



ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS



St. Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio

Memorial: 10 February



ON OUR KNEES IN HIS HANDS

FEBRUARY
2023

“Are you fasting? Show me your fast with your works. Which works? If you see someone who is poor, show him mercy. If you see an enemy, reconcile with him. If you see a friend who is becoming successful, do not be jealous of him! Love your neighbor.”

Saint John Chrysostom

Published by:

The Life in the Spirit Communities of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Colombo, Sri Lanka, (With Ecclesiastical Approval).

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Wednesday February 1

Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Hebrews
12:4-7,11-15

Psalm 103:
1-2,13-14,17-18

Mark
6:1-6

Have simple faith in God and trust him

In today's Gospel proclamation we read that Jesus did not do many miracles in his home town. People were so familiar with Jesus, that they started to question him. At times, our faith can become like this. After being Christians for many years, we can also become too familiar with Jesus. Often the longer we know Jesus and the church, we come across various theories about Jesus. There are many denominations that give different interpretations of the Bible. At times too much familiarity and knowledge and too little faith can draw us away from Jesus rather than bringing our lives closer to him. Lack of faith leads to fewer manifestations of the power of God. We can become complacent. Today's Gospel proclamation is inviting us to come back to simple faith in Jesus. Trusting him with every little thing in life, even when things do not seem to be going well. The first reading says that God sometimes disciplines the one he loves. Things might not be going the way we like, still let us lean on God alone and trust in him with simple faith.

Prayer: Abba Father, give us simple faith to trust in you and cast away all our doubts. Amen.

Thursday February 2

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Malachi
3:1-4

Psalm
24:7-10

Luke
2:22-40

Listen to the Holy Spirit

When we contemplate on today's readings, we can see how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. The Holy Spirit is the one who knows God's timing because he comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus. He reveals God's way to humble people and leads us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is close to us and helps us to remain in the Lord. A few months ago I was planning to start a new project but I did not have anyone to help me because I was living in a different country and I did not speak their language. However, the Holy Spirit guided me and led me to a few natives who were receptive to my outreach. Little by little this project was bearing much fruit among them and people started requesting for more of these outreach projects. As we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, he gives success to the work of our hands. Let us awaken ourselves to the Holy Spirit and allow him to guide us to our goals, in accordance with his will. Then one day, we will be able to reach our final destination in heaven, which God has prepared for us.

Prayer: Abba Father, lead me and guide me.
Amen.

Friday February 3

Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Hebrews
13:1-8

Psalm
27:1,3,5,8-9

Mark
6:14-29

In Jesus suffering becomes liberative

The world and the church need new types of leadership in every generation. It is the nature of things that all earthly leaders must come and go. They have a part in the drama of life and then the curtain comes down. But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. His pre-eminence is permanent, his leadership is forever. In a radical way John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus boldly inspiring people to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. John willingly suffered and died for Christ. As temples of the Holy Spirit, we too are called to be bright lights glorifying Christ in a world darkened by sin. When we are led by Jesus, suffering becomes liberative, and we experience the peace that passes all understanding. St. Bede said, "Such was the quality and strength of the man who accepted the end of his present life by shedding his blood." Though John the Baptist was locked away in the darkness of a prison, he was a bright lamp. Have we reached this place of surrender?

Prayer: Abba Father, take control of my life and may I experience the great freedom and power of your leading in my life. Amen.

Saturday February 4

Solemnity of Our Lady of Lanka, Patroness of Sri Lanka

Exodus
17:8-16

Psalm
96:1-3,7-10

Acts
16:25-33

John
2:1-12

Believe in Jesus and you and your household will be saved.

We are victorious people! God has won the victory for us. The best thing that could happen to us is to encounter and have a personal relationship with Jesus. Moses had a personal relationship with God and God's favour was upon Moses. When Moses was interceding with his hands raised high, God won the victory for them and Joshua fought physically while Moses fought spiritually. In the second reading Paul and Silas experienced the same favour of God. Both of them were deeply in a relationship with the Lord, who worked miraculously to set them free. Something remarkable is that when the prison doors were opened, they did not move out and that shows their inner freedom because of their relationship with the Lord. The Gospel proclamation gives us a clear picture of God's favour upon the Blessed Mother; her compassionate heart stirred Jesus to perform his first miracle. In recent decades, we sought the intercession of the Blessed Mother to protect Sri Lanka during the World War II, and she answered our prayers.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the same compassionate heart of the Blessed Mother. Amen.

Sunday February 5

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah
58:7-10

Psalm
112:4-9

1 Corinthians
2:1-5

Matthew
5:13-16

Our desire should be to bring glory to God

Today's readings show us the value of following the commands of God and carrying Christ within our hearts. The Lord is saying that when we fast, we should also change our behaviour. When we change our behaviour, the light that will rise from us is not a light that we would have generated ourselves, but it is the light of Christ.

When we start following the commands of God, people will start seeing him living within us. God will become real inside us, and we will no longer want to project ourselves, but instead our desire will only be to bring glory to God.

Today's Responsorial Psalm speaks of a person who has this light shining from within him or her. The Psalmist says that people, who carry God in their words and deeds, will be a light to people who are living in darkness.

Even when they have problems and struggles God's light will give them strength. This is because they trust in God. They have surrendered their lives to God and therefore they know that God will take control of everything and resolve every struggle in his time and in his way. They have no fear, and their hearts are secure. Therefore, they can look beyond their struggles, help others and show them the love of Christ.

In the second reading we can see that St. Paul was a disciple who trusted God completely. He humbled himself before Christ and surrendered his life to God. He devoted himself to knowing only about Christ and gave up everything else.

God gave us a command in the first reading – stop sinning and start doing good. Then the light of God will be seen within us. St. Paul followed this command that God gave him. He stopped persecuting believers, speaking badly or engaging in sinful acts and concentrated on God alone.

The Gospel proclamation tells us that as followers of Christ we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The way we behave and live must make a difference in the lives of others so that they will see Christ within us and be drawn to follow him.

The Lord is calling us to let go of our problems and focus on helping others. To do this we should start building a relationship with him through prayer. As we nurture this relationship with God it becomes love and blossoms into intimacy. In this intimacy the secrets of God will be revealed to us and sacrifice and giving will not be a burden. Instead by sacrificing and doing things for others, we will become joyful.

Prayer: Abba Father, through my relationship with you help me to become the salt of the earth and a light to those in darkness. Amen.

Monday February 6

Memorial of Saints Paul Miki and Companions, Martyrs

Genesis
1:1-19

Psalm 104:
1-2,5-6,10,12,24,35

Mark
6:53-56

Am I a part of God's plan or is he a part of mine?

From a formless, empty, darkness God brought everything to 'being'. At the end of each day 'God saw that it was good'. Genesis reveals that God created human beings in his image. What a beautiful revelation of God's goodness. But Satan entered through deception and brought sin and separation. As I reflect on God's goodness in creating me as a partner in his plan for creation, I am hit with the truth that often I am expecting God to be a part of my plan. I am not engaging nor discerning his plan. I am disturbed and angry when he does not fit into mine. Separation happens. Satan enters through lies, as he did at Eden. John 3:16 is my comfort. God sent his only Son to be my Savior. What I need to do, is to believe in him. Mark 6:54 says 'As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus.' How did this happen? Jesus knew who he was and his purpose. He reflected divinity. Do I reflect Jesus who lives within me? Do others recognize Jesus in me? Am I focused on God's purpose for me?

Prayer: Abba Father, may the Holy Spirit be a constant companion in leading me to the purpose for which I have been created. Amen.

Tuesday February 7

Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
1:20--2:4

Psalm
8:4-9

Mark
7:1-13

A loving relationship.

God created the world with all kinds of living creatures and blessed them. Then God made us in his image and gave us dominion over his creation. Giving a body, soul and spirit, God created us to have a loving relationship with him and each other. There was no evil, only beauty, in the world that God made. Then sin entered into the human heart. Throughout history many laws and traditions were added to make people obey God and live right with each other. Sadly in the process the love relationship between God and people was lost. In the Gospel proclamation, Jesus rejects the Pharisaic tradition surrounding the law's observance and warns against substituting human teachings for divine commandments and using the law as a way to escape from one's obligations. We can perform rituals and externally observe the traditions and laws of the Church while our hearts are cold internally. If we have lost our way, let us pray that the loving relationship between God and us and between each other would be restored.

Prayer: Abba Father, incline my heart to your divine law, to love you and love others. Amen.

Wednesday February 8

Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
2:4-9,15-17

Psalm
104:1-2,27-30

Mark
7:14-23

Choices

We live on the shadow of a greater love, the love of the Father who provides for us and sustains us. He is always offering us plenty of opportunities and advising us to avoid certain ones. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the Psalmist tells us in Psalm 104:29 - "If you take away their breath they perish". Such is the frailty of our life in the hands of our maker. When we are aware of this we will make adjustments and live in obedience and love. It is crucial for us to remind ourselves that God made us and our destiny is in his hands. When I have a fear of an impending problem or death, I tell myself: if I die I die to you God and if I live I live to you - just as St. Paul said. I am not abandoned and I am not orphaned. I belong to the Father who is always there for me. The Gospel proclamation says that we cannot blame the circumstances around us because we need to be aware that from within us comes the inclination to sin. May the spring of sin be replaced by the spring of living water.

Prayer: Abba Father, I treasure your life giving Spirit in the depths of my heart. May it overcome the sinful tendencies within my soul. Amen.

Thursday February 9

Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
2:18-25

Psalm
128:1-5

Mark
7:24-30

A time of silence is a time of grace

A Gentile woman had a child possessed by an evil spirit. She knew that only the Lord could free her. She fell at his feet; an intense encounter followed. Even in the midst of silence and derogatory statements being made, she was undeterred. She was persistent, faithful and confident. In the silence of expectant hope, spiritual muscles are strengthened; faith is nurtured. Many of us may feel that the Lord is not around. When our children are entangled in evil, we hope things would turn around or saner council may prevail. Initial prayers may seem to be unfruitful. The silence is loud enough to turn away from God. We think he is not listening. We may be thinking God should treat us on our worth. After all what with Prayer meetings, fulfilling obligations and church activities. We deserve better. Disappointed we leave God and cling to the world. Instead let us in the midst of our pain and struggles with family members take a cue from this unworthy one. A time of God's silence is a time of grace.

Prayer: Abba Father, may I never despair when my pleas are met with deadly silence, instead let me await greater glory. Amen.

Friday February 10

Memorial of Saint Scholastica, Virgin

Genesis
3:1-8

Psalm
32:1-2,5-7

Mark
7:31-37

Resist temptations

In today's first reading, Satan came to tempt Eve. At one time, Satan had been a glorious angel. But in pride, he rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. As a created being, Satan has definite limitations. Although he is trying to tempt people away from God, he will not be the final victor. God promised that Satan will be crushed by one of the woman's offspring: the Messiah. Why does Satan tempt us? Temptation is Satan's invitation to give in to his kind of life and give up on God's kind of life. Satan tempted Eve and succeeded in getting her to sin. Ever since then, he has been busy getting people to sin. He even tempted Jesus, but Jesus did not sin! How can we resist temptations? First, we must realize that being tempted is not a sin. We have not sinned until we give in to temptation. Then, we must pray for strength to resist and say no when confronted with what we know is wrong. James 1:12 tells of the blessings and rewards for those who do not give in when tempted.

Prayer: Abba Father, may the value of your kingdom be more natural than what the world has to offer us. Amen.

Saturday February 11

Fifth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
3:9-24

Psalm
90:2-6,12-13

Mark
8:1-10

God comes in search of me

In today's first reading we meet Adam and Eve after they have fallen. They are hiding. They are unable to face God and they think that God cannot see them. When we fall into trouble aren't we often tempted to think that God cannot see us? To Eve, God says that the pain of childbearing will be intensified, but yet her desire will be for her husband. The things we desire bring us pain. To Adam, he says that the ground is cursed because of him. Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment echoes this sentiment. God tells Adam, that he will have to fight nature to survive. Yet God comes in search of Adam and Eve, and clothes them in garments of leather – he ministers to them in their fallen state. In today's Gospel proclamation we read how Jesus became man to come in search of us. He ministers to the poor, the infirm, the weak and the powerless in the face of the hard life has dealt them. When he comes in search of us, let us run to him, give thanks for the blessings received, and the floodgates of heaven will open.

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for coming in search of me when I am not able to even look at you, and for divine intervention in my circumstances. Amen.

Sunday February 12

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sirach
15:16-21

Psalm 119:
1-5,17-18,33-34

1 Corinthians
2:6-10

Matthew
5:17-37

Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom

When we meditate on the first reading we realize that it is out of great love that God has given the Ten Commandments for us to follow. Observing the commandments can be challenging or rather difficult sometimes, yet they are the directives, norms and precepts for a smooth journey of life.

Just like road rules guide us safely to our destination, the commandments too instruct us to follow the correct path of life. Therefore the commandments cannot be burdensome or hectic for us but, we have to follow them as a travelers map to guide and rule our heart.

It is God's deep love that has set the law before us. Now, we have a choice for life and death, to choose from. Therefore it is for our own good and benefit that we are obliged to follow them.

The responsorial psalm and the second reading further express the wisdom relating to the law of God and the blessedness in following the law of God.

How much more should we concentrate and focus on the law of God as the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets, I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." (Mt 5:17-18). Therefore we can rest assured that it is vital to follow the law of God, the Ten Commandments or the "Decalogue".

Hence teaching and obeying these commandments pave the way for one to be called greatest in the kingdom. Therefore we cannot simply ignore or do away with a single commandment, but strive to follow them diligently.

However the Lord Jesus Christ has brought the commandments to fulfillment or perfection through his life and we are also called to do the same. Whereas the law instructed that it is wrong to commit adultery, Jesus went further and said that it is wrong to even look at a woman with lust, elevating the standard or the level of expectation. All the commandments are brought to perfection through Jesus.

We are to be wise enough to follow them closely and live pleasing lives before God. Let us also ask for wisdom to fathom these in a deeper sense so that we will have the reverential fear to not offend God.

May we understand and grasp that breaking the law is not only unholy and displeasing to God but brings disastrous consequences as a result. As the fear of God is the fount of wisdom may we be blessed to observe the law of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Abba Father, empower us with the Holy Spirit
to follow your commandments. Amen.

Monday February 13

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
4:1-15,25

Psalms
50:1,8,16-17,20-21

Mark
8:11-13

Fullness of discipleship

The Gospels have many dimensions. Signs and wonders should take a person closer to God. But healing and miracles are not the essence of the Kingdom of God. Physical healings are temporary. Some believe that healing and miracles are the fullness of Christian Discipleship, but it is not completely true. Even in the Old testament signs and wonders were performed to manifest the presence of God, but it made the people draw closer to God. The Pharisees wanted to argue, showing their superiority complex. Some of us might think that we are better than others because we go for Sunday Mass and weekly prayer meetings. But is the breaking of the word becoming real in my life? Do we often argue with our counterparts? The response of Jesus was not to prove that he is from above, instead he quietly leaves the place without having any arguments. Jesus shows us that self-control is as important as miracles. Am I following the example of Christ? Like St. Paul, could I say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."?

Prayer: Abba Father, may I follow Christ more fervently.
Amen.

Tuesday February 14

Memorial of Saints Cyril, Monk and Methodius, Bishop

Genesis
6:5-8; 7:1-5,10

Psalms
29:1-4,9-10

Mark
8:14-21

The Lord always provides

In today's Gospel proclamation, Jesus asks a few hard questions from the disciples who witnessed the miracle first hand. They did not have faith to understand what the miracle meant. They could not comprehend that God would provide for them. At times, we too are like these disciples, having witnessed the many miracles God has done in our lives we tend to forget them when we are in a crisis. Since my childhood I have seen miracles in my life. I trusted in the Lord and he provided. This month I was running on bare minimum and as a single parent I had bills to pay and a house to run. I started to worry. I had forgotten what the Lord had done in my life before. We have a living God, a God who never lets us down. I repented for my lack of faith and the Lord did provide like he has always done. Sometimes we look at the world and our circumstances seem louder and bigger than God. But today the Lord is calling us to open our eyes of faith and to know him who loves us, he will never let our foot slip or stumble.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to know you and hear your voice.
Amen.

Wednesday February 15

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
8:6-13, 20-22

Psalm
116:12-15,18-19

Mark
8:22-26

Open the eyes of my heart Lord

Noah obeyed the Lord when he asked him to build an ark. He did not know if the flood would come or not. He did not know how he was going to build the ark. He did not know what life will look like after the flood. There were many unknowns but when God spoke to him he listened and obeyed. Today if we are caught up in life and do not have answers to many things, if it is all gray and we are blind not knowing what is next, Jesus is walking with us, like he did with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. He is speaking to us and sharing his Word with us, so that our eyes will be opened and we will recognize Jesus amidst all our blindness. Simeon held Jesus and said "my eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:31). Let us hold Jesus in our lives, let us see him and hear him in our challenges and through the power of the Holy Spirit let us obey him even when we do not understand or see clearly. Our response in obedience will become a great blessing for our family, friends, and others. It will bring new life!

Prayer: Abba Father, open my ears to hear you, eyes to see you and grant me the grace to obey you in total surrender. Amen.

Thursday February 16

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
9:1-13

Psalm
102:16-23,29

Mark
8:27-33

Who do you say that I am?

What is our level of awareness that we have about Jesus? Surely our personal experience with Jesus is important. It is clear from today's Gospel proclamation, that the Lord was interested to know who people thought he was. No matter what our experience or encounter has been, how do we answer this question with confidence? The level of confidence that Saint Peter demonstrated in answering with "You are the Christ" was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Living our life in the Spirit is the pathway to be able to proclaim and acknowledge the Lord Jesus as the apostle Peter did. Most of the time we are covered by clouds of our own struggles, issues, rejections, anxieties – the list goes on. Clouds limit the line of sight to see who God is and therefore we fail to accept Jesus as the Lord. Let us consciously decide to fall at his feet, confess our sin and surrender in completeness to his arms so he can bless us with the Holy Spirit to help us connect with the merciful heart of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Abba Father, in your unlimited mercy, forgive our sins and give us the ability to experience your Son's presence in any situation. Amen.

Friday February 17

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Genesis
11:1-9

Psalm
33:10-15

Mark
8:34-9:1

To die to oneself is to find life in God

In the first reading we see unity, ambition, passion and drive towards a common goal. All of which are desired in today's divided world. Bizarrely we see it all torn down and sent into disarray. A closer look and we see that these seemingly good works are motivated by self-promotion or in disobedience and rebellion to God. In my own love story with God, I find I am deceptively and inherently self-promoting. It is more of me than the God I want to glorify in his great mercy. If good works are not rooted in building of faith and bringing glory to God but rooted in SELF at its heart, then would not that tower we build with all our good efforts: the testimonies, the charity projects, the work in our churches and communities be just that - an impressive shiny tower devoid of all that is of God? Jesus tells us, if we want to follow him, then we must carry our cross. To give up the person we strive to be, to become the person God created us to be. I am blessed when God saves me from my self and "brings to nought my plans or foils my foolish ambition".

Prayer: Abba Father, show me all that I am that I should not be and give me the grace to be all that you call me to be. Amen.

Saturday February 18

Sixth Week in Ordinary Time

Hebrews
11:1-7

Psalm
145:2-5,10-11

Mark
9:2-13

Faith: the way to please God

Waiting to pick up my kids from school one day, I noticed a boy running towards a reversing vehicle. The vehicle was not moving fast but I was fearing for the boy's safety. However, the closer he got to the moving car, the happier he looked and to my relief the car came to a sudden stop. The boy then opened the passenger door and hopped in with a beaming smile. It was then I realised that it was his parent who was driving the car. As dangerous as the scene appeared, the boy saw it differently. He believed in his parent to not harm him in any way. In the same way, no matter how dark the storms that surround us, how deep the miseries that engulf us or how impossible our challenges may seem, we are called to trust in our Father who is in control of it all. We are given a glimpse of Jesus' glory through the Gospel Proclamation so that we remember him for who he really is and not lose faith in difficult circumstances. Let us trust the Lord completely, he will always protect us.

Prayer: Abba Father, reveal yourself to us each day so that our faith in you may never waver. Amen.

Sunday February 19

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Leviticus
19:1-2,17-18

Psalm 103:
1-4,8,10,12-13

1 Corinthians
3:16-23

Matthew
5:38-48

Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. Lev 19:2

Today's first reading tells us of a directive the Lord gave Moses: "Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy."

Mark those words, - "speak to the whole community: Be holy". The call to holiness was given to one and all and not just to the religious leaders. When we hear the words, 'Be holy' our warning flags come up and we assume that God is calling us to a sterile kind of life. But the true meaning of holiness is that we are set apart for better things and for the Lord's glory.

We link the 'Be holy' to 'do not be lustful' but the Lord qualifies the call to holiness when he directs us not to bear hatred and revenge and instead to love one another. Such a call seems a little odd in the Old Testament but this was and has been the Father's call...by living in love we can live in holiness, avoiding revenge, hatred, selfish behaviour and greed.

Our call to holiness is to live the way the Father treats us as mentioned in Psalm 103. We are benefitted from having a relationship with him. He redeems our lives from destruction and crowns us with kindness and compassion. He does not deal with us according to our sins but instead is slow to anger and rich in mercy.

Having such a Father to love us and live in and with us we are called to emulate his qualities and show mercy and love in our day to day living. He forgives and puts away our transgressions. He reminds us that we carry his presence and we become Temples of his presence when we journey in holiness.

It is a privilege and blessing because it not only benefits us but also those around us. While we are temples, others around us are also temples of God's presence, even the politician, the actress in the movie, the criminal on the street can receive the mercy of God still available to them and they are temples of God. Hence we cannot destroy them since we will be destroyed as well.

Everything, every person and every situation belongs to the Lord. We need to seek his face as we respond to whatever happens around us. The Lord is well aware of our thoughts and those around us. Given that our omnipotent God is so well in tune with our lives, our thoughts and our motivations, we cannot assume a God-like authority in life and should be quick to forgive. We cannot live with an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth mentality but instead show love, mercy, kindness and forgiveness in all circumstances.

Prayer: Abba Father, you have shown us love, mercy and compassion, we pray for the grace to share the same with those around us. Amen.

Monday February 20

Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Sirach
1:1-10

Psalm
93:1-2,5

Mark
9:14-29

Divine wisdom

Wisdom is fundamentally different to knowledge. Knowledge is of the mind, while wisdom is of the Spirit. While knowledge is fuelled by fact, wisdom is fuelled by faith. Wisdom is God-breathed, God-inspired and feeds heaven's perspective into our thoughts, feelings, words, actions, and responses. The good news in today's First Reading is that God has poured out and lavished this gift of wisdom upon every living thing. We have already been clothed in this gift and learning how to access it and activate it is key to following in the footsteps of Jesus. In today's Gospel proclamation, Jesus operated in wisdom and knew that faith renders all things possible. Through wisdom, Jesus knew that the demon inside the boy was under the authority of the one true King. Through wisdom, Jesus knew to pray a prayer of commandment. And through wisdom, Jesus used the situation to not only deliver a life but awaken the disciples' spirits to recognise the power of faith in action. So, like the disciples, let us also be eager to operate in this wisdom.

Prayer: Abba Father, unlock my mind, heart and spirit and make me a storehouse of your wisdom. Amen.

Tuesday February 21

Seventh Week in Ordinary Time

Sirach
2:1-13

Psalm 37:
3-4,18-19,27-28,39-40

Mark
9:30-37

How do we change our perspectives.

Often our conversations revolve around our achievements, abilities, goodness, the greatness of our ancestors and the achievements of our children. Most people are focused on themselves. In today's Gospel proclamation we hear the 12 disciples discussing, who the greatest is. But Jesus says "if we wish to be first then we need to be the last and the servant of all." We may find it difficult to understand what Jesus is saying. How do we become the last, to be the first? It is not having a low self image. We need to use our talents and gifts to the fullest capacity to the glory of God. In this journey the Lord will make our high places low, which may be a painful process. In the day to day events of our lives, if we allow God to act, and say 'Lord let your will be done in this situation', then he will bring about that humility, through the working of the Holy Spirit. Accepting our life situations without complaining or putting the blame on others should be our way of life. The Holy Spirit will guide us and make us to be the first by being the last.

Prayer: Abba Father, anoint us with your Holy Spirit so that our inner eyes may be open to accept the values of the Kingdom. Amen.

Wednesday February 22

Ash Wednesday

Joel
2:12-18

Psalm
51:3-6,12-14,17

2 Corinthians
5:20--6:2

Matthew
6:1-6,16-18

“Rend your hearts and not your garments” Joel 2:13

Today's readings seem to echo the same word: our heart. We are required to examine our hearts with an authenticity that cuts to the core. It was a common practice to tear one's garments as an outward display of repentance. However, God is asking us to tear our hearts in contrition. We judge the outward appearance but God judges the heart. God calls us to be authentic, to be true to self and God. Today the Church begins a season of reflection on Jesus' passion and death. The fruits of the Spirit are produced for the benefit of others. We may not see how significant a change we are making in the grand scheme of things. Every life is precious, every life is sorely needed for the functioning of other lives. And when we get this, the fact that we are needed by those around us, it all makes perfect sense: that we are formed by dust and once our divine purpose is fulfilled, our mortal bodies return to dust. So when we receive ashes today, let us wear it with an awareness of our call to a purposeful life.

Prayer: Abba Father, may I draw closer to you this season of Lent.
Amen.

Thursday February 23

Thursday after Ash Wednesday

Deuteronomy
30:15-20

Psalm
1:1-4.6

Luke
9:22-25

Choose life

Today's readings speaks of choice. Moses leaves before us the choice of life and death and the Lord Jesus presents the choice of taking up our cross and following him or losing our life. Looking back at life, I see clearly where Jesus placed this same choice before me. Thirteen years ago I met the Lord in one of my deepest crisis moments where by his amazing grace I chose life and followed him. The strength to continue to carry the cross daily and keep choosing life came with the deep desire and love for the Word, Holy Mass and sitting at his feet before the Blessed Sacrament. In every cross that has come my way, in his goodness and mercy the grace is given to keep choosing life. Each time I choose life over death in the most trying situations, it is not to save only my own soul but others too. Let us reflect on how Jesus chose to deny his glory in heaven to become a mere human being, and how he chose to die on the cross for our sins to give us all the strength to carry our cross and enter eternal life one day.

Prayer: Abba Father, give me the strength to endure the pain that will bring me eternal joy one day. Amen.

Friday February 24

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah
58:1-9

Psalm
51:3-6,18-19

Matthew
9:14-15

The Lord is calling us

During this Lenten season the Lord is showing us what he expects from us as true fasting. We are not called to become followers of Christ on a shift basis but rather it is a lifetime commitment. There is no off-time or roster basis in becoming a follower of Christ nor is it an act to show the people around us for a period of time. What does it mean for us to fast this season? Did we pray and ask the Lord what he expects us to give up? Some of us may already know in our hearts certain things that we should be giving up this season but we may be avoiding this calling. But the Lord truly knocks on our hearts and reminds us, through the first reading, of a set of different ways we could bring joy to others and ourselves. Last year, during the Ash Wednesday liturgy, Pope Francis reminded us that fasting sets us free from the self-centered and obsessive quest of physical fitness to help us to keep our spirit in shape. It is not about a diet, but we should fast from anything that can create any kind of addiction in us.

Prayer: Abba Father, forgive me for avoiding your voice for my own benefits. Give me the strength to accept your words according to your will. Amen.

Saturday February 25

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Isaiah
58:9-14

Psalm
86:1-6

Luke
5:27-32

God is there for me.

In today's Gospel Proclamation, the Lord Jesus gives us his Mission Statement here on earth, his purpose in our midst. This mission statement, gives hope to all of us who feel lost, broken, hopeless or sinful. We are given Good News, the Lord Jesus has come for you and for me! The First Reading gives us instructions on how to lead this life of righteousness. However, it also gives us the assurance that we are not alone, and that the Lord himself will lead us and be with us. The Lord who gave up his life for us will not forsake us. His help is ever present for those who seek. We should not get tired or impatient because the Lord's timing is different to ours. "Sun-scorched" (vs 11) means slightly burned or damaged. Maybe today we feel like this sun-scorched land, with no purpose. But today is also the day that the Lord is going to transform us to a "well-watered garden", blooming with his presence. All we need to do is repent and surrender at his feet, I cannot, but he can.

Prayer: Abba Father, remind me that at my lowest point, you are still there with me, guiding me to your righteousness. Amen.

Sunday February 26

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis
2:7-9, 3:1-7

Psalm
51:3-6,12-14,17

Romans
5:12-19

Matthew
4:1-11

Rediscovering God in reconciliation.

Lent is one of the two seasons of preparation in the Liturgical Calendar. The other being the season of Advent. Lent gives us 40 days of preparation to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. A call to a deeper awareness of self and an inner conversion of heart. Today's readings remind us of the battle that comes against the identity we have in Christ as we seek to follow Christ faithfully.

The first reading gives an account of the creation story and the fall of Adam and Eve. Satan deceives Eve by asking, "Did God really tell you...?" In the busyness of life we may have missed the mark ourselves. Perhaps we have also heard the whisper of the evil one, "if you lie just a bit it wouldn't matter.. or if you compromise just this once no one would notice.., if you give in just a bit you could save your self" and so the battle rages on. Some are pulled into self pity and some dwell into their past or fear the future and doubt God's plan. And in that dark abyss of sin and compromise God seems distant.

How can I let go of this darkness and enter his light? The Lord reminds me, 'it is, in repentance and rest, in quietness and trust that you re-discover me and find your strength' (Is 30:15). As I go for the Sacrament of Reconciliation I clear out my heart and find freedom once again. As I come out of the confessional I feel the lightness in my spirit and experience his joy. I have reconciled with God!

In today's Gospel proclamation we see a dichotomy of events in Jesus' life. On one hand, the son of Joseph and Mary proves his divinity by his responses to the temptations he faced and on the other being the Son of God identifies himself with the sinner, understanding what it truly means to be tempted.

As the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says in 4:15, 'we have one who has been tempted in every way..'. So we can come to him in that confidence knowing that he understands. He is the good father and he patiently waits for us.

Lent offers us that opportunity to rediscover God in the desert of our lives; where we pray, wait and prepare our hearts for an infilling of the Holy Spirit, through repentance and reconciliation. As we hear in one of the Prefaces for Lent: "through bodily fasting you restrain our faults, raise up our minds, and bestow both virtue and its rewards." Therefore, let us be intent on carrying out good works and choose to fast and pray as we draw closer to celebrating the mysteries of salvation.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me rediscover your love, mercy and grace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and find joy as I walk in your ways. Amen.

Monday February 27

First Week of Lent

Leviticus
19:1-2,11-18

Psalm
19:8-10,15

Matthew
25:31-46

Be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy.

Today's readings teach us that our relationship with God should reflect in our actions. The old testament sets out the law of the Lord; the law that the people of Israel followed encouraged them to love their neighbors; it was this law that made them stand out among other nations as the chosen people of God. Jesus accomplishes this law to the fullest in the New Testament by sacrificing his life on the cross for the salvation of humanity. It was an act of unconditional love and mercy. This raised the standards of the law to greater heights. The season of Lent reminds us that God loved us first despite of our unworthiness. Therefore, we are called to open our hearts and minds to his love, that the Holy Spirit may lead and guide us to share his love by our acts of mercy, compassion and charity towards our neighbors. As promised in the Gospel proclamation, true witnesses for Christ are those who testify not only by words but also in action. They will enjoy their inheritance of eternal life.

Prayer: Abba Father, may my words and works be pleasing to you.
Amen.

Tuesday February 28

First Week of Lent

Isaiah
55:10-11

Psalm
34:4-7,16-19

Matthew
6:7-15

Experience the power of God's Word

As we start this blessed time of Lent, the Lord is inviting us to do a spring cleaning of our hearts. We are offered a reality to hold on to, using the muscle of faith. The Word of God creates, and when he speaks, it is already done. Through faith, the currency of heaven, we pull it down into our life. The Lord Jesus taught us to pray in the same way he himself spoke to the Father. He invites us to have an identity change first. The Creator God wants us to call him Father! Not that we can ever earn or deserve to be his children, he himself has willed it so. We are invited to see God as he is (higher and above all earthly troubles), and to see ourselves as God sees us, as his beloved sons and daughters, called to expand the Kingdom territory on earth. As children, we know that the Father meets all our needs and protects us from the lies of the enemy. We can forgive others because he first loved us and has forgiven all our sins on the cross. Let us be loving and merciful to those around us.

Prayer: Abba Father, help me to love those around me, by taking your love and mercy to those who cannot love me back. Amen.

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St. Jose Luis Sanchez del Rio

St. José Luis Sánchez del Río was born on March 28, 1913 in Mexico. He loved his faith and grew up with a strong devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

José was 12-years-old when the Cristero War began in Mexico. During this time, the Mexican government wanted to extinguish the influence of the Catholic Church throughout the country. People from many of the central and western states in Mexico rebelled against the government in defense of the Catholic Church. José's brothers joined the rebel forces, but his mother would not allow José to participate. But José desperately wanted the chance to stand up for his faith. He begged his mother to let him join, saying, "Mama, do not let me lose the opportunity to gain Heaven so easily so soon". The General allowed José to become the flagbearer of the troop.

José was ultimately captured by the government troops and imprisoned in the sacristy of the local church. During his captivity, José was ordered to renounce his faith in Christ. Even under the threat of death, José refused. He was forced to watch the hanging of a fellow inmate. Instead of breaking his resolve, José encouraged the man, telling him they would meet again soon in Heaven. During his time in captivity, José prayed the rosary daily and wrote a letter to his mother. He told her he was ready to fulfill the will of God.

On February 10, 1928, after realizing they could not break José's faith, the government troops cut the bottom of his feet and forced him to walk around the town toward the cemetery. During his walk, José recited the rosary, prayed for his enemies, and sang songs to Our Lady of Guadalupe, despite being cut with a machete several times. He cried out in pain but did not give in. They told him if he shouted, "Death to Christ the King," they would spare his life. Instead he shouted "I will never give in. Viva Christo Rey (Long live Christ the King)!" At the age of 14, St. José Luis Sánchez del Río died as a martyr on February 10, 1928. Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to him and he was officially canonized on October 16, 2016.

His memorial is on 10 February.

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.

