

JANUARY
2021

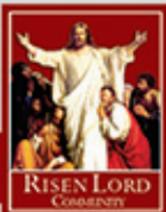


ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS



Blessed Devasahayam Pillai

Feast Day - 14th January



DAILY READINGS & REFLECTIONS

Volume 21
Issue 01



ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

JANUARY
2021

“The Lord bless you
and keep you;
the Lord make his face
shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”
“So they will put my name on the
Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Numbers 6:24-26

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On Our Knees In His Hands

JANUARY 2021

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Note that Feast day readings may differ from country to country

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Num 6:22-27

Ps 67:2-8

Gal 4:4-7

Luke 2: 16-21

We welcome this New Year not knowing what to expect. Do we welcome it with joy or do we await its unfolding with cautiousness? These would have been the emotions of the Blessed Mother. She had previously been found to be with child and now that the child had come into the world, what more could she expect to happen.

For thirty years she waited for the prophecies to be fulfilled and the sword to pierce her heart and she witnessed her Son's passion. But the word says for all those years she pondered over the prophecies and words given to her. I am reminded of a beautiful testimony where a young man from another faith. He was introduced to the Lord Jesus and was so convinced that the Lord Jesus was the Lord and Saviour. Though he had it logically well-explained in his mind, it was not penetrating his heart. He says that one night as he sat on his bed, for a good two hours he repeated the word from John 3: 16 which says, "God so loved the world that he sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Just past the 120-minute mark, he began to bawl out and a new faith, light, and awakening were etched in the sanctuary of his heart. The light was switched on and in an instant, everything came together in his heart and mind. He was truly born again. Now he was utterly convinced of the Lord Jesus as his Lord and Saviour.

As we face this New Year, we honestly do not know what to expect. But we can also expect that even if the world goes through turmoil and the backlash of the previous months, we are still being held in the arms of the Saviour and He is still in control. In Galatians 4: 7 the word reminds us that because we are children, God has sent into the Spirit of His Son into our hearts and we cry out; Abba that is Father! we are no longer slaves, but sons or daughters, and ours is the inheritance, by God's grace. In this New Year 2021, may the Lord bless us, keep us and make His face to shine on us.

Prayer: Abba Father, this year, give us your peace, as we treasure your word and ponder over it in our hearts. Amen

Saturday January 02

St. Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen

A man on a mission to identify with and for Christ

1Jn 2:22-28

Ps 81:14

Jn 1: 19-28

Today's Gospel proclamation speaks about the witness of John the Baptist. His primary role is not as one who baptises but one who testifies to the light coming into the world, a human witness to a cosmic event. God is about to order a new creation, a new presence of light in the world but it necessitates a fellow human to point to its presence, otherwise, human as we

are, we might not see it. That human being is St. John the Baptist.

To the question raised by the Jewish leaders as to - "Who are you?" St. John the Baptist had no difficulty answering. If someone challenged our identity -- both naturally and spiritually, how would we answer? There is an identity war going on today and many are in crisis or at least confused. We can try to manufacture an identity, but it is derived. The true source and maker of our real identity are God who made us in his image and likeness. St. John identifies himself in and through his relationship with the Lord Jesus. Whereas Jesus defines himself as "I AM," John is clear to say, "I am not." He is not the Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet. He is not the light that shines in the darkness. Yet, even in his resolute claims about who he is not, who he is and why he is here is defined by and inseparable from the presence of the Word made flesh in his midst. He knows nothing but to articulate his identity in connection to the Lord Jesus' identity. To the question "Who are you?" can we respond with the same indivisibility with God and all that God wants us to be? Can we locate our identity as intimately with Jesus as John identified? What makes John the Baptist's message effective is that he does not just preach his message; he is his message. He preaches penance, but first, he lives it, going out into the desert and living an ascetic life. He baptizes with water, but first, he gets into the water. If we want to make Jesus known to others, we first have to know him ourselves. We cannot preach the essence of the Gospel, the message of love, if we don't live love in our daily lives. However, if with the help of God's grace, we do our best to put love into action, then words will hardly be necessary.

Prayer: Abba Father, as you chose John, we pray that we also manifest Jesus to the world by identifying with your beloved Son. Amen.

Sunday January 03

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

They saw the child with his mother and they bowed down and worshiped him Matthew 2:11

Isaiah 60: 1-6

Ps 72: 1-13

Eph 3: 2-6

Matt 2: 1-12

Today we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord. Epiphany means manifestation. According to Catholic tradition, the feast of the Epiphany celebrates the many ways that Christ has made Himself known to the world. What the Church celebrates today is the manifestation of our Lord to the whole world; after being made known to the shepherds of Bethlehem, He is now re-

vealed to the Magi who have come from the East to adore Him.

This year I was trying to explain to my toddler what Christmas was about. We watched a movie called *The Star* to teach him about the birth of Christ. Although He could not fully understand, I found the Lord speaking to me as I watched. The three wise men travel great distances on camels and find the child Jesus with His mother and father. Not only do the wise men stand in amazement as they enter the place, but the animals too realize this child is not any ordinary child. They cannot understand it, but they too are amazed by the child in front of them. Their amazement turns to adoration and worship as they all bow down before the King of Kings. The Wisemen present Him with gifts of frankincense, myrrh and gold.

Although this was a children's movie, I found the Lord showing me how awe-inspiring this event was. The whole of creation- men, animals and the whole universe- bows down and worships the God that left everything in heaven to become a baby and live amongst us. It is not only people who worship the Lord but everything in creation. Psalm 150 comes to my mind, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Psalm 148:3-4 says, "Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies." In Luke 19 the Lord Jesus arrives in Jerusalem riding a donkey and the people are praising Him. The Pharisees ask the Lord to tell them to stop but the Lord replies, "I tell you if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." The event of the Epiphany is reminding us of what a King the Lord Jesus is. He is to be worshipped by everyone and every thing.

In the First Reading, the prophet Isaiah explains why all creation wor-

ships the King. He says, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you” (v. 1-2). Christ is the light that this world in darkness is looking for. We worship Him because He leads us out of darkness and sin into light and grace. Darkness and sin engulf our lives. We live in negativity and fear of the unknown. But the Lord is calling us to have a breakthrough in our lives. We are called to walk out from under the cloud of darkness above us and into the light of Christ. How can we do this? Verses 4-5 gives us the answer- “Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy.”

We must reconnect with the Lord through praise. When we feel our hearts and minds are weighed down and we cannot see the light of Christ in our daily life, we are called to stop and lift our eyes to God in praise. Praising God in the silence of our hearts and minds can bring clarity to us. When we align ourselves with God again and again He can change our lives. Therefore, all creation worships the Lord Jesus.

St. Paul speaks of this mystery of God in the Second Reading. He says, “Surely you have heard about the administration of God’s grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly” (v.2-3). This mystery is the ability of God to change our lives and bring us back into the light. This is the mystery of God’s mercy to forgive our sins and make us holy once again. This mystery was not revealed until Christ was born into the world. It is because of this mystery that we all bow down and worship the Lord.

Today, as you celebrate the Epiphany and remember the 3 wise men bringing gifts to the child Jesus, we are reminded that we too can offer the Lord Jesus the gift of praise to connect us to Him and the gift of worship with all creation because He is the King of Kings.

Prayer: Prayer: Abba Father, I bring an offering of worship to my King. No one on earth deserves the praises that I sing. Jesus, may You receive the honor that You’re due. O Lord, I bring an offering to You. Amen.

Monday January 04

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious

His presence in us will bring out the best in us

1 Jn 3:22, 4:6
Ps 2:7-12
Matt 4: 12-17, 23-25

1 John 3:22 says that whatever we ask for we shall receive. Taken out of context it can take us for a ride. The full context is that when we observe the commandments we begin to remain in God and when we live in God, we can then ask him for anything and we shall receive it.

Further, it says that in this journey we do not trust every inspiration but are called to discern every Spirit. Every Spirit that does not give glory to our Lord Jesus is the spirit of the antichrist. But instead of fearing we are then reminded that the one in us is more powerful than the one in the world.

St Elizabeth Seton was a staunch Episcopalian who became one of the keystones of the American Catholic Church. She suffered many deaths and setbacks and yet she loved the Lord. While in Italy with her dying husband, Elizabeth witnessed Catholicity in action through family friends. Three basic points led her to become a Catholic: belief in the Real Presence, devotion to the Blessed Mother, and conviction that the Catholic Church led back to the apostles and to Christ. Many of her family and friends rejected her when she became a Catholic in March 1805. She founded the first American religious community for women, the Sisters of Charity. She opened the first American parish school and established the first American Catholic orphanage. All this she did in the span of 46 years while raising her five children. The thousand or more letters of Mother Seton reveal the development of her spiritual life from ordinary goodness to heroic sanctity. She suffered great trials of sickness, misunderstanding, the death of loved ones (her husband and two young daughters) and the heartache of a wayward son. She died January 4, 1821, and became the first American-born citizen to be beatified (1963) and then canonized (1975). She is buried in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Let us remind ourselves that no matter what we go through in life, God is willing to carry us through and He will accomplish much more that we can ask for or desire.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace of endurance specially in times of trial. Fill us with wisdom to discern the plans you have for us. Amen

1Jn4:7-10

Pss72:1-8

Mark6:34-44

The Gospel proclamation reveals a divine secret when the Lord says “ give them some food yourselves “. It seems a tall order. I would have taken the easy way out. To start with, I may not have sufficient for myself. More demands forthcoming, perhaps. Even a nuisance.

We see possibilities of miracles emerging living another way. For through the Lord, the disciples too, by their own hands miraculously feed the multitudes. When stepping out beyond self-interest we enter the divine domain. Loving the other more than self invites us into a mystical dimension. The disciples and crowds unwittingly catch a glimpse of God descending into their human condition seeing the Lord Jesus. “ Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father”.

We see God's love manifested for the unhappy and miserable state of humanity working in harmony with the Lord Jesus, in conjunction with the disciples. God is an exchange of love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has destined us too, to share in a similar exchange. We are made to be in a relationship. God is a relationship, community. Without God relationships are flawed. We are however created in the image and likeness of the Triune God, who is Love. This Love has been poured into our hearts, that we may channel it into other hearts. God has created us out of love for love, that we too may create anew other lives.

The depiction of Divine love is revealed in the first reading. God sent His Son knowing fully well we would have the option to reject and even kill Him. He reveals His ongoing and continuing love despite that. We did not love God, and yet He gave up His Son as a ransom for our iniquities. It is imperative that we too need to love like that. That is Divine love we share in God through Christ our Lord. Now in that Divine Human nature, we can give love to a world starving for it.

Prayer: Abba Father, I offer you that little love I have received in life, bless it to be a blessing so that others may see you in me. Amen

1 Jn 4: 11-18

Ps 72: 1-13

Mark 6: 45-52

In the first reading today, St. John says, "God is love. The one who lives in love, lives in God and God in him." 1 John 4: 16. St. John's letter also speaks of God's perfect love and how it casts out all fear. Psychologists have said there are more than 100 types of fears - ranging from the fear of cockroaches to the greatest fear of dying. But

when we spend more time in deep contemplation with the Lord for about one hour in the morning, we enter into a deeper experience of God's love along with the amazing grace to seek and do His will in all things and everywhere. Bible scholars say God's love has many qualities, the most important being that His perfect love is unending, unfailing, unlimited and unmerited.

When we grow in the desire to seek and do God's will, the Lord Jesus says in the beatitudes that we will have a pure heart without secret agendas or motives. Matthew 5:8. When we have a pure heart, God will give us inner revelations and insights so that we would be creative and imaginative in what we do.

Freely as we receive this, ever merciful, compassionate and ever forgiving love through the Holy Spirit, we are empowered by the Spirit to freely give it to others as we sing in that beautiful hymn, "Freely freely you have received, freely, freely give, go in my name and because you believe, others will know that I live; all power is given in Jesus' name on earth and heaven in Jesus' name and in Jesus name I come to you to share His love as He told me to."

In today's Gospel proclamation, we read the widely quoted story of how the Lord Jesus walked on water and calmed the storm when the apostles feared their boat would captize in the storm. When they saw the Lord, walking on the water, some feared it was a ghost but the Lord said, "Fear not, it is I" Bible scholars say that in the Gospel there are more than 300 occasions where our Lord Jesus says Fear not or Be not afraid. As we sing, "Even if you walk through raging waters or through blazing fires, fear not for I go through it with you and in you."

Prayer: Abba Father, love changes everything. Give me the power of the Holy Spirit to obey the Lord's final commandment "Love one another as I love you". Amen

1 Jn 4: 19, 5:4
Ps 72: 1-2, 14-17
Luke 4:14-22

In today's first reading from St. Luke, we are called to love one another since He first loved us. Love was the motivation of our Lord's ministry and not fulfilling the cry of His ego. The word in John 3: 16 tells us that God 'so loved' the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life. There is a beautiful old song

that says, "Love it was that made us and it was love that saved us, love was God's plan when he made us, God's divine nature is love."

In the Gospel proclamation, when our Lord Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from Prophet Isaiah, He shared His mission. His mission was, "To bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to give new sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and to announce the Lord year's of mercy." It is said that the people were amazed by his teaching and preaching but could not find a link between His background of being Joseph the carpenter's son and the wisdom he was expounding. Though they loved His teaching they could not love the teacher because in their eyes He was from a lowly background.

When we are baptised, we become disciples and our mission becomes the same as our Lord's. We begin with clean and clear motives but drift towards receiving love and appreciation from people. Most often we cannot love as our Lord loved. Our love can shift from loving people to loving the ministry, the people, the power, and the status that we enjoy.

Today, we are called to examine our mission and our motives. The Psalmist declares in Psalm 72 - Lord every nation on earth will adore you. When we adore the Lord, He will help us clean up the mess and confusion in our hearts and minds. He will take us to the place where love will take prominence over power and position. We will be convinced that He first loved us while we were in sin and our purpose will be purified as we live and love in the Lord

Prayer: Abba Father, let your love invade my heart and motivations. Let your love take over as your mission unfolds in my life. Let your love reign. Amen

1 Jn 5: 5-13

Ps 147: 12-20

Luke 5: 12-16

Both saints, Jerome Emiliani and Josephine Bakhita, endured adversity. The former, a 15th-century military commander, who was vanquished by an invading force, found peace with God in prison and after escaping, devoted his life to the underprivileged, especially orphans. This was despite experiencing and overcoming the deadly plague himself.

St. Bakhita who was kidnapped and trafficked as a child and sold into slavery, where she endured severe maltreatment, later found peace in a convent, offering up her sufferings to God. She died in 1947 and is the Patron Saint of victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. The first reading describes the wonders of creation and the domination given by God to humankind over the natural world. This was out of love for us.

The Gospel proclamation tells us that when people found the Lord Jesus on the other side of Lake Gennesaret, they “ran throughout the whole region” brought the sick to him and they were healed. We can only imagine the crowds mobbing him and the number of sick people they had gathered from the area for healing. Our Lord Jesus had just taught and fed the five thousand before seeking solitude on the other side of the lake, but could not avoid the crowds and, tired as He was, still healed all those brought to him.

There is a common theme between the lives of Sts Jerome Emiliani, Josephine Bakhita, Adam and Eve, and the healing ministry of Jesus. Adversity, whether caused by our actions, as in the case of our first parents; or by circumstances, such as war or the evil actions of others, as in the case of the two saints memorialised today; or by congenital or acquired illnesses that were healed by the Lord Jesus; all offer the opportunity for redemption, If we embrace it and chose to accept the mercy, forgiveness and unending love of God. Just like the two saints and the sick healed by Jesus, we too require healing, whether physically, emotionally or spiritually.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray that you send Your Holy Spirit into our hearts to give us the grace to be humble, to repent and to joyfully accept the redemption Your Son earned for us. Amen

1 Jn 5: 14-21

Ps 149: 1-9

John 3: 22-30

This week as we celebrated the feast of the epiphany we recall how the Lord decided to reveal his birth to the wise men who knew that a great king has been born into this world and in the same way the Lord revealed Himself to the shepherds as a baby in a manger.

Today we know that this great King and this baby in the manger came as a fulfillment of the promise by the Father in heaven. He was given to the children of God and as a light to this entire world, which is caught up in sinfulness, blindness, confusion, sickness, and darkness. The Lord Jesus came to deliver us from the grip of the enemy's clutches and bondages.

This is to help us realise that we give into self-centredness easily instead of giving inner responses as an act of surrender to God. In the first reading, the invitation is to be right with God and to be born again in Spirit and truth on any given occasion. In our human nature, we fall but as believers, we know that Christ Jesus is living inside us. Hence we do not remain in that fallen state. We return to the Lord in prayer using the gift of prayer tools given to us and we enter into the spirit in confidence that the Father will grant us whatever we ask through His Son as per His will.

In the Gospel proclamation, it is confirmed in St. John's reply to the Jew "no one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven". Further, the Lord reminds us that when we are born of His truth and Spirit we are His possession. That sense of belongingness is from God who lifts us up from our confusion into His light and Peace. It gives us the grace to distaste sin and addictions of the flesh. When we see our brothers and sisters fallen or even challenging us we will be led to intercede for them. We do not have anything to boast about ourselves but testify and rejoice to the life we have received from Him. The Lord is diverting us to His path of life from the valley of sin and death. We are invited to rejoice since we have been made complete in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Abba Father, when we fall and fail help us to experience your presence powerfully. And the grace to understand that you uphold all who fall and raise up all who bow down. Amen

Sunday January 10

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God -1 John 5:1

Isa 5: 1-11
Ps 12: 2-6
1 Jn 5: 1-9
Mark 1: 7-11

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord Jesus. This is the beginning of the Lord Jesus' ministry and where His identity was revealed to the world. Before this, in accordance with the Jewish culture of that day, the Lord Jesus was known by His father. The Lord Jesus lived for 30 years in the identity of being the son of St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother. But at His bap-

tism, the Father revealed to the Lord Jesus His true identity as the Beloved Son of God. Today, let us ask ourselves a question- what is the identity I hold?

The Lord Jesus' life changed the day He went to the River Jordan to be baptised by St. John the Baptist. After John baptised Him with water, He was baptised with the Holy Spirit, the heavens opened, and He could hear the voice of God. The Father said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy" (Mark 1:11). It was a revelation about who the Lord Jesus was. It was not a theological truth or a title or a position. Instead, it was a divine revelation about the Lord's true identity.

Today, the Father wants to speak these same words to us. He wants us to know that we are His beloved sons and daughters. That our identities do not come from the world, but from our Heavenly Father. When we realise that we are not merely a person on the earth without purpose or value, but instead that we belong to the family of God, we become children of God. How can we hear the Father speak these same words to us? It is by sitting at the Father's feet each day, hearing Him speak to us and having a relationship with Him.

In the First Reading, God calls to us to come to Him. If we are thirsty or hungry for something, instead of going to the world to satisfy our needs, we can go to Him. He wants to give us the love, joy, happiness and satisfaction that we are looking for from the world. The world may ask us for something in exchange for delivering what we ask for, but the Lord wants nothing in exchange except a relationship with us. He wants us to know Him just as He knows us. Isaiah 5: 6 says, "Seek the Lord while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near." We have been given the privilege to call on the Lord each day and

find Him. This is the privilege given to the children of God.

In the Second Reading, St. John reiterates this by saying, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has become a child of God.” The only way we can know that we are children of God is by hearing it from our Father, when we sit at His feet each day in personal prayer, and hear His voice, He will turn our beliefs in God and the Lord Jesus into a living experience. Once we may have only read about Jesus’ love for us or that we are made children of God through the sacrifice on the cross. We maybe have only believed with our minds, without having a real experience of this. But as we pray each day and come to personally know God, we will tangibly experience this love of God for us and know deep within us, without a doubt, that we are God’s children.

1 John 5:6 says, “And Jesus Christ was revealed as God’s Son by his baptism in water and by shedding his blood on the cross—not by water only, but by water and blood. And the Spirit, who is truth, confirms it with his testimony.” St. John is saying the Lord Jesus was revealed as the Son of God to us through two events that took place- through His baptism when God opened the heavens and said the Lord Jesus was His Son and at His crucifixion, when God tore the veil of the temple, the earth shook and the rocks split. In addition to water and blood, St. John says the Spirit confirms this testimony of the Lord Jesus being the Son of God. When we are baptised by the Holy Spirit the eyes of our spirit are opened and we come to experience that Jesus is the Son of God. 1 Cor. 12:3 says, “No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit makes this real within us.

Today, the Lord is calling us to come to Him to find out who we are, instead of looking for it from the world. He is calling us to have a relationship with Him. We can develop a relationship with the Father through personal prayer. When we sit with Him, He will open our eyes to His revelations and give us an experience of being His children. As we continue to nurture this relationship with Him, God will baptise us everyday with the Holy Spirit . Then, just as the Lord Jesus heard the Father call Him His beloved Son, we will also hear the Father call us His beloved children. Instead of it being a verse we read in the bible or a tale that someone told us, we will know in our hearts that we are children of God because God Himself will speak to our hearts.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to know in the depths of my spirit that I am a child of Yours. Let me live in this identity the rest of my days. Amen.

Heb 1:1-6
Ps 97: 1-9
Mark 1: 14-20

The Lord Jesus brought the message of God's will on the earth even though it was not popular and expected by people. People of this age desired a political kingdom as they were under the oppressive rule of the Romans. But Jesus brought the kingdom of love, of grace, of humility for all people which was to be received voluntarily.

According to today's Gospel proclamation, St. Mark reminds us that the focus of Jesus' ministry was preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God. He preached 'the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1.15). Psalm 102.13 says, "You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come". He wanted people to realise that the time for them to encounter the kingdom of God was so close as your hand. One cannot enter the kingdom of God without a change for the better. That is why Lord Jesus preached 'to repent, believe in the Lord'. Our minds are naturally and always occupied by something or the other. Therefore, it is a must to change one's mind, not merely feeling sorry for what we have done. Even though the kingdom of God was at hand, the people were heading towards destruction. When God said to Abraham, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you", if he did not leave his country, his people and his father's house, he certainly couldn't come to the land the Lord showed him. Jesus wanted people to trust God, taking him at his word, and living a relationship of dependence on Him. The disciples immediately left their nets, parents, hired servants to follow Jesus, by responding to His call.

Today church celebrates the feast of blessed William Carter. He was married and he was a bookseller who established his printing press in London. He published Catholic books for England's persecuted Catholic population. He had gone through many difficulties and dangers while operating the press and producing books. This work of publication led to his imprisonment and finally execution.

Prayer: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Amen!

Tuesday January 12

1st Week in Ordinary time

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this?"

Heb 2:5-12

Ps 82:9

Mark 1:21-28

Many people are baffled by the concept of God. If we ask 10 people who God is for them, we are likely to get 10 different answers. This has been a question that has divided humanity for as long as we know.

Some see God as distant and far from humanity, controlling things from above. They are motivated by the fear of God. Some cannot accept God because of the bad things that have happened in the world or because of what they have gone through in life and some keep God to satisfy their selfish motives. Some say they will believe it when they see it. Understandably, so many people have many different views about God as we are talking about the unseen.

If God exists, do we really think God will put us into such a dilemma that we live all our life's trying to figure out who God is or if there is a God at all? This is the answer Jesus Christ brought with him when he stepped foot on this earth. God is not distant, he is not a tyrant putting fear in humanity. He cares about us, he hears our cry, he knows us by name. God is the author of our life. Because He cares, he sent his only son, Christ Jesus, to this earth, so that we may know God, so that we will understand this world better, so that we know the purpose of our existence on earth. This is what our Lord Jesus demonstrated through his life on earth.

In today's reading, we see the Lord Jesus driving out an impure spirit from a man and setting him free from captivity. He speaks with authority and people are amazed at what they hear. This Jesus Christ is alive and present today just as he was 2000 years ago. He still performs miracles and signs for people to see and he still enters into people's lives and transforms them. But our Lord Jesus never forces himself on anyone. Human beings have the free will to choose what they want but unfortunately, our choices have consequences too. However, if we want to know the truth about God we only need to humble ourselves and ask God the question if He is real? Then he will reveal himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ and that is when a person knows without a doubt that God is real and God is alive.

Prayer: Abba Father, we pray that you open our eyes to see you, open our hearts to know you and experience your love. Amen

Heb 2:14-18

Ps 105:1-9

Mark 1:29-39

The Letter to the Hebrews states that the Lord Jesus is the Pioneer of our Salvation. It was through suffering that he identified with us and was able to be one with us and therefore was able to sympathize with us. A person who has never loved can never understand either the sudden glory or aching loneliness in the lover's heart. Before we can have sympathy, we must go through the same thing the other has gone through. This is what our Lord Jesus did.

In Saint Mark's Gospel, we witness authority, love and power manifested in the presence of Jesus. He loves us so much that he became a man and entered our weak wounded condition, triumphing over it by giving us his own life on the cross. He took on our infirmities and endured our pain. Now he invites us to receive His love and healing power. "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3) Our Lord Jesus wants to heal us in the deepest way possible – by increasing our capacity to accept in faith all that he did for us on the cross, by drawing us into an ever closer union with him. Ever striving to be like our Lord Jesus, Saint Paul sought to become all things to all people. (1 Corinthians 9:22)

Paul Tournier a Physician had a significant impact on the spiritual and psychosocial. He speaks of one of life's greatest discoveries he made. He used to visit an old Christian pastor who never let him go without praying with him. He was struck by the extreme simplicity of the old man's prayers. It seemed a continuation of an intimate conversation he was having with the Lord Jesus. He shared this with his wife and they both asked God to give them this same close fellowship with the Lord Jesus that the old pastor had. He says since then, 'He was the Centre of my devotion and my travelling companion. "He takes pleasure in what I do and concerns himself with it, He is a friend I can discuss everything in my life. He shares my joy and pain, my hopes, and fears. He is there when a patient speaks to me from the heart, listening to him with me and better than I can. When the patient is gone, I can talk to him about it. In our lives, we receive so much from the Lord Jesus. This is not only for us, but to be shared with the rest of the world.

Prayer: Abba Father give us a heart like your beloved Son to serve others. Amen

Heb 3: 7-14
Ps 95: 6-11
Mark 1: 40-45

In today's first reading we are urged to listen to the voice of God and to not harden our hearts against His voice. During our prayer time, we mostly expect God to speak to us. We expect a huge miracle, a powerful voice, or a vision from heaven. Most of the time we are busy reminding Him about our to-do list as if He does not know and He might forget what we

need. We do not realise that we need to pause for Him to speak to us, for us to listen to His gentle voice or His gentle whisper.

The Lord Jesus' healing touch on a leper is revealed through today's Gospel proclamation. Here the leper went to the Lord Jesus because he knew the Lord to be the only answer to his problem. When he said to the Lord Jesus "if you wish, you can make me clean", he meant that if it is your will you may heal me. But what do we ask when we go to the Lord Jesus? We go to Him with our problems and we expect Him to solve our problems according to the way we want them to be solved. But the leper surrendered himself to the will of God despite his desperate need for healing.

The Lord works more powerfully in lives that are surrendered to Him. The Lord Jesus Himself reveals this beautiful mystery through His life when He said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish His work" (John 4:34). Every moment of His life was designed by the Heavenly Father and God was unfolding His plans so beautifully in and through His life.

The Blessed Mother is a good example of a person who understood this mystery of total surrender. As a teenager, she may have had so many plans and dreams about her life, but everything was changed when the angel visited her. Because she submitted and surrendered herself to the Lord, He moved through her life and fulfilled His purpose through her.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me a heart of surrender and love that longs to hear your voice. Amen

Heb 4: 1-5, 11

Ps 78: 3-8

Mark 2: 1-12

As Christians are we concerned only about ourselves or do we consider others' needs? Maybe as Christians, we could be concerned only with our own needs and our relationship with the Lord Jesus while neglecting others.

In the Gospel proclamation, the large crowd in the house was a hindrance for the paralytic to reach our Lord Jesus. At times we are so occupied with our own agendas that we fail to empathise with our brother or sister in need. God's house is, is a shelter full of love, healing, and wholeness. It is meant for the bruised and the broken to be reached out to not with our own efforts. It happens with the simple openness of ourselves and others to the presence of our Lord Jesus working us through.

The daily daunting challenges can hide from our view the powerful presence of God. Rest assured; the Lord invites us to be open to his presence. In the first reading, St. Paul reminds God's people of the call to rest just as the Lord rested on the seventh day after creation. For us of the new covenant, sabbath rest is more than just attending Holy Mass on Sunday but being at rest, enjoying intimacy with God in His house. The reality of our Lord's presence assures us of the rest that no challenge in life can take away. It is a foretaste of the eternal joy destined for us by the grace of God.

The psalmist exclaims, "how great are the works of the Lord!" To make that exclamation ours today we need to help our generation to encounter God and to be open to His presence. That way we will proclaim for ourselves "how great are the works of the Lord!" confirming the truth that God is alive and present, here, and now.

Prayer: Abba Father, today brings another beautiful day of opportunity. I believe I am exactly where I am meant to be. Help me right now to be open to your most holy and amazing presence. I trust you with the beautiful mystery you are unfolding. Amen.

Saturday January 16

St. Joseph Vaz - Saint of Sri Lanka, Feast

"Hardly will you be able to do at the time of death what you have not done during your life" J Vaz

Isa 52: 7-10
Ps 61: 1-10
Acts 20: 17-36
Mark 16: 15-20

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Joseph Vaz, the Saint of Sri Lanka. God's salvific plan in the life of our beloved Saint and of the Church in Sri Lanka is clearly visible when we pour over our Church history.

The merciful abundant love of God towards the abandoned Sri Lankans was poured into the heart of this Indian priest. St. Joseph Vaz was not at rest until he sailed to Sri Lanka as a beggar to revive the Catholic Church. The events of his life unravel the mighty hand of God in the areas that would have become stumbling blocks and made him terribly helpless. His plea to travel to Sri Lanka was turned down only until the path was paved and God led him in the accurate path; to the correct people to obtain permission. The necessary transfers of the ruthless and brutal Dutch officials were made on time to clear the entrance for St. Joseph Vaz. The shipwreck he faced was another beautiful plan of God for him to land in the exact place in Sri Lanka, the ideal point of departure of this great mission in the country.

St. Joseph Vaz's autobiography would read all these events he faced as difficult situations of his life and it is correct in the eyes of this world and according to the human understanding. This is the irony of God's work; unfathomable events take place in our lives, and we end up in awe because if God had not been in these events we would not have made it to the end. When we look back we could see the hand of God in every event. Therefore we need not be perplexed or depressed when we face shipwrecks in our lives if we are sure that we are surrendered to God and are under His protection.

We are called to be Saints among our people. We too will face enormous shipwrecks and diseases like St. Joseph Vaz faced. Yet when we are properly rooted in the love of God and His word, we will not doubt nor vacillate. When the road seem rough and we can hardly move, let us look at the Cross that saves us from fears and doubts. When our atmosphere is hopeless and when the world is left in misery God will revive us and light up our world.

Prayer: Abba Father, I'm your servant, let your will be done in my life. Amen.

Sunday January 17

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will - Psalm 40: 8a, 9a

Sam 3: 3-10, 19

Ps 40: 2-10, 8-9

1 Cor 6: 13-20

John 1: 35-42

One of my greatest complaints is that I do not hear the voice of the Lord. Seeing how naturally God's voice came to Samuel makes me feel jealous. To me, one of the goals of writing this reflection is to see if I can get any tips from Samuel.

First, I discover that Samuel was sleeping near the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark carried the presence of God. When Moses and Joshua would go into the Tent of Meeting and worship before the Ark of the Covenant, the Glory of the Lord would come and rest upon the Ark. So, I get my first tip. I must be in the presence of God to hear his voice. One of the greatest advantages that we Catholics have over our Protestant brethren is the Blessed Sacrament, where our five senses can reinforce the experience of coming into the presence of God. We should not waste the opportunity God has given us, Samuel was neither praying nor doing anything remotely religious before the Ark; He was just sleeping. Our minds are often preoccupied with many things. It may be that the Lord must wait until we get out of the way for Him to speak to us. So, I get my second tip. I must find rest in His presence before I can hear His voice. If I come to him only when I am in the midst of a raging storm, chances are that I will not hear him.

The first reading goes on to tell us that Samuel was not familiar with the LORD, because the LORD had not revealed anything to him as yet. As a result, Samuel gets confused and thinks that Eli was speaking to him. This tells me that I need to have some practice hearing the voice of the Lord, if not I can get the voice of the Lord confused with the other voices that are bombarding me. Not only should I come to Him to listen when I am in crisis, but I must come to Him in good times so that I get accustomed to hearing His voice. While God initiated the dialogue with Samuel, there was something Samuel had to do before he could continue to hear the voice of the Lord. To move on he needed the counsel of one who is familiar with hearing the voice of the Lord; Eli. Actually, Samuel got it wrong the first time when he thought that it was Eli who was calling him. It was the discernment of Eli that put him on the right track. It shows just how

important it is for us to come under the guidance and discernment of one who is accustomed to hearing the voice of the Lord to grow in hearing the voice of the Lord. The words ending the reading sum up the extent to which Samuel grew: The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. In today's Gospel proclamation we meet another man who is accustomed to hearing the voice of the Lord. He is St. John the Baptist. It was because he heard the voice of God that he was able to know that his cousin was none other than the Son of God.

In today's reading his counsel leads two of his disciples to our Lord Jesus. The presence that was on the Ark of the covenant was now upon our Lord Jesus and the glory of God rests upon Him. Just like how Samuel spent time in the presence, the two disciples get the opportunity to spend time in the living presence of God. By their testimony, St. Peter comes to the Lord.

Simon son of John embarks on a journey towards a new identity and heritage; Cephas, the rock on which the kingdom of God will be built. In today's second reading St. Paul reveals to us that the purpose of our bodies is neither to receive pleasure nor give pleasure. Its main purpose is to carry the presence of God. They are to be an extension of the Body of our Lord Jesus so that the presence that was upon our Lord Jesus will be upon us, and we carry His presence with us.

What a wonderful thing it would be if we were a gateway to heaven wherever we went! Sounds improbable or impossible? St. Paul reminds us God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. He goes on to say Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. Simon son of John did not become Cephas overnight. It was a journey of a lifetime, with many falls and many returns to the Lord. So it will be with us. We keep on coming back to His presence. We keep on hearing His voice, and we pray today's responsorial psalm: Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Prayer: Abba Father, Lead me to the place of encounter so that I may find rest in you and hear your voice. Here I am Lord, I come to carry your presence, so that through my testimony, others will encounter you just like St. Peter did. Amen

Heb 5: 1-10
Ps 110: 1-4
Mark 2: 18-22

Today's Gospel proclamation shows how the Pharisees question our Lord Jesus on fasting. The Jews were accustomed to fasting based on the Law of Moses. It was a ritual practiced by them diligently. Following these rituals made them feel righteous and closer to God. But, that is all. This was just rituals and laws written to be followed, hearts were not converted. Though they seem to

uphold the law, their mindsets had not changed. They were still living in sin with pride, jealousy, envy and so on. The act of Jesus' disciples not fasting but instead feasting seemed to torment the Pharisees. Already the disciples had plucked grain on the Sabbath and had eaten them without the ceremonial washing. So to the eyes of the Pharisees it looked like these Jews were breaking the law. All the more reason to persecute our Lord Jesus for encouraging such behavior. On the other hand when questioned, our Lord Jesus compares himself to a bridegroom at a wedding feast. In the Old Testament the same comparison is made by the prophets Isaiah and Hosea. Jesus Christ is the bridegroom at God's wedding feast. The disciples are the friends of the bridegroom. They believed that while the Son of God is with them there is no need to lament but rejoice. But our Lord dies to indicate that there will come a time when the bridegroom will be taken away. After this is when we Christians began to fast. Fasting reminds us of our dependence on God, the need for God's grace and mercy upon our lives. It is also a sacrifice we make in worship to our God.

In the Gospel proclamation we also see our Lord saying that we cannot sew new cloth onto an old garment or pour new wine into old wine skins. What our Lord Jesus meant by this was that the new message of salvation cannot be poured into people with the old mindset. The Jews and their hardened hearts were the old wine skins, the old garments. They were not willing to accept the Lord Jesus with his new way of thinking. It is the same with us today. Are we willing to accept the message of salvation in our lives? Do we believe that God is love (1John 4:8). We need to be new garments and new wine skins, with an openness and willingness to have a closer relationship with God.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to renew my mind and be open to your grace. Let me have a deeper journey with you. Amen .

Heb 6: 10-20

Ps 111: 4-10

Mark 2: 23-28

Who is greater? People or the Sabbath? In today's Gospel proclamation again we see a bone of contention between our Lord Jesus and the religious leaders. Our Lord's mission was to bring salvation to humankind and he did not focus much on the Sabbath rules. Our Lord Jesus clarifies that what matters is not the mere act of observing the sabbath but the intentions of the heart. God wants us

to do things out of love and mercy instead of just offering a sacrifice that lacks love and mercy.

It is only in the light of Christ, through the Holy Spirit that we are guided how to discern what is appropriate in the eyes of God when we face situations relating to the observance of the Jewish laws. Today the world is run on law rather than on love and compassion. There are many times we carry the same intentions that the religious leaders carried in their hearts while they were trying to trap the Lord Jesus.

"Then the Pharisees went away to work out between them how to trap him in what he said." Matthew 22:15. Pharisees in their blindness believed the Lord Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. They failed to understand that the Lord Jesus was the source of Love. They wanted to charge Him for any reason they could find. They failed to accept the Lord Jesus as the Messiah that they were looking for.

In today's context, if we do a deep dive into our hearts, how many times will we find ourselves in the place of those religious leaders. How many times have we failed to understand the importance of love. It could be the rejection of someone or turning our backs on someone in need or even to the extent of manipulating someone else for our own good. These are the times that we become like Pharisees in action. We are called to follow the path of our Lord Jesus and only that part. In John 13:34 our Lord Jesus tells us "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Hence we called to not merely follow tradition or rituals that many tend to do but love one another as the Lord loves us.

Prayer: Abba Father, help us to follow the path of your Son as we aspire to become like Him. When we fail to love one another let us be guided by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Heb 7: 1-3, 15: 17
Ps 110: 1-4
Mark 3: 1-6

We witness our Lord Jesus performing yet another miracle on the Sabbath though watchful eyes were upon him, waiting to pick on even the slightest wrong move He would make. However, our Lord addresses this sheer hostility with a clever question, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" and simply goes on healing the man with the withered

hand. This is a bold move on our Lord Jesus' part, and I cannot help but contemplate on what my reaction would be in a similar situation. Would I give into the common, accepted ways and laws of the world and turn a blind eye or dare to do the will of my Father? What would the stares and possible judgments of the people in authority mean to me?

Most of the time we are used to living our lives trying hard to meet expectations, reach goals, and create a stable place on earth. We make efforts not to step on each other's toes and mind our own business. In trying to do so we live in denial of the truth most of the time, failing to fulfill our real purpose in life. This has made us selfish and self-centered. As for our Lord Jesus, this was totally different. He knew His purpose on earth and was faithful in fulfilling it unto death, thus proving Himself to be the eternal High priest in the order of Melchizedek, standing in the gap between us and the Father.

He is inviting us to "stretch out your hand", withered or perfect so that His healing may flow into us, enabling us to stretch it often. St. Ambrose comments on this miracle, 'You, who think that you have a healthy hand, beware, lest it is withered by greed or by sacrilege. Hold it out often. Hold it out to the poor person who begs you. Hold it out to help your neighbour, to give protection to a widow, to snatch from harm one whom you see subjected to unjust insult. Hold it out to God for your sins. The hand is stretched forth, then it is healed.' Let us take heart and come out from behind the curtains of the law that blind us, to attend to the genuine need of our brothers and sisters and live a life pleasing in the eyes of our Father.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to be sensitive to the needy and reach out to them in love. Amen

Thursday January 21

St. Agnes, Virgin & Martyr

Christ reigns in the virtual church as well

Heb 7: 25, 8:6

Ps 40: 7-17

Mark 3: 7-12

Today we celebrate the feast of one of our greatest saints. Agnes means lamb in Latin, but in Greek, it denotes to " Pure One". St. Agnes was a girl of twelve years who chose to die for Christ during the Diocletian persecution. At her young and tender age, she triumphed over the merciless tyrant and received the crown of martyrdom for the glory of God. When she was proposed in marriage to the son of the city prefect she refused and repelled him. As a result, she was sent to a house of ill fame. At the house of shame, she found an angel of the Lord ready to protect her. She was enveloped by a light that blinded all who tried to approach her. Finally, when her executioner was hesitating to behead her, she replied with encouraging words " strike without fear, for the bride does her spouse an injury if she makes him wait ". Thus, St. Agnes was fully aware that she was prepared as a bride adorned for the spouse and bridegroom, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel proclamation today emphasizes many activities of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Namely preaching, healing and exorcism are highlighted. As we can see our Lord Jesus has chosen a place by the lakeside, away from the opposition of scribes, and institutional walls, and still people follow and gather around him at these unexpected places, seeking healing and the good news. When they approach him with the desire to listen to him and be healed, loving energy flows out of him. An important point for us to ponder living in the twenty-first century going through the challenging time of a Coronavirus pandemic is that the present generation has the same desire and urge to listen to Him and be healed? Thus, whether it is online prayer gatherings, Zoom, YouTube, Facebook, Insta customized apps, or any other online platform, they are effective and efficacious enough as long as it is our desire and faith that leads us to do so. The power of the Lord Jesus Christ evermore present now and forever and Faith in him and His most precious blood can cast out any evil, sickness, and disease at His command. Thus, we can be assured we will be healed and heard even in the Virtual Community and Church.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the strength and courage to believe in your mighty power and presence in all circumstances of life . Amen

Friday January 22

Week Day of Prayer for the legal protection of unborn children, St. Vincent, Martyr

We are the chosen people of the new covenant.

Heb 8: 6-13
Ps 85: 8-14|
Mark 3: 13-19

God's desire for his people was so great that he was ready to sacrifice his only begotten son our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, allowing him to endure pain, suffering, humiliation, and death. This was because he could not bear the thought of losing any one of us. We are the chosen people of the new Covenant.

•In biblical terms going up the mountain had great significance, Moses went up the mountain to receive the 10 commandments, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. We see many times the Lord Jesus himself going up the mountain to pray. In today's gospel proclamation we see the Lord Jesus call those whom he chose as apostles to come up the mountain and be with him so that he might send them to preach - Enjoying a closer relationship with the Lord Jesus always precedes being sent out on a mission to help other people.

•He gave them the power to heal sicknesses and to cast out devils - God empowers his people for the mission he calls them to.

•When we see the names of the apostles we realise that the Lord Jesus chose a variety of people from various backgrounds, abilities, and affiliations, and brought them together to form a community. They are called together to be with him and to learn to accept and love and live with each other.

•In the last sentence of today's Gospel proclamation, we see; Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him - Though each of us is chosen by the Lord Jesus, we continue to have a choice every moment of our earthly lives, we can choose to either serve him or betray him like Judas. However even if we feel we have betrayed the Lord Jesus through our sinful actions, it is good to remember, that nothing we do will ever shock the Lord Jesus. He knows us through and through, and we only need to turn back to him in repentance. He is always there ready, willing, and waiting to welcome us back.

Prayer: Abba Father, Thank you for choosing us, strengthen us to live out our faith mission on this earth. Amen

Heb 9: 2-3, 11-14

Ps 47: 2-9

Mark 3: 20-21

Though we know Christ, we may believe we have to work hard to make ourselves good enough for God. But rules and rituals have not cleansed people's hearts. By the blood of Jesus,(1) we have our conscience cleansed. (2) we are freed from death's sting and can live to serve God. (3) we are freed from sin's power.

If we are carrying a load of guilt because we are finding that we cannot be good enough for God, take another look at our Lord Jesus' death and what it means to us. Christ can heal our conscience and deliver us from the frustration of trying to earn God's favour. Let us bring our guilt-ridden life to Christ, confess our inability to clean up our conscience and ask him to forgive us. Thank him for his deliverance. because God can forgive us and clear our record. When the people sacrificed animals, God considered the people's faith and obedience, cleansed them from sin, and made them ceremonially acceptable according to Old Testament law. But Christ's sacrifice transforms our lives and hearts and makes us clean on the inside. His sacrifice is infinitely more effective than animal sacrifices.

No barrier of sin or weakness on our part can stifle his forgiveness. Sinful deeds are more than just wrong actions; ironically, these also include our attempts to reach God by being good enough! Our new culture glorifies self-effort and personal achievement. It defines a successful person as one who obtains certain goals: financial security, health and fitness, and the respect of others. But here the Bible gives us a different picture of successful living: we need to accept Jesus' sacrifice for our sin, abandon the futility of sinful deeds, and let the blood of Christ purify our consciences. In today's Gospel proclamation, with the crowds pressing in on him, our Lord Jesus did not even take time to eat. Because of this, his friends and family came to take charge of him, thinking he had gone "over the edge" as a religious fanatic. They were concerned for him, but they missed the point of his ministry. He was the Son of God and He had come to bring salvation to us.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for your amazing grace that saves wretched people like us. Amen

Jonah 3: 1-5, 10

Ps 25: 4-9

1 Cor 7: 29-31

Mark 1: 14-20

In our first reading today, we hear of God telling Jonah to go and preach against Nineveh. Nineveh was an enemy kingdom to Israel. It was known even outside the Bible as a great, lawless and corrupt city. It is to this city that God tells Jonah to go to. Jonah initially refuses and runs the other way. He had no love for the Ninevites or their salvation. It was only after being thrown overboard,

being swallowed up by a whale and then eventually ending up on the beach of Nineveh, covered in whale vomit that Jonah changes his mind. Jonah's disobedience causes Jonah to go through completely unnecessary suffering. Jonah's eventual obedience causes the salvation of more than a hundred and twenty thousand people.

The heart of God is always to save His lost children, even when they do not know or do not acknowledge God. Jonah, being a prophet, being familiar with the voice of God, still chose to disobey God in the first instance. It took a near-death experience for him to change his mind. I find Jonah so relatable because oftentimes, despite having a relationship with God, despite having encountered His goodness time and again, at times my first response to God is a no. This is especially true when God wants me to serve in a capacity that is uncomfortable to me or in a capacity that requires huge sacrifices of my time, energy or resources. And while God in His absolute mercy has kept me from being mixed up in whale vomit, I do find that my own decisions and stubborn actions often cause me to end up in really uncomfortable situations with completely unnecessary heartache. I think this stems from a deep-seated need to look after my own needs.

We become so absorbed by the world and its ways that we often fall into the trap of thinking that we need to look after our selves. The Ninevites were enemies of the Israelites. It would have suited Jonah just fine if God did destroy the Ninevites because that was one entire headache just taken care of. We think that what we see, what we hear, the current situation we are facing is everything. So we spend all our energy, all our resources, all our time into our very ineffective and unsatisfactory attempts at fixing it.

In the Gospel proclamation today, we read of our Lord Jesus preaching the amazing news that the Kingdom of God is at hand. He urges us to repent and believe in the Good news; the good news that the Kingdom of God has come near. The Kingdom where God reigns as King is near, that it is here. So we no longer have to provide for our own needs. We no longer have to look after our selves and strive to make things right. We no longer are limited to our resources and abilities. We can live in the Kingdom of God where He provides every need. Where His resources become our resources. Where we are not limited to our broken selves. And in this Kingdom, God is not just King but He is Father. So we do not need to live as terrified subjects of a cruel king. But we live freely and unafraid as sons and daughters of the Most High King.

King David, a prophet with far vision, understood this so well. He cries out to God to show him God's ways, to teach him the paths of God. Even though King David was a great king of this world, he desired to live in the Kingdom of God. He wanted to walk in the ways of the King of Kings. David goes on to say that God instructs the sinners in His ways, He guides them and teaches them what is right. This is the Kingdom of God; this is the great Good News that Jesus came to bring. So it does not matter where we think we stand with God. It doesn't matter if we are still stuck in the middle of our sinful life. If we just lift our eyes to heaven and embrace the reality of the Kingdom of God on earth among us, then we can receive the instructions and the loving guidance of the most perfect Father, whose heart is to have all His children back home, reigning with Him in His Kingdom. It does not matter if we have been saying no to God a thousand times before this. It does not matter if we feel like we have missed your chance and that currently are covered in whale vomit, stuck inside the belly of a whale, deep underwater. God has the ability and the desire to take us out of our limitations. He wants us to live freely and joyfully. He wants to use us to spread His Kingdom further and as we say yes to that, our own needs are met in ways that we could never dream about. God is a perfect Father – He alone knows how to perfectly meet the needs of His children – not just so we get by in life but so that we excel and reign in life.

Prayer: Abba Father, show me how to live this good news today. Show me Your paths, teach me to walk in Your ways. I want to embrace my place in Your Kingdom. I no longer want to be defined by my own circumstances and abilities but I want to reign with You in Your Kingdom here on earth. Amen.

Monday January 25

Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle

Conversion, power and miracles

Acts 22: 3-16/

Acts 9: 1-22

Ps 117: 1-2

Mark 16: 15-18

With today's first reading - most of us are familiar with the dramatic conversion of Saul, renamed Paul by Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the road to Damascus. His journey was motivated by an obsession to arrest, chain and bring back those preaching the Resurrection and to try to stamp out the new religion of Christianity. God, however, deliberately chose him as His instrument

to achieve the opposite – to propagate the faith to the world. The greatest persecutor became the greatest propagator. Our ways are not God's ways. We also know, as recounted in today's gospel proclamation, that God chooses whomever he wants to accomplish his will, whether they appear to us to be appropriate or not. Who could have expected that a committed enemy of the faith would be used by God to bring the Gospel to the world outside Judaea?

While our call is usually not as dramatic, we do know that by receiving the sacrament of baptism, we too are called to His purpose. St Paul was told by God's messenger, Ananias, of his mission to be God's witness. We are not often so explicitly commissioned, however, we know that the gifts and leadings of the Holy Spirit are available to us to discern our role in the Divine Plan.

The Gospel proclamation to go and preach the Gospel to everyone applies equally to us as it did to the Eleven. The instruction is accompanied by promises that astounding signs and miracles would accompany belief – demons being cast out, healing of the sick, speaking in foreign languages, immunity to the venom of deadly serpents and poisonous drink. Significantly, those powerful promises do not only apply to the evangelists, but to those who accept the Word and believe as well, meaning all of us. St. Paul's conversion and work remind us of the self-sacrifice of priests and those in various religious orders, who leave their families and familiar communities to go and serve where commissioned, sometimes in inhospitable lands, where they risk their lives and pay the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom for the faith.

Prayer: Abba, Father, we pray that you send your Holy Spirit into our own individual spirits to make us open to Your Will. Amen

2Tim 1: 1-8 or
Titus 1: 1-5
Ps 96: 1-10
Luke 10: 1-9
or Mark 3: 31-35

Today we celebrate the feast of Saints Timothy and Titus. Saints who chose to be pliable and usable in the hands of God. The 1st reading is part of a letter by St Paul to his spiritual son St Timothy. As we reflect on the Word, we ask God's grace to imitate the Lord through their lives.

St Paul begins by lifting a heartfelt Praise and Thanks to God for St Timothy's life, faith and ministry and encourages St Timothy; To rekindle the Gift of God that is in him, revealing a truth that God has not given him a spirit of timidity, but rather a Spirit of Power, of Love and Self-control. An appropriate word during a time when St Timothy perhaps felt disgraced by the imprisonment or discouraged by the void left by St Paul, as St Paul was also possibly facing death. Often we too have been tempted to feel sad and hopeless in our circumstances or carry doubt and discouragement in the wilderness waiting on God's promise. The Words of the Holy Spirit through St Paul can help illuminate our hearts afresh today.

St Paul reveals that when we received Jesus Christ into our lives and believed in the Gospel, we received the Gift of God and the seal of the Spirit, with the greatness of His Power and His glorious Inheritance (Ephesians 1:19). Hence as the Lord overcame the world, we too can, for we have not been given a spirit of Timidity (to pull back in fear or weakness), rather a spirit of Love and Self-control, which prompts us to rise above and follow God. Blessed are the eyes that see this truth (Luke 10:23) and so are we.

We can be generous with our exhortations towards those most in need, just as St Paul generously gave his exhortations to strengthen saints Timothy & Titus. For we ourselves are confident of the Love of God and remember what God has done for us. St Titus like St Timothy was a close and trusted disciple of St. Paul, whom he called his partner and co-worker. In St Paul's letter to Titus, we discover more of the exhortations given to him and his missionary journeys.

Prayer: Abba Father, Help us today to fan into flame the Gift of God to love those who hurt us and to follow not our passions but God. Amen

Wednesday January 27

St. Angela Merici, Virgin

"I will put my law in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Hebrews 10:16

Heb 10: 11-18

Ps 110: 1-4

Mark 4: 1-20

As I reflect on the readings of today, my heart sings a song that says: "The Sacrifice Lamb has been slain, His blood on the altar a stain, to wipe away guilt and pain, to bring hope eternal. Salvation has come to the world, God's only Son to the world, Jesus the One for the world, Yeshua is He."

Our Lord Jesus paid a supreme sacrifice on the cross for us that we may have eternal life. The majesty of this truth is often lost on our minds simply because it is not something we can perceive. Who is this King of Glory that would give up His very life? What kind of love is it that sacrifices life itself for the undeserving -- for me? I take to heart the words of the first reading that remind me of this ultimate sacrifice that has been paid. The God whom we worship is not finite, He does not fail, He does not falter. No, the God whom we worship is powerful and mighty, His enemies bow at His feet, He sits in glory in the heavenly realms and rules with authority. This Sovereign Lord is the same God that became the sacrificial lamb that was slain on the altar. He humbled Himself unto death, death on a cross, so that we may have life.

How often we take for granted the salvation that has been bought for us with the precious blood of Our Lord Jesus. We continue to fall and fail miserably, writhing in our sinfulness, in our inhibitions, when in reality, our sins have been washed away by the Lord Jesus. We no longer have to suffer, we no longer have to hurt, we no longer have to strive -- for salvation has come! When I read the Gospel Proclamation, it is as if my life is being displayed on the pages of my Bible. The truth that salvation has been given to me as a free gift has passed through my ears countless times, but so often I fail to see that as my reality. Instead, I allow the things and pleasures of this world to distract me and lure me away from the highest truth. I do not see salvation in those times, but I see my own nature, my struggle for wealth and position, my need for love and acceptance, and the word of God, the Lord Jesus, do not take root in my life.

Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to have good soil, where the truth of salvation can be harvested and that I may be a light that can bring the salvation of the Lord Jesus to others. Amen.

Thursday January 28

St. Thomas Aquinas, Priest & Doctor

Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob. Psalm 24:6

Heb 10: 19-25

Ps 24: 1-6

Mark 4: 21-25

“The goal of human existence is union and eternal fellowship with God.” the words of St. Thomas Aquinas whose feast we celebrate today. Every field has its own experts. The Catholic Church’ experts are the saints. If we do well to listen to the experts in other fields, we ought to listen to what the saints have to say.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews offers a similar sentiment in today’s first reading; “Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22) Draw near to whom? Draw near to a fellowship in building a personal relationship with God, a union that is forever, it can begin right where we are and not something we need to wait for in the afterlife. “Having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb 10:22)

Barriers that existed in having such union with God have been broken by the great high priest in charge of the house of God, Jesus Christ. Therefore, we have complete freedom to enter the presence of God without a guilty conscience. It is sinners who are invited to be saints, as St. Thomas Aquinas writes, Jesus Christ died “to satisfy for the whole human race, which was sentenced to die on account of sin.”

If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. (Mk 4:24) Paying attention to the negative voices of the world will result in us hiding the “light of the divine”. Our Lord Jesus alludes to putting the lamp where its meant to serve its purpose, on the lampstand. We are meant to serve a purpose too, in taking the light of God’s Kingdom to right where we are exposing the lies of a broken world. The best way to begin is by having a personal relationship with our eternal Father thereby if our relationship is sincere our actions and demeanour will reflect it and be rewarded more greatly; however, all reward is through the grace of God. Speaking to St. Thomas, Christ once said; “Thou hast written well of me, Thomas; what reward wilt thou have?” St. Thomas’ reply was: Nothing but you, Lord. Nothing but you “We should utter the same sentiments.

Prayer: Abba Father, today I desire above all else to live in fellowship with you for eternity. Amen.

Heb 10: 30-39
Ps 37: 3-6, 23-24, 39-40
Mark 4: 26-34

The underlying theme in today's readings is of perseverance in reaching our final destination, which is Heaven. The Gospel Proclamation likens the Kingdom of God to a man who scatters seed on the ground and the mustard seed. In both these parables, we see the growth taking place. However, both start with something as small as a seed. Let us focus on the seed. It is something

seemingly insignificant, but with the right soil, nutrients and care it can grow to its fullest potential. In the First Reading, we see St. Paul's letters to the Hebrews about their journey as Christians. They faced many obstacles but stood firm in their faith. Therefore, it seems as though this seed is a symbolic representation of our journey of faith.

In dry weather, the seed which transforms into a seedling must send out its roots deep in search of moisture to survive. In the same way, the seed of faith, unlike any other seed, thrives during the storm, in persecution, amidst obstacles and challenges. It is these circumstances that deepen the roots of the seedling. In the Gospel of Luke 5:4, the Lord Jesus says, "Put out into deep water...". It is in the deep that our faith is tested, and we experience trials and tribulations. Just like the roots of the tiny seedling that go in search of moisture, in the face of trials, our roots too should go deeper in faith – deeper in the Lord Jesus. It is then that we begin to see the same circumstances through His perspective, it is then that we receive the strength and the courage expressed by St. Paul in the First reading. It is that very experience that helps us to stand firm in our faith, with our head held high and we begin to know in our hearts 'My God, My Father will see me through'.

In today's Psalm, the Psalmist speaks about the secret to perseverance in the middle of the storm. He speaks to us about an added factor of 'trust'. Today, let us choose to trust and have faith in Our Father, that even when we do not understand and when we struggle to hold on in faith, He will give us the grace to persevere and endure until the very end.

Prayer: Abba Father, today we choose to thank you for the challenges we are facing in this world. We know in all things You are working for our good. Amen

Heb 11: 1-2, 8-19

Luke 1: 69-75

Mark 4: 35-41

The readings today talk about our faith in God and we can reflect on situations where we have stood by this faith in God. When was the last time we stood with Faith in Christ Jesus when the trials of life were tossing our boat of life and we were about to get drowned in the sea of problems? Has it been a few years ago or few decades ago? Has this experience/s become just a memory and is futile now?

Many of us come into the understanding of the living Christ with our experience in Him and through our faith. But this experience can be out-dated for most of us. When we get to know things better, we tend to give it our own interpretations. It is similar to the problems of life. As the Christian life matures, the commitment becomes more challenging. But this may not be to our liking therefore, we may give it our own religious interpretations and adjust the Word of God to suit our whims and fancies. St. Augustine clearly says, that if you believe what you like in the Gospels, and reject what you don't like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself. Is this the story of our lives today? Or do we really seek the Word of God in the smallest things of our lives and trust Him to guide us into His will?

Christ Jesus does not leave us even for a second. He is with us all the time. The Holy Spirit lives in us and we are His temple. Jesus was also present in the boat with the disciples. But they failed to understand His power after witnessing many miracles performed by Christ Jesus. The apostles had the first-hand experience of all these miracles unlike the others who heard about them and came into belief, They were the closest to Christ Jesus but still failed to trust in Him as their eyes were only focused on how big their problems were. Their thoughts would have been similar to our thoughts whenever we hit a crisis. For e.g. - I should be happy no matter what. I am the centre of this universe, everything needs to be right for me. What about ME? Is it the will of God or our own will that is reigning in our lives today? Let us choose to interpret the word as our Lord wants us to and in the light of His wisdom.

Prayer: Abba Father, the peace that comes through faith in You surpasses all human understanding. Pour out your perfect peace. Amen.

Deut 18: 15-20

Ps 95: 1-9

1 Cor 7: 32-35

Mark 1: 21-28

Today's liturgy is about leadership and knowing one's leader. As much as the leader has authority and power, he or she has to wield the power in agreement with the one who imparted that leadership upon them. In the same way, those who are led by the leader need to recognise their leader to obey and trust in him or her.

In the First reading, we see Moses describing to the Israelites, the leader God had chosen to lead His people to the Promised Land. That leader was Joshua and Moses was explaining to the people that he would be a prophet whose task was to hear what God was telling His people and convey the same to them and nothing else. Also, he was not supposed to give anyone else's instructions or commands to the people, other than God's.

The Gospel proclamation is about perfect leadership, as shown by none other than the Lord Jesus. Since the beginning of the public ministry of our Lord, one thing was obvious to all who listened to Him and followed Him; the authority with which he spoke, taught and ministered. We can easily figure out why. The Lord Jesus only sought the will of His Father who sent Him on the mission, and did and said only what He saw and heard from the Father. His own words as given in John 5:19 explain thus: "The Son can do nothing by Himself, He can do only what He sees His Father doing because whatever the Father does, The Son also does."

What was the result? The blind received sight, the deaf heard, the mute spoke, the lame leapt in joy, the sinners received forgiveness and joy, those who were ruled by evil spirits received deliverance and freedom, and the list goes on. Yes, the people were amazed at the authority with which the Lord Jesus spoke, but did they recognise His true leadership or true identity? If not, why? Didn't God the Father describe His Son, Messiah, well in advance to His people? Yes, for centuries the people of God were prepared by the prophets about the coming of the Messiah. Then what made them not recognise their Saviour, after all those prophecies? The reason

was that their minds were set on an identity formed by themselves about the Messiah, rather than God's Word that described Him so clearly and in detail. The result was that the people of Israel chose to see the carpenter's son (cf. Matthew 13:55), above and beyond all what they had heard from prophets and witnessed firsthand too. Yet, there was a category who recognised the true identity of the Lord Jesus, namely those from the spiritual realm. The angels declared His arrival right at His birth when he was laid in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. The evil spirits also recognised Him as the Son of God and begged of Him not to destroy them. They not only recognised the Lord Jesus but also obeyed him, as they were powerless in his presence.

What about us? How do we identify the Lord Jesus in our lives? What role does He play in our day to day life and our family life? Is He a mere helper God to whom we cry out when our efforts fail? Or is He a God who is angry and needs to be pleased with our good works and good behaviour? We are invited to make a conscious choice today. St Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all- how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"(Romans 8:31-32). St Paul also says, "... neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:39). Our Lord Jesus promised, His disciples thus, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever-The Spirit of truth."(John 14:16). The list goes on, introducing to us, God our Father, Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is the best guide available to us that helps us accept Christ as our Lord and surrender our lives to Him as it becomes real in our life. In this unlimited treasury, we find all we need for a life filled with peace, love, joy and freedom and absolute divine providence. "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.." (Ephesians 3:20) The only way is to move from a life lived 'with Christ' to 'in Christ'. This is what the Four Steps Retreat offers us and helps us to begin a journey of a life lived in the Spirit 24/7. This was the secret of the lives of the apostles after the Pentecost, and of the early Christians, that challenged everyone around them and this is the need of the hour.

Prayer: Abba Father, You hold the depths of the earth in Your Hand, yet You also hold my life in Your mighty Hand. Give me the grace to hear Your voice and respond to it. Amen.

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Blessed Devasahayam Pillai



Devasahayam Pillai (named Neelakanda Pillai at birth) was born into an affluent Nair-caste family on 23 April 1712, India. He was raised by his maternal uncle, and was inculcated with Hindu beliefs and traditions early on. His family had much influence in the royal palace of 'Maharaja Marthanda Varma', king of Travancore, and Devasahayam went into the service of the royal palace as a young man. He was soon put in charge of state affairs as an official.

In 1741, Captain Eustachius De Lannoy, a Dutch naval commander, was sent to capture Colachel. The Dutch forces were defeated and Eustachius De Lannoy and a few other Dutch soldiers were captured and imprisoned. He was later pardoned by the king. De Lannoy later earned the trust of the king and went on to become the commander of the Travancore forces. During their influential roles under the King, Devasahayam and De Lannoy became well acquainted. De Lannoy's Christian faith interested Devasahayam and De Lannoy enlightened him on the faith, leading to his conversion in 1745. He was baptized at the Roman Catholic Latin Rite church at a village in Tamil Nadu, where the Jesuits had a mission. Neelakanda Pillai, his name at birth, was then changed to Lazar, although he was widely known by the Tamil & Malayalam translation as Devasahayam, meaning God's help.

Church chroniclers say that the members of the royal household and the Nair community brought false charges on Devasahayam. He was divested of his portfolio in the administration and was arrested and tortured for three years. In 1752, he was let off in the forested hills. Some people believe that soldiers went up the forested hills and shot him to death. His body was then carelessly thrown out near the foothills. It was in Kanyakumari district that Devasahayam Pillai died on 14 January 1752. Traders found Pillai's decomposed body and carried it to the Kottar Church. His mortal remains were interred near the altar inside St. Xavier's Church, Kottar, now known as the diocesan Cathedral. The remains of Devasahayam Pillai is in the Cathedral ever since.

Devasahayam Pillai was declared a Martyr and Blessed on 2 December 2012, at a solemn ceremony held in the Diocese of Kottar. His feast day is on 14 January.

On Our Knees In His Hands is a book of reflections and aid to prayer based on the daily readings of the mass. Its purpose is to help Catholics and other Christians engaged in the normal hustle and bustle of life to discover God's presence and direction in the practical situations they are placed in. This is made possible by a group of writers who themselves are lay people living at the heart of busy day to day life.

