and those around him to face it. Just as death was clear to him, so was the resurrection!

I am wondering if the argument among the disciples about who was the greatest had anything to do with the Lord predicting his death. Did they argue about who would take the place of the Lord among them after his death? We would never know but what is important is the words of the Lord to them: “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

In a crisis what hurts most is our pride and ego. We do not want to lose. A crisis makes us look weak, powerless and vulnerable. So, we do what is within our power to be stronger and more powerful than our opponents. The Lord’s instructions are clear; be the smallest person, be powerless and vulnerable by doing the will of God. The problem is, we who have the wisdom of the world in our “right mind” would not do this. It is only a person who has the wisdom of heaven who can willingly become the last.

Today’s second reading says: “The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure and peace-loving. Persons with this wisdom show understanding and listen to advice; they are full of compassion and good works; they are impartial and sincere.”

The wisdom that comes from heaven brings us revelations from heaven. Our eyes open to the truths that are beyond the crisis. The Lord predicted his death. He also predicted his resurrection. He saw the terrible price he had to pay with his life, but he also saw the greatest reward that awaited him and the rest of the world. When we are led by the wisdom of heaven - no one loses but everyone wins.

*Prayer: Abba Father, set me free from where I am caught up in and give me the grace to see beyond my circumstances to the reward that awaits me through a life of complete surrender and obedience to you. Amen.*
Prayer: Abba Father, One thing I ask of you, and only this do I seek: that I may dwell on your Holy Mountain all the days of my life, never losing sight of your beauty and your hand in the events of my life. Amen.

Monday 24th September 25th Week in Ordinary Time

“The just one shall live on your holy mountain, O Lord” Psalm 15: 1

In today’s first reading, we discover several characteristics that God desires to see in our lives. Almost everything mentioned in the reading deals with our intent; things that are not apparent to others. Plotting and envying are usually done deep down within our thoughts, no one sees them. What’s more, even if we behave as desired by the scripture, no one will know that we are being faithful to God. In many ways it is easier to be honorable when others see what we are doing. To be honorable and faithful when no one can see calls for something that is known as an “inner response”.

The responsorial psalm speaks of the attributes of one who lives on the Holy Mountain of the Lord. It is not that good people live on the Holy Mountain, but those who live on the Holy Mountain are transformed to be people who have qualities and behavior that is pleasing to God. This reveals a secret on how to cultivate the behaviors that scripture desires.

In today’s Gospel Our Lord Jesus reveals that nothing that is hidden will not remain uncovered. If we play games by putting on an act, while our intentions are impure, there will come a time when we are exposed. If we live by giving inner responses to God, even though no one will know what we do, we will become a lamp that shines out, giving sight to those in darkness.

One area I usually fail to give inner responses is being true to my time of personal prayer and reading the word of God. When I miss a day or two, I do not notice a change. However, when a situation arises, I tend to lose sight of God. I carry the burden of having to look after myself, and every now and again, my true hidden motives jump out when I deal with others. On the other hand, when I am aware of God’s presence, and what He is capable of, I am at peace, knowing that He is involved, and that He is above all people and all situations that are beyond my control. The same situation that prompted my inner selfish nature to jump out, becomes one where I relate to others gently and kindly.

Prayer: Abba Father, One thing I ask of you, and only this do I seek: that I may dwell on your Holy Mountain all the days of my life, never losing sight of your beauty and your hand in the events of my life. Amen.
The readings of today focus on the observance of the law of the Lord. In the first reading from the book of Proverbs, we receive an insight on what pleases the Lord most – when we are right and just, or, when we obey His commandments.

The Psalmist reiterates this as he prays to the Lord, longing to be faithful and live by the law of the Lord. The Psalmist makes a bold declaration and says in verse 44, “I will keep on obeying your instructions forever and ever.”

Living in this modern age, my mind wonders how realistic that statement can be when faced with the trials and ordeals of life. It is easy to make such a statement when there is no trial or temptation amidst us, but can we say the same when we are faced with a crunch situation and we feel the only way out is to use influence, to react or to give in to our temptation?

Yet, the Lord Jesus reminds me, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” (Mark 10: 27) I am given a reassurance that it is not by my ability that I need to strive to follow the law of the Lord. The people of the Old Testament felt they had to do everything by themselves because they did not have the gift that was paid for by the life of the Lord Jesus – the promised Holy Spirit, who is our Helper. When we find the law of God difficult to follow, the Holy Spirit will guide us with His wisdom and lead us through the narrow path, shining His light that we may not stumble along the way.

The Lord Jesus reiterates the writings of the Old Testament in the gospel proclamation, and says anyone who does the will of his Father is his mother or brother. We are taken into the family of God Himself when we do the will of God. The will of God need not be as great a task as dying on the cross to save humanity, but simple acts of sacrifice for the good of those around us, such as offering help without expectation, showing joy in the face of adversity or choosing to give an inner response when rejected by those around us.

Even for these simple acts, we need the aid of the Holy Spirit, that all we do may be overshadowed by His fruits of love, joy and peace.

_Prayer: Abba Father, show me instances in my day where I may be open to do your will and give me the power of your Holy Spirit to accomplish it. Amen._
St. Cosmos and Damian, were twin brothers from the medieval ages. They were practicing doctors who treated their patients free out of love for God. They helped by their brothers in their noble profession as they eased the pain and suffering of hundreds of people. Alas after such lives of dedication they were tortured for their faith and shot with arrows since they refused to renounce their faith. Since their death they have had a large following and many churches have been dedicated to them, reportedly possessing the relics of their skulls. Many miracles have been attributed to them.

If we look at the readings from today we see the direction the Lord Jesus gave his apostles and disciples. He directed them to go out gave them power and authority to cast out evil spirits and heal diseases. They were to go out taking nothing for their journey but made to rely on the goodness of the people they ministered to.

One word that catches my eye is the fact that we are to proclaim the Good News. To proclaim is to shout out from the rooftop and tell the whole world. Recently I met a preacher who for four years had been preaching in town buses. Such was his conversion that when he discovered the love of the Lord Jesus, he was compelled to go into buses and proclaim the word.

We do not feel the need to make such a proclamation because we have not had that experience of being saved dramatically from sin and bondage.

The prayer of a person who proclaims the word of God is what is mentioned in the first reading from Proverbs. Such a person believes that every word of God is true and that God is a refuge to all. Once again I had the wonderful opportunity to meeting a priest who claims and prays the word of God repeatedly over sick people and most often the people are healed and recover from their malady. In the passage from Proverbs the writers prays that he will be kept from lying and he also prays for a life that will provide him with the adequate amount of food and provisions so that he will not be too comfortable, lest he will deny the Lord,

*Prayer: Abba Father, you are my refuge and my strength. As your word transforms me let me proclaim you to the world with love and passion. Amen*
Thursday 27th September  St. Vincent de Paul, priest

“Who is this Man, whom I hear such wonders?” 1 Kings 10: 1

What the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes says in these verses may be the same which we would come up with from time to time, as we face each day in the existence of our life. If what we need in our existence was good life, wisdom, wealth, power, success and good health, and if we did not know the existence of God, it would be meaningless. Great people who did great work in the history of this world, come and go, yet even their names are known only for a time and their fame and works fade away. Solomon with all his wealth, fame, power and wisdom began to feel this emptiness.

Reading the psalm of the day, it becomes clear that nothing on earth that is formed by earth is meant to last forever. There is a beginning and end. It is only in the Lord Jesus that people are given the assurance of true meaning in life.

In the Gospel proclamation, Herod, the King at the time of the Lord Jesus, could not deal with this truth. He had everything but lacked the truth that came from the Lord. That’s why he was restless, anxious to know about the Lord. He was incomplete in his inner being. Everything he possessed could not meet nor challenge what this carpenter’s son was doing. The people of that time saw in the Lord what any human being should see in Him today. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Solomon with all his wisdom failed to see the entire truth since the Lord Jesus was still to be revealed. By the shedding of His blood did the world have clear sight to understand the mission of our existence. The disciples of the Lord went through this change i.e. ‘the with Christ’ and ‘in Christ’ understanding. This change took place only after the Lord paid the penalty for the sinfulness of people and the Spirit of Truth entered into the lives of the disciples so they no longer lived for themselves but for the glory of God and to accomplish His purpose in their lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, bring your life into my soul, I’m alive in you. Let your kingdom shine through my life, I want more of you. Amen.
Today’s first reading reminds us that the Lord has set apart a particular time for everything to take place. Yet most of us want things to take place at the time we think they should happen and do not have the patience to wait till God acts.

But do we act fast when God calls us to do something? To forgive the person who has hurt us? To give an inner response to the person who treats us unfairly? To love our parents, spouse, children when they ignore us or are indifferent to us? Instead, most often we ask the Lord to be patient with us and give us time to come to terms with things, or else we ask the Lord to give us time to change because we cannot act immediately.

But verse 11 assures us that the Lord makes everything beautiful in its time. If we look back on our lives, hopefully we can say we are more beautiful in the Lord now, than we were in the past. But each one of us has a long way to go, to become a more spiritually beautiful person who the Lord wants us to be.

St. Wenceslaus, duke of Bohemia, though a prince, conducted himself towards God and his subjects in such a manner, that he was beloved and highly esteemed by everyone. He was charitable to the poor and compassionate to widows and orphans. He spent several hours in prayer, and even in winter visited the Church at night barefooted. When his servant who accompanied him complained of the cold, the duke told him to step in his footprints and the servant no longer felt any cold; for the footprints of the prince were warmed by his love of the Holy Eucharist.

When a Count came to battle with him, Wenceslaus challenged the Count to single combat so that there would be less bloodshed, with the condition that the victory should be on the side of him who should slay his adversary. The Saint went to meet him, making the sign of the cross, and the Count saw, by the side of Wenceslaus, two angels who cried to him: “Stand off!” He fell at the Saint’s feet, asked for pardon and promised obedience in future.

Prayer: Abba Father, make me the beautiful creation you want me to be, in your time. Amen
Saturday 29th September  

**Feast of Sts. Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Archangels**

“I am Gabriel, who stand before God.”

Today we celebrate the feast of the three Archangels Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, the only angels named in Sacred Scripture and all three have important roles in the history of salvation. Saint Michael is widely seen as the “Prince of the Heavenly Host,” the leader of all the angels. His name is Hebrew for “Who is like God?” and was the battle cry of the good angels against Lucifer and his followers when they rebelled against God. He is mentioned four times in the Bible, in Daniel 10 and 12, in the letter of Jude, and in Revelation.

St. Michael, whose forces cast down Lucifer and the evil spirits into Hell, is invoked for protection against Satan and all evil. According to Catholic scholars Pope Leo XIII, in 1899, having had a prophetic vision of the evil that would be inflicted upon the Church and the world in the 20th century, instituted a prayer asking for Saint Michael’s protection to be said at the end of every Mass. Christian tradition recognizes four offices of Saint Michael: to fight against Satan, to rescue the souls of the faithful from the power of the enemy, especially at the hour of death, to be the champion of God’s people and to call away from earth and bring people’s souls to judgment.

“I am Gabriel, who stand before God.” (Luke 1:19) Saint Gabriel, whose name means “God’s strength,” is mentioned four times in the Bible. Gabriel announces the birth of John the Baptist to his father Zacharias, and the Incarnation of the Word in the womb of the Blessed Mother. Christian tradition suggests that it is he who appeared to St. Joseph and to the shepherds, and also that it was he who strengthened the Lord Jesus during his agony in the garden of Gethsemane. “I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven, who stand before the Lord” (Tob 12:15) Saint Raphael, whose name means “God has healed” because of his healing of Tobias’ blindness in the Book of Tobit. His office is generally that of healing and acts of mercy. Raphael is also identified with the angel in John 5:1-4.

Prayer: Abba Father thank you for teaching us this prayer. “Angel of God my guardian dear to whom God’s love commits thee here, ever this day be at my side to light and guard to rule and guide”. Amen
Jealousy

If we scan the readings for today we see an underling theme - our reactions to what we see with our senses.

Our eyes and subsequent feelings lead us to react to people and situations in ways that God does not want us to do.

In the first reading the Lord in His mercy pours out his anointing on Moses and shares it with the seventy elders. All of them begin to prophesie.

While Father God and Moses are open to the sharing of the Spirit, Joshua who is a warrior by nature reacts to Eldad and Medad’s receiving of the spirit.

In the same way in the Gospel proclamation, John is disturbed by a certain ‘someone’ who is driving out demons and wishes to forbid him. But the Lord Jesus’s response is precise that whoever is not against us is for us.

This behaviour is similar to our reaction to those who are within our folds, churches, groups and even religious affiliations. Most often we react like Joshua and John, we lose our heart and any humanness within ourselves.

Here’s where the Gospel proclamation makes sense where the Lord Jesus says that whoever gives a glass of water in the name of Jesus will not go without a reward.

As discussed earlier, most of our problems arise through the faculty of our eyes. Our greed, jealousy, lust and responses are all a result of what we see.

In my life when I look around my home, I find so many things that I have bought on an impulse. In addition there are multiple things that I own which I can easily give away. When we were children, my parents use to clear the home of all our old toys and clothes, often within a few hours we would get a call that the nearby convent had received things which were too good to be given to the poor lest they...
would resell and hence we were offered many of those things since we were from a large family.

As I read the second reading about gathering riches I think of the visuals of the recent disaster in Kerala. The raging water did not spare the good or the bad. The homes of the rich and poor alike were ravaged. Cars and van vans floated freely in the surging waters while even houses shifted off their foundations propelled by the fury of the flooding waters. If we think of it, the dams that held the water were meant to collect and keep water, but the water they held back in abundance as a precious resource turned out to be the cause of their disaster.

The riches and valuables that we horde can ultimately become the cause of our ruin. We collect and assume that the riches will be our blessing but they can lead to our destruction. An added complication is when we collect riches by cheating people. The word tells us that the wages cheated from workers under us cry out to the heavens and our flesh will be consumed like fire for the simple reason of pil-ling up riches.

The remaining verses in the Gospel proclamation hold a warning for many of us in the present generation. The verse and warning about causing little children to sin is so relevant in today’s stories of child abuse rampant all over the world.

The Lord directs us that whatever causes us to sin should be cut off lest it causes us to sin. I am personally convicted by the verse that says if my eye causes me to sin, I must pluck it out lest I will be thrown into the hell where the worms that eat them never die.

As I reflect, my eyes lead me to jealousy and I covet the things of other people. Further with my eyes I have lusted on things of the world and let my gaze linger on what the Lord would not want me to do. One way we can fight out this temptation would be to repeat the word of God that reminds us of the worm that will eat our eyes. This will lead to a fear of God in our hearts that should prevent us from the sin we love to hold on to. By repeating this word of God, we will be convicted of our sin, have mercy of those who face this issue and be able change our lives for the better.

*Prayer: Abba Father, I offer up the lust that consumes my soul day after day. Let you love replace the lust and lingering gaze in my eyes. Amen*
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