

FEBRUARY
2021



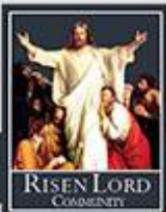
ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS



Season of Lent

FEB 17th - Ash Wednesday

APR 4th - Easter Sunday



DAILY READINGS & REFLECTIONS

Volume 21
Issue 02



ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

FEBRUARY
2021

“Lent is like a long ‘retreat’
during which we can turn back
into ourselves and listen to the
voice of God, in order to defeat
the temptations of the Evil One.”
“Renounce yourself in order to follow
Christ; discipline your body; do not
pamper yourself; but love fasting.”

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On Our Knees In His Hands

FEBRUARY 2021

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Note that Feast day readings may differ from country to country**

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Monday February 01

4th Week in Ordinary Time

"Immortality was the soul of their hope"

Heb 11: 32-40

Ps 31: 20-24

Mark 5: 1-20

Philosophers down the ages have believed that there is a perfect, unseen world, of which this world is but a shadow. Similarly, the Letter to the Hebrews says "All your life you have been trying to get away from the shadows to the truth which is in Jesus Christ." Jesus Himself IS the ultimate truth, the perfect world.

The incredible victories of heroes are mentioned in this passage. Against unimaginable odds they held on in faith to the belief that God was on their side. They had faith in God's almighty power and ultimate victory. The Hebrews' writer seeks to inspire new courage and new responsibilities by making his readers and hearers remember the past. This chapter is a reminder of how the Lord stood by His people. When we are discouraged, let us remember that it is this same God that we worship, whose arms are all-encompassing, and under whose cloud of unconditional love we, God's children live, and move, and have our being.

In the Gospel proclamation we view scenes contrary to what we would expect. Our Lord Jesus, open to the mind and heart of the Father, saw, felt, and acted according to God's will. The demon recognised Jesus as the Messiah, and we would have expected those witnessing that miracle to have cemented their faith. But these people were blind to reality. Instead of experiencing joy at seeing a man freed of demons, they reacted with terror. Their avarice made them want to banish the disturbing Christ, blinding them to the joy of Jesus' presence. Many in the modern world do the same. Faith has been described as a way of holding on to what we hope for, certain of what we cannot see. The first reading recounts biblical examples of people who risked everything, underwent unbearable torture, for the sake of their faith. Their faith and endurance enabled the Jewish religion to survive. Jesus Himself was born into the Jewish faith, according to God's purpose. We, as God's people, are chosen to be inheritors of this glorious tradition. Let us hold fast to it and in love and hope.

Prayer: Abba Father, may your Spirit help us to follow Jesus and fulfill His vision for us. Amen

Tuesday February 02

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

The feast of the Presentation of the Lord!

Malachi 3:1-4
Ps 24: 7-10
Heb 2: 14-18
Luke 2: 22-40

Today, Mother Church invites us to celebrate an important feast, the feast of the presentation of the Lord. To put it in simpler terms, we as Catholics celebrate the day when God who became man goes to the temple that was built to worship him. It is interesting because according to the Gospel proclamation only two people from all those who were present

in the temple that day recognized this babe as the one true God. Have you not asked or wondered how it happened? In today's 1st reading, prophet Malachi tells us that when God sends his messenger he will suddenly appear. To Simeon it would have been a total surprise to see this mother carrying the baby into the temple. But the gospel reveals to us that Simeon was a devout & a righteous man who often pondered on the word of God with an expectant heart to see the Messiah. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that the baby he was seeing was God himself. Do we not like Simeon want to see Him, do we not long to be with Him? Yet how ready are we for that meeting? Our hearts are filled with sin, bitterness, hatred, unforgiveness, greed, jealousy the list goes on. How comfortable are we to stay without going for a good confession? The gospel further tells us that he took the baby into his arms and praised God. How unworthy are we to carry Him as a baby? I often think if I was Simeon, this child would be another ordinary child brought to the temple, I would not recognize God coming into the temple of my heart as a baby or would mother Mary be comfortable in letting this baby go into my arms. Place yourself in my shoes and ask would she let him go into your arms?

But our Lord tells us through the second reading that He has come to our rescue, He is fully aware of our unworthiness and assures us that He is there to help us become righteous. Let us confess as often as possible and till we do that turn to the Lord with the Four Steps and give the absolute & sincere truth of our hearts to Him. Let us ask for the intercession of Mother Mary through the rosary knowing for certain that He will appear suddenly. Let us be ready for Him.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to recognize the Lord when He comes so that we may not miss out or identify someone else as him. Give us your Holy Spirit to live a righteous life that is pleasing to you. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen!

Wednesday February 03

St. Blase, bishop & martyr/St. Ansgar, bishop

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church

Heb 12: 4-7, 11-15

Ps 103: 1-2, 13-18

Mark 6:1-6

Today, the Church celebrates two Martyrs of the Church; Saints Blaise and Ansgar. Saint Blaise was a Bishop and a physician of Sebastea, which is now Turkey. St. Blaise is known to have performed many miracles. One of them is the miraculous removal of a fish bone from a young boy's throat. Therefore, he is venerated as the patron saint of those who suffer from throat diseases.

He is said to have been tortured to death for the faith; after refusing to deny the Faith, he was beheaded in 316. Saint Ansgar was an ascetic, mystic and a missionary. His conversion took place when he, as a young boy, learned in a vision that his mother was in the company of Mary, mother of Jesus. He was devoted to the poor and the sick, imitating the Lord in washing their feet and waiting on them at table. He persevered in difficult times to bring the faith to a pagan land.

The lives of these two saints and martyrs are beautifully summarized in the first reading of today. The trials set before us by God are truly for our own discipline and God will not give us something that cannot be handled by us. These martyrs have gone to the extent of giving up their lives for the Lord. We may often lose our focus from God and get entangled with the things of the world. But the Lord is inviting us to return; we have the four steps, we can always use this tool given by the Lord to return to Him. Our focus in life is not to collect treasures of the world but rather to labour for the kingdom of God; our aim in life should be eternal life with Him after our lives end here on earth. When our eyes are set on this, things thrown at us in the worldly realm do not matter. What matters is to overcome these snares, trials and live a life with God. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. (Heb 12: 12-13) In today's Gospel proclamation we see that the eyes of the people are focused on the worldly realm, they're unable to see the goodness of God in others and things around them because their mind is only set on the world. Is it the same with us today?

Prayer: Abba Father, the work that You have assigned to us, may we see that as our duty and our vocation. We are born to do Your will and we believe this. Amen.

Isaiah 43: 1-3, 5, 10-13

Ps 95: 1,3, 7-10

Acts 1: 12-13, 2: 1-11

Matt 2:1-2, 7-12

Today is the Solemnity of our Lady of Lanka and we celebrate Independence Day of Sri Lanka. The Portuguese entered Sri Lanka in the year 1505 and were dominating from about 1505 to 1658 and then came the Dutch (1658 – 1796) and finally the British ruled Sri Lanka from 1815 to 1948. How does the Solemnity of our Lady of Lanka coincide with the Independence Day of Sri Lanka?

During the malevolent second World War II Sri Lanka was under the regime of the British and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was acting as a base for the operations of the British soldiers against Japan. Therefore Ceylon was a target. In 1939 at the beginning of World War II, Msgr. Jean Marie Masson, Archbishop of Colombo, made a vow to Our Lady promising that if Sri Lanka was spared the horrors of war, he would build a votive sanctuary in her honour and would have it dedicated to Our Lady of Lanka. The county was only marginally touched. In 1946 Msgr. Masson obtained the Vatican's permission to build a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary and in 1948 Pope Pius XII proclaimed the Blessed Virgin Mary as patron of Sri Lanka. Hence the National Basilica was built. The faithfulness of our God is reflected in and through these events of our history. During the Dutch persecution God sent St. Joseph Vaz to restore the Catholic Church. God's love and faithfulness to His people and to His promises are strong and constant.

The promises given in the first proclamation have become true to us. Our God spared and delivered Sri Lanka. When we are in the hands of our loving God we need not fear. God has redeemed us and called us by name. We as a nation could be comforted when we turn to our history and recognize the faithfulness of God to His people.

The event in the second proclamation, which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples while many nations were gathered in Jerusalem, is another expression of God's love and faithfulness. When the Holy Spirit comes; unity and clarity takes over. Heaven invades earth and God dwells in the depths of people.

In the Gospel proclamation the birth of the Lord Jesus and the visit of the Magi's denote God's love and faithfulness to the entire world.

Prayer: Abba Father, Oh! Faithful God! I'm yours and you are mine. Amen.

Heb 13: 1-8
Ps 27:1-9
Mark 6: 14-29

Today, we celebrate the memorial of St. Agatha, also known as Agatha of Sicily. She is a virgin and martyr of the Church. St. Agatha was a beautiful young lady who had dedicated her life to God and became a consecrated virgin from her young days. However, she was much sought after by men; nevertheless, St. Agatha was faithful to her vow. This dedication led her to a lot of suffering,

imprisonment and even death. We may have heard of the torture she underwent by a man who was interested in her, but she was strong in the Lord and was able to smile at the moment of the greatest suffering, which led to her breasts being cut off. Her torture increased and so did her love for the Lord. These were her words in prison,

“Lord, my Creator, You have protected me since I was in the cradle. You have taken me from the love of the world and given me patience to suffer. Now receive my spirit.”

Today’s readings beautifully present the life of St. Agatha and the calling upon her life, which gave her the determination to hold on and persevere despite many hardships. In the Gospel proclamation we see the same take place in the life of St. John the Baptist. Both these saints were living a life of praise. Their external circumstances did not change, in fact they got worse. But what changed was the way they dealt with their suffering. There was thanksgiving, praise and worship that were built in their hearts. As a result, they experienced heaven right in the heart of the fire.

In the First Reading, St. Paul is inviting us into this same experience (vs. 6-9). He is inviting us to imitate the lives of the saints, because God is our helper, and therefore we have no reason to be afraid as there is nothing people can do to harm us. Today’s readings invite us to break away from ourselves, from the bubble that we often tend to live in and instead to turn to a life of praising, thanking and worshipping God through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the middle of any circumstance. This will then open the door to God’s blessings.

Prayer: Abba Father, today we choose to live a life of praise, thanksgiving and worship. Give us the Grace to walk in your ways. Amen

Saturday February 06

St. Paul Miki & Companions, martyrs

We find rest in the safe harbour of Jesus

Heb 13: 15-21

Ps 23: 1-6

Mark 6: 30-34

Today we celebrate the feast of twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki. In 1597, a group of native Japanese Catholics and foreign missionaries had to suffer death for the sake of their faith. Saint Paul Miki was training for priesthood, Kisai another companion who was a lay brother and John Goto a Catechist are the well-known martyrs in this group of best known martyrs of Nagasaki. Saint Paul

Miki and his twenty five companions were stabbed to death, with lances on February 5, 1597 and his last words were “after Christ’s example, I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as fruitful rain “. Therefore the blood of martyrs remains the seeds of Christianity perennially.

The Gospel proclamation illustrates the Apostles, expressing to their Master, what they had done and taught in His authority. They were the chosen to be “sent” or the official agents who were appointed or Commissioned by the Lord Jesus himself. They had so much to share with their master, yet the Lord understands the condition of the Apostles for he knew that they are tired and weary after their busy mission tour. Thus, the Lord invited them to a place of solitude where they can rest. As servers or even believers we can be assured that our Lord recognises that we may be weary at times, and he graciously offers rest for our physical bodies and souls. This need these moments of rest. This reminds me of the “Quiet Time Retreat” we had during the second wave of the pandemic. Certainly the Lord Jesus Christ is offering us refreshment and revival to us through this challenging times, as He is the all-knowing and understanding creator God. Just as the manufacturer knows the mechanism of his product, our creator God knows that we too need rest for our weary bodies and souls. Are we prepared to rest awhile with the Lord? Have we been sensitive to this call by spending a quiet time and listening to Him ? Let us replenish ourselves with the living water that quenches our bodies and souls in this time of rest.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me a spirit of prayer to enjoy your presence in the quietness and be intimately bound to you. Amen

Sunday February 07

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted- Psalm 147:3

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7
Ps 147: 1-6
1 Cor 9:23
Mark 1: 29-39

In today's first reading we meet Job, who is complaining to God about his lot in life. But who is Job? He was once a rich man who had a large farm with seven thousand sheep and three thousand camels. Five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys. He had many servants at his beck and call. He had a family that was the envy of the community. But now all that was lost. He

had lost his animals, his crops and his family. On top of that he has become very sick. In today's first reading we hear what is going on in Job's heart.

Have we not all been in this pit one time or the other? Maybe it was when we discovered that we had been struck down by a life-threatening illness like cancer, or the loss of a livelihood, or the death of a near and dear one. Maybe it is when we look back on our lives and see all the missed opportunities, the unfulfilled dreams, and potential. Maybe it is when we look back at that bad decision that destroyed a promising future. Maybe it is the fallout of a decision made by someone else over whom we have no control or influence. We have all had that special Job moment in our lives at one time or the other. During such times, Job's prayer may as well be ours.

Unknown to Job, there was a different drama being enacted in heaven. Satan had entered the courts of heaven and scoffed at God claiming that Job remained faithful only because he was blessed with a good life. God then gave Satan permission to test Job. If we belong to God, Satan cannot touch us without God's permission. We also learn that there is a higher purpose in the tragedies, disappointments, and setbacks that God allows into our lives. As today's responsorial psalm proclaims, God is good all the time, not only when things are going well for us.

My Job moment came four years ago at a time I thought I had a promising career and a rosy future. But then, an activist investor bought a significant number of shares in the company I worked for, earned a place in the board, and demanded that we reduce staff by a significant amount. There I was in my fifties, without a job, and with little of hope finding a new one. Unknown to me, a family member had

contacted a terminal illness, which would eventually cost me more than all my assets and savings put together. When I lost my job, my employer gave me a golden handshake. If not for this money, the sickness would have turned me in to a pauper. When I lost my job, I felt as though the world had come to an end. As I look back I realise that there was another drama being enacted in heaven.

In today's Gospel proclamation we meet our Lord Jesus, who is returning from the synagogue soon after he had exorcised a demon. It was still the early days of our Lord Jesus' ministry and people were probably stunned by the events that happened there. God, who had seemed dormant and distant for ages, had suddenly come alive wherever our Lord Jesus walked. The healing of St. Peter's mother-in-law may sound trivial to us today, but in those days of primitive medicine, it could have been a life-threatening sickness. By evening the place was teeming with people who had come to seek divine intervention for their own Job moments. As soon as St. Peter's mother-in-law is healed, she starts serving. Even today, many who are touched by divine intervention, start wanting to do more for the Lord. The miracle is the beginning of a new way of life. Yet there are others who take the miracle and go back to living the way they were. Those who walk away miss the opportunity to continually see a drama in heaven being enacted through their lives. It would have been logical for the Lord to build on the success he had on that Sabbath day. However, when he goes up the mountain early next morning, He hears His father's voice guiding Him in a different direction. Now, not only is heaven enacting another drama, it is interacting with the earth, and revealing how to co-operate with the heavenly drama. This is the privilege of those who do not walk away after the miracle but choose to remain for more. We see the whole of Galilee impacted because one person (our Lord Jesus) cooperates with the heavenly drama.

In today's second reading we discover that the Lord Jesus has passed the baton to St. Paul. He is now cooperating with the heavenly drama. He concludes the reading with the words "All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it." By cooperating with the heavenly drama, he is given eyes to see the heavenly drama that takes place in his own life. Like St. Paul we are invited to live our lives participating in the drama of heaven.

Prayer: Abba Father, grant us the grace not to waste away our tribulations, but to ride upon them to respond to your invitation to a life that receives meaning and purpose from heaven. Amen

Monday February 08

St. Jerome Emiliani /St. Josephine Bakhita

Adversity, conversion, healing and redemption

Genesis 1: 1-19
Ps 104: 1-12, 24 & 35
Mark 6: 53-56

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, despite experiencing and overcoming the deadly plague himself. The latter, 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, out of love for us.

The Gospel proclamation tells us that when people found Jesus on the other side of Lake Gennesaret, they “ran throughout the whole region” and 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 collected from the area for healing. 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 own 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 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 or 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

Genesis 1:20-2:4

Ps 8:4-9

Mark 7:1-13

It is said in the Book of Genesis that men and women were made in the image and likeness of God and were created to rule over the fish, birds, cattle, wild animals and all creeping things.

In effect we were given the freedom to lord over and have a say in the lives of all creatures. This freedom was given to be exercised with love, compassion and responsibility. We were also meant to experience this freedom in our lives and spiritual journey.

This was the freedom the apostles and disciples experienced when they went about with our Lord Jesus. Though they were Jews themselves, in the presence of the Lord they did not feel the need to follow the numerous traditions imposed by the leaders and Pharisees.

The issue was not with the traditions themselves but the leaders judged people as holy or unholy based on their adherence to the traditions. The traditions had just become practices and were not serving a purpose in bringing people closer to God.

In these times of the pandemic, many of our traditions and practices have taken a beating. The practice of attending mass has lessened. Most churches find that parishioners are not attending mass as before. While caution cannot be thrown to the wind, it is becoming obvious that some people cherish the experience of Mass and the Eucharist while others are enjoying the holiday away from it all.

But the point that our Lord Jesus was making and which is relevant today is - are we honouring our Lord with our lips or from the bottom of our hearts. Are we wanting and wishing to be spending time with Him in solitude? Are we keeping aside time to converse with the Lord and receive strength and wisdom from the Spirit? Do we feel the longing to search the heart of God and share His love or are we busy judging people based on traditions and practices. The people of our Lord Jesus time found excuses in the name of the law and God to abandon their responsibility towards their parents since they had dedicated their lives to God. Today, the pandemic has become the excuse to even visit a church. Let us search our hearts and see where we stand - lost in worship or clinging to guidelines as an excuse.

Prayer: Abba Father, reveal the real state of our hearts. Show us our true nature and in your mercy break our hearts to fall in love with you again. Amen

Wednesday February 10

St. Scholastica, virgin

Change your world by changing your words

Genesis 2: 4-9, 15-17

Ps 104: 1-2, 27-30

Mark 7: 14-23

In today's Gospel proclamation our Lord Jesus shares an amazing revelation. He says, it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles, rather it is the things that come out of our mouths that defile, because they come from one's heart where intentions, words and deeds arise.

We have area/s in which we often fail and fall, for me it was my tongue. It often ran before my brain. I lost it in places that normal people wouldn't much notice and in the process terribly hurt my family countless times. And yet there was a time I thought this was my lot, I was wounded from my past to be any good. In my desperation I persistently prayed with the 4 steps for change and one day God came to my rescue. He revealed a kingdom principle through Jeremiah 15:19-20 that the Lord desired to use His children as His mouth but the worthless words they utter were a hindrance and calls us into repentance.

His grace slowly brought me into repentance and as I kept reflecting on His word I experienced His healing. I have not arrived, however the urge to be offended or re-act has gotten lesser, or the desire to defend myself when provoked looks an utterly worthless pursuit. I've found the pearl of great value and tasted His peace and joy.

Let us bring to mind what Jesus Christ said "...those who want to save their lives will lose it...those who lose their lives for My sake, will find it." (Matthew 16:24). Yet, we often fight to save our lives only to lose it in the end. "Happy are those who do not blunder with their lips and need not suffer remorse for sin."(Sirach 14:1,2).

The Bible says in Proverbs 18:21; "Death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat it's fruit." So what do we choose today? Life in all its fullness or death & destruction? As we sit with our Lord Jesus today let us give Him the bitter truth of our pain, shame & suffering and receive His Holy Spirit. For His grace is enough for us, for His power is made perfect in our weakness.

Prayer: Abba Father, set a guard over my mouth and keep a watch over my lips that I may serve you. Amen

Genesis 2: 18-25
Ps 128: 1-5
Mark 7: 24-30

“Eve was not taken out of Adam’s head to top him, neither out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him.” (Matthew Henry)

Today’s readings seem to celebrate womanhood, in the first reading we see the creation of woman. Men and women are different,

each bring different strengths, abilities, and perspectives to the world making the world the diverse, colourful and beautiful place it is. Men and women are divinely designed to be complementary. They must come together to show the fullness of God.

In today’s Gospel proclamation we see a woman who shows extraordinary inner strength and depth, as she pleads with the Lord Jesus for the healing of her daughter.

- We see hunger in her plea, as she longs for her daughter to be healed. A longing which would not take “no” for an answer. It is her hunger that led her to seek out the Lord Jesus, seeking and finding Him even though; He was “in hiding.”
- We see her perseverance in prayer even when it seemed that she was being denied the healing that she longed for. We see her tenacious, resilient prayer, which did not demand healing, rather, asked for the crumbs from the table, acknowledging crumbs from God’s bounty are enough to heal her daughter.
- We see her humility, she did not turn away from the insulting words that the Lord Jesus seemed to be saying, she simply recognized that He was above her, she did not defend herself, she simply accepted her position in the eyes of the Lord and humbled herself before Him. She did not try to dictate to Him how she should be treated; she simply left herself in the hands of God. Her disposition of hunger, perseverance and humility earned her the admiration of the Lord Jesus who in St. Matthew’s gospel proclaims her to be a woman of great faith.

Today as we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes we remember the most perfect example of womanhood “the blessed Mother Mary”. She was a woman filled with the grace of God whom the Angel Gabriel proclaimed blessed above all women. Who’s “Fiat” total and complete acceptance of the will of God in her life made her the “ark of the new covenant”, and the means by which the word became flesh and salvation entered the world.

Prayer: Abba Father, we bring to you all the women in our lives and we ask that you bless them with your strength and grace to fulfil their missions. Amen

Friday February 12

5th Week in Ordinary Time

"I confess my faults to the LORD," and you took away the guilt of my sin. Psalm 32:5

Genesis 3: 1-8

Ps 32: 1-7

Mark 7: 31-37

Today's readings tell the story of disobedience and obedience. A tale of the all-powerful, omnipotent supreme God of the universe becoming creation himself to restore order on how it was meant to be from the beginning, unhindered fellowship with God, But the events of today's first reading may be eerily similar to our own daily lives. The antagonist in the story operates no different even today by making us doubt the Word of God, doubt God's goodness and what he has already revealed to us.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and finally the pride of this life are what we face. Our Lord Jesus was also tempted in the desert, but triumphed in the end. He did not depend on himself alone, but on the Heavenly Father and also being obedient to the Word that was already revealed. Adam and Eve used external objects to cover up the sin and shame within. Gen 3:7 says "and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." How often do we attempt to cover up our sins and fallen nature with what is external and hide behind excuses? Not even at the fall of man did our God restrain his mercy but in fact covered humankind with mercy, compassion and love. Our Lord has not ever shut his heart on us, in truth it is we who have shut our hearts and closed our ears to him, perhaps to hide behind the sin and shame. The blood of our Lord Jesus has taken away the guilt of our sin and we do not need to hide behind fig leaves. Rather freely enter into his presence with repentant hearts.

The Gospel proclamation further elaborates the heart of God, when our Lord Jesus heals a Gentile who was deaf and could hardly talk. This is what God intended from the beginning to give life and life in all its fullness. But it appears Jesus did not want to appear merely as a miracle man but one who had come as the suffering servant to do the will of Father. In obedience and by his wounds He healed and restored humankind back to God. Significantly when we spend time alone with our Lord he will come to us and heal the deafness in our spirit and when we walk in obedience we can begin to experience the same fellowship our Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Abba Father, by your grace let me walk in obedience to your word. Amen

Genesis 3: 9-24

Ps 90: 2-6, 12-13

Mark 8: 1-10

A parent would instinctively know that something is amiss when a young child goes quiet all of a sudden and out of view. The natural reaction would be to call out the name of the child or better still, go looking for the child. What awaits at the other end would be nothing short of shocking. This was the same that happened in the garden of Eden that eventful day. Being left alone to enjoy

the richness and beauty of nature, Adam and Eve were lured into sin which drove them into hiding, away from God, perhaps hoping that things would be back to normal, which never did. As a result, sin entered the world, trapping us to rely on the words of the enemy, making us fend for ourselves with all our might thus living independent of God.

Looking at ourselves through the eyes of the scripture today, we are challenged by our God's call 'where are you?' Are we hiding, with our heads hung low, unable to look at our Father for we have been eating fruits off many forbidden trees? Are we trying to pin the blame on the other person or circumstances for our failures? Or are we in a state where we can openly run to Him with no hesitation as we have no doubt of His unfailing mercies? Wherever we may be the good news is that just like a loving parent who keeps an eye out for his or her child, our Father in heaven is always on the look out for us. We only have to turn to him and cry out 'here I am Lord!', for this is His original plan for us from the beginning of the world; to be in communion with Him.

We are not left to our own devices and He is able to provide for us! We no longer have to fight on our own to be satisfied. Just as it is revealed in the Gospel proclamation, not only our spiritual needs will be met but our material needs too. Our Lord knows our needs and when He says 'I feel sorry for all these people' it is assured that He is sensitive to our pain and suffering. What He needs is our contribution, seemingly little it may seem. Let us make it a point today to consciously offer ourselves to Him by returning to His arms each time we fall.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us the grace to hear Your call, as you come looking for us and trust in Your merciful love. Amen

Leviticus 13: 1-2, 44-46

Ps 32: 1-2, 5, 11

1 Cor 10: 31-11:1

Mark 1: 40-45

Today's Liturgy might sound familiar to most of us. We have heard how much of a dreaded disease Leprosy was in the past, not just in the time of Old Testament or in the time of Lord Jesus' earthly life but also till as recently as the 1940s, when effective treatments were discovered. Today we know how the disease is spread and that prolonged contact is needed for someone to be infected

with Leprosy, but as in the time of Old Testament, even during the life time of Lord Jesus that was not the case. People with Leprosy or any similar skin disease for that matter were totally shunned by society and were deprived of any human contact, for the fear of infecting others. It is in that context we need to dive into the Liturgy of today.

The First Reading gives the classical social restrictions related to Leprosy and similar skin diseases, namely self-isolation. This term would have been much less significant if we heard it before 2020, simply because it was something we did not have to go through much, unless we had an infectious disease like chickenpox or likewise. Yet to us who lived through last year, this term brings in more living memories of loneliness and frustration. Basically, a leper had to submit to indefinite self-isolation except for the extremely rare possibility of a spontaneous or supernatural cure. And we know that all conditions were in place to ensure strict adherence to the laws of social distancing and self isolation, being monitored by the religious leaders of the time. We who are living in the COVID 19 pandemic can relate to this system very well, and also can appreciate the disgust, reaction and rejection of the affected ones by society at large; we only need to have someone cough, sneeze or blow their nose in public nowadays to trigger the same behaviour in those around!

Why was our Lord Jesus different from the social norm? We all know He was fully human, like us or any of the others who lived during that time. He also had learnt Moses' Law related to Leprosy and other skin diseases. If so, why did the Lord respond to the leper in a very different manner? The answer is that the Lord was following the thinking pattern, speech and behaviour of another person- His Heavenly Father. He was so intimately connected to the Father, that He only

did what He saw the Father doing, said only what the Father wanted Him to say and responded only as the Father's Heart was moved. The result was a miracle, a supernatural healing. The love and the power of the author of life flowed through Lord Jesus to the leper. Heaven invaded the earth when one person was in total communion with the Father, changing the norms of nature.

How about the present time we live in? Can the same thing happen today? The correct answer is 'yes'. Yet the sad truth is we do not witness the same work of God in and through each of us. We too have received the same divine sonship and daughterhood through our Baptism, being made an intricate part of the Holy Trinity and grafted to the life of Christ. The same Holy Spirit who dwelt inside our Lord Jesus of Nazareth is dwelling within us. Yet, often the facts of this world remain alive in our minds and hearts, more than the truths of God's word and His promises. Our intellect and physical senses dictate to us the truth as perceived by our body and soul, undermining what our spirit, connected to the Holy Spirit, is seeing, hearing and understanding. Gradually our spirit undergoes 'disuse atrophy', meaning death due to not being used at all! We are invited today to get alone with our own selves for a little while and find out where our own spirit is currently. Is our spirit leading our life, or has it been pushed back to the least priority status?

This act of our Lord Jesus was not just about healing of a leper but also those who witnessed this encounter had a glimpse into the Father's Heart. The leper simply implored the Lord to speak a word of healing, for he believed that His word would heal him. Yet what was the Lord's response? Affirming His desire and eagerness to heal the helpless person, The Lord went beyond His call of duty because He saw the Father embracing the disfigured, scarred and weakened body of the leper, who himself was a beloved child of the Father. This certainly does not mean that we ignore or break the civil law. St Paul clarifies beautifully in the Second Reading that the one sentiment we as God's children ought to be led by is love, and not reaction, arrogance or selfish ulterior motives. May the Spirit of peace, love and freedom fill our hearts today in a special way to partner with the Father and the Son, to bring in abundant joy to those around us, suffering with various forms of isolation and rejection.

Prayer: Abba Father, may we follow the example of Your Son in our day to day life and bring heaven down to the earth. Amen.

Genesis 4: 1-15, 25
Ps 50: 1&8, 16-21
Mark 8: 11-13

“Offer God a sacrifice of Praise”, today’s response of the responsorial Psalm reminds us of a great way to win the Heart of God. How does praise become a sacrifice? How can we praise God which ends up pleasing to the Eye of God? We are presented in the first reading today with how Cain and Abel made their offering to the Lord. Abel offered “best firstlings of his flock” Gen 4:4 while

“Cain brought an offering to the LORD” Gen 4:3. What is important to notice here is how humankind starts widening the gap between the creation and the creator. God had no second thoughts of creating the best of you and me for his purpose. What is it that we can offer him in return as an offering? There are many times where we fall short of giving the best in return to God. As an example, how is our quiet time with the Lord? Are we giving that time the significance that it deserves or is it just another time of the day? Choosing our options between offering “best vs any” to God could result in disengagement from the purpose of our lives while becoming slaves to our comfort zones without even realising the difference between the two. We may end up giving something to God but the best of ourselves. The scripture confirms that we are wonderfully made in his image. He took so much care to design Adam & Eve, yet they rejected the creator and fell from His presence to their own flesh. That same fall continues through Cain to the next generation. Isn’t it the same struggle we go through in our day to day life? This fall continues even today though God gave up divinity to teach us through humankind by becoming one of us to help our journey to eternity. Are we also seeking for external signs from heaven instead of internal transformation that is expected from us? We may expect a miracle to convince ourselves about the power of God without realising that God’s plan in our life continues to unfold every moment. We are naturally driven by what we see and feel in our senses. But the Lord Jesus speaks to our hearts as he spoke to St. Thomas through the words “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” John 20:29.

Prayer: Abba Father, I humbly pray that you transform me from my desire to see signs and wonders rather than have an internal transformation of my heart. Transform me so that I may become a child of your Kingdom. Amen

Genesis 6: 5-8,

7: 1-5,10

Ps 29: 1-10

Mark 8: 14-21

Today's reading talks about Noah and the floods that destroyed the earth and every living creature with it. God chose to do such a thing because of the people's evil. The only person who found favour with God was Noah. The Pharisees and the Jews thought that they belonged to this chosen race of Noah. They found themselves to be blameless and thought they had found favour with God. But the

truth was their hearts were hardened and they had evil intentions too.

Today's Gospel proclamation shows us how the Lord Jesus was warning the disciples to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod. Here yeast is a symbol of the evil influence of the Jews and the political leaders. A warning that the disciples could not understand. They thought our Lord spoke about yeast because they had only one loaf of bread with them. These were the same disciples who had heard of the miracle of manna in the desert, who witnessed feeding of five thousand and four thousand gentiles with seven loaves of bread. Having witnessed such powerful miracles, they were still blind to the truth. If our Lord Jesus could feed multitudes with a few mere loaves of bread, how much more could he do it with his chosen twelve. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29) the disciples saw but yet could not understand that the one true Messiah was with them and they had no reason to doubt or fear.

Today though we have seen the wonders we fail to put our complete trust in Him. There was a time in my life when I had to scrape through with my finances. Though I had faith in God, I always lived in fear and doubt. I always kept counting the finances. Once the Lord showed me my lack of trust in him. He used the example of the multiplication of the loaves and asked me to offer the loaves I had (my current income earnings) He promised to multiply. It was hard to do. But I knew the Lord was teaching me to accept Him as the Lord and Savior of my life, to put my complete trust in him. From then until now I have not counted a single cent, but yet I have never fallen short. When we accept and make God our first priority in life, the Lord looks after every little detail of our life. All we need to do is put our trust in Him and he will never fail us.

Prayer: Abba Father, help my unbelief. Come into my life and help me put my trust in you. Amen

Joel 2: 12-18

Ps 51: 3-6, 12-17

2 Cor 5: 20-6: 2

Matt 6:1-6, 16-18

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, a season of fasting and prayer. It is the time the Church has set aside for us to come back to the Lord in repentance for our sins. During this time, many people give up things they usually enjoy such as chocolate or meat. While this is good, we are also called to give up more than just a snack or a meal for a short period of time. We are called

to make a lasting change in our lives. The Lord speaks to us through the First Reading from the Prophet Joel when He says, "Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead" (Joel 2:13). He wants us to permanently give up something, never to take it up again. While we can give up sweets for a short period, we can also make a bigger sacrifice by giving up an addiction or a negative behaviour forever and replacing it with a relationship with God.

How can we give up something we are addicted to or a negative behaviour we have been engaging in for most of our lives? Joel 2:12 says, "return to me with all your heart." The first step we can take is to examine our hearts. If we are playing a game with God and pretending to give up something only to take it back, then we are not dealing with the sin in our lives and God will not answer us. Instead, God is calling us to examine our hearts truthfully. The Lord is inviting us to stop playing around on the surface, but instead to go deeper into our lives and give Him the truth of our hearts—the ugly sin that we hid from the world—with the intention of giving it up for good.

The next thing we can do is to see God differently. Not as a deity in Heaven, waiting to punish us for our sins or as a judge waiting to rule over our lives. Joel 2:13 gives us an idea of the nature of God, "He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." Each of us have a picture or an idea of the personality traits of God. Even though we have heard that the Lord is good, when we commit a sin or look inside and see our sinful nature, we may be inclined to hide our true nature from God. But the Prophet Joel is asking us to give up what we think we know about God and to replace it with these traits. God is gracious and compassionate. He is slow to anger and abounding in love. He relents

from sending calamity to us. This is the idea of God we must carry in our minds during these 40 days. When we have this idea of God, we are more likely to turn to God and give Him the truth of our lives.

Today's Psalm gives us a prayer to keep on our lips during Lent. Psalm 51:4 and 12 say, "Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and make me willing to obey you."

In the Second Reading, St. Paul reminds us that the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins when He was nailed to the cross and therefore, we are made right with God. We need not wait until we are rid of our sins to come to God. But we can come to Him in our sinful state and be cleansed by the blood of Christ. The Lord says in 2 Cor. 6:2, "Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation." Do not wait another day or another hour or another minute to go to the Lord.

In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus is asking us if our motivation is to please God or to have honour among men? Are we entering this Lenten season on the surface or are we ready to make a real change in our lives? In Matthew 6:1 the Lord says, "Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven." The Lord is saying that when we do something for human recognition, we are losing the internal revelation from God. As we journey with God and give Him inner responses, God will open our inner lives and reveal His love and presence to us. However, if we are trying to win honour before men then we will miss out on this internal revelation of God within our hearts. When we do something for God, such as fasting or when we do something for someone else, we must do it as an internal response to God. Then God will reveal His presence and love to us. Matthew 6:18 tells us, "Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you." The private reward is the interior experience of God.

During these 40 days, the Lord is calling us to look inside our hearts and give Him our sinful nature, behaviour and addictions for good and enter the secret place of God. We can do many sacrifices for God with the intention of deepening our interior lives.

Prayer: Abba Father, may these 40 days lead me to an internal revelation of God. I pray I will know Him more and experience His love in a deeper way. Amen.

Thursday February 18

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Let me follow You

Deut 30: 15-20

Ps 1: 1-6

Luke 9: 22-25

In today's first reading, the book of Deuteronomy speaks to us that obedience to God will bring life. God in His unconditional love and mercy created us and gave us the gift of free will which no other being has. He does not force us to do anything. Using our free will, we should choose His ways. However, many of us are still living a life of worries, depression and enslavement. We are unable

to experience the fullness of life which God has gifted us with simply because of our disobedience to Him. When we disobey Him, we suffer the consequences of it and lose the fruits of Holiness. The choice is in our hands. God with His mercy, guides us and instructs us in the way we should walk.

In today's Gospel proclamation, our Lord Jesus speaks about His passion and death. We all should walk through the experience of pain, suffering, rejection and death. However, by nature most of the time we do not like to go through suffering or pain and try to avoid it.

The Lord Jesus had a purpose for His life. That was to fulfill the will of His Father. He lived for this purpose alone and was ready to go through suffering, rejection, pain and even death. It was clear to Him that the result of His response to His Father in heaven would be resurrection from death. It is with this promise that the Lord Jesus challenges us "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

The One who gave us life has a purpose and hope for it. We need to live our lives fulfilling that purpose and hope. We generally ignore this purpose, live our life according to our own plans and become stressed. This way of life of tiring ourselves to avoid suffering and rejection causes us more misery. Our lives are often centered on our own selves. To save our life let us lose it. Let us deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him. Whenever we take a decision, if we choose His will instead of ours, that is when we deny ourselves; take up His cross and move forward.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the power and strength to seek your will and to submit to it. Amen

Isaiah 58:1-9

Ps 51: 3-6, 18-19

Mat 9: 14-15

Time-out is a means of disciplining a child for unacceptable, difficult behaviour. Parents have found time-out to be more effective than yelling or threatening to improve the behaviour of a child. For an example, if a child has a temper tantrum at a dinner table over what is there on the table while acting out with an aggressive behaviour towards others, parents will give the child a time-out; a

short boring time away from others, from the table and from all that is enjoyable at dinner time. During the time-out when the child hears the joyful conversation, the sound of the silverware and the appetizing smell of all that is delightful on the table, the child realizes while being sorry what the child is truly missing bringing about a change, a conversion in mind and heart. In that environment of depravity or of “fast”, the child comes to realize what is truly good, godly and wholesome in life: relationships, company and fellowship.

Today is the first Friday after Ash Wednesday and we hear the constant call to fast. Fasting is for mending relationships, getting them right. In the Gospel today, in answer to the question about his disciples not fasting, our Lord says: “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.” Unlike for the disciples of Jesus’s day, we live at a time where the presence of our Lord Jesus is even less acknowledged. We look for his 2nd coming, waiting for reunion while being in need also of constant reunion with ourselves and fellow humankind. Fasting therefore is something necessary to be embraced.

In the first reading, God tells people of Isaiah’s time that their fasting is futile. It was solely to draw God’s attention to themselves. Fasting neither acknowledged their dependence on God nor His generosity to them. Their fasting failed to seek solidarity with the needy stirring a greater charity in imitating God’s generosity and care for all.

It is time that we took a time-out for a fruitful fast.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me this Lent to remember that my care for others is a measure of my greatness. Amen.

Isaiah 58: 9-14

Ps 86: 1-6

Luke 5: 27-32

When our Lord Jesus calls us to follow him, he wants to give us a new life, a new purpose, which liberates us from the enslavement of this world.

In the first reading from the book of Isaiah we have a glimpse of the tremendous effort demanded of all to do away with every form of slavery from small privileges that working companions compete for to the laws that keep

entire groups marginalised, then the light will rise in the dark.

In St. Luke's Gospel proclamation, we find Levi who was a collaborator who worked for the Roman forces that subjugated his fellow Jews. He helped to carry out one of the most common methods of oppression and made his own living by taking a cut of the money he collected. Our Lord Jesus calls him with the words 'Follow me'. He leaves everything and follows Him. He who was better known as Mathew was chosen as one of the twelve apostles and eventually went on to write the Gospel that bears his name. Mathew's conversion was a great dramatic work of Jesus. A materialistic and reviled opportunist was transformed into one of the great exponents of the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus invites us as he did Mathew, to follow him! Who needs to respond? We all do. His words are a challenge to us. As he said he has not come for the righteous but for the sinners. We all need to repent, 'because, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.'(Romans 3:23)As we enter into the season of Lent it is an opportune time for some soul searching.

We may go to church, and even pray, but decent social behavior and high moral standards does not change our fallen state and the need to open our hearts and give the truth of our hearts to Him and follow Him. If our lives are to be fruitful and free from the enslavement of the world and above all if we want to experience true salvation, true freedom we must follow him in total surrender.

The holy father Pope Francis in his exhortation in *Christus Vivit*, says the following particularly to the youth of today "Jesus is the true youthfulness of a world grown old, the youthfulness of a universe waiting to be clothed with his light and to live his life. With Jesus at our side, we can drink from the true wellspring that keeps alive all our

Prayer: Abba Father give me the grace to respond to the call to follow your beloved Son! Amen

Sunday February 21

1st Sunday of Lent

When we repent , God relents

Genesis 9: 8-15

Ps 25: 4-9

1 Pet 3: 18-22

Mark 1: 12-15

The season of lent echoes with one call - a call to repentance. Why must we repent? Repentance is a preparation for a deeper experience of our Lord Jesus. Repentance makes way for a cleansing and clearance of our hearts, minds and conscience.

It is said that Noah built the ark and made his call to repentance for some 55 years to as many as 120 years before the flood started. The popular number of 120 years comes from Genesis 6:3 when God said that man's days would be 120 years. He was 600 years old when he entered the ark together with his eight family members. The ark was about 450 feet long (135 meters) and 45 feet wide (22.5 meters). The height of the ark was 45 feet (13.5 meters) and it was divided into three levels and it took many years to build. The people watched Noah build his ark for years and accepted him as a sort of nutty prophet with his fancy ship. His call to repentance was not taken seriously and would have been the joke of the town.

Though the call to repentance was followed by a global flood it pained the heart of God and the father made a covenant to never again destroy the world and its creatures with flood waters. Before the flood there was no concept of rain. Later on rain became a normal occurrence and the rainbow was a reminder of the covenant God made to humankind.

The story of Noah is a foreshadow of the story of our Lord Jesus. Our Lord Jesus came to this world as a result of widespread sin and hatred. He built an ark of the word of God where people could find refuge from their inability to live as God wanted them to live. The flood and flow of our Lord Jesus' blood cleansed us of sin and resulted in a covenant between God and people. A covenant of love came into being where through the merits of Christ Jesus' passion we can find hope, refuge and eternal life.

Even our Lord was driven into the desert by the Spirit for forty days to prepare himself for His ministry to the world. Often we see repentance as a dirty, weak and boring word. But true repentance is the trigger that catapults us into a next level sort of relationship with God.

Repentance clears the way for us to hear God's voice more clearly. It humbles us and opens us up to experience the hand of God more powerfully.

Many of us love to wear a certain t-shirt, top or pair of shorts as our home clothes. Over time, these clothes gather stains and spots and no matter what we do the clothes cannot be cleaned of their patches and spots... but we love those clothes all the same because we feel comfortable in them. And so it is with sin. Along time our heart and conscience becomes stained with sin and we find it difficult to get rid of that sin because that sin might have become a comfortable habit we love and enjoy and it takes a mighty effort to clean off that sin.

The Psalmist says in Psalm 25 -: "Your ways, O Lord are love and truth to those who keep your covenant." Repentance seems like a dirty boring word but the reality is that it wipes away clouds of doubts, fears, and darkness and allows light into our being. When we repent it becomes easier to experience the love of our Lord Jesus and the voice of God becomes clearer to us. God is moved to speak a covenant over our lives and we begin to walk in intimacy with our God.

When I look from my balcony and watch my neighbour wash his vehicle, I easily notice the spots he has missed and the patches that might have escaped his eyes. He may have the special fibre cloth, the bucket of detergent and the hose but he can still make mistakes and he may still miss out on cleaning certain key areas of the vehicle. The person from afar can see the entire vehicle body, the bright areas and the dull areas and the missed out spots. So it is with a time spent in repentance and contemplation. We may have all the knowledge but we have our blind spots. From afar, the spirit is able to point out our lacks and losses. When we accept them we are washed and made whole.

Our Lord Jesus came for this reason. In the body He was put to death due to our sin. In the Spirit He was raised to life. Repentance and fasting is putting the flesh to death that our spirit may be raised to life. Many of us are handsome, beautiful, glowing and bright but the reality can be that the body is alive but our spirits may be dead.

Our Lord Jesus tells us that the time has come; the kingdom of God is at hand. Change your ways and believe the Good News.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for the call to repentance which our Lord Jesus offers us. May we repent and then rejoice as His light breaks into our lives. Amen

Monday February 22

Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle

The great Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle

Levi 19: 1-2, 11-18
Ps 19: 8-15
Mat 25: 31-46

The Chair of Saint Peter (Latin: Cathedra Petri), also known as the Throne of Saint Peter, is a relic conserved in St. Peter's Basilica, enclosed in a sculpted gilt bronze casing.

The name derives from the Latin cathedra meaning chair or throne, which is used to denote the chair or seat of a bishop (hence the term cathedral for the main church in an episcopal see).

Today's feast of the chair of Peter celebrates not only the triumph of Christ's grace in the heart and soul of Peter, but his status as the primary pastor and teacher of the Church. The chair is the symbol of his teaching authority, as it is of every bishop.

Peter was Jesus' chief apostle whom later Catholic tradition regards as the first pope. Born in the village of Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee, his original Hebrew name was rendered in Greek as Simon, but Jesus gave him a new name, the Aramaic word for "rock" rendered in Greek as Kephias. Sometimes he is referred to in the New Testament as Simon Peter

In the Gospel proclamation today when Jesus asked a question, He was making a point. Jesus and His disciples were in Caesarea Philippi, away from their own territory. It was a place of idolatry and oppression – a threatening place both politically and spiritually. In this environment, Jesus posed two important questions about the perception of His identity. He was not interested in His popularity rating. He wanted His followers to be sure about the One they were following.

Today our culture is just as hostile and opposed to Jesus. People offer a long list of inadequate and incorrect ideas about Jesus, ranging from "just a good teacher" all the way to "divisive" and "intolerant." The real question was and continues to be: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:15). At the Church of the Primacy of St. Peter by the Sea of Galilee, where today's Gospel story took place, there's a sign that says, "The deeds and miracles of Jesus are not actions of the past. Jesus is waiting for those who are still prepared to take risks at His word because they trust His power utterly."

Prayer: Abba Father, Peter had a divine revelation with which he boldly proclaimed your Son as the Christ, the Son of the living God. We pray for the same boldness and revelation to proclaim you as our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Isaiah 55: 10-11
Ps 34: 4-7, 16-19
Mat 6: 7-15

As we enter the season of lent, which is a season of preparation of heart, body, mind and spirit to reflect on the passion and the resurrection of our Lord, today's Gospel proclamation takes us to the very heart of prayer - The Lord's prayer.

We know this is the very prayer the Lord as Teacher and Master taught His disciples when they asked Him how to pray. It is "the very prayer"

our Lord is offering Himself to us to reflect and ponder as we communicate with Him through this prayer every time we recite it. Every aspect required is covered and fulfilled in this prayer. We are reminded of a loving eternal Father, whose dominion never changes. He is reaching out to His children, whenever they call on Him in surrender.

At the same time the prayer which I feel is a spiritual gift from the Lord, leads us to praise our Heavenly Creator, identify Him as Father, thank Him for His promises, for what the Lord has done for us in the past, for what He is doing right now and for what He is fulfilling in the future, to repent, to surrender, to be connected to the Father and to intercede together with the Son and the Holy Spirit on behalf of our brothers and sisters.

Our heart is the battle ground between the flesh and the spirit. Are we content pondering on the current situation or are we ready transfer that conflict over to the Lord for His will and purpose is a choice we have to make on a daily basis. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, therefore, use the gift of prayer tools which will enable one to yield to the Lord and enter His presence. To draw His power down as quoted in the first reading today from the book of Prophet Isaiah, for just as when snow and rain comes down from heaven it fulfills the purpose it has been sent for so will the "Word" which comes out from the mouth of God will not return back empty until it accomplishes the purpose it has been sent for. Today we celebrate the feast of St. Polycarp who was a bishop and a martyr of Smyrna (ancient Greek city). He was bound and burnt on a stake, then stabbed with a spear when the fire failed to consume his body. The reason for his martyrdom was refusing to burn incense to the Roman emperor. His final words were " how then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?"

Prayer: Abba Father, give us a heart to praise you, honour you, glorify you in everything we do. Amen.

Jonah 3: 1-10
Ps 51:3-4, 12-19
Luke 11: 29-32

Today's reading portrays God's steadfast love to his creation, his people, for us. He is none other than a God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger. He is a God who reaches out to his creation, to elevate, and to correct their paths.

Today's first reading illustrates what took place in Nineveh. We can see how Jonah takes the message of God to Nineveh. Instead of reflecting on Jonas message, instead of looking in for signs or questioning or reasoning or rationalizing Jonas words, Nineveh accepted and believed in the message proclaimed by Jonah. The Word says that "Nineveh Believed in God". They abandoned their sinful ways, went down on their knees and prayed with all their might and strength, and fixing their gaze on the Lord they repented. We can see the Lord heard them, reversed their punishment and forgave them.

Nevertheless, in the second reading in Book of Luke we see the crowds looking and seeking for signs.

Today in our lives too we often look for signs and explanations and reasoning instead of believing in the Lord. When we come to a crisis in our lives instead of fixing our gaze on the Lord and going down on our knees, we question God. We look for logical rational reasoning and we resort to logical things or rational things. Instead of repenting and fixing our gaze on the Lord we look for meaning, purpose and often try to interpret things according to our limited human ways, without realizing and understanding that his ways are higher than our ways, and his plans are higher than our plans.

Reflecting on today's readings we understand and realise that what we need to do is to fix our gaze on him, go down on our knees and yearn for him. When we choose to do this something amazing and beautiful take place. As we can see what took place in Nineveh. Once we choose to look at the face of the Lord. This Lord who is full of mercy, transforms our lives and situations. He takes our sinful weak cursed lives and situations and transforms them into a blessing.

Prayer: Abba Father, lead me to get down on my knees that I may experience your saving power and transforming love. Amen

Thursday February 25

1st Week of Lent

Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you"

Esther C: 12, 14-16
23-25
Ps 138: 2-8
Matt 7: 7-12

Faith is power, for it is the link to the reality of God. When we live in our own understanding and in the narrow confines of our thoughts, our reality, we live in a very cramped up world. Our problems can overcome us and can lead to urges like depression and suicide.

This world is never perfect, no matter what, or who we turn to, in this world, we come across imperfections and brokenness. Even though our own fathers may desire to give us good things, the reality is, they can fail too. They are also part of this imperfect world and even they can hurt us.

This is where faith in God comes into play. Yes, we have a father in heaven who is perfect, a father who can take away all our sorrows, a father who is able to provide us good things even if our earthly father and mother fail, a father who would leave the 99 to come looking for you, a father who does not look into our past or our failures. A father who is waiting to embrace us no matter what we may be going through at this moment.

Living in faith draws divine energy into our life, the impossible starts to happen, our lives become so much more lively and happier. Once we are filled with faith, divine energy flows through us to others too. When we ask for in a spirit of trust, we see the power of prayer, really believing that what we ask for will happen, it happens!! When we truly open ourselves to God, and expand our hearts to receive, the impossible takes place.

Faith is a gift from God and faith in action is Love and Faith can move mountains. In Matthew 21:21 our Lord Jesus answered and said to them, Truly I say to you, If you have faith, and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say to this mountain, Be you removed, and be you cast into the sea; it shall be done. Mark 11:24 declares Therefore I say to you, What things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.

Prayer: Abba father, increase our faith, expand hearts to receive all you have planned in my life. Amen

Ezekiel 18: 21-28

Ps 130: 1-8

Matt 5: 20-26

The Pharisees and Sadducees believed having Abraham as their father would guarantee salvation. A personal responsibility in dealing with their flawed nature was not that important (Mt.3/8-9). We too may think that by our external religious observances, we are perfect and pleasing to God. We may believe that our broken nature is not something to be worried about.

The Lord invites us into deeper dimensions. The serious consequences of killing ,bringing mayhem and chaos into the world ,affecting all humanity, needs to be dwelt with at a deeper level. The cause is our human nature, that is broken and distorted. Everyone bears a personal responsibility for the sad state of the world. Anger, pride and jealousy are capable of destroying families and communities.

As the saying goes ' the greatest battles originate in the mind, but manifest on the battlefields' . The Lord brings attention to our personal twisted and flawed nature.

In the first reading the aspect of personal responsibility is brought out. Having lived an evil life all our days, but in the end living a virtuous life in repentance , guarantees salvation. Likewise one who has lived a very virtuous life all one's days, but in the end chooses a sinful life, his virtuous life counts for nothing for salvation. Ancestral sin need not make one a prisoner of circumstances. Conversely ancestral holiness may not necessarily guarantee one to inherit such holiness.

Everyone carries a flawed nature .Ultimately it's a matter of personal responsibility in dealing with our camouflaged twisted nature. Only one who has not such a nature could save us. The Lord invites us to come as we are, since He is that perfect One. He loves us and draws us into His Holiness, our naked unholiness is revealed, even to the extent of shocking embarrassment. In tender love He cleanses us in His blood. Giving us the Holy Spirit, He gives us His own nature with no blemish, flaw or darkness. We become a transfigured being within a vessel of clay.

Prayer: Abba Father, heal my mind, heal my soul, wash my wounds and make me whole. Amen

Saturday February 27

1st Week of Lent

"So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)

Deut 26: 16-19

Ps 119: 1-8

Matt 43-48

Do we trust that God's blessing is the best thing for our lives? If so today's first reading brings out a question, do we follow His blessing or something else? This reading shows how much God wants to bless us. If we believe His blessings are vital, then we will give and share suitably. God wants us to have a totally new attitude and this is mentioned in the last section of Deuteronomy 26. The perfect

blessings are for those who fulfill the promise. It is contingent upon obedience. In our current context, we will think of this in terms of our spirit of giving. Jesus said, "It is more holy to give than receive." God's blessing is more valuable than anything earned on earth. He will give His blessing in a multitude of unanticipated ways. If we think it will mean this or that, we might be disappointed but one will not be disappointed in the end. These words go beyond speaking about what is said earlier in chapter 26.

Today's Gospel; proclamation comes from the Sermon on the Mount. It is a passage, which many find hard, too idealistic or just downright meaningless. It is important that we understand what 'love' here means. In Greek, it is the word agape, a deep concern for the virtuous of the other that reaches out even if there is no return. Jesus tells us that we need to try to love people in the same way. It is vital to note that he is not telling us to be IN love with those who hurt us or to like them or to have them as our friends. That would be impractical and irrational to ask. However, if we just care for those who are nice to us how are we different from others? Even members of a murder gang, people with no religion or morals do the same. However, we are called to imitate the God in whose image we have been made.

What do I gain by detesting my enemy? Then there are two of us. Why should I allow another person's hate to affect my feelings towards them? A person, who hates, is a person who is suffering, a person who is doing more harm to self – rather than to the supposed enemy. Surely, it is much better to pray for that person than to hate them back; to bring about healing and reconciliation rather than deepen the wound on both sides.

Prayer: Abba Father teach us to be perfect as you are perfect and to love each other with agape love. Amen

Sunday February 28

2nd Sunday of Lent

"Even when it seems I'm surrounded, by many liars... I still stay faithful to God" Psalm 116:10-11

Genesis 22: 1-2, 9-18

Ps 116: 10, 15-19

Romans 8: 31-34

Mark 9: 2-10

I was recently listening to a podcast by Fr Mike Schmitz where he gave an explanation about the sacrifice of Isaac that I had never heard before. Abraham is about one hundred years old at this stage. He had spent nearly one hundred years walking in faith. He is after all the father of faith. God asks him to go up to Mt Moriah, to take his son, his only son and sacrifice him to God. Abraham is fully

aware of the promise that God had made him to make his descendants into a nation. And God had promised that this would be done through Isaac. It seems like a strange and almost needless request from God.

Although never explicitly taught, I always assumed that Isaac was just a little boy when this happened. But Fr Mike explained that Isaac was about 30 years old – perhaps even 33 years old. It was highly likely that Abraham has told Isaac many times about the promise of God concerning Isaac. That through him God would make the descendants of Abraham into a nation. So Isaac the young and very capable man, for indeed he was in charge of carrying all the firewood up the hill, and his father walk up the mountain in faith all the while walking in the tension that what God is apparently requesting of them right now is not compatible with the plan of God that they thought they knew. Isaac could have easily overpowered his father but instead he lets himself be bound to the firewood that he carried up the hill. In faith the son watches the father, likely with great personal struggle, lift up the knife to sacrifice the son. None of this makes sense. But the father and son work in faith and God does not disappoint. Right at the perfect moment, the angel of God intervenes and the father and son get to offer to God a sacrifice and climb down the hill together. Indeed Abraham was so confident in the promise of God, that earlier on as he started climbing Mt Moriah with his son whom he was to sacrifice, he tells his servants that 'we' will come back to you.

This all seems so pointless until God reveals that this is a pre-shadowing of the greatest sacrifice to come. Isaac the son, faithfully and obediently walks up Mt Moriah to be a sacrifice, pre-shadowing the Great Messiah, the faithful and obedient Son of God, Who came willingly and laid His life down on a similar mountain.

In the Gospel proclamation today we find Jesus, going to

Mt Tabor with his closest friends and there on the mountain Jesus is visited by Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets, explaining that it wouldn't work that way. Lalith Thaththa always says that perhaps it is here on this mountain that it was fully revealed to Jesus the extent of what would be needed for the salvation of all humankind. And the acceptance of Jesus, His unwavering obedience to the Father and His eternal love for us, transfigures Him that He shines in dazzling brightness.

Life becomes a lot easier when we simply accept that God does not work in ways that we can easily understand. His ways seem illogical up until the moment you realise how far reaching, perfect and all inclusive they are. God promises us that as the heavens are above the earth so are His ways and thoughts above our ways and thoughts. Sometimes it is just easier to accept this and move on.

There are promises that God have given me but He does not seem to be working in the ways that I think He needs to work for those promises to be realised. Indeed, just like with Isaac, the very promise He has given me seems to be at risk of being destroyed by what He is asking me to do. I desire to serve Him and worship Him constantly but He seems to be asking me to be present to my children. He has promised me wealth and prosperity but right now He just seems to be asking me to give and to keep giving. Perhaps you are promised a happy marriage but right now He is asking you to be faithful to your unfaithful spouse. Perhaps you are promised a rewarding career but right now you are being asked to be faithful in your mundane and thankless job. It doesn't make sense but it doesn't need to.

Just like Abraham, the choice is mine. Either I focus my energy on the promise and its achievement or I focus on obeying God, trusting that He Who promised is faithful. Because if God is for me - and He is very clear that He is - then who on earth or in all of creation could ever stand against me? How could defeat or failure ever be my final portion when it is Christ Himself Who constantly intercedes for me?

God is not wasteful. He is not vengeful. He is not careless. He is the most perfect and most loving Father. So when He asks something of me, I am to freely obey Him because my heart can safely trust in Him. So in this season, as I try to work through what God has asked of me and what He has promised to achieve through me, even when they seem so contradictory, my response is only to keep trusting in Him and to continue to walk with Him. Because He Who Promised can be trusted to keep all His promises concerning me.

Prayer: Abba Father, I surrender my will to you today. Lord, give me a willing spirit that is so quick to obey You. I trust in You. Amen.

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Guide to Lenten Fasting & Abstinence

When? From "Ash Wednesday" to "Good Friday"

Who?



14+
ARE OBLIGED
TO PRACTICE
ABSTINENCE



18-59
ARE OBLIGED
TO
FAST

Those outside the age limits and those whose state in life (e.g. pregnant women, manual laborers, those who are ill) may be excused from the requirements of fasting and abstinence, but are encouraged to take up some other form of penitence or acts of charity or piety.

What?



NO MEAT



FISH IS OK

Meals!



1 Regular Meal



AND 2 Smaller Meals

FAST = Reduction of food | ABSTINENCE = Refraining from eating meat

Other ways of fasting can be included by keeping away from entertainment, such as social media, partying, and any other forms of enjoyments.

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.

