

MARCH  
2021

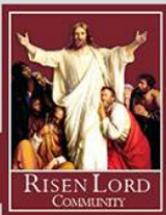


# ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS



**St. John of God**

*Feast Day - 8<sup>th</sup> March*



DAILY READINGS & REFLECTIONS

RISEN LORD  
COMMUNITY

Volume 21  
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# ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

MARCH  
2021

Lent is a time to retreat into yourself.  
When you step back from pushing  
your agendas, desires, wants... God  
will step forward to reward you with  
His presence, power and grace.

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# On Our Knees In His Hands

## MARCH 2021

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Kindly refer to the Catholic Bible editions for the readings. Your local Bible Diary will make it easier.  
Note that Feast day readings may differ from country to country

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## Monday March 01

2nd Week of Lent

*Give and you will get!*

Daniel 9: 4-10

Ps 79: 8-13

Luke 6: 36-38

We just shifted to a certain locality in Colombo and we were told of the active nightlife that is in operation. If we are asked to minister in this area, tell me... will we target the giver of pleasure or the seekers of pleasure? Often we label the givers of pleasures as being the culprits. But only God knows their real stories and tale behind them taking on such a profession.

Recently, I watched the testimony of one such woman who from the age of 15 was drawn into such a trade and was kept enslaved for periods of 3 years and finally forced to smuggle drugs. She was so sick of her life that she confessed to the customs officials that she was a mule carrying cocaine and received a seven year sentence. It was after all these experiences that she walked into a church service and received her deliverance.

Today's readings show Daniel seeking mercy for the sins of the people, kings, religious leaders and the country. His prayer makes apt reading for this time of Lent where we are called to examine our lives, and undergo a sort of maintenance test. We may find minor flaws or major life threatening issues which may save us from worse breakdowns. Daniel mentions some key behavior patterns we can be guilty of... ours is the shame, we have sinned against you, we have not listened to the voice of God and we have not followed the laws.

It is in the light of these accusations we are guilty of, that the Gospel proclamation must be read. Most people love the phrase - Give and it will be given back to you. Unfortunately they misinterpret the 'M' the verse refers it. We often think of it as give money and get money back. But the reality is, this verse refers to mercy more than just money. We are called to give mercy and one day when we stand before the throne of God, we will find mercy. Will all the money in the world help when we stand before the throne of God and are in need of mercy? Even our Lord Jesus showed mercy to Mary Magdalene whose reputation was tarnished and ultimately she was the first woman he appeared to when he rose from the dead. Today strive to give and get... mercy!

**Prayer: Abba Father, you have been merciful to me. May I share the same mercy with people around me and be your witness. Amen**

Isaiah 1: 10, 16-20

Ps 50: 8-9, 16-23

Matt 23: 1-12

Today's readings offer us much food for thought during this Lenten season. The first reading, while addressed to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, is no less relevant today. While some of the temptations may have been different at that time from today, the challenge to keep God's laws is common to the people at all times. The sins of self-gratification, selfishness, inequality oppression of the weak and related sins must also have been widely prevalent at that time since they were exhorted to help the powerless, avoid sin, repent and seek forgiveness from our merciful God to obtain His blessings. Isaiah's message is equally relevant and instructive to us today.

The psalm resonates with the first reading, pointing to the failure to keep God's laws and the reproof that follows as a consequence; while praising and worshipping Him leads to salvation.

On the same theme, the Gospel proclamation, is much more stern. Our Lord Jesus Christ does not mince his words. While He instructs His followers to observe the laws taught by the scribes and Pharisees because they are the laws handed by God to Moses and from him to the scribes and Pharisees, Our Lord Jesus cautions the people (and us) from behaving as their leaders did. He castigates the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy; for making burdensome rules for everyone else but not lifting a finger to help anyone struggling to observe them; for being obsessed with status; appearances and titles. By way of contrast, Jesus teaches us to avoid seeking honourable titles, treating everyone as equal to ourselves and acknowledging and accepting God as our only Master. The human urge to seek distinction and honour is no different today than in Jesus' day. Is it not easy to be tempted to pursue advancement in our careers, wealth and social recognition at the expense of time for prayer and inculcating in our children the Christian beliefs and values that our Lord Jesus proclaims in today's Gospel? In elbowing our way to the top of the career ladder, do we compromise on the ethical standards of fairness to others? In pursuing self-gratification, whether in the form of wealth or addictive behaviour, are we oblivious to the plight of other people, whether in our family, community or even in other parts of the world?

**Prayer: Abba Father, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts to infuse us with love for you and our fellow people less better off than ourselves. Amen**

## Wednesday March 03

St. Katharine Drexel, virgin

*I say, "You are my God." My destiny is in your hands; Psalm 31; 15-16*

Jeremiah 18: 18-20

Ps 31: 5-6, 14-16

Matt 20: 17-28

In today's Gospel proclamation, the events that unfold read similar to what take place in today's society, after all it seems humankind has not evolved. Here we find our Lord Jesus explaining to the disciples of his impending death and resurrection but little or nothing registers. Relating to the sons of Zebedee does not the mother do what any parent would do, secure the future of the

children. But the question is where, in which order? In which kingdom? Even the disciples were yet to understand and absorb most things on the human level jostling for power and position to rule in this world, to be secure, to be seen high and mighty among mere mortals. It is easy to say how pathetic of them, but brothers and sisters let us not fool ourselves and say we are not like since often we even pay homage to God so we solve our problems and get what we want.

Yet, in the midst of this we get a experience of our Lord's compassion. It is noteworthy that our Lord Jesus does not reject the mother's plea or request but accepts it and responds in his perspective, in the eternal perspective. Let us not forget that our God is also a parent, a loving Father who cares deeply about our future, a future that is invested in an eternal kingdom. But at times we will have to forget self and indeed drink from the cup of suffering. If we want to have a share in the joy of Christ, we will also have to share in his suffering there is no way around it. It is a privilege. "But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed". (1 Peter 4:13)

If God could lower himself to our level who are we to stick our noses up in the air? It happens when we lose our eternal perspective. Our Lord Jesus knew where he came from and where he was going, back to the Father after his earthly mission was completed. It is when we lose our eternal perspective and are insecure that we want to dominate, control and jostle for power and position.

"But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant" (Mt 20:26) The question is "What is it you want?"

**Prayer: Abba Father, help me to keep my eyes fixed on your kingdom and through it serve those around me. Amen**

Jeremiah 17:5-0

Ps 1:1-6

Luke 16:19-31

In today's readings we see the Lord Jesus beautifully unveiling his ultimate purpose for our lives to be truly dependent on Him alone. The secret treasure is revealed in today's Psalm 1:2 "but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." The First Reading goes on to build this further by showing us the comparison of depending on people or depending

on God. That being said, we need others in our life to know who God is, but from there on, to walk on this earth as a Son or Daughter of God, we need something more.

In the first reading, it is said "But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord" and has "confidence in Him" - the foundation for any relationship. This trust and confidence in the Lord Jesus is built on a daily basis by reflecting on His Word as mentioned by the Psalmist. It is only then that we are able to stand strong in the middle of the storm, and have no fears or worries as our roots are deep in the Word.

The Gospel Proclamation speaks of the after life experienced by Lazarus and the rich man. However, let us look at their life here on earth. The rich man had the luxuries and was living in the realities of this world. It is the only parable in which the Lord mentions the name of a person. On the other hand, Lazarus is referred to as "a poor man" who was at the gate of the rich man's house, and was covered in sores. Lazarus had no material wealth, but yet seems to be more important as we are made aware of his name. Let's dive a bit deeper now. It is possible that although, Lazarus had no material wealth, he was rich in the heavenly wealth. He had gone beyond the things of this world, beyond his circumstances, his plight and was dwelling on the Glory awaiting him in heaven. In contrast, the rich man was caught up in the things of this world, and did not know a life beyond that. This puts a question in our hearts, where do we stand? It is a call and a timely reminder by our Lord Jesus to repent of our limited perceptions, and to look towards heaven as our ultimate goal.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we desire to move beyond the realities of this world and experience our life through Your reality. Amen**

## Friday March 05

2nd Week of Lent - Day of abstinence

*God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son*

Genesis 37: 34, 12-13,  
17-28

Ps 105: 16-21

Matt 21: 33-43, 45-46

Today is Friday of the Second Week of Lent. The first reading brings to us a typical case of an earthly father figure. We see how Jacob favors Joseph so obviously that the other sons become envious towards Joseph. We have read this passage many times in the past and we are familiar with this passage. And we are quick to judge Jacob to understand that he is definitely not right

to be treating his sons. We believe Jacob is to be blamed. As we come to this conclusion, what about our understanding of God's love towards His children? Do we believe His love for us is like the love of Jacob towards his sons or different?

Our answer to the above question may be a big 'NO'. But subconsciously, we are envious about people who have more authority, power, or money than us. It may seem to us that they are more favorable in the eyes of God. Our earthly understanding would force us to believe that the Father Almighty may also favour some of His sons and daughters. We may not really spell this out, but when we go through certain crisis or problems, this comes to our minds subconsciously. We often feel a certain person, or a group of people may be extra privileged than us and may be God is favoring them more. NOT TRUE! We even begin to resent our own brothers and sisters because of this temptation that creeps into our minds. We may have already got caught in this flow of thinking or maybe we are trapped in this temptation today. But God is reminding us through the today's readings. The Gospel too suggests the same. The people who killed the messengers of God and then finally killed the Son of God were also caught in this wrong understanding. They were jealous that someone else might become more favorable than them to God. But the scripture is clear. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," - Isaiah 55:8. God our father does not think as we do. We cannot compare our thoughts to him. St. Augustine actually came close to understanding the heart of our Heavenly Father when He said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." Can you believe this love of God.

**Prayer:** Abba Father, cleanse us with Your message of love and wash away any bitterness, jealousy, resentment, entitlement, pride, and the other garbage that gets in our way. Amen.

Micah 7: 14-15, 18-20

Ps 103: 1-12

Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32

Today's Gospel proclamation sites the parable of the prodigal and his brother. A great illustration of how God's love looks like here on earth. While we reflect on it, let us ask ourselves 'where am I today?'

Am I like the prodigal son? Have I grieved the heart of my Father in my responses toward my loved ones, void of total dependence on God? Has my heart wandered towards the ways of this world through the lust of my flesh or the pride of my heart? Have I not denied my flesh or refused to suffer for Christ and followed God in my own terms? In the depths of our sinfulness, as we turn to Him through prayer like the Four steps we are assured of His acceptance and forgiveness, because "Steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord." (Psalm 32:10).

Perhaps I've acted out like the elder son? Being intolerable towards those who did not measure up or entertaining thoughts of anger or jealousy towards those more blessed than myself Have my old fears and insecurities surfaced? If so, like the prodigal son we could run back to the Father receiving unmerited forgiveness and being changed by His love.

In Psalm 103 King David writes, 'He does not deal with us according to our sins...for as the heavens are high above the earth so great is his steadfast love...He forgives our sins and heals our deceases.' The parable ends with a demonstration of the Father's love. While the son was still far off, the Father runs to him with love and compassion, embraces and kisses him. The Father's love was the kind that carried a heart of total acceptance without judgement in welcoming an erring child. A heart that saw the good in him and forgot the past. May we also look at those not measuring up, the Cephas' and Saul's in our lives and like the Lord Jesus see a transformed Peter or a Paul in them. As prophet Micah utters, who is like our God who removes our guilt and pardons sin, who does not continue in anger but delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us.

**Prayer: Abba Father, remove in me all that is not of you. I consecrate my heart to the most precious heart of Jesus, through whom my joy and peace is found. Amen**

## Sunday March 07

### 3rd Sunday of Lent

While we can come to God as we are, we cannot remain as we were.

Exodus 20: 1-17

Ps 19: 8-11

1Cor 1:22-25

John 2: 13-25

In today's first reading we meet the Hebrews at the foot of Mount Sinai. They have walked with Moses and with God for a while now. They have had many ups and downs in their relationship with the Lord. They had daunting problems, like being trapped between the Egyptian Army and the Red Sea and having no water to drink in the middle of the desert. In each such instance they panicked

and complained as though God did not exist. Yet, the Lord delivers them by providing what they need. Could God not have taken them on a route that did not have these impediments? Could He not have provided for them earlier so that they would not have panicked? Or was He preparing them for something special, making use of each crisis as an opportunity for purification? As I look back on my own life, it is in the time of trouble that I have grown significantly. Like the Hebrews I have not been the ideal student. I have messed up, complained, got disturbed, and lost the peace in my heart. Yet in the struggle as I repeatedly returned to the Lord, He came through for me, raising me to discover Him as Lord and savior in a new way. Each crisis has blessed my life, and also prepared me to understand and minister to others in crisis.

Today we meet the Hebrews at an important juncture. Moses and Aaron have just returned from a powerful encounter experience on Mount Sinai. This occurred before the eyes of the Hebrews. Not only had the Hebrew people prepared for this day through their trials and tribulations, but they had spent three days in preparation, making sacrifices and refraining from earthly pleasures. On this day, the Lord takes the covenanting relationship with the Hebrews to the next level. He reveals the responsibilities of the Hebrews about their part of the covenant. While we can come to God as we are, we cannot remain as we were. We embark on a journey of change and purification.

Today's first reading does not constitute the full giving of the Law. It starts with today's reading and continues several chapters into the book of Exodus. But before He hands out the law, He reminds the people who He is. He is the God who entered their orbit via a breakthrough when they are down, helpless and have no answers. He gives

them a purpose: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:5-6a). They will not only enjoy God’s favor (treasured possession), but they are also set apart by God (holy nation) to stand before Him for the sake of other nations (priests). However, to fulfil that purpose, they must live in a particular way.

The law starts out by saying “you shall have no God’s beside me.” Perhaps the Lord was aware of how vulnerable they were to the influence of the nations around them and how easily they could lose their purpose. This applies to us as well. We too are vulnerable to a world that has ignored the existence of God and thinks it has all the answers, just like those who built the Tower of Babel. Bishop Robert Barron says that there are four gods commonly worshiped in our times. They are the gods of wealth, power, pleasure, and honor. In today’s Gospel reading we see Our Lord Jesus chasing out the traders from the temple. What did the traders do to anger our Lord Jesus far more than the deeds of other sinners He encountered during His lifetime? For all practical purposes, the traders were assisting the functions of the temple by providing goods and services necessary for those who came to worship. By accusing them of “turning the His father’s House into a marketplace”, our Lord Jesus is implying that they were serving the god of wealth under the guise of serving God. This is a warning to those of us who serve the church in one way or another. We may not seek the god of wealth, but we may seek the god of honor or the god of pleasure as we serve. The first reading reveals that the repercussions of serving other gods flow from one generation to another. Yet, His mercy has an even greater impact than the repercussions of sin. So, in His mercy, He allows situations and challenges into our lives that expose the gods we actually serve. If we return to Him and give Him the truth of our hearts, He is able to turn the curses we have placed upon our children into blessings that far exceed the curse. In today’s second reading, St Paul reveals the way God works. It may not be logical nor does it happen in the time, place, and manner we expect. Just like how the disciples discovered later that Our Lord was talking about His body when he referred to the temple, it is only in a relationship with Him that we discover the heart and mind of God. We too are called to this personal relation with Him.

**Prayer: Abba Father, grant us the grace to treat every challenge as an exposing of the gods we serve and help us to return to you constantly. As we give the truth of our hearts, purify our hearts, so that the false gods and idols will be rooted out from our lives. Amen**

## Monday March 08

St. John of God, religious

*Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth! Psalm 86:11*

2Kings 5: 1-15b

PS 42: 2-3, 43:3-4

Luke 4: 24-30

We generally have preconceptions or biases. These are formed by our background and our past experiences. Many times we are blind to these preconceptions and accept them as truths in our hearts. These preconceptions prevent us from seeing the truth of situations and left unchecked will even prevent us from seeing God's hand in the situations of our lives. We see these preconceptions play out in the first reading and the gospel proclamation of today.

In the first reading, we see Prophet Elisha send a messenger to tell Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman being a General of the Syrian army expected to be treated with respect due to his position and he almost walks away in anger when this does not happen. But the beauty of Naaman's heart is his willingness to change his mind at the request of his servants and obeys what the Prophet Elisha says. Because of this humbleness of heart, he receives his healing from God.

In the gospel proclamation, we see Nazareth's people view the Lord Jesus as nothing more than the "son of Joseph". Unable to accept the truth of whom the Lord Jesus is; they are filled with anger when the Lord Jesus exposes the truth of their hearts, and are ready to throw him off the cliff.

Let us examine the preconceptions we carry within our hearts. Are we able to accept God's word even when it is spoken by someone whom we view as being less than us in some way? The world today throws many concepts at us that are against God's word, and the teachings of the Catholic Church;- do we accept these concepts? Or do we accept God's word as the ultimate truth? Are we able to accept the truth God reveals even when that truth hurts us and convicts us? Or do we excuse our behavior and brush off the uncomfortable truth? Do we even change the truth into something more digestible to us? Are we willing to humble ourselves before God's truth and like Naaman change our ways? Or are we going to be stubborn-hearted like the people of Nazareth and throw the Lord Jesus off the brow of the cliff rather than let his gentle words of rebuke convict and change our hearts?

**Prayer: Abba Father, I humble myself before you, reveal your truth in my heart. Help me change my ways to your ways. Amen**

Daniel 3: 25, 34-43

Ps 25:4-9

Matt 18: 21-35

Today's first reading emphasizes how human error, sin and weakness lead to humiliation and even pave the way to become least among the nations. It is for this reason Israelites offered animal sacrifices to atone for the sin of the nation. Thousands of rams, calves lambs had to be offered for the same and yet all these sacrifices and holocausts could not suffice for the price of sin. This is the reason

God had to send His only begotten son, the unblemished lamb who was pure and sinless to pay this penalty of sin. The Lord Jesus Christ willingly offered his life and gave up his precious body and blood for our sake so that he would become the worthy lamb of God who would make up for the sins of many. Thus, believing in Him, the efficacious blood of the lamb will wash away our stains of sin, guilt and shame. Today's gospel proclamation keeps challenging us to the core. St. Peter asks the Lord Jesus Christ, How many times he should forgive the brother or sister who wrongs him, He wanted to know if seven times would be enough. The Lord Jesus' reply "seventy times seven" would have left him speechless. We have heard the saying that to err is human, to forgive divine. So when we forgive seventy times seven we become seventy times seven more like God. Is not that wonderful? Aren't we taken aback as well with this stern and severe response of our Lord? Do we also have limitations in forgiving? Have we ever felt "enough is enough"? Or simply "How many times Lord"? Even "Why is it me all the time"? Yes, quite frankly the Lord is reminding us, when it comes to our sin, so heavy, disgusting and ugly, we do not ask questions. When the Lord forgave us and cleared our debts we had no questions. We were pardoned and healed and we have often taken for granted the mercy of God. When it comes to sharing this mercy and forgiveness of our Lord with our brethren we think twice. It can be difficult or seem impossible but one must be willing, to forgive even the unforgivable, unpayable debt, because such is the mercy of God. The Lord Jesus' example of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." is the single most powerful prayer that has ever been prayed. Therefore let us ask the Holy Spirit to remind us and strengthen us in this area to forgive others. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer let us be mindful unless we forgive the sin of others even our sins will remain unforgiven.

**Prayer: Abba Father, remind me how you lavishly pardoned my sin, and now it is my turn to share your forgiving love with others. Amen.**

Deut 4: 1,5-9

Ps 147: 12-20

Matt 5: 17-19

From a worldly point view laws and commandments restrict our actions to a certain degree. Whenever we hear the word 'Laws', there is an involuntary cringe within our hearts, a groan and a sense of dissatisfaction. We may feel trapped, obliged, and forced. On the contrary, God's law is one that is of love that leads us to true freedom, because His Law is not enforced on us. It is given

to us with an assurance of His close presence as we strive to keep in His ways, guiding us and carrying us; 'And indeed, what great nation is there that has its gods so near as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call to him?'

We only need to look to our God and simply live in the awareness of His presence within us if we are to keep His Laws. The task at hand becomes all the more easier, as the perfecter of the law is already being revealed to us. Our Lord Jesus lived His entire earthly life, demonstrating this Law of Love. He was so close to the broken hearted, sinners and the needy. Our Lord was quick to forgive those who mistreated Him. His acts of love and mercy can go on with no end. This is the height of the fulfilment of God's Law that is given to us this day. We who yearn to follow His ways and are already headed the right way are truly blessed just as our Lord's own words confirm, 'the man who keeps these commandments and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Therefore today, in a special way as we read through the scriptures and sit in prayerful reflection, we are invited to look into our own ways, thoughts and actions. Are they driven by love or by self-interest? Do they reflect gestures of love and compassion towards our neighbour instead of criticism and contempt? Can we truly love our neighbour more than we love ourselves? If our lives are an imitation of Christ's love, we indeed are immensely blessed, but if we are still struggling and caught up with our own selves, there is still cause for joy. For the mere desire we have to live in His ways is a sure sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He will enable us to rise beyond our being, as we willingly submit to His leading.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we bring to You our yearning hearts, so that You may fulfil the desires of our hearts to walk in Your ways. Amen.**

Jeremiah 7: 23-28

Ps 95: 1-9

Luke 11: 14-23

In today's reading the Lord speaks to His people through the Prophet Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 2:23 the Lord says, "Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you." The Lord was calling the Israelites to obey His commands to receive a blessing. However, instead of following God's commands and getting a blessing, the people did as they wanted. It is not only them, but us as well. If we follow God's commands, we may have saved ourselves from pain and suffering. Why is it hard for us to follow the Lord? The bible tells us the reason for this is our sinfulness. Everybody is born sinful. St. Paul calls us this the nature of the flesh. Today, the Lord is calling us to sit at His feet in personal prayer, hear His voice and obey His commands. He is calling us to recognize the nature of sin and disobedience within us and to say no to it. The psalmist recalls what happened to the Israelites when they did not obey the call of the Lord. "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did" (Ps. 95:8-9). The people saw what miracles and wonders the Lord did for them when He led them out of Egypt, but they could not remain faithful to the Lord and His commandments.

In today's Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus warns His audience not to ignore this invitation of the Lord to seek His face, hear His voice and listen to His commands. The Lord says in Luke 11:21-23, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder." When we are not strong in the Lord, even a small problem or difficulty can disarm us. We can fall to pieces each time we face a crisis. We become like this man the Lord Jesus speaks of; who is overpowered by attacks and is robbed of his things. But if we have sat in the presence of our Father and spent time with Him daily through personal prayer, we will be able to face even the toughest storms because He will carry us through. St. Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 6:10-11, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

**Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to fight my battles on my knees. Clothe me with Your armour that I may overcome what comes my way. Amen.**

Hosea 14:2-10

Ps 81:6-11, 14,17

Mark 12:28-34

Today in the Gospel proclamation we are reminded of two commandments that we need to be aware of and follow. As we all know, a commandment is an established law and there were a number of such laws that Jewish people were supposed to follow as they came down from generation to generation. However today, in the

Holy Gospel our Lord Jesus simplifies these complex laws that have been passed down generations into a simple set of instructions for everyone to build the foundation on as a follower of Christ. The First commandment is about loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and in all our strength. This commandment can be challenging for many of us as we are fail to feel the presence of God amid the secular world, we live in. We are becoming more and more dependent on things that we can see, feel, taste, smell and touch. Sometimes becoming slaves to the drives of our senses. Anything beyond what we can experience is becoming unthinkable resulting in not being able to love our creator and giving time for our creator as Lord Jesus is asking us to set the foundation on. How do we fix it? How do we love God? What does God need from us? In the Gospel of John 4th chapter Lord Jesus confirms that the Father is seeking people who can worship him in spirit and truth. Spending time to praise and worship God and making everything else to be second place in our lives while depending on divine providence is one way, we can love God. Saying yes to the will of the Father like blessed mother did when she accepted to be the mother of Lord Jesus is such great example we could follow. Secondly to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. For many of us the neighbour is who are in proximity and the people we know and those whom we have an association with. In the parable of the good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke 10:25-37 our Lord Jesus gives us a perfect definition of who our neighbour is and how we should love our neighbour. When our Lord Jesus asked the scribes, "So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" This parable shows the difference between just knowing the law and those who sincerely followed the law in their lifestyle and conduct. Today Lord Jesus is assuring all of us if you sincerely loving your God and your neighbour you are not far from Kingdom of God!

**Prayer: Abba Father, teach us to love. Amen**

Hosea 6: 1-6

Ps 51: 3-4, 18-21

Luke 18: 9-14

During the season of lent we engage in sacrificial and spiritual exercises - going on pilgrimage, doing the way of the cross and holy hour, getting involved in charity, fasting from our favourite food, even quitting bad habits such as the use of alcohol.

These things make us feel spiritual, holy and right with God. These exercises are good but today the Lord is inviting us to dive deeper, to examine our hearts, minds, body and spirit. Instead of focusing on external activities to look within like the tax collector.

Our Lord is not in search of the righteous but the sinner – a true heart of repentance. “I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:10 At home we are, our true authentic self - we show our ‘true colours’. We keep this side hidden from the world. It is like we are different people within our social circles –in workplaces, among relations, friends, colleagues/peers, at church and the community. We choose to behave and project the personality that brings us the best level of respect, appreciation and recognition. We even pretend with God or hide away.

Today we can Come to the Lord just as we are, He loves us – sinful, broken, lonely, anxious, fearful, addicted. ‘Give the Truth of our Hearts to Jesus’. We can open ourselves to receive God into our lives - His love, forgiveness, mercy and healing, poured out on the cross. Christ is asking us today “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

The truth is we prefer to do our spiritual obligations and live life comfortably as we do not want to end up on a cross like Christ. Yet this is our Christian calling when we were baptized. When we truly repent, we hear our Lord’s voice and can rest in His presence irrespective of the challenges we face in life – like Christ at Gethsemane. Ultimately God will be glorified. When we accept Christ into our lives we are transformed, and we become a part of Christ Himself. The Holy Spirit leads us to be more than we can ever be by ourselves.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I am a sinner, come and cleanse me, forgive me, take my hand and lead me closer in the waters of healing mercy. Amen**

2 Chron 36:14-16, 19-23

Ps 137: 1-6

Eph 2: 4-10

John 3: 14-21

We have come more than half way through the season of Lent, and the liturgy over the past several weeks has helped us to look into the heart of the Heavenly Father, relentlessly calling His children to come back home, to our inheritance. Today's liturgy invites us to place our individual lives in place of the people of God in the Old and New Testament and see for ourselves if we have

been living in any differently. It gives us yet another opportunity to repent.

The First Reading speaks of the hard-heartedness of God's people and the persevering heart of God, filled with pity on His people, even the people, including priests and leaders became more unfaithful to God. Rather than looking around and pointing fingers at others, today is a good day for us to look into our own lives. How have we responded to the call of God to love Him and love our neighbour? Do we continue to live the same way, turning away from the grace that flows from the Sacrament of reconciliation? Do we ignore the voice of the Father inviting us to respond in love instead of reacting to our family, work colleagues and those in parish and prayer community? Have we moved out of God's favour, exposing our lives and those of our loved ones to the law of cause and effect, becoming vulnerable to the assaults of the enemy?

It is heartening to see how God, the author of all creation moved the heart of a gentile king to build His temple, and to give leadership and support to His people to get back to their land. I believe that would have been the last thing they expected to happen while in exile on hostile land. "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm..." (2 Chronicles 36:22). What does this teach us today? God's word is eternal and cannot be changed. If we have received a promise from The Lord in prayer, from the Scripture or a word of knowledge, we can rest assured that it has already been done in heaven and is manifested on earth when we wait in faith and with a thankful heart.

Today's Gospel proclamation is so beautiful that the more we pause to reflect on it, the more we dive into the vast ocean of the Father's love. It simply says that God's love for me was such that He did not spare His own life, The Son and the Father being the one and the same. The Father planned the final assault on sin and death and the Son obeyed and fulfilled the Father's will. All that is asked of you us is to believe in this loving Saviour and inherit eternal life. Does this seem reasonable and fair? Definitely not! What about the payment for the debt of our wrongs? How can it be so easily forgotten and cancelled? Dear brothers and sisters, the payment was not forgotten or cancelled, it was paid in full on the cross by the broken Body and the Precious Blood of the Son of God. The Light of the world arrived, thus dispelling the darkness of sin and death. Through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, and the subsequent release of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all who believe in Him, we too carry this same Light in us. Let us think for a moment. Do we dispel the darkness in the hearts of those around us by the Light of Christ we carry in us? Do we give a ray of hope, comfort and joy to those we meet by our smile, loving and encouraging words and kind deeds? Is our light visible to others only in the church or at prayer meeting?

We might feel that these are good ideas, and are certainly doable when life goes well for us, but not that easy or rather near impossible when we ourselves have our share of illness, financial burdens and disappointments. How can we still be a light to others at those times? The Second Reading gives us the answer. We who accept Lord Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, have received a new status and have been seated with Him in the heavenly realms, and this is not something that is to happen after we finish our earthly life but is already here and now, while still in this earthly life. We have at our disposal, the unlimited grace of God, as The Father now sees His Son Jesus when He looks at us. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10). Further, we belong to the One who, in all things, works for our good, because we love Him and have been called according to His purpose. (Cf. Romans 8:28). And we have His Spirit, the deposit that guarantees our inheritance as God's children, to empower us to love the unlovable, to comfort when we ourselves are hurting, to be generous while we ourselves are in need. The result is that we bring heaven down to the earth and reveal the Father's love to those who are yet to meet Him.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we pray for the grace never to forget even for one moment, the love You have for us. Amen**

Isaiah 65: 17-21

Ps 30: 2-13

John 4: 43-54

Isaiah 65 is replete with promises of the future. It is consoling to us specially when are going through a bereavement or a tragedy. God promises us a new heaven and a new earth. The joy that we receive will be so great that we will forget the former pains and experiences. The Lord encourages us to rejoice in what He will do.

This is the same cry that echoes in the Psalm as the psalmist cries out - I will praise you Lord for you have rescued me.'

While the promises from Isaiah are supposed to refer to the future eternal life, we have been told by our Lord Jesus that the moment we receive Him, the kingdom of Heaven begins to function in our life. The eternal experience is kick started and we begin to have glimpses of the Lord's power at work in our lives. The laws of nature are broken and cause and effect seems to have no effect. When we live in faith we begin to overcome the obstacles and the impossible becomes possible.

One such promise from Isaiah states that life will no longer be shortened. A man who dies in his hundreds will be considered as one who died in his youth.

In the Gospel proclamation, the eternal kingdom life had begun to operate. With the Lord Jesus' presence, miracles, signs and wonders began to unfold. The people who exercised faith were not those were from the chosen race but those who were from a worldly Roman background. One such person was the Centurion. He approached our Lord Jesus with such an attitude that compared his own ordering of his soldiers, to the Lord's ability to order the forces of nature. Our Lord Jesus goes super, super natural and even without calling for boy, laying hands on his head or making a prayer of healing, simply says - Go, your son lives.' The man responds and returns home to find his son healed. Have we such faith or are we still trying to tell the Lord how deep or how impossible our problem is. Let us just trust Him.

**Prayer: Abba Father, forgive me for coming to your presence with so many questions and doubts, instead of trusting in your ability to speak into my situation and give me your supernatural answer. Amen**

Ezek 47: 1-9,12

Ps 46: 2-9

John 5: 1-16

A marvelous river, flowing out from under the Temple, is a manifestation of the blessings conferred on the land by the Lord's return to live among his people. It is linked with the healing of the man who was waiting for the waters of the "Sheep Pool" to move.

Water is the predominant feature of the first reading, the responsorial psalm, and the Gospel proclamation also. In these readings, water is portrayed as healing and the source of all life. In the first reading from the book of the Prophet Ezekiel, the water is portrayed as majestic, fresh and life giving as it flowed out from underneath the temple. The Jews believed that the temple is where God dwells and all life on earth flows from this source.

Our Lord Jesus healed a cripple by the Pool of Bethesda. When the Lord Jesus came into the temple, he saw this man lying on the floor. He could tell from the man's debilitated appearance that he had been ill for many years. The Lord Jesus quietly walked over to the man and asked him a simple but very powerful question: "Do you want to be well?"

Our Lord Jesus listened intently to the man. Then He powerfully tells the man to stand up, take up his mat and walk. The Lord does not do a dramatic healing. Rather he quietly and lovingly speaks to the man.

All it takes is for this sick man to reveal his weakness to Jesus when he asked him a question – and he does so with detail, like a true confession: how he has attempted to enter the pool, how as he has tried, someone else has beaten him to it. Perhaps without this detailed account of his failure, he might not have been cured. The sick man admitting both his personal weakness and desire to plunge into the pool move Jesus to compassion. This is the remedy to our issues: presenting ourselves to Christ as we truly are, with of our weakness, and thus receiving his compassion.

**Prayer: Abba Father, give me the grace to claim my healing and restoration in humility and simple trust in your word. Amen.**

Isaiah 49: 8-15

Ps 145: 8-9, 13-18

John 5: 17-30

Today's readings highlight the beautiful relationship the Lord Jesus had with the Heavenly Father. From our youngest days we were trained to love God. But most of the time, this love fades because of an obligation or a guilt.

At the bottom of it all, is a certain sense of fear—that somehow God is this distant angry person and the only way to calm Him would be to pray to Him. Most of the time we equal Him to someone who awaits offerings and will snatch anyone who fails to do so. The consequence of this is a loss of a deep and intimate connection, relationship and love that He so longs to give us.

The Old Testament speaks of God as a single person, but now the Lord Jesus shows us a new face of God. He is Father and He has sent His Son to complete His work.

The relationship that the Lord Jesus has with His Heavenly Father is so intimate that He is able to say, "the Son cannot do anything on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing; for what He does, the Son will do also." (John 5:19)

Throughout the reading, He makes it clear that all He does is because the Father has shown Him what to do. His love for His Father enabled Him to have absolute trust in His ways. That is how He is able to heal and forgive even those who are about to persecute Him.

In all that God does, He wants to give us life, and the greatest of His work is the Resurrection. This 'rising from the dead' does not mean 'to return to life' but to begin a new transformed life. When we accept the Word of God in faith it gives us life, takes root in us and transforms us. Together, the Father and the Son raise us to a new life and God's love reaches us, through the voice of the Lord Jesus.

**Prayer: Abba Father, may we have an intimate relationship with You, and seek You so that Your will may be revealed to us through Your Son. Amen**

Exodus 32: 7-14

Ps 106: 19-23

John 5: 31-47

“God sees not as the mortal sees” (1 Samuel 16:7) reminds us of how different God’s view is from ours in human judgement, no matter how smart and learned we are. We have the privilege of coming to know what is happening around us 24/7, the good but more often the evil. The ever-increasing violence and crimes of all sorts against humanity especially the most vulnerable are rampant. Human suffering and assault on environment are all over. The saddest part is that the more common these are, the more numbed and blind we become to these evils. These increasing trends we come to accept passively as “the order of the day”. These may seem natural to us, they irrefutably state that our human history has been and is immersed in sin. Is there a way to break that cycle?

In the first reading, God was on the mountain giving the law to Moses. People below think that they were doing the right thing by making the golden calf their god and worshipping it. God points to their sinfulness. He warns them with annihilation. Moses while not defending the people’s actions intercedes for them. God relents his punishment. God calls their sin for what it is. Still despite his anger He is willing to forgive and save them.

In the Gospel proclamation, the Lord Jesus is the perfect image of the merciful Father. He has come to save, not to condemn. The Lord Jesus’ enemies accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. For them, fidelity to the law brings eternal life. though the Lord Jesus is the source of life. For them, following God meant following laws. They failed to accept the Lord Jesus because they were not open both to love God and to allow God to love them.

We are sinful, but God does not encourage us to sin. Because he loves the sinner but not the sins. We can approach God for ourselves or for others because God is merciful and forgiving. Only He can help us break that cycle of evil.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I am sinful, help me to seek your mercy for me and for all. Amen.**

## Friday March 19

Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of Mary

*St. Joseph, pray for us!*

2Sam 7: 4-5, 12-16  
Rom 4: 13, 16-18, 22  
Matt 1: 16, 18-24 or  
Luke 2: 41-51

Today is the solemnity of St. Joseph; spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the earthly Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Joseph who lived in the 1st century was from Nazareth, Galilee; a region of Palestine. St. Joseph comes from the bloodline of David in accordance with the promise of God that the Messiah of God would be a descendant of King David.

Pope Francis declared this year as the “Year of St. Joseph” (from 8 December 2020 to 8 December 2021). A new Apostolic Letter entitled “Patris corde” (“With a Father’s Heart”) Pope Francis described St. Joseph as a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a father who is creatively courageous, a working father in the shadows. This letter also signified the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX’s declaration of St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church.

The second reading explained the walk of faith that we are called to. When the surrounding was bleak; Abraham continued to trust in the ‘word’ of God. The promise of God was fulfilled in his life and he was called righteous. Our work alone would not make us righteous but the gift of faith that comes from God transforms us to walk by faith and not by sight. The icon we could follow is St. Joseph. With the annunciation of our Blessed Mother, the world of St. Joseph would have collapsed. But God strengthened his faith and he followed his dreams.

The Gospel proclamation speaks of the meaning of righteousness of St. Joseph. It is evident that his world crumbled, yet his virtuousness pushed him to abide by the law without any harm to his betrothed pregnant lady. His righteousness glistened out through his actions; firstly because of his faithfulness to God’s law and his caring and gentle ways towards the Virgin Mary and secondly his faithfulness to God and his obedience, sincerity and morality. Age to age God reigns in His people!

**Prayer: Abba Father, make me righteous! Amen.**

Jeremiah 11: 18-20

Ps 7: 2-12

John 7: 40-53

'God burns with a jealous love for you. It means he wants to be your only lord, your only love! He calls us to conversion, which means we must turn away from everything that pushes us from away from the lord to whom we belong. We must turn away from everything that pushes us away from the Lord. Turn away from our egoism that desires a security which is set deeply in our souls.

He strips you of that which is your enslavement, and which leads to a lack of faith in his love', said, Father Tadeusz Dajczer, a Polish priest and a professor of theology. We know for certain to prove his love, he did the ultimate sacrifice of giving himself and became sin to destroy death forever and give us eternal life. In the reading from Prophet Jeremiah and the Responsorial psalm, it is as if Jesus himself is speaking, "But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter."

In the Gospel we see how people found it hard to accept him for who he really was. They only saw him through their veiled perceptions. He was the son of a carpenter. How could they believe that this ordinary young man was truly the 'Son of God?' Even so the officers of the temple could not but be, in awe of him when he spoke.

Nichodemus who was a man of God was challenged by Jesus, his wisdom and teaching. The other Pharisees were blinded by their knowledge of the law and historical understanding, above all their own importance in the hierarchy of the system. Aren't we caught up in some way with our own understanding of who God is? Because we too are blinded by the pleasures of the world and our own pursuit for happiness as we understand it. It is always success driven whether it is in our lives or those of our children. Even those of us who have committed our lives to follow the Lord, try to manipulate and use God for our purposes. We say things but never mean it. Most often we pay lip service, but our hearts are closed.

Let us question our motives and realign the purpose of our life. What is my baptismal calling? Let him be the center of our lives. Let us be true disciples.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we need your love! Open our hearts and minds to experience it in our depths and let our conversion be real! Amen**

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Ps 51: 3-4, 12-15

Heb 5: 7-9

John 12: 20-33

The Mosaic covenant on Mount Sinai established how the people of God must conduct themselves in the Promised Land. Even though they witnessed the signs and wonders, they did not have a personal connection with God, nor did they hear His voice personally. Their only link to God was through the prophets, the rituals and external observances that were stipulated in

the law of Moses. As time went by the law became a burden. They got attracted to the lifestyles of their neighbors and the gods they worshiped. They forgot the God of Israel and the covenant with Him. As they drifted away from the God of Israel, they lost the Promised Land, the temple of God and the ark of the covenant. They ended up in Babylon as exiles. In Babylon they came to their senses. They repented and turned to God and God heard their cry.

In today's first reading God speaks to the exiles in Babylon through the Prophet Jeremiah; "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them."

It was God's plan that His people know Him personally, and intimately as a wife would know her husband. He wanted them to be in love with Him, long for Him, and be committed to Him. They however, did not have a daily walk with God. Therefore, they got distracted easily. This sounds familiar to most of us who come to an initial experience. We are on fire for God, and we want to give our lives to God completely. We spend all our energy and time doing things externally instead of sitting at His feet, being loved and ministered by Him, hearing His voice in the scriptures... As a result, we get hijacked by what is happening around us, we react to them instead of giving inner responses. Before long we too end up as exiles, crying out to God to save us.

God came up with Plan B for this problem of the human heart; "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their

God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord.

The new covenant would make the believers' hearts beat in unison with God's own heart. They would have an inner life with God. Their awareness of His presence would be strong enough to withstand the distractions, and the temptations of the human heart. Their relationship with Him would be so intimate, that living separated from Him would not be an option for them.

The first reading began with the words of God; "The days are coming". In the Gospel the Lord Jesus says; "The hour has come". What does these two statements mean? Do they speak of the same event or something different?

The Greeks mentioned in today's Gospel were in fact known to be righteous Gentiles. They honored the Jewish people and their God. They came to meet the Lord Jesus to explore the possibility of becoming His followers. It was in this context that the Lord says; "The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified". The glory that the Lord speaks of here, and the glory we understand are two different things. We attribute glory to prestige, status, wealth. The glory that the Lord Jesus speaks of is His own death and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is the event that God spoke of "as the days are coming" through the Prophet Jeremiah, and the Lord Jesus spoke in today's Gospel. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit would awaken the spirit of the believer; Jew or Gentile, to live in obedience to God rather than in rebellion. In the letter to the Hebrews, the author explains the Lord Jesus' own struggle in living in obedience to God and completing His mission; "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." This also teaches us the secret on how to live on the mission the way the Lord Jesus did.

As we go through our own struggles to walk away from the mission, we can be certain that the Lord Jesus, offering up prayers on, petitions with fervent cries and tears on our behalf, to the one who could save us from walking away from a life with God.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I can live in obedience to you only by the power of the Holy Spirit. Give me the grace to be the seed in my family. May I be willing to die to bring your life into my family. Amen**

*“Neither do I condemn you, go and do not sin again.”*

Dan 13: 1-9, 15-17,  
19-30, 33-62  
Ps 23: 1-6  
John 8: 1-11

As we are in the final week of lent approaching the Holy week today's readings lead us to reflect on how we could misuse power and authority entrusted to us and deviate from God's ways of dealing with issues we face internally and externally in life causing damage to ourselves and others.

The Gospel proclamation gives us an insight as to how limited we are in our thinking capacities when confronted by a challenge, we would either resemble the sinful woman or the elders of the law, both parties failed to discover the Love and Mercy which flowed from the Lord until the Lord spoke directly to the issue with wisdom, insight and forgiveness. Not only the problem was resolved then and there the woman discovered the depth of Love God had for her. Her life was delivered from the darkness she was living in, into the Light of Christ.

This revelation is needed to experience the power of forgiveness and Love God has for us. "Give the truth of your heart" is the second step of the four steps. In this step when we give the truth inside of us and repent from the depth of our hearts a divine exchange happens. We hand Him over our brokenness, sinfulness, addictions, sickness, bondages, years of pain and everything which is not pleasing to Him (including our hidden pleasures which trap us in unforeseen ways as it did for the elders in the first reading), in return the Lord lets His Forgiveness, Mercy, Love and Compassion flow into our hearts. We are healed and begin to transform from within. We begin to experience "the power of His Love"! This experience cannot be obtained from the world. As we know the Lord has already paid in full for our lives with His life, His precious blood and purchased us in full. He has the authority and power to forgive us and heal us physically, emotionally and spiritually. It's a gift for us from the Lord. Let's open up our hearts to receive it. "He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul, He leads me in right paths for His name sake. Even though I walk in the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me." (Ps. 23. 3-4)

**Prayer:** Abba Father, open our inner eyes to see our sinful nature and give us the Grace to humbly accept the gift of forgiveness from your hands. Amen!

Numbers 21: 4-9

Ps 102: 2-3, 16-21

John 8: 21-30

In today's first reading we are reminded how the Israelites complain and speak against God. They were not complaining about the journey they were taking rather about being dissatisfied of how God was providing for their basic needs. We too are on a long journey specially being forced to live and move about with many restrictions. Our freedom to meet, move about with each other has been limited

and we too are starting to get miserable and unhappy. The Bible tells us that God took care of every basic need of these people just as He is and has been doing ours. Yet we long for things that we feel are better and seems good for us and we shift our focus and gaze from Him to the world. Just like then, we too are struck down by different kind of serpents that are identified as sickness, depression, etc. The church has given us seasons filled with grace, to make us realize our sinfulness and help us to hear what God says. God in His great love and mercy tells us to refocus our attention to the cross for healing and salvation. Truly how many of us have heard His calling and has shifted our gaze to the cross. We still have time; it is still not too late.

The psalm assigned for today tells us that we should cry out to the Lord always, we are imprisoned by our addictions, bondage to sinful living. We may not realize but things that displeases the Lord has become habits in our hearts. Gossip, judgement, deceit, lies, mockery, undermining people, the list can go on. During this lent let's cry out to the Lord for help & the psalmist assures us that He hears and also answers our prayer.

In the Gospel proclamation our Lord Jesus further assures to look to Him the one who willingly took our position on the cross and was lifted high to be looked upon. We have all seen and often gaze at the crucifix in the church. I am also confident that you also have a cross hung in your house or even in the room where you rest. We have taken it for granted and don't even notice it. Only if we take time to listen to God's word to gaze upon the one nailed to the cross & cry out to Him, we will be delivered to celebrate life in its fullness.

**Prayer: Abba Father, in your great love & mercy give us the grace to gaze upon your son hung on the cross and seek your mercy. Amen!**

Dan 3: 14-20, 91-95

Dn 3: 52-56

John 8: 31-42

Do you know the joy and freedom of submission to God and his word? Freedom today usually means “freedom to do as I please”. This notion of freedom, however, is a mask for servitude to one’s passions and to the power of sin. Our Lord Jesus offers his disciples true freedom -- freedom from the slavery of fear, the slavery of selfishness, freedom from the fear of what others

might think or say about us, and freedom from hurtful desires and the power of sin. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has set us free from the power of sin. How is this possible? Through the power of his Holy Spirit we can choose to walk in his way of love and holiness. A disciple is a follower and a listener. If we listen to the words of Jesus, with a humble and teachable spirit, he will give us the grace and the power to follow in his way of holiness. Ask the Lord to open your ears to his word that you may hear his voice.

Jesus came to do the will of his Father. He was not spared the cross which he willingly embraced for our sake. His obedience reversed the curse of Adam’s disobedience. The Father crowned him with victory over sin, death, and Satan. Jesus shows us the way to true freedom and victory—freely submitting our heart, mind, and will to an all-merciful, all-loving, and all-wise God. What the Father offers us is a kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). The happiest, freest people are those who delight in God. Their joy is the pleasure of doing the Father’s will.

What is so important about the word? Why the emphasis over and over again? Does Jesus mean literally words? Or what they represent? How do you remain in the word? You remain in the word by following the teachings of Jesus and by living according to his word. That is how to remain in the word. If you do this the truth will be revealed to you and eventually you will be freed from the sins that enslaved your body and your mind. This is true freedom. One thing in this life is important: To live the word. Everything else is secondary and once you begin to live the word everything else falls into place. The word truly frees. In it we can find salvation.

**Prayer:** Abba Father, Allow me to grow in your word, to realize more fully every day your kingdom, to move further and further from my prison and closer to the truth that you speak of. Help me to live your Word. Amen.

## Thursday March 25

### Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

*When was your moment, what has been your response?*

Isaiah 7: 10-14; 8:10

Ps 40: 7-11

Heb 10: 4-10

Luke 1: 26-38

In the Christian world, across the centuries, the Annunciation has been a popular theme. It refers to the announcement of the arrival of our Lord and Saviour Jesus into the world through the 'Yes' of the Blessed Mother.

The first reading from Prophet Isaiah speaks of King Ahaz having a visitation from the Lord encouraging him to ask for a sign. That sign was a defining question and was the prophecy to a birth that was to take place roughly 500 years later. It would be a shift where the God of the Heavens would become Immanuel - God with us - and humankind's relationship with the world would be forever transformed.

In the Gospel proclamation, Angel Gabriel visits the Blessed Mother and breaks the news of the impending birth of our Lord Jesus Christ to her. The words the angel uses carry such significance - "Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you." Luke 1: 27. These words were being declared over the life of the Blessed Mother much before the ministry of our Lord Jesus. Here was a young girl, already filled with the grace of God and having the presence of the Lord! The angel then addresses her fears of the future as the Blessed Mother cannot seem to comprehend the full extent of her being a conduit for the presence of the Lord to become real on the earth. Finally the Blessed Mother's response is - "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me as you have said." She was saying - Here I am to do the will of God.

This was also the response of our Lord Jesus as detailed in Hebrews 10 where the writer to the Hebrews quotes our Lord's response to the call of the Father. Our Lord Jesus' to the Father's call was - Here I am, I have come to do your will." Each of us has a moment of annunciation when a word speaks to our heart, or a word of knowledge is given to us regarding a pressing issue. In that moment of grace, God tells us that He loves us, He addresses our fears of the future and He awaits our response. With our personal annunciation, the God of the Heavens becomes Immanuel - God with us. Today have you told the Lord - Here I am Lord, I have come to do your will.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I await the moment of annunciation in my life. I pray for the grace to respond as you want me to as our Blessed Mother did. Amen**

Jeremiah 20: 10-13

Ps 18: 2-7

John 10: 31-42

In today's readings and throughout scripture we often see a pattern of rejecting messengers of God. In the first reading prophet Jeremiah is rejected by his own people including his friends trying to take revenge from him and in the Gospel we see Jews trying to stone Jesus because he claimed he was the son of God but Jesus proves to them from scripture that there is nothing wrong

with what he is saying.

We may think that this will never happen if it was us, but there is all the chance that we may reject Jesus if he speaks to us today, since we are so unfamiliar with the word of God. We have so many different devotions and ways of reaching God today, but we have forgotten the most fundamental and the most essential way, which is the holy bible, (The word of God). It is difficult to know the ways of God if we do not read scripture on a regular basis, pray with it the word of God!! We may be disillusioned in believing that we are so close to God, just like the Jews of that day. They believed they were the chosen race but when God actually came to earth and spoke to them, they stoned him. One reason is, they were not familiar with the word of God and the other reason is that they understood the word of God in a totally different way to how it was intended by God, even though they might have read scripture or heard it in the synagogues, their hearts were not right with God so they interpreted the word of God to suit their own selfish desires and we see both these issues at work today in our world.

The first chapter of "The Imitation of Christ", explains this further "Now there are many who hear the Gospel often but care little for it because they do not have the spirit of Christ. Yet whoever wishes to understand fully the words of Christ must try to pattern his whole life on that of Christ". Let us strive to understand the scriptures and follow the true spirit of Christ.

**Prayer: Abba Father, we pray that you would give us the grace of reading scripture on a daily basis and to amend our lives according to your word. Amen**

Ezekiel 37: 21-28

Jer 31: 10-13

John 11: 45-56

The reading from Ezekiel is one teeming with assurances of the future. The nation of Israel was a divided nation and caught the grip of vices and idolatry. In this context the Yahweh gives them a promise of His action. The entire promise is filled with 'I shall' assurances. I shall gather them, I shall make them into one people, I shall free them and I shall cleanse them.

All these promises were to be fulfilled with the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus. When Mary began witnessing to the Lord mighty miracle in raising her brother Lazarus from the dead, while the people were filled with hope the leadership felt threatened. Their fear was that the Romans would see the unrest and destroy the nation of Israel and their temple.

But the fact was, they were so blind. Their intentions were good but there were saving their nation from the nation's Saviour. In fact our Lord Jesus was not the Saviour of Israel but the entire world. The Jewish leadership thought they knew better than God. Here God the Father was providing them with an answer which He had promised through the mouth of Ezekiel. And these people were indeed destroying the Saviour intended to save them. Caiaphas inadvertently tells them - "You know nothing at all. It is better to have one man die for the people than to let the whole nation be destroyed."

In our journey with the Lord, we know nothing at all. As we say, God's ways are mysterious and beyond our comprehension. What we see as problems and setbacks are sometimes stepping stones to a greater future and an enriching relationship. Most people, who have had sort of 'Born Again' experience, had such a moment when they were faced with a crisis, began seeking God and then shifted into a new life. Born again is not a Protestant word or a bad word - our Lord said if you are not Born again you cannot enter the kingdom of God). It simply means that one day, the light was switched on in your brain and soul and you began to see life and experiences as God sees them. Let us ask the Lord for His Spirit/wisdom as we look at life and make decisions.

**Prayer: Abba Father, let me not fight the very solutions and answers you are providing for me today. Help me recognize them and welcome them. Amen**

Isaiah 50: 4-7

Ps 22: 8-24

Phill 2: 6-11

Mark 14: 1-- 15:47

In the first reading today we read about Jesus being anointed at Bethany. Mark keeps her nameless, simply calling her 'woman' but in the gospel of John he actually names her as Mary. John states that Lazarus was there with Jesus, reclining at the table. The same Lazarus who was raised from the dead by Jesus. What joy must have filled the heart of Jesus as he watched this

once dead man now interacting with his sisters and interacting with his friends? What joy must have lit up the face of Lazarus every time his eyes rested on Jesus, reclining on that table with him? John says that Martha was serving – she was doing what she knew best to do. I would like to think that by now Martha served with joy. Her heart singing as she went about serving food and looking after those gathered around the table, seeing her Master interacting and laughing with his disciples, with her beloved brother – the one she thought she lost forever. But Mary – Mary does something extraordinary. Mary brings an alabaster jar full of nard – something so exquisite, something so costly, something that could have very well been her inheritance - she breaks that jar and pours it over Jesus. She anoints Him with this sweet fragrance – a fragrance that was reserved for the anointing of kings.

Such extravagance! It delighted the heart of Jesus and offended the sensibilities of Judas and those like him. They justify their offense – it could have been put to better use they said. It could have been given to the poor. But it doesn't matter. Mary knew that once again she has chosen the better thing. She poured out the best she had on the One who deserves nothing but the best. And this gesture so truly touched the heart of Jesus that He declared that wherever the gospel is preached, Mary and her extravagant love will also be declared. Oh the grace to have a heart of extravagant love like Mary! Oh to delight His heart like she did.

Soon after this, Jesus is betrayed. Taken captive, beaten and crucified on the cross. But that sweet smell of nard would have lingered on. Very likely the soldiers would have smelled it as they crowded around the cross of Jesus. Very likely Mary herself would have

smelled it as she wept broken-hearted at the foot of the cross. Very likely the mother of God herself would have smelled it and it would have given her comfort at that moment as she saw her son being crucified so cruelly. A display of extravagant love for the One who displayed love at its best.

This action of Mary captures my heart. She truly knew the art of loving well. She recognised the One that her heart found its rest in and she abandoned everything in favour of Him. She didn't try to serve Him like her sister did. She didn't waste her energy trying to win His approval or try to busy herself in work. She was able to settle herself and focus on the main thing. This is something that often I am unable to do. I love being in the Presence of God – truly I find peace in Him that I don't find anywhere else. And truly I could spend hours with Him without noticing the time. But I get so easily lost in the 'work' I do for Him. Be it raising my children, keeping a clean home, serving in this community or caring for those that I've been sent to – it's all from Him and its all unto Him – but so often I get my eyes off of Him and onto the things before me and I get lost in the work. So instead of wanting to break that alabaster jar, I would want to keep it even safer – for another day, for another time, for when I feel safe enough to recklessly give up all that I can control.

We celebrate palm Sunday today. The day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and the people greeted Him and celebrated Him crying 'Hosanna'. They took off the very cloaks they were wearing and laid it on the road so He could ride over them. Conquering kings would come charging in on warrior horses. Our King of Kings, the Prince of Peace, comes riding on a non threatening donkey. The Saviour has come. He's come to save us from our own selves. He's come to save us from the sin that enslaves us. He's come to save us from the busyness that we've lost ourselves in and to remind us and declare over us the truth of the victory of the cross. So let's join Mary today. Let's take out that precious jar we've been hiding in a corner. Let's take off the cloaks of control and being our own masters. Let's lay it all down and invite the King to ride on them. To crush the lies and to throw away the heaviness that oppress us and to take us with Him to the victory that awaits us through Him.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I bring before You my own precious alabaster jar. Lord spilled at your feet, it releases a sweeter fragrance than it ever would otherwise. So I give it all to you. Let me live in your sweet Presence. Amen**

## Monday March 29

### Monday of Holy Week

I will make you as a light to the nations

Isaiah 42: 1-7

Ps 27: 1-3, 13-14

John 12: 1-11

In today's Gospel proclamation, St. John tells us a different story about Martha, Mary and Lazarus and says it happened six days before the Passover. The proclamation says, Mary washed the feet of the Lord Jesus with some expensive perfume and Judas found fault with her, saying that it would have been better for her to sell the perfume and give the money to the poor.

St. John was known to be close to the Lord Jesus and the Gospels say that he was the disciple whom the Lord loved most. St. John's Gospel was written long after the crucifixion of the Lord after Judas betrayed him. Scholars say that is why he took a hard shot at Judas saying, "not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief."

But the heroine of the story is Mary. As she looked to the Lord Jesus she went to him the way she was, acknowledging her sinfulness and unworthiness. Moved by a prophetic spirit she chose to do the unthinkable. Spend a precious perfume on anointing him. She might have known the significance of what she was doing or might not have known the depth of her actions.

What was the Lord Jesus' response, "Leave her alone." He knew she was doing the will of the Father.

This brings us to the first reading where Isaiah shares a powerful word which is good for us to digest. I, Yahweh have called you for the sake of justice; I will hold your hand to make you firm; I will make you as a Covenant to the people, and as a light to the nations, to open eyes that do not see, to free captives from prison, to bring out to light those who sit in darkness.

This is what our Lord wants to do in our lives. When we begin to journey with Him, we will be moved to do things that might or might not be understood by people - a similar example was Noah. We will be misunderstood by the world but feel a compelling urge to do what we need to do. In doing so we will become a light to the nations.

**Prayer: Abba Father, I pray for the grace to listen to you, hear your voice and respond to your urge no matter how odd or absurd it may seem. Amen**

Isaiah 49: 1-6

Ps 71: 2-6, 15&amp;17

John 13: 21-33, 36-38

The Gospel proclamation reveals the inner turmoil of the Lord. The anguish in His deeply troubled heart, when He says "one of you will betray Me". He knew from the start who it would be. He would have remembered Psalm 41; " Even the friend who had my trust, shared my table has scorned Me" (v 10). Judas was said to be a close friend of the Lord, " Yet scripture had to be fulfilled. The

one who ate my food has raised his heel against Me. (Jn13/18).

Did the Lord not try to save Judas by giving sufficient grace to help himself? Yes, He did, even up to the last moment; washing Judas's feet and kissing it. Showing love and honor by giving the morsel from His own hands, a sign of special favour according to Middle Eastern custom.

All too often we think God works only when relationships are harmonious, yet most of His plans are realized in and through turmoil, brought on by rejections we endure. At times we want to be in complete control. Yet , God sees the bigger picture, even when we lose control. We must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. Every unsettling of life, every disastrous situation and hopeless condition cannot hinder the plan of God. We on our part should not get discouraged or bitter, lest we hurt ourselves. In our relationships at home or community it is very hard to accept rejection or betrayal, especially when that person had been very close to us. However, that same Spirit of Jesus that loved Judas to the very end is now given to us. Therefore, " Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice ; be kind, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ" (Eph 4/39-32).

Let's use that barometer to discern any bitterness in our hearts. Is there anger towards anyone or maybe entertaining and remembering the details? If so let us give that truth to the Lord, for whom the Son sets free shall be free indeed.

**Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for the freedom to forgive and freedom in forgiveness. Amen**

## Wednesday March 31

Wednesday of Holy Week

*The graces we resist, the chances we miss, the Lord can redeem.*

Isaiah 50: 4-9

Ps 69: 8-10, 21-34

Matt 26: 14-25

Without condoning what Judas did, some Catholic Scripture scholars say that he might have thought that the Lord Jesus would work a miracle to save himself from the mob sent by the Jewish religious leaders. But the Lord did not work a miracle and allowed himself to be tortured and crucified. When Judas realized what was happening, the Gospels say he went back to the religious lead-

ers and returned the money they had given him. Judas said, "I have betrayed innocent blood".

Some Catholic Bible scholars say though Judas made restitution for his sin, he hanged himself because he went to the wrong people after the betrayal. When he returned the money they virtually told him to go hang with it and used the money to buy a burial field, because according to Jewish law, such blood money could not be used for any other purpose. If Judas had gone to the Lord Jesus or to another apostle, they would have consoled him and told him that the Lord's forgiving love and mercy were unconditional.

The lesson for us is that when we commit a grave sin, we need to go to the right people for advice. If we go to hard liners or hypocrites like the Jewish religious leaders, we might also end up in despair.

Catholic Scripture Scholars also believe that the Lord Jesus' immortal words from the Cross; "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," would have applied to Judas as well. After his period of purgation or purification, he may be with the Father whose love is unmerited, unending, unailing, unlimited and unconditional.

In the first reading Isaiah prophesies what happened to the Lord Jesus hundreds of years before. "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced."

**Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for your unending, unailing, unlimited and unmerited love. Amen**

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# St. John of God

St. John of God (Joao Duarte Cidade) was born on March 8, 1495 in Portugal. At eight years old, John heard a visiting priest speak of adventures that were waiting in the age of 1503 with new worlds being opened up. That very night he ran away from home to travel with the priest and never saw his parents again. John worked as a shepherd in the mountains until he was 27.

John took off to join the Spanish army in the war against France, and as a soldier, he was hardly a model of holiness, taking part in the gambling, drinking, and pillaging that his comrades enjoyed. One day, he was thrown from a stolen horse near French lines. Frightened that he would be captured or killed, he reviewed his life and vowed impulsively to make a change. When he returned he kept his spur of the moment vow, made a confession, and immediately changed his life. His comrades didn't mind that John was repenting, but hated that he wanted them to give up their pleasures too. After being falsely accused, he was rescued from hanging at the last minute and thrown out of the army after being beaten and stripped. As a shepherd he had plenty of time to contemplate what God might want of his life. A priest advised him to leave for Spain.

In Spain he spent his days unloading ship cargoes and his nights visiting churches and reading spiritual books. Reading gave him so much pleasure that he decided to quit his job and became a book peddler, traveling from town to town selling religious books and holy cards. After hearing a sermon from the famous John of Avila on repentance, he was so overcome by the thought of his sins that the whole town thought the little bookseller had gone mad. After the sermon John rushed back to his shop, tore up any secular books he had, gave away all his religious books and all his money.

Friends took the distraught John to the Royal Hospital where he was interned with the lunatics, but later was moved to a better part of the hospital. One day while John was out, the alarm went out that the Royal Hospital was on fire. He dropped everything and ran there. He found the crowd standing and watching the hospital, and its patients, go up in flames. He rushed into the blazing building and carried or led all the patients out. He then ran up the roof, and separated the burning portion with an axe to stop the spreading of fire. He succeeded but fell through the burning roof. All thought they had lost their hero, but he appeared miraculously out of smoke.

In 1550, John fell ill and died on March 8, on his 55<sup>th</sup> birthday. John of God is patron saint of booksellers, printers, heart patients, hospitals, nurses, the sick, and firefighters

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.

