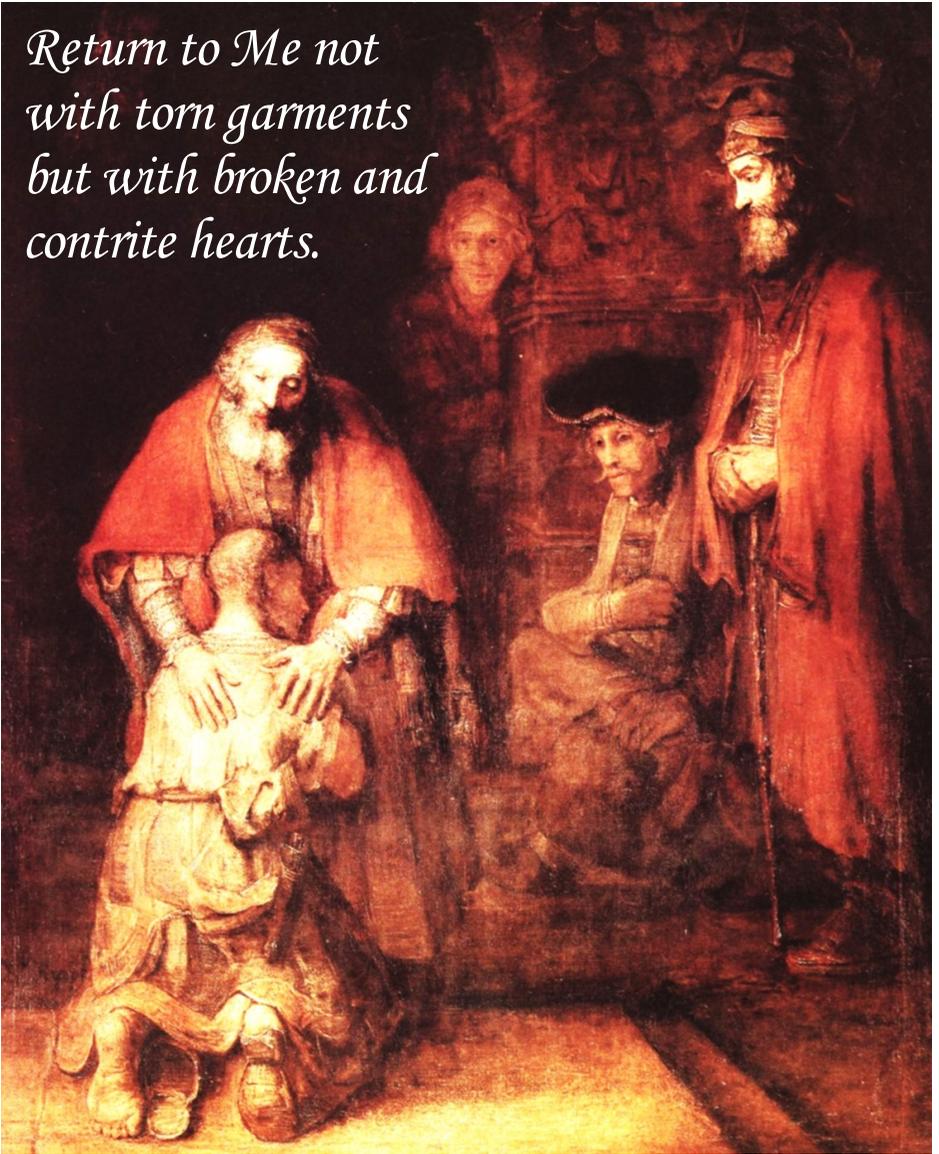


*Return to Me not
with torn garments
but with broken and
contrite hearts.*



40-Day journey-inward with the Lord over Lent.

Lent Meditation

2006

March 1st to April 16th

a project of

THE BOARD OF WORSHIP & MUSIC
TRINITY ANNUAL CONFERENCE
METHODIST CHURCH IN MALAYSIA

*a word from
the board chairman*

Greetings in the name of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ!

Lent is a time for reflection. ‘Who am I?’ ‘What have I done?’ ‘Where am I going in my life’s journey?’ For the Christian, these questions cannot and should not be asked in isolation, with oneself as the point of reference. That would only lead to despair. These questions and reflections need to be asked and seen in the light of a relationship, that between oneself and Jesus Christ.

“Return to me not with torn garments, but with broken and contrite hearts”, is our theme for the TRAC Lent Devotions 2006. Jesus makes the call. He calls each person. He calls his covenant people. Jesus’ call to return pre-supposes a prior relationship – once intimate, loving, and vibrant, but now distant, cold, and strained, perhaps even broken. Do I hear? Do we hear? Jesus waits, with open arms and heart. The way home to Jesus begins with and continues in genuine repentance – marked by inner broken hearts (spirit and in truth) and not just the externals (sackcloth and ashes).

May I thank the team of writers for this generous labour of love in sharing with us their minds, their talents and their hearts in these devotions. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

May these devotions help us in our reflections this Lent. May they provoke us to genuine repentance. May they assist us in renewing and strengthening our relationship with our Saviour and Lord.

In Christ,
Dr. Samuel Ong
Chairman
Board of Worship and Music
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contributors

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preface

A 40-Day Journey is a long time. Lent is an annual 40-Day Journey with the Lord. During this Journey we hope to meet the Lord; to speak to the Lord; to hear the Lord speaking to us; and to respond as the heart and the mind is moved.

This Lent, a five member clergy-laity-local-overseas team of writers has put together the 2006 Lent Meditations as a labour of love to the Lord and to the TRAC Community. We pray that through the different approaches and spirituality of each writer, believers would be able to meet with the Lord; to speak words of deep intimacy to the Lord; to hear words of love from the Lord; and to be loved enough and courageous enough to respond from the depths of the heart.

All our engagement with spirituality should lead to transformation, especially of the inner person. It is our hope that not only will believers be healed and transformed as they read, meditate and pray with this booklet, but that they will go on to share this healing and this transformation with others. By doing so they will renew themselves, their families, their workplaces, their community, their church, the nation, and the world.

“God Who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 1.6)

SHALOM!

The Editor

1

Ash Wednesday, March 1

Joel 2.12-18; Ps 51.3-6, 12-14, 17; 2 Cor 5.20-6.2;
Matt 6.1-6, 16-18

“NOW” is an eternal moment.

Today, Lent begins.

“NOW” is when we can return to the Lord.

Lent - a penitential season.

A 40-day period where we wind

“NOW” is when we can return to the Lord with all our heart; with fasting, weeping, mourning.

down, seriously examine our lives, and say sorry to God for our sins, through prayer and fasting.

“NOW” is when we know that the Lord is gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and abounding in love.

What happens when in the “NOW” moment of these 40 days we know of our sins and repent of them?

David, in his “NOW” moment, knew his transgressions.

It will lead us to the joy of God’s salvation.

Knew, that it was against God, God only, that he had sinned.

And having been forgiven, we can go on to teach transgressors God’s

Knew, that it was only God, who could restore to him the joy of God’s salvation.

ways and help sinners turn back to God.

Knew, that the sacrifices of God, are a broken spirit.

Paul says of Christians that we are ‘ambassadors for Christ’.

Knew, that God will not despise a broken and contrite heart.

That our message to the world is: “Be reconciled to God”.

Today, is Ash Wednesday.

That this message is urgent, because, - “NOW is the day of salvation”.

Over to you

Do I know my sins?

What are they?

Am I sorry for my sins?

Prayer

Lord, help me know my sins.

Help me repent of them.

Help me to know that my sins keep me from You.

2 Thursday, March 2 Deut 30.15-20; Ps 1.1-4, 6; Lk 9.22-25

“Today ... Choose God, Choose Life”

Today, in Luke’s gospel, we hear Jesus saying, “The Son of Man must suffer ... be rejected ... be killed ... be raised to life.” Yes, Jesus chose God – He suffered... He was rejected... He was killed ... but, He was raised to life!

What is it to choose God?

For Moses, to choose God is to “love the Lord your God”; is to “walk in God’s ways”; is to “keep God’s commands, decrees, laws”; is to “listen to the voice of God”. When we choose God this way, Moses says, “You will live; you will have life and prosperity; you will have blessings and God will give you many years”.

For the Psalmist, to choose God is to refrain from worldly advice, worldly ways, and worldly attitudes.

To choose God is to find our delight in God’s Word. When we move away from worldly stuff and move towards that which is holy, then is promised - unending nourishment, continuous blessings.

What are the consequences of not choosing God? Jesus will be ashamed of us (Luke 9:26). Moses promised ‘death ... destruction ... curses’. The Psalmist said, we would be like “chaff that the wind blows away”. Our plans, our hopes and dreams, even our very selves will “perish”.

What a contrast between choosing and not choosing God! Let us remember what Jesus said, “What good is it for a person to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his / her very self?”

Over To You

When was the last time I chose God?

When was the last time I did not choose God?

Why do I not choose God all the time?

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for the times I did not choose You.

Today, let me meditate on Your Word – choose You! Choose Life!

3 Friday, March 3
Is 58.1-9a; Ps 51.3-6a, 18-19; Matt 9.14-15

True Spirituality

This is the third day of Lent. How easy had it been to deny ourselves of food? Not easy! In fact it had been hard work! And then we read Isaiah 58. And what does Isaiah 58 tell us about fasting? The type of fasting acceptable to God. A whole new ball game altogether!

As Isaiah puts it – fasting is not just about not eating food. Fasting is about not exploiting our workers, especially our migrant workers – just wages, just working hours, just benefits. Fasting is about not quarrelling and fighting – which we are prone to when the sugar level is low. Fasting is about doing what is within our power to end injustice and oppression in our multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural society. Fasting is about sharing our food with those who hunger; providing shelter for the homeless, clothing the naked;

and looking after our own flesh and blood.

What happens when we ‘fast’ God’s Chosen Fast? Instead of the “darkness” we are in – our “light” will break forth like the dawn. Instead of the “sicknesses” that attack us personally, as a nation, and globally - our “healing” will quickly appear. And whatever the blessings are, which God wants to give, will be ours.

Fasting from food is a first step to fasting ‘God’s Chosen Fast’. But fasting from food is not the last word. The last word on fasting is whether we will go on to serve the practical needs of our fellow men and women; that we don’t just talk, but get into action; that we see pressing issues and tackle them headlong. When we do that, then our spirituality is ... true ... real ... tangible ... credible.

What happens when our “fasting”

is truly pleasing to God? God gives us Lord will answer; when we cry for
a promise. That is - when we call, the help God will say: 'Here I AM'.

Over To You

Take 15 minutes and ask yourself - "Is the fasting that I am practising pleasing to God or not?"; "Am I becoming a more just person ... a more caring person? ... a person after God's own heart?"

Prayer

Lord, help me move on to deeper, more authentic ways with You. Help me live the authentic life.



Saturday, March 4
Is 58.9b-14; Ps 86.1-6; Lk 5.27-32

Sabbath Rest

When was the last time you had a Sabbath Rest?

For many modern Christians today, Sabbath Rest has lost its meaning. It needs to be recovered. The very word “Sabbath” in Hebrew means - “to cease”, “to rest”.

In our world today we have become ‘workaholics’. We are working ourselves to death! We are destroying ourselves, our family, our society, our world, through this respectable suicide – work! We are not spending enough time together. Result? Marriages are breaking down. Divorces are going up. Families are breaking apart. We are alienating ourselves from each other.

How can we recover the sanctity of the Sabbath Rest? What does God say about the Sabbath Rest? The very first time the word “holy” appeared in the Bible was when it said, “and God

blessed the 7th day and made it **holy**” (Genesis 2.3). So, the Sabbath is a holy day. In fact the words “holy” and “heal” come from the same root word. Therefore the Sabbath as a ‘holy day’ is a ‘healing day’. No wonder Jesus healed on the Sabbath! And God on our Sabbath so wants to heal us in body, mind, and spirit. Will you let God do God’s healing work in your life on the Sabbath?

The Bible is very clear as to work – “six days you shall labour” (Ex. 20.9). As to rest, the Bible is also very clear – “the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work.” (Ex. 20.10). So, six days for us ‘to do’. The seventh day for us ‘to be’. Six days we are busy with what is of the world. The seventh day we reach out to eternity. Six days we put our hands to labour. The seventh day we put our hands

together and worship the living God.

Isaiah says, “if you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please ... if you call the Sabbath a delight ... and if you honour it by not going your own way

and not doing as you please ... then you will find your joy in the Lord ...” (Is 58.13-14). This, is the Sabbath joy that the Lord wants us to have. Will you have it?

Over To You

The Jews observed the Sabbath to remember God’s gift of creation and to remember their redemption from slavery in Egypt. Early Christians observed the Sabbath to remember the resurrection of our Lord. What about you – why do you or why do you not observe the Sabbath?

Prayer

Lord, grant me the wisdom to observe the Sabbath. Help me take time to rest. Help me to know that those things that touch me deeply do not come from living like a workaholic, but come from living from the core of my heart, my emotions, my very being.

5 Sunday, March 5
Gen 9.8-15; Mk 1.12-15; 1 Pet 3.18-22

The Temptation in The Wilderness

The Spirit has a harsh side. Most Christians are familiar with the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12.4-11) and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22-23), that is, a “soft” image of the Spirit. So it is a surprise to find that it was the Spirit that drove Jesus out into the wilderness where the wild beasts take residence.

Why should the Spirit send Jesus into the wilderness? It happened right before Jesus began his ministry in Galilee. It seems like the Spirit thought that Jesus needed a sort of refining process in order to launch a full-scale public ministry, proclaiming the kingdom of God.

Mark does not give a detailed account of what Jesus went through in the wilderness, so we fill the gap, relying on the well-known account of Matthew (Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13). First of all, the Devil asked Jesus, Who had fasted forty days and forty nights, to

command the stones to become loaves of bread. Jesus answered, “It is written ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then, the Devil placed Jesus on the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, and asked Him to throw Himself down to test the divine protection promised in the Old Testament. Jesus answered, “It is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” Again, the Devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and told Jesus that He will receive all their splendour once He falls down and worships the Devil. Then Jesus cursed the Devil, saying “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God.’” Unshaken, Jesus proved His faithfulness and loyalty to God’s sovereignty.

People are so easily attracted to

different powers – material, miraculous, political – that they often allow these powers to enslave them. We, Christians, are no exception. Therefore, when we make up our mind to live and work for the Kingdom of God, we find ourselves ironically often not in a blissful heavenly palace, but in the desert where the wild beasts are howling. A refining and tuning process getting into gear, no doubt.

It is worthwhile to listen to the experience and wisdom of the desert fathers and mothers, who, living in solitude, knew all the dangers and potentials of the wilderness. A desert mother, named Syncretica, once said:

Over to you

Imagine that you are by yourself in the wilderness.

How do you feel?

What would you do?

Think what the wilderness of our personal and communal life is.

Prayer

Living God, be with us in the time of tribulation. Please give us courage and strength so that we could remain faithful to you.

“In the beginning there are a great many battles and a good deal of suffering for those who are advancing towards God and afterwards, ineffable joy. It is like those who wish to light a fire; at first they are choked by the smoke and cry, and by this means obtain what they seek (as it is said: ‘Our God is a consuming fire’[Heb 12.24]): so we also must kindle the divine fire in ourselves through tears and hard work.” We are blessed to have a cloud of ancestors of faith, who prayed together with Job that “when [God] has tested me, I shall come out like gold” (Job 23.10). May this be our prayer as well!



Monday, March 6

Lev 19.1-2, 11-18; Ps 19.7-9, 14; Mt 25.31-46

We Do Care!

“I don’t care!” – this is one of those remarks prevalent in our times. One of young peace activists (working for an organization named “Change-maker” in Europe) confided in an international Christian conference that a blunt, “I don’t care!”, is one of the most frequent responses young people offer when they are invited to engage in peace movement to make this world a better place. The Christian activists try to explain the reality of the calamities such as war and terror, ills of neo-liberalism, hurricanes, earthquakes, which are taking place on this globe, and to invite others to the common struggle to make change. Yet many young people turn a deaf ear to this invitation. Indifference, passivity, and silent defeatism characterize this kind of response.

Our Christian faith carries within it the good news about the God who

cares. God cares whether the wages of a labourer are paid properly (Lev 19.13), whether the deaf and the blind enjoy the human life with dignity (Lev 19.14), and whether anyone shed blood by falling victim to profiteering system (Lev 19.16). Jesus Christ cares about those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick or in prison by radically identifying himself with them. Whatever we do to one of the least of the people, we do it to Jesus Christ (Mt 25.40). The kind of God, whom Jesus Christ embodies, is full of compassion and sympathy.

This is a great challenge for all of us. Do our churches care just as God and Jesus Christ do? Aren’t we interested only in the growth of church in terms of inner membership? When it comes down to the relation to the least of people in our society, don’t we tend to escape into the easy practice of charity?

Through charity, the haves give the have nots some things. However, the existence of the oppressed and the marginalized in our society poses a much more serious challenge to our faith, because Jesus Christ identified himself with those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick or in prison. What will we do to Jesus Christ who comes to us as the one who is hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick or in prison? We call Jesus our friend, our closest neighbour, and the Bible goes “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”(Lev 19.18, Mt 22.39).

We live in the age where the law of the survival of the fittest is entrenched and considered “holy” even. This law holds sway over the

world. People have become too individualistic to have any genuine concern for the well-being of the marginalized. The priority of people are what brings them material profit, instant gratification, and sensual pleasure. The desire for true human relationship and healthy pleasure coming from the attempt to make this world better seems to have yielded to the dominant pressure of this individualistic consumerist society. Nevertheless, the Bible attests that both God and Jesus Christ have the radical interest in the well-being of the least of the people. It illuminates an alternative life style for Christians.

The Christians are the remnant people who do care!

Over to you

Take a moment to ponder whether we have ever seen Jesus Christ in those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick or in prison. If not, why? Does this biblical insight guide the life of your church?

Prayer

God of compassion, open our eyes to see Jesus Christ in my suffering neighbours. Teach us the way to become a neighbour to the victims, the marginalized, and the weakest of my society.

7 Tuesday, March 7
Is 55.10-11; Ps 34.3-6, 15-18; Mt 6.7-13

The Lord's Prayer

One day Jesus taught the disciples how to pray. Prayer is not to be misunderstood as a heap of empty phrases, because God knows what we need before we ask God. The prayer Jesus taught the disciples is called the Lord's Prayer. To our dismay, however, the Lord's Prayer is often learned by rote, and its important aspects are not given enough attention and thought.

First of all, we address "Our Father," not "My Father". God's care is of course individually designed. Yet God is not to be privatised merely as a guardian of an individual, because God calls the people of God and grows a special relationship with the community of faith as its "Father". On the other hand, the original Aramaic word Jesus used in addressing God is "Abba", which means "daddy". When Jesus called God as "Abba", it caused no small

embarrassment to the religious leaders who thought of God in terms of an authoritarian, patriarchal, and distant monarch. Jesus evokes the God as father according to the Jewish religious tradition, but Jesus' father is not like an authoritarian head of a patriarchal household or palace. Jesus' "Abba" is like a daddy full of warmth, intimacy, and understanding. Here Jesus is by no means interested in establishing the masculinity of our God, who transcends human sexuality and gender, but intends to clarify God's relational, life-giving quality.

Second, the major concern of the disciples should be for the sovereignty of God to be established in this world. Thus we pray that "your kingdom come", and that "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". It is puzzling that this ecumenical vision, which takes the entire world as the stage for the divine action, often

vanishes, and that the obsession with the narrow concerns such as the individual's after-life takes its place. Prayer is also ultimately about seeking "your will", not "my will", to be done. Its classical example is found in the prayer Jesus himself offered in Gethsemane: "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mk 14.36).

Lastly, Jesus revives one of the old biblical insights. The psalmist sang that "with the loyal you show yourself loyal; with the blameless you show yourself blameless; with the pure you

show yourself pure; and with the crooked you show yourself perverse" (Ps 18.25-26). Likewise with those who forgive their debtors, God shows the forgiveness of their own debts. This emphasis on the importance of human initiative is opposite to what many believe as the order of things. It is not like God does everything first, but rather God awaits our action first! Jesus expects us to become an active agent of our own life. We need to realise our God-given inner freedom and power, and can use it. Our initiative matters.

Over to you

We didn't mention above two parts of the Lord's Prayer. One, is about our daily bread, and the other, is about temptation and the deliverance from evil. For people who keep many days' food in their own refrigerator, what does it mean to pray for the daily bread? In what kind of circumstances do you pray most sincerely not "lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil"? If you have more time, try to write your own version of the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer

O Lord, thank You for guiding us with new insight. Bless my journey of faith, and continue to light my path by Your wisdom.



Wednesday, March 8

Jon 3.1-10; Ps 51.1-2, 10-11, 16-17; Lk 11.29-32

Turning Around

The book of Jonah is quite straightforward in describing a recalcitrant prophet, who didn't like God's idea of sending him to Nineveh. The divine commission, given to Jonah, was not what he had dreamt of. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian, the imperial people infamous for their brutality towards the subjugated. God's concern about such people was disagreeable to Jonah. So he fled from "the presence of the Lord."

Jonah didn't succeed. He observed that his disobedience somehow caused much harm to his fellow sea travellers. When the lot that the sailors cast fell on Jonah, he acknowledged that he had been fleeing from the Lord. Jonah was thrown into the sea, into the deep. After spending three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, Jonah called on the Lord, and was delivered

from the belly of fish. Jonah went to Nineveh, and proclaimed the impending judgement of the Lord. And behold, something great happened. The people of Nineveh returned to God. The decree of the king contains the typical expression of what repentance is like: "all shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands"(Jon 3.8).

When Jonah turned around from his former stubbornness, self-centredness, and rebellion against the will of God, relationships resumed. What Jonah had rejected was not only the work, that is, the commission to proclaim the divine message to Nineveh. His relationship with God himself was put at risk, because, trying to get away from the sight of the Lord, he attempted to break with the God, God self. This peril of relationship with the Lord was built

on Jonah's rejection of relationship-building with the people of Nineveh. He didn't want to include them into his own sacred universe, nor did he intend to play a role as a bridge between this people and the God. It is interesting to note that even a great prophet in the Bible have this deep-seated weakness of humanity, in which people cling to the rigid demarcation of who insiders/outside are. Jonah wanted the circle of the people of God to be closed. That weakness was so strong that Jonah preferred holding onto it even to endangering his vital relationship with God. Jonah's narrow particularism is in stark contrast to God's universal love and mercy. Jonah closes down, while the God opens up. The God, who converses with the fish, is concerned about the

people and animals in Nineveh (Jonah 2:10; 4:11), and thus shows God's vital relationship with all living beings. Once Jonah followed the way of this God, a new relationship with the God opened to the people of Nineveh.

Acceptance of one's own destiny often opens up into many new relationships. Leaving behind our self-centredness and turning around towards the vision of God signals the beginning of full life. When we hold on to habitual and conventional thinking, however devout and safe it feels, we are in danger of losing the vital relationship with life. What matters is turning around, that is, discerning the will of God and transforming our being. Something great, new, and powerful, will happen from it.

Over to you

Have you ever felt like Jonah in any area of your life? If you have not turned around yet, imagine what kind of fruits your disobedience would bear.

Prayer

God of abundant love and mercy, deliver me from my self-centredness and indifference to Your vision and grant us the willing spirit to fulfil Your Commission.

9 Thursday, March 9
Esth 4.16; Ps 138.1-3, 7-8; Mt 7.7-12

If I Perish, I Perish

How optimistic the Bible is about life! “Everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door, the door will be opened”(Mt 7.8; cf. Mt 21.22; Jn 10.16). Could you tell that this is really the experience of all people? The answer might be not in the affirmative, but it was evidently the experience of Esther.

Queen Esther was the wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus. When she learned about the conspiracy that a power holder named Haman made against the Jews, she decided to stand up to prevent the tragic calamity from coming upon her own people. Yet it took extraordinary courage to enter the king’s court and to break silence because it was a law that any person who went to the king without being called was to be put to death. Furthermore, Esther knew too well the destiny of the ex-Queen, Vashti,

who had fallen from favour with the king. Nevertheless, Esther couldn’t bear to see the impending pogrom of her own kindred race. Something that she felt as more important than her own life was at stake.

What is the source of Esther’s extraordinary courage? The request she made of all the Jews in Susa was to hold a fast on her behalf, and she herself and her maids participated in it. This is a clue which allows us to understand where her pre-eminent fortitude, relativising the absolute force of the imperial system, sprang from. She shed the fear of those who “kill the body but cannot kill the soul”, and reconfirmed the fear of God. Esther trusted in the Lord who holds the ultimate authority over both soul and body (Mt 10.28). Trust in the ultimate sovereignty of the Lord was the secret of Esther’s remarkable courage. Her action might risk her

own life, so she said, “If I perish, I perish”. Yet she believed that God would take care of the rest, and that the door would be opened somehow. Today the Jewish descendants remember the deliverance from pogrom by celebrating the festival of Purim. This celebration is intertwined with the memory of the young Jewish Queen with remarkable faith and courage to act.

The extraordinary time of

emergency requires the extraordinary courage to make a breakthrough. In the history of many communities, similar versions of Esther are often found. It is worth remembering those who regarded the solidarity with their own people and the action for them as something of more value than their own life. The tale of persons who broke the conventional boundary and acted out of solidarity with people inspires and empowers us.

Over to you

(1) Who are Esther-like people in the history of your community? Let’s ask ourselves if our faith results in conviction and action. Try and name some issues which confront us and would take extraordinary courage to stand up for. What are you doing about these issues?

(2) The latter part of the book of Esther contains some embarrassing aspects. Not content to receive what they aspired, the Jews began to revenge. They “struck down all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering, and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them”(Esth 9.5). What do you feel about this kind of reaction?

Prayer

Living God, answer me in the time of affliction. Give me courage when I should act. Bless me with trust in Your presence even in the midst of trouble.

10 Friday, March 10
Eze 18.21-28; Ps 130.1-8; Mt 5.20-26

Many Faces of Anger

Anger is not an easy emotion for us, but it is normal for us to have feelings, and thus it is normal for us to feel angry. Not only being normal, anger can be also good. When Jesus wanted to heal a man who had a withered hand, he asked a question of people in the synagogue. “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?” To Jesus’ disappointment, the people who gathered there to study the word of God didn’t show any sympathy, merely keeping silent. Jesus grieved at the hardness of heart of the so-called people of God, and looked around at them “with anger”. The anger with which Jesus responded towards the stone-like indifference and the lack of discernment of people brought forth a miracle and restore the health and the wholeness back to the disabled man (Mk 3.1-6; cf. Ps 7.11).

Anger itself is not the problem,

but what kind of person feels the anger and what we do with it often cause problems. Sometimes when we feel furious, we have a danger of getting enslaved to anger itself, and thus falling victim to the will to control the reality in the way we want. When we become reactionary to the negative input from the world which causes anger and thus violent, we are endangered to perpetuating what we claim to resist. The flame of indignation becomes our controller. Anger easily ignites a circle of violence. In this case, the seed of murder is already present in the emotion of anger itself. There is no space for reconciliation, but only the accelerating movement of negative energy. Anger is not transformed into creative energy, but confined and enslaved to itself. This kind of anger does not “produce God’s righteousness”(James 1.20).

It is natural that we feel angry, but anger is not to control us. We own our anger. It can be used as the compost for a different world to emerge. To achieve this requires a profound spirituality, a living relationship with God. The God gives us the strength to go beyond our personal limitations and the capability to see beyond our tunnel vision.

There are different kinds of anger. We can get angry when confronting the injustice of system and the callousness of people who support it wittingly or unwittingly. This kind of anger needs to be transformed into

creative energy to change the world and make it a better place. But we can get also angry when people are different from us. We become arrogant, ready to insult our brothers and sisters and call them “fools”. In this case, we need to get free from our obsession with angry, and search for the right relationship with them to bloom again. We need to leave our offering before the altar, and go to first be reconciled to our brothers and sisters. Anger indeed has many faces, and we need to have discernment concerning their different qualities.

Over to you

Go for a walk, and think of the diverse causes and effects of anger in our life. How do you deal with anger? Do you shut yourselves from anger, why is it so? What are the most helpful ways to transform your anger for the sake of creativity?

Prayer

Gracious God, I live in the world which makes me deeply angry in many ways. I need discernment and guidance. I pray that my anger could be transformed into the courage to change the things I can. Yet also grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, and the wisdom to know the difference.



Saturday, March 11

Dt 26.16-19; Ps 119.1-2, 4-5, 7-8; Mt 5.43-48

“Much Love to Our Foes”

The sermon on the mountain is a collection of many wonderful, beautiful, yet challenging words of Jesus. The most challenging one is about love for enemies. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy’. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous”.

To love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us is apparently a tall order and it even sounds like hypocrisy. How come we can forgive and love those people who did harm to us, and don’t even apologise? Isn’t it an unrealistic and idealistic sentimentalism which disguises our emotional truth? Isn’t it a dangerous religious pretension which makes a

fake saint? What on earth does Jesus mean?

When we regard love as a matter of emotion, such questions pop up. However, the following explanation Jesus offers to his new commandment is based on a keen “observation” of reality. God is different from humans in dealing with the evil and the good, with the righteous and the unrighteous. This observation is what the wisdom tradition has long struggled to confront and fathom. How can the God of justice and righteousness show such perseverance and generosity to the evil and the unrighteous? The genius of the biblical tradition lies in the fact that it encompasses the voices of both prophets and sages, and holds them in a creative tension. Jesus the prophet is also Jesus the sage. His command to love your enemies and to pray for

those who persecute you reflects a deliberate strategy of the sage par excellence to create the alternative world.

Jesus wanted the disciples to build peace on the earth. In the beatitudes, Jesus said “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”(Mt 5.9). Jesus’ vision of peace is urgent and radical. In order to build peace, his disciples cannot remain in their own comfort zone either emotionally or socially. Outsiders even like enemies and persecutors should not be excluded in the attempt to build peace on the earth. Hatred begets hatred, and this process goes against peace-making and peace-building. Enemies and persecutors are to be invited to this urgent process, and the invitation is

made by love and prayer. In this regard, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” means neither a sentimentalism nor a religious pretension, but a well-thought strategy to stop a vicious cycle of revenge and create the reality of peace on this earth.

Jesus’ last statement is the command to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect. God’s perfection revealed itself in the indiscriminate universal love and concern towards even the evil and the unrighteous. So the children of God had better not expect perfection in this topsy-turvy world, and rather try to perfect our love towards it. What kind of art is this? A poet once sang “much love to our foes”, and Jesus wants us to get tuned to this melody.

Over to you

How can we let go of bad memories of life and forgive those who hurt us? Do you think that forgiveness is identical with forgetfulness? Do we know people who practised this radical spirit of love for enemies?

Prayer

God of sun and rain, open my eyes to see the world as You see it. Bless me to keep growing in compassion, and to work for peace.

12

Sunday, March 12

Gen 22.1-2, 9,10-13, 15-18; Ps 116.10, 15-19;
Rom 8.31-34; Mk 9.2-10

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

Genesis 22.2

Abraham was told to take his only son, Isaac, to Moriah and to offer him there as a burnt offering. We know how much Isaac meant to his father, being the miraculous fulfilment of the promise made by God to Abraham in his old age. It probably seemed like a cruel joke to him that God would ask back a gift so wondrously given not so long ago. Whatever inner thoughts or conflicts Abraham might have, he never faltered in faithful obedience. He knew his God well enough to have the courage to let go of his beloved son. His faith was revealed in his obedient submission to his God. We often say that we trust God, but is that trust shown in our daily life?

Over to you

Are there things holding you back from giving your all to God? Surrender them to God and receive courage to trust God wholly because "God who did not spare God's own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will God not also, along with Jesus Christ, graciously give us all things?" (Rom 8.32)

Prayer

Father God, I may not be as courageous as Abraham in taking such a big step of faith, but I'm willing to be led by You one step at a time. May my faith please You and my life glorify Your Name. Amen.

13 Monday, March 13
Dan 9.4-10; Ps 79.8-9, 11, 13; Lk 6.36-38

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Luke 6.36

It may be easier to offer sympathy or compassion to those who are less fortunate and who have not offended us. It may not be so easy to be merciful (kind and tender-hearted) to those who seem self-sufficient or more so, to those who have hurt us before. Our human nature cries out warnings for self-preservation, but the Holy Spirit within each believer will prompt, gently yet persistently, to do otherwise. His call is to love one another, as we have been loved by God. “If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal?” (The Message: Eugene H. Peterson)

Over to you

Are there people in your life to whom you should be showing mercy? Ponder over names you’d rather ignore or avoid. Ask God to help you to be kind and tender-hearted towards them, not because they deserve it, but because your Father in heaven is merciful and so will you.

Prayer

Lord, You have always shown mercy to me, undeserving as I am. Please help me to be merciful like You. Make me willing to forgive as I have been forgiven. Amen.

14 Tuesday, March 14
Is 1.10, 16-20; Ps 50.8-9, 16-17, 21, 23; Mt 23.1-12

Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;

Matthew 23.5

When schedules get really tight, the first thing many Christians will push aside or remove from their daily list is Quiet Time. If this attitude is left unchecked, many will soon discover a meaningless faith. Many sincere believers can live out a Christian life with a presentable outward appearance, but feeling empty within. This happens when we fail to cultivate an intimate daily walk with

God. We could be sinning but think nothing of it, securely cocooned in Christian-like behaviour and activities. God is not looking for right Christian appearances but genuine and pure hearts that seek to commune with, trust in and obey God. God is not looking for eloquence of speech or material sacrifices, but grateful hearts that desire to please God alone.

Over to you

Have you been too busy lately to enjoy being in God's presence? If so, make time today to listen to what God is saying to you today and respond to God.

Prayer

Lord, there are always endless things to see to everyday. Grant me precious moments of dwelling in Your presence daily that You may show me the things that truly please Your heart. Amen.

15 Wednesday, March 15

Jer 18.18-20; Ps 31.4-5, 13-16; Mt 20.17-28

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Matthew 20.25-28

Someone once remarked that life is actually made up of relationships- in the home, in church, at the workplace, etc. Many trials and conflicts often stem from soured relationships. How does a Christian respond in such a situation? On most occasions, we think we are “mostly right”. So we ask God for justice to prevail. However, sometimes we need to examine ourselves honestly to seek

out elements of pride or personal prejudices which may have crept in insidiously in the handling of the issue at hand. When most people may seem to be on our side, God may be saying otherwise: instead of being great, be meek; instead of demanding more, give as the Lord has given. May God help us to hear God's soft voice and obey.

Over to you

Are you going through a troubled relationship? Ask the Lord to help you to see the situation honestly. If pride or personal prejudice is in the way, ask God to remove all obstacles and to transform your heart and mind.

Prayer

Search me, O Lord and know my heart today; cleanse me from every sin and set me free to be a child pleasing in Your sight. Amen

16 Thursday, March 16

Jer 17.5-10; Ps 1.1-4, 6; Lk 16.19-31

"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a an according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

Jeremiah 17.10

In a certain cartoon strip, a grandmother who was alone in the kitchen spoke aloud, "No, you shall not have any ice cream". Her grandson walking by, said, "But Grandma, I didn't ask for any". The grandmother replied, "No, dear, you did not. I was talking to myself". Knowing that God is omniscient (all-knowing), can be sobering and yet comforting, too. No matter how

ignorant people may be to our sinfulness (if we are true to ourselves), we know that God is not deceived and we will need to repent. Yet, we may be grappling painfully with our weaknesses in desiring to be children pleasing to our Father. Friend, take heart. God sees the earnest attempts and will not judge our failures with contempt. God knows and understands.

Over to you

Is the Lord speaking to you about certain struggles in your life? Are you filled with self-contempt for failing to be more like Jesus? God knows and will help you if you turn to Him.

Prayer

Thank you gracious God for accepting me. I know you are not ignorant of my unworthiness, may you also hear the cries of my painful struggles to be a child pleasing in Your eyes. Amen.

17 Friday, March 17
Gen 37.3-4, 12-13, 17-28; Ps 105.16-21;
Mt 21.33-43, 45-46

"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

Matthew 21.43

In the parable of the tenants, a landowner rented his vineyard to some farmers. When the time came to collect his dues, his servants were killed, including his son. Jesus asked his listeners what they thought the landowner would do. "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end", they replied. A sobering thought from this parable is never to take God for granted. Although the story was a warning to the Jews regarding their

rejection of Christ, the underlying principle for us today is our own response to Christ. "And let us ask ourselves, whether we, who have the vineyard and all its advantages, render fruit in due season, as a people, as a family or as separate persons" (Matthew Henry). It is a wonderful privilege to have a Saviour and Lord who loves, guides, defends and comforts us, but what is our response to such an amazing love?

Over to you

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any offensive habits which you are reluctant to let go.

Prayer

Forgive me, Lord, for while I enjoy and claim to be Your child, I often neglect to live out Your kingdom values. Help me never to take Your love for granted. Amen.

18 Saturday, March 18
Mic 7.14-15, 18-20; Ps 103.1-4, 9-12; Lk 15.1-3, 11-32

So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Luke 15.20

After the sobering thought yesterday from the parable of the tenants where we were reminded not to take God for granted, today's parable of the lost son seems to assure us of His ever constant love for us when we return to Him in earnest. As Christians, we have a high calling of being God's people to live in a manner that glorifies God. Yet whilst on earth, we know that we sometimes struggle to do what we know we should, and when we fail, we become discouraged. In today's parable, we catch a glimpse of our gracious God. The father's joyful and warm reception of his prodigal son tells us how much our Father in heaven is willing to receive us and forgive us even though we have gone astray, if we genuinely return to Him.

Over to you

Are you truly assured of God's acceptance of you, regardless of your failures? Paul declared that nothing could separate him from the love of God (Rom 8:38).

Prayer

Lord, thank you for this timely assurance of Your unfailing love despite my constant failures. Today, my heart is filled with deep gratitude to you for Your love that never gives up.

19 Sunday, March 19

Ex 20.1-17; Ps 19.7-10; 1 Cor 1.22-25; Jn 2.13-25

‘So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

John 2.15-16

Our bodies are the Temple of God. Just as Jesus drove the money changers, sheep and cattle from the Temple so God desires to clear our hearts and minds of all the undesirable attitudes and motives we harbour. When we accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, we gave Him the authority to rule in our hearts and in our lives. Yet, many of us still have areas in our lives that have yet to be

surrendered to His control. Our lives may be in turmoil because we have chosen to go our own way. Our Lord wants to rid us of the turmoil and give us His peace which transcends all understanding- peace which only He can give when we surrender our will to His. It is only when we surrender ourselves to His authority that our lives can be transformed to be more like His.

Over to you

Are you willing during this Lenten season to surrender all your innermost thoughts and desires over to your Lord – that God may lead you along the right path?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, have mercy upon me for the times that I have harboured thoughts that are against Your will and which are displeasing to You. Forgive me and cleanse the thoughts of my heart that I may love You and worthily magnify Your Holy name, through Christ my Lord. Amen

20 Monday, March 20
2 Kings 5.1-15, Ps 42.1-2, 43.3-4; Lk 4.24-30

‘So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, just as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said. “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.”

2 Kings 5.14-15

Naaman had come with gifts searching for the prophet who could heal him of his leprosy. He waited at the door of the house of prophet Elisha. Instead of coming out to meet him, Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman. Although angry with Elisha, Naaman finally did as instructed and he was healed of his leprosy. Just like Naaman, we long to be made whole, to be healed of all hurts and to live the abundant life. God is right here in our midst and the Holy Spirit is right in our hearts, yet we sometimes are deaf to His still small voice and choose rather to depend on our own strength and to follow our own will. Even when we hear Him, we doubt and question, “Is it really the Holy Spirit’s prompting?” This happens especially when what the Lord instructs seems quite different from what we want to hear. We need God to teach us God’s ways and to guide our steps each day.

Over to you

Naaman was healed when he obeyed and followed Elisha’s instructions. You too will be made whole and find purpose and joy in your lives when you choose to obey and follow Christ. Come before the Lord today and acknowledging God as the only way to life eternal, your only source of rest, joy and peace.

Prayer

Thank You Almighty God for sending Christ to be the Way, the truth and the life. Thank You for Your Holy Spirit's presence to guide me each day. Help me to be reminded that You watch over me and that I can call on You at all times and in all circumstances. Help me to listen and to obey Your Holy Spirit's prompting through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

21 Tuesday, March 21
Is 7.10-14, 8.10; Ps 40.7-11; Luke 1.26-38

'For nothing is impossible with God'

Luke 1.37

This was the message from the angel Gabriel in response to Mary's query as to how she a virgin, could conceive. Throughout the Bible and throughout the history of humanity, we have seen God doing things that were humanly impossible. Even today, God works in ways, which amazes us – for God is God – the all Powerful Creator of all. Yet many still doubt and reject God's sovereignty over all the earth. Our finite minds just cannot comprehend the greatness of God.

respond to God as many did – in total submission to God's sovereignty and God's will. There may be many things that we may not fully understand, situations which may seem impossible to bear, but the Lord is calling us to trust in God completely and in God's promises; and to be reminded that God is God – God who works within us to accomplish infinitely more than we could ever imagine or hope for. And the best assurance God gives us is that God is Immanuel – God is with us.

Today the Lord is calling us to

Over to you

Does the way I live testify to myself and those around me that some things are impossible with God?

Prayer

Our Father, God of heaven and earth, forgive me for the times I have forgotten how great, how strong and how mighty You are and chosen to rely on our own human and finite capabilities. Help me today to give myself unreservedly to Your Sovereign control; believing in Your unfailing love and faithfulness to see me through each day and that with You, nothing is impossible, Through Jesus Christ our Saviour I pray, Amen.

22

Wednesday, March 22

Dt 4.1,5-9; Ps 147.12, 13, 15-16, 19-20; Mt 5.17-19

*‘And now, Israel, listen carefully to these laws and regulations that I am about to teach you. Obey them so that you may live.... If you obey them carefully, you will display your wisdom and intelligence to the surrounding nations... For what great nation has a god as near to them as the Lord our God is near to us whenever we call on him’
(NLT)*

Deuteronomy 4.1,6-7

Obedience to God’s laws and regulations was what Moses told the Israelites were required of them. These were given so that God’s chosen people would live upright lives pleasing to God and at peace with their fellow men and women. The same obedience is required of us today. Christ said that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it and that it would remain for all time until its purpose was achieved. Through His life and ministry, Jesus taught us how to live a life obedient to the Heavenly Father’s will. Today, Jesus has given us a new

commandment – which which embraces all of the principles of the commandments God gave to Moses and the Israelites. As followers of God, we are called to live our lives in obedience to God. Just as Moses told the Israelites of the consequences of their obedience to God’s law (Dt 4.6-7), our obedience to Christ and His teaching will be evident in our lives as we witness to others. What better way to preach the Good News than through our lifestyle? The most powerful witness of the truth of God’s love and God’s Word is what others see in our lives.

Over to you

Does my lifestyle reflect one, which exemplifies Christ's – one of self-denial, of love and obedience to the Heavenly Father's will?

Prayer

Teach me Your ways, O Lord and help me to know Your will and to obey Your commandments – that I may be the light of the world and salt of the earth that You want me to be, through Jesus Christ My Lord, Amen.

23 Thursday, March 23 Jer 7.23-28; Ps 95.1-2, 6-9; Lk 11.14-23

'But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward'

Jeremiah 7.24

As God's children, let us take heed of what Jeremiah says. Have we been listening out for God's voice or have we been following the stubborn desires of our evil hearts? All around us, we see the consequences of a decadent society. We may claim not to be part of it, but are we actively doing anything to improve the situation? God has placed us where we are for a purpose, God's purpose. Let us not be caught up in the rat race

of the world nor become oblivious of the injustices and oppression around us. Instead, let us seek the Lord's will for us in our own situation and do what is required of us. In today's reading, the psalmist says,

*Come let us worship and bow down
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker
For He is our God
We are the people He watches over
The sheep under His care*

Psalm 95:6-7

Over to you

When was the last time you did not listen or pay attention to God's voice? What were the consequences?

Prayer

Thank You Father God for Your love and protection. Have mercy upon me and forgive me my stubborn ways. Teach me to discern what pleases You and to do what You would have me do, that I may grow in knowledge and love for You, through Christ who first loved me, Amen.

24 Friday, March 24
Hos 14.2-10; Ps 81.6-10, 13, 16; Mk 12.28-34

'Bring your petitions, and return to the Lord. Say to Him, forgive all our sins and graciously receive us.... The Lord says, then I will heal you of your idolatry and faithlessness, and my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever.' (NLT)

Hosea 14.2,4

Our God is a gracious God, full of mercy and unfailing love, yet a holy and righteous God who is ever willing to forgive and heal. But, we God's people sometimes prefer to choose our own way and do our own thing. Instead of God being supreme in our lives, we have allowed our own desires to rule our lives. We have then actually replaced His supremacy with idolatry – be it self, another person, worldly possessions, money, ambition

or position. We need to constantly question the motives of our actions and repent of our sin of pride and waywardness; and then seek the Lord's forgiveness and grace to set us on the right path. Thank God for God's great love for us revealed through the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ, that assures us that God does forgive us and that because of Christ's death, we are redeemed.

Over to you

Am I vigilant enough to know the motives for each of my action? Am I living a discerning life, moment by moment? What are the barriers to an active vigilance and regular discernment in my life?

Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, today I come to You, realizing the many times I have failed to put You first in my lives. Please forgive my sins of waywardness and self-importance and teach me Your ways for You alone are God and there is no other. I ask this through Christ Jesus, Amen.

25 Saturday, March 25
Hos 6.1-6; Ps 51.1-2, 16-19; Lk 18.9-14

'I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices. I want you to know God; that's more important than your burnt offerings.' (NLT)

Hosea 6.6

The Lord God has clearly made known what God wants of us – not our rituals, fasts or sacrifices but our steadfast love and knowledge of God. We can only get to know God and love God more through a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ each day – reading God's Word and communing with God, walking and living in God's presence, obedient to God's will. The wonder of it all is that the more we seek to know God, the more God reveals to us. Unless we acknowledge who we really are – sinners redeemed by God's grace alone, we will not be able to know God and the extent of God's love. We need to first search our hearts and realise our sinful ways, then come before God in humility and repent of our sins of pride and self-righteousness. When God's Spirit takes control and works in our lives, we will be transformed to be more like Jesus!

Over to you

How much do I know of God's mercy to me? When was the last time I experience deeply God's mercy in my life? When was the last time I forgave someone of a terrible hurt?

Prayer

O Lord, how I desire to know You more and to love You more for Your love to me is beyond all measure. Have mercy upon me, O God because of Your unfailing love and cleanse me from all my sins. Help me to be faithful in my devotion to You. Through Christ my Saviour, Amen.

26 Sunday, March 26
2 Chron 36.14-16, 19-23; Ps 137.1-6; Eph 2.4-10;
Jn 3.14-21

But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

2 Chronicles 36.16

It is hard to see God's hand upon one lives when we go through hardship. It is as if life is not fair to us. For some of us, we may even think that God has forgotten us. The experience of the Israelites when their country was besieged by the Babylonians. The writer of the book of Chronicles has the privilege of hindsight and understood it as God's hands of discipline upon His people so that they may return to Him with their hearts not merely with their religious activities and festivities. To be taken into exile was a purification process

the Israelites were going through.

John wrote, God has come not to condemn the world but to save it. Those who believe in Him will be saved. God has not changed. His dealing with us in our lives is not without a purpose. His dealing with us, as with the Israelites are intended to purify our motives, causing us to reflect and examine our lives again. That which we are going through – especially that which is unpleasant and trying, do we need to pay attention and listen to Him?

Over to you

Are you going through a very difficult time because of a decision you made in disobedience to God? Turn back to Him in prayer, confession and seek God's mercy and guidance.

Prayer

Lord, purify my heart so that I may see within me that which displeases You.
Deal with me gently so that I may wholly return to You.

27 Monday, March 27
Is 65.17-21; Ps 30.2, 4-6, 11-13; Jn 4.43-54

Taking Jesus at His Word

The royal official's son is very ill. He desperately wanted him well. As an officer in Herod's office, he would have access to various and vast resources to aid his son's well-being. He came to Jesus, humbled and throwing himself at the mercy of Jesus. He begged Jesus to come and heal his son. He probably had expected Jesus to go to his house, lay His hands upon his son, say some special words or do something so that his son may live, so he pleaded, "Sir, come down before my child dies". Instead of coming with the official, Jesus said, "You may go, your son will live." The official took Jesus at His word. No debate took place. No query. No 'what ifs'. His son was healed and lived. His faith is worth taking note of.

How would you describe your

faith in the Lord? Do you, like the official take Jesus at His word? Taking Jesus at His word is crucial in our life of faith because faith often pertains to things we cannot see with our own eyes. Taking Him at His word means trusting Him, the One who keeps His promises. The official had heard about Jesus and the miracles that He had done. It is very probable that the official wondered if what Jesus had said would come true but he chose to believe Him. Knowing Jesus must lead us to taking Him at His word, trust and obey Him. Often-times we miss out a greater good when we decided to trust in our wits and reasons but trusting and obeying Him brings us peace and well-being we would never be able to give ourselves.

Over to you

What has the Lord been speaking to you that you know you have not heeded?
Choose to obey TODAY!

Prayer

Lord, speak that I may hear and upon hearing, I may trust and obey You.

28

Tuesday, March 28

Eze 47.1-9, 12; Ps 46.2-3, 5-6, 8-9; Jn 5.1-16

Healed, Empowered To Live And To Give Life

We read the passage in Ezekiel about the river wherein swarms of living creatures will live wherever it flows. Large numbers of fish is also found there, fish of many kinds. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river, their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. The fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing. The picture of the life-full river certainly gives us a beautiful picture of hope especially when we think of the rivers in our country, many of which are laden with rubbish, poison and mud due to erosion of soil. Ezekiel wrote that the river is so because the water flows from the sanctuary to the Temple. Jesus told the woman at the well (Jn 4) that whoever drinks of Him will never thirst and more than that, it will become in him/her a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Jesus is the life-giver. The invalid man

experienced a new life when Jesus healed him. Invalid for 38 long years. Could he have ever dreamt that such a moment would take place in his life? Who would not rejoice with him over the new lease of life given to him? Who would not throw a party to celebrate such an occasion?

But the exchange between the healed invalid man and the Jews somehow change the mood within us. Legalism preoccupied and prevailed over the minds of the Jews. We perhaps find it strange that the Jews found trouble with the healed-invalid man instead of rejoicing with him. We may find it even more strange that the legal issue was over 'carrying his mat on a Sabbath day'. The poor healed-invalid man must have felt intimidated by the powers that be, which stands behind the seemingly frivolous legal issue confronting him. It must have killed the joy within him.

It saddens us, does it not? Let us pause for a moment and reflect. Ask ourselves how we too may have responded to a person's new-life experience in/with Jesus. Do we readily rejoice over the good work God does in the lives of others or do

we quickly scan over the person and find a reason/fault that would negate the good thing that is happening in his/her life.

Jesus had come to give us life, life to its fullest so that we may bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Over to you

Think of one person whom you take note that the Lord has bless him/her with much grace. Take time to give thanks to the Lord for him/her.

Prayer

Lord, may you be pleased to bless me with a heart that quickly take note of the good work in your doing in the lives of others. May You bless me with grace and creativity to bless the person and spur him/her on.

29 Wednesday, March 29
Is 49.8-15; Ps 145.8-9, 13-14, 17-18; Jn 5.17-30

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”

Is 49.15

No matter what we did, no matter what our experience had been and no matter how bad the world may seem to us, the Word of God tells us that God will never forget you. His dealings with the Israelites gives us insight into His faithfulness to His people. The Israelites were disciplined by God in their disobedience to Him. It was a very trying time for the whole race. They were taken into exile. They were humiliated. They felt abandoned. Families were torn apart. Years of uncertainties seemed endless while in the land of their conquerors. Yet, through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke to them words of assurance and hope. “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has

borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”. Here is a picture of God's relentless love for His people - How would a mother forget her child whom she nurses? How would a mother ever discard the child whom she bore and born? The message is God will never forsake His people. His commitment to His people is unquestionable. Such a commitment compels a response from His people. The Israelites were to respond to Him in quiet trust and obedience. While the signs indicating that the promises and words of assurance will materialise were no where to be seen, they were to doggedly trust God. That would have to be their act of repentance to the Lord. Their repentance will be marked by their

holding on to the promises of 'the Lord who is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made'. He is 'the Lord who upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down' (Psalm 145, 13-14). In their repentance, they will choose to order their lives in the light of who God has said He is and what He has promised. Only in so doing, they will live with hope and see their deliverance.

In your times of sinfulness, neglect and even 'abandonment of God', you need to remember the relentless love of God for you, turn away from your

stubborn ways and choose to trust Him and honour His relentless love. Further, you take the first small steps to walk away from sin and trust in His love that will enable you to continue to honour Him. If you think that God has 'given up' on you, tune your ears to hear His words of commitment to you- "I will not forget you!". Choose to honour His commitment to you by recommitting your life and your ways to Him for His pleasure. In so doing, you will find the Lord leading you beside springs of water, there to find rest and restoration of your soul.

Over to you

Imagine yourself being lovingly held by God in His bosom. Hear Him say to you that He will never forget nor forsake you. What would you say from your heart in response to Him?

Prayer

Thank You for never letting me go. Forgive me for the times when I fail to honour Your love and commitment to me. I want to trust and honour You Lord. May Your glory be seen in me as I recommit my life to You.

30 Thursday, March 30
Ex 32.7-14; Ps 106.19-23; Jn 5.31-47

But Moses sought the favour of the Lord his God...

Ex 32.11a

How quickly the people forgot about the marvellous deeds the Lord God wrought in their midst, we might have thought when we read the passage about how they kindled God's anger by making for themselves the golden calf. How foolishly they had acted, we might have judged. Why, how is that Aaron was such a weak leader, we might have concluded. Put ourselves in Moses' shoes, we may have simply kept quiet when God intended to unleash His wrath upon the Israelites. God knows best, we would think and we are not wrong in thinking so. However, Moses' response to the Lord's anger is touching. Here is a leader who had suffered much having to lead the people whom God Himself named "stiff-necked people", instead of thinking "serve them right", came to the Lord and sought

the favour of the Lord. Take note of the words He employed (Exodus 32.11-13) to plead on behalf of the people. It was not merely an emotional plea. It was a substantial plea which is based on the personhood of God, His work amongst the people and His promise to them. Here is a man, a leader who had known the Lord, his God, he has also known his people.

The Lord relented and withheld His wrath against the Israelites.

Are you having a difficult time trying to keep your family together. Are you having a very challenging time trying to lead your subordinates in your office towards the common goal? Are you experiencing an uphill task in teaching a group of uninterested students in your school? Are you pastoring a group of

'stiff-necked' people? The temptation to live and let live' may be very real. At some moments you may even have entertained the thought of God unleashing His wrath against the people and thereby solving your problem. How human that is, and indeed, none of us can fault you for having such a thought. Moses came to a point whereby he could plead on his people's behalf. He stood in the gap for them. And God heard him.

The trying situations in our lives invite us into a deeper understanding of God and His ways in our lives and the lives of those God has placed around us. Moses understood the heart of God whereby mercy within mercy is found and so, he pleaded for

his people. We too are able to come to the point where we could see God's heart for His people. We could also stand in the gap for them. Helpless and hopeless it may seem, we know that God takes pleasure in our seeking His favour.

This Lent, may the Lord grant you grace to choose to stand in the gap of God and those who have rebelled against God, those who have hurt us, those who rebel against our leadership and those who have trampled upon our kindness to them. When we do that, we will experience the inexhaustible contentment that comes from the knowledge that we had sought the Lord's favour.

Over to you

Consider making a commitment to pray for a wayward colleague or son/daughter or friend or parishioner.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the honour of standing in the gap between You and the people whom You love. May You continue to teach me and sustain me that I may persevere in praying for them.

31

Friday, March 31

Wisdom 2.1,12-22*; Ps 34.16-20,22; Jn 7.1-2, 10, 25-30

'...I am not here on my own but He who sent me is true...

John 7.28

When you read today's gospel passage, you would have sensed the gathering and mounting hostility of the leaders against Jesus. Why so? What did He do to rouse such hostility? Was it not Him who turned water into wine? Was He not the One who taught with authority and illumines the minds of many including one of their religious leaders, Nicodemus? Was He not the One who healed the man who had been paralysed for 38 years? Was He not the One who had had compassion on the crowd and fed them not just with truth of life but also the bread for the body? Was He not the One who spoke words that set the Samaritan woman free? Alas! They were not very good news to those in authority. Jesus' life and ministry while bringing life to many

became poison to many others who are in authority. His life and ministry was viewed as a threat to the those in position. Jesus had not lived and ministered on His own accord. His, was a mission not of His own thinking and scheming. He said, 'I am not here on my own but He who sent me is true...' So, what was the problem with the religious leaders?

Mysteriously, we find that we may be passionately setting out to do 'many things' in the name of God or 'for God's sake' only to find out that we may become stumbling blocks or even 'the accepted authority' to stop others from doing God's purposes and will in their lives. It can be frightening to know that we can even become oblivious to the ugly things we do to intimidate others from doing God's purposes. Unfortunately,

it takes a long and subtle process before we get to the point. Usually, only when we are honest with ourselves and subjecting ourselves to a constant self-examination and scrutiny will we be able to detect within us, the gradual shifting of focus from the Lord to self, in what we say we do for the Lord's sake, growing jealousy, sense of insecurity and a seeking of power and recognition.

It does not matter what we achieved in the name of the Lord. It does not matter whether we are people with position or not. Jealousy, insecurity, hunger for power recognises no personality. As Jesus stayed focus on the what His Father

sent Him to do, unperturbed nor distracted, un-intimidated and unafraid, we too can choose and be enabled by the Holy Spirit to do our Father's will and purposes.

This Lent, let us take time to rekindle our first love for the Lord. Call to mind again the time when you pledge your love and commitment for the Lord and His work. Then humbly ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the insecurity, jealousy and greed for power and recognition that lurch within you. Work with the Holy Spirit as He leads you to surrender to Him the negative motivations within you that stands in your way to do God's purposes and in the way of others as well.

Over to you

Call to mind those you working alongside to serve the Lord and His people. Give thanks to the Lord for each of them. Consider how you may encourage them and spur them on to love and good deeds. Ask the Lord to reveal to you some of your thoughts of them and the words you had spoken to them which had hurt/discouraged them in their seeking to serve the Lord. Then, pray for opportunity and means to bless them.

Prayer

Search me, O God and know my heart, I pray. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any offensive ways in me and lead back again to Your everlasting way.

*For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves, 'Let us lie in wait for the righteous man because he is inconvenient to us and oppose our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord. He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life unlike that of others, and his ways are strange. We are considered by him something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy and boasts that God is his father. Let us see if his words are true and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected.' Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, and they did not know the secret purposes of God nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls.

1

Saturday, April 1
Jer 11.18-20; Ps 7.1-2,8-11; Jn 7.40-52

“Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?”

John 7.51

The Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA) is referred to by some as one of the great immoralities in our nation. We know that it was legislated for a specific purpose to deal with the specific national crisis at one time, i.e, to combat communist terrorists during the 1960s which threatened the security and stability of the nation which was then at its infancy. Alas! The legislation has now become a weapon in the hands of the authority, abused again and again. The Official Secret Act 1972 (OSA), despite objections from different quarters within the nation was enacted. Left in the hands of the authority who alone decide the secrecy of national matters, it has become the terrible-twin of the ISA. Whom do we fault for the birth of the legislations? Who is to take the blame for the evils that is birthed

from the abuses of the legislations? Who is there to speak up for the victims of the abuses of the legislations? At the micro level, the evils that we see in our communities of faith, in the schools, in the business world and our workplaces and the ills that we see in our family and relationships – whom do we fault? Who should take the blame?

Nicodemus stood up for Jesus. There is no doubt that he took the risks of being counted as one with Jesus (see verse 52a) and therefore be ostracised and even persecuted.



However, his good sense prevailed. Allowing the good sense to prevail over him, he was able speak with wisdom, asking a just and relevant question. That Nicodemus had a choice whether to do what was right is obvious. He acted responsibly at the very least. Not the general crowd around him, though. They were cowed by the pressure from the higher authority and the heat of emotions playing in their minds and hearts. They were determined to put to end, the Son of God.



We too find ourselves placed in positions and times when we are to decide for what is right and good. It is easy to opt for what seems to be immediately safe for ourselves or perhaps for some of us to opt for something that promises us immediate benefit. However, that may not be the responsible decision. We will only see the evils that is birthed from our irresponsible and selfish decisions in times to come. By then, we could only regret because the evils may have become irreversible. Many innocent lives would have to suffer because of our decision made out of fear and lack of courage & consideration with good sense.



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Be that as it may, let us not be totally discouraged for our decisions which lacked good sense. Each day presents to us new opportunity to rely and trust God in our decision making. In His goodness, He will make all

things good for those who love Him... His goodness deserves our commitment to courageously stand up and decide for what is good and pure, for the defenceless and oppressed.

Over to you

Earnestly think of one person who needs you to stand up for during this Lent. Seek the Lord's direction and carefully plan the steps you could take to protect the person and his/her rights

Prayer

Lord, bless me with courage and good sense to stand up for those who need me to do that for them.



Graphics taken from <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

2 Sunday, April 2
Jer 31.31-34; Ps 51.1-2, 10-13; Heb 5.7-10; Jn 12.20-33

Although He was a son, He learnt obedience from what He suffered...

Hebrew 5.8

Once, there was a priest who was sent to pastor a small community of faith in a small village. All went well until one day, a man came to see him with his daughter. The man was very angry with the priest. He said, "You are a wolf in sheep skin. You have violated our trust. How could you do this despicable thing? She is only a teenager. Instead of protecting her, you have shamed and ruined her. Now, you take care of her and the child of your sin!". The young lady stood still, not a word came from her mouth. The priest was shocked by the accusation. He thought for while. Not saying a single word in defence, he took the girl into his home. He took care of her. He braved many suspicious looks and suffered lost of respect from his parishioners. Day by day, he bore with the unkind remarks and gossips that went round the

village. Yet, he persevered, discharging his priestly duties faithfully day after day, month after month.

The day came when the young girl was to give birth to her child. The priest saw to her every needs. He nursed her and helped care for the baby. One day, out of the blue, a young man appeared at the home of the priest. With tears in his eyes, he fell at the feet of the priest and begged for forgiveness from him. He confessed that he was the father to the new-born child. He wanted to amend his ways and assume his responsibility as a husband and father of the young lady and the child, respectively. Hearing that, the priest readily forgave him.

The villagers soon came to hear of the account. They regretted their judgemental ways and sought his

forgiveness too.

As for the priest, it had been a very difficult time. He had suffered much. What gave him strength to do what he did? What gave him peace? He trusted in the Lord. He obeyed the Lord in the midst of great adversities. That had given him peace and strength to carry on. The Lord honoured him.

Are you bearing the shame which had resulted from others' wrongdoing? Has the decisions of those above you brought you much suffering? Have your wayward children caused you endless heartaches? Has your spouse's

unfaithfulness hardened your heart?

Have you been grossly misunderstood and wrongly accused? Do you feel you have been made use of? Do you feel taken for granted by your church members? Take heart! The Lord take note of your suffering. Even more, the Lord hears your prayers and take pleasure in your desire to obey and honour Him in your adversities. As sure as the morning will come, so will the Lord's help and vindication. His glory will be revealed through your obedience to Him. He will teach many a transgressors through you because you obey Him and choose to honour Him.

Over to you

Read the passage from Hebrew a few times through, slowly. Think of Jesus as you read - His obedience to His Father. Let His word minister to you.

Prayer

Lord, I trust you. You suffered not because of your wrongs but for my sake. In You I place my hope. May You strengthen me that I may obey You. May Your glory be seen in me.

3 Monday, April 3
2 Kings 4.18-21, 32-37; Ps 17.1, 6-8; Jn 8.1-11.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

John 8.11

“It is OK, everyone else is doing it. I am not an exception.”

“After all, God does not condemn me.”

“He came to save sinners, after all”

“Jesus loves sinners, right?”

We hear such replies when we lovingly try to help a wayward person turn around. When Jesus said ‘...neither do I condemn you...’. Some have used what He said as license to be lawless, to continue in his/her sin, to carry on with his/her unethical practices of business or profession. While He did not condemn her, Jesus certainly did not condone her adultery. The gospel that we preach is not only about God's love. It would be a distortion to say that His love license us to do anything our flesh

dictates. It would be great injustice to God if we use Jesus' words to legalised our sins. When Jesus said to the woman, 'go now and leave your life of sin. What we need to hear is that God loves us with a holy and pure love. Love that compels us to leave lives that will hurt our loved ones and ultimately destroy us, and our community. His holy love compels us to strive for greater holiness in our lives. His words of compassion to the woman would have triggered within her a new zeal to order her life aright, abandoning her life of sin for an abundant life.

Perhaps it is easier for us to say the above to those who are 'under our control' and those whom we are not beholden to. We can be quite ready to speak the full gospel to them. But the rich, the powerful, those in authority

and especially those whom we fear also need to hear the full gospel. Jesus addressed the teachers of the law and the Pharisees unafraid. They needed to see God's grace upon them in that while they are sinners themselves, God had not condemned them. God had been gracious to them. One by one, they were to abandon their 'project-kill', starting with the oldest.

May we hear Jesus' words afresh

this Lent – “...neither do I condemn you but go now and leave your life of sin”. May we be enabled to see the sins in our lives. May we seek His grace and strength to leave our life of sin. Jesus said, “I came so that you may have life, life to the full.” Embrace the gospel and courageously walk in the light of His holy love again.

Over to you

Spend some moment of quiet in the presence of the Lord. Read John 8.1-11 again. Let the Lord show you how you may 'bring' the gospel of God's love to others in your life.

Prayer

Thank You for saving me. May You be pleased to use my life to speak of Your salvation to those who need to hear You say, “...neither do I condemn you but go now and leave your life of sin”.



Tuesday, April 4
Numbers 21.4-9; Ps 102.1-2,15-20; Jn 8.21-30

Even as He spoke, many put their faith in Him

John 8.30

Being fully human, Jesus faced setback after setback. He had taught the words the Father gave Him. He had ministered with compassion. He had brought life to many. He had given hope to the hopeless. He showed the people the Kingdom of God and the way of life therein. He lived His life fully committed to the mission the Father had sent Him for. He has now come near to His end. The hostility against Him was mounting amongst the teachers of the laws, the Pharisees and the religious leaders. They were very set on rousing the people up against Jesus. In such moments, the people's understanding and belief in His words would probably lend a great deal of encouragement to Him. But we read that many of Jews could not understand Him. Their questions to Jesus (Jn 8.21, 25, 27) would have

exasperated Him but Jesus persevered. He faithfully speak to lend them understanding of God and His mission.

Similar faithfulness and perseverance is observed in God's servant, Moses. The people seemed to have forgotten their destination. The mundane and ordinary things in life gave them reasons to become bitter and a complaining lot. We read in Numbers 21.7c that 'Moses prayed for the people'. When we read the fuller account of the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land, we will be reminded of the people's complaint and unhappiness but we will also read of this faithful servant of God, Moses stood by his people again and again, not losing his focus, the Promised Land.

Day to day, we discharge our responsibilities in the marketplaces, in

our offices, in our homes, in schools and even in our church office. We are not immune from setbacks and frustrations. We cannot run away from difficult relationships in the office. For some of us, we even face rejection after rejection when we try to share the gospel with our friends. Others would have to face with the uncertainties of whether you would 'get the job' or 'close the deal'. Others of you who decided to stay home may wonder again and again if what you gave up so that you could invest in the lives of your family and children would bear fruit. These day to day things when viewed from the perspective of eternity are matters that we should not consider lightly. When faithfully attended to, with the eternity perspective in mind, it would be to us like those weight-lifting exercises we do to keep our muscles toned and our bodies fit. Failure or neglect to do so may subtly lead us to

lose our focus and cause us deep frustrations which may in turn lead us to bitterness.

Jesus continued to speak and teach and even as He does so, many put their faith in Him. Whether Jesus knows that many believed or not, we are not sure. It is not important, perhaps. Whether the people knew that Moses prayed for them, we are not sure. It is not important, perhaps. But their faithfulness is something important we can bear in mind.

This Lent, may you find Jesus' and Moses' faithfulness to their mission spur you on to continue on your faithfulness to live for the Lord and His mission. If you have become tired and lost focus on the reason for your living, turn to the Lord and let Him encourage you to persevere. Instead of being paralysed by your setbacks, may your strength be renewed and heart refreshed by Jesus' faithfulness to the people, to you.

Over to you

Spend a quiet moment in presence of the Lord. Reread John's passage slowly. Place yourself in the passage. Ask the Lord for grace to be able to feel what was taking place in the passage and to know how the Lord himself felt. Let the Lord affirm you.

Prayer

Teach me, Good Lord,
to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
except that of knowing that
I do Your will.

5 Wednesday, April 5
Dan 3.14-20; Ps 150; Jn 8.31-42

“...But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Daniel 3.18

The name, Nebuchadnezzar spoke of intimidating power to the people during the time of Daniel, Shedrach, Meshach and Abednego. His name means, “may Nebo (the god) protect my boundaries”. He was a man of enormous power and wealth. During his time, Babylon was the largest city in the world. It has been estimated to have covered over 2,500 acres/1000 hectares, with the Euphrates River flowing through it. The name of the city came to symbolize the entire empire. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was one of the wealthiest and most powerful empires in the history of the world. Even the Bible called it “city of gold” (Isaiah 14.4). Babylon became a very important centre for trade, taking exports out and bringing imports in, trading with India, Europe, Persia, Anatolia and Egypt.

Babylon possessed a well-established legal system and sophisticated trade and social laws. No wonder, Nebuchadnezzar looked out for intelligent and promising young men to be trained for the purposes of advancing the governance of the empire. Babylon's culture was known to be one of the finest in the world. The hanging garden of Babylon is referred to as one of the wonders of the world.

Subjected to such impressive super power or should we say international power and being brought up and living there as a 'permanent resident' amongst the people known to be having one of the finest culture, it is no wonder if one should make oneself at home with all that the country has to offer. It would be almost natural that one

should embrace the culture and become one of the loyal and faithful subject of the superpower. Why, should not one be grateful for the security and prosperity that the empire has acquired? It would make very little sense to fight against the king.

Daniel and his friends were not shielded from the bright lights of the city of Babylon. They were surrounded by the intellectuals of the empire. They had known the sophisticated culture and administration of the nation. Yet, their commitment to the Lord remained steady. Daily, they stand headlong with the super power of the world, yet, they reserved their heart's devotion to the Lord their God. Death would not deter them. Even if God does not save them from the fire, they will not switch loyalty. What Nebuchadnezzar did not know is that while he may have filled their minds with the vast knowledge about himself and his empire, conquered

their country, he could not conquer their hearts.

What would you do if you were in the shoes of Daniel and friends? Our Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon bear different faces. Who is the Nebuchadnezzar in your life that you pledged your loyalty to? What has the lure of power, recognition and wealth done to you? Has the impressive and yet intimidating systems of the world caused you to change your heart towards God? Has your connections and networks taken the place of God in your heart? Where does your loyalty lie? Has your heart shifted its focus from the Lord to the powers and the promises of the world? When was the last time you worship the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength? Is the Lord still at the centre in all you think and do?

Watch it, lest we short-change ourselves when we switch our trust from the Almighty One to mere human and the created things.

Over to you

Take time to think of God today. Write down your thoughts about God. Ask yourself if God has become 'inferior' to your 'Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon'? If so, pray and share with a Christian friend whom you trust, who might be able to help you process your findings.

Prayer

Lord, be please to remove the fear from my heart of those who would destroy my body but not my soul. I humbly ask for grace and courage to declare that I will have no other gods before You. Only You will reign as my heart's King.



Thursday, April 6
Gen 17.3-9; Ps 105.4-9; Jn 8.51-59

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as God, is the One who glorifies me.

John 8.54

It is amazing as we follow the exchanges between Jesus and the Jews. Did it occur to us why did Jesus even bothered to get himself into such a messy 'debate' with the Jews. Couldn't He have simply walked away from their taunting? The very fact that He insisted on His relationship with the Father whom the Jews claim as God, did that not amount to His glorifying Himself? Herein lies the paradox of glorifying and yet not glorifying oneself. To be related to God as a son to his Father certainly elevates Jesus to a higher realm—to be divine! Yet, to say so in the context of His time only means trouble. It is a blasphemy! Death is the punishment (Lev 24.16) For the Jews, there is only one God, there can't be another. Even if the claim is true, it is only shrewd that He

maintains the political rightness. Maintaining political rightness in the situation would most likely keep him safe and earned Him praise and respect. Yet, to Jesus, such self-praise or glory is nothing if it is independent of the glory of God. To Him, submission to God is absolutely necessary. Abandonment of Himself totally to God and His mission is where He his glory lies. When He submitted to God, God glorifies Him. Such is the glory Jesus sought.

What are some things we do to bring glory to ourselves? What are some things we lay out before others as trophies that we could bring some glory to ourselves? What are some things we get others to do that will elevate us to greater fame and recognition by the world? What are some things we do with our children

and loved ones so that we may be glorified? What are some statistics we keep just so that we may boost our ego a little more and we feel glorified? On their own, none of us can fault you if you do them. But the deeper truth in what Jesus said calls for our attention. In the course of doing what is listed above, we need to ask whether our end is to bring glory to ourselves regardless of how it is done . Regardless of how many hearts we break and how many people we have

'used' and then 'discarded' after usage. Does it matter to us of how many people we have trampled upon in the process of our seeking self-glory?. Does it bother us the we may have lives ruined in our pursuit for self-glory?. Are we still seeking God's purpose done and His glory? Is our conscience pricked by the thought of the many lies we tell so that 'we arrived'? Whose glory are we seeking? Are we still seeking God's glory?

Over to you

“Love people, use things”. How true does this pithy saying speak about you? In our lives and working with others, do we seek God's glory? Write down your thoughts.

Prayer

Lord, may You be glorified in my life. Save me God from pursuing the glory that means nothing. Keep me pursuing the glory that only You can give.

7 Friday, April 7
Jer 20.10-13; Ps 18.1-6; Jn 10.31-42

*O Lord Almighty, You who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to You I have committed my cause.
Jer 20.12*

Have you ever experienced being set-up by those who are envious of you or those who simply do not like you for no good reason? Have you ever experienced being trampled upon by the very person you showed kindness to? Have you experienced the sting of terror when you hear your secrets broadcast when you thought you had confided in that one person ONLY whom you trusted? Have you experienced the horror of waking up in the morning to find out that your loved one had been cheating on you all these years? Have you experienced the trauma of finding out one day that the person you loyally worked for many long years had been committing criminal breach of trust? If you have, then you would be more able to understand Jeremiah's lamentations; then you would be more able to

understand the deep hurts and sharp pains that run through your whole system upon finding out the betrayal. The effect can be paralysing. It can even cause mental instability. The agony, unspeakable and the pain, lasting for may years to come. Such is the effect of betrayal.

Jeremiah's words. "My friends are waiting for me to slip..." may sound familiarly painful to some of us, especially those who had always strove to be earnest and sincere in our relationships and friendships, only to find that our friends/colleagues may not be that nice as we thought. Reading Jeremiah's passage today may bring to your mind your own painful experience of being betrayed. What has the experience done to you? Have you decided to withdraw from the others and resolved not to be in the

company of others again? Or has the experience caused you to become cynical and suspicious which in turn had made it difficult for others to relate to you? Or has the experience made you angry with God and you have decided therefore not to have anything to do with Him henceforth. Or has the betrayal robbed you of all your desire to love and be loved again?

Doubtless, the pain of betrayal is hard to bear! Sometimes we heard Jeremiah called 'the crying-prophet'. Why, we should and could understand his painful experience which seem to be the reward for his obedience to the Lord's call upon his life. He spoke and lived as the Lord directed. This had roused the anger of the godless. Jeremiah kept trusting the Lord although he remonstrated before the Lord. That was the safest and the most right response in the

face of such adversity. While others may set him up, friends betrayed him, he knew that his life was in the hand of God, so is his vengeance. God will triumph ultimately.

May our thoughts of Jeremiah cause us to turn our eyes to the Almighty God, the Mighty warrior and the One who probes the heart and mind. There, we will find healing, release and victory over the sting of betrayal that had been inflicted upon us.

For those of us who are in habit of betraying our friends and loved ones, may God have mercy on you and give you grace to repent. Ask the Lord to bless you with deeper knowledge, understanding and even the needed experience to know what it means to be betrayed. Of course, not all of us need to go through such experience in order to repent. We can choose to repent as the Lord lead us.

Over to you

If you are one of those who suffers/suffered from a betrayal, seek the Lord's healing presence. Ask Him to minister to you. Let God speak His words of healing and peace to you. Then, arise and be strong in the Lord so that you may continue seeking to love and be loved.

If you are one who is the betrayer, betraying your spouse, colleague or friend, make no more excuses but turn around less you find that it is too late. Think of doing something good and positive for the person.

Prayer

Lord, I sing praises to You, God of justice.

I give praise to You, God who cares for the needy and those
who are in the hands of the wicked.

Let me trust You, O Lord as I commit my betrayer to You.

Your vengeance is sweet and complete. Let me not take upon
myself the vengeance that I seek.

To you, I commit my life and my cause.



Saturday, April 8
Eze 37.21-28; Jer 31.10-13; Jn 11.45-56

“...I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty,” declares the Lord.

Jer 31.13b-14

In the passages of Ezekiel and Jeremiah that you read today, you hear the promise of shalom by God. You got to see a picture of peace and goodwill. It gives us picture of a place where the Lord's active and sovereign hands are at work. It gives a picture of a place where God's purposes prevail. It is a picture of heaven-like place. What we need to take note from the passages is that it reveals to us the heart of God and His intention for us. In spite of the people's sin and rebelliousness and when laws are unable to help them walk in the ways of God, the Lord did not abandon them. God still chose to love them instead of giving up on them. In place of punishment and condemnation, God promises goodwill and well-being. His promise to His people is nothing but goodness and wellness

for them. Such is the heart of our God.

In today's gospel passage, we read of the hostility of the religious leaders that have climaxed and they were getting ready to ambush and arrest Jesus. One wonders why is there so much of strategies and conspiracy needed to arrest a man who had only brought the people good. Alas! The hearts of the religious leaders, chief priest and the Pharisees were bent to put an end to Jesus who have brought life to many.

Do we see the contrasts between the heart of God and the hearts of the religious leaders, chief priests and the Pharisees? God desires good for the people, what about the religious leaders? Jesus taught with authority, fed the hungry, heal the sick, what about the religious leaders?

Do we see the heart of God? When we say that we want to follow Jesus, it is important that we continue to know the heart of God. His heart that goes out to those who are in need. He longs to give them life in abundance. When we think of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, what comes to our mind? It has to be the thoughts about God's love and the extent He was/is willing to go for our sake. Such love of God is not only to be talked about or even written about. It ought to be embraced and honoured. How do we

honour such sacrificial love of God if not by incarnating them in our lives. Let our thoughts, words, actions and life speak of our desire to see others good, well and safe. Let our decisions be ones that reflect God's thoughts for us, i.e., the our decisions benefit others, not just ourselves. In our ministry, whatever form they may be, let it be a reflection of the ministry that Jesus would have done, thinking not about our glory but only about what good it may bring to the ones we are ministering and serving.

Over to you

Take time to be quiet before the Lord. As you prepare to celebrate Passion/Palm Sunday tomorrow, make it meaningful by thinking about someone whom you could visit and shower your love on. Let this be someone whom you have not visited for a long time, better still, someone whom you know your pastors and leaders 'have no time' to visit.

Prayer

Change my heart O God.
Make it ever true.
Change my heart O God.
May I be like You.

9

Passion/Palm Sunday, April 9

Is 50:4-7; Ps 22:8-9,17-20,23-24; Ph 2:6-11;
Mk 14:1-15, 47

Love While There Is Still Time

Today is the beginning of Holy Week. The most holy week in the Christian calendar.

It is a week of beauty and treachery. A week of courage and cowardice. A week of darkness, struggle, torment, torture. It is Christ's battle with the powers of darkness. His agony over the plight of humanity. His unflinching determination to go to the cross. His unwavering confidence in God come what may. Holy Week is holy because of the awesomeness of the holy love of God in Christ Jesus for us.

Mark's gospel begins with a plot by the religious leaders to kill Jesus. It also mentions Judas' agreement to betray Jesus. Sandwiched in between these two sinister events is a beautiful moment – forever immortalized in the expression of love by Mary for Jesus. She breaks an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume and pours it over Jesus' head. She knows enough to know, Jesus will die.

But, there is still time to love. So, why not do something extravagant?

And Jesus' response? "She has done a beautiful thing to Me."

Over To You

When was the last time you pondered on the awesomeness of the holy love of God in Christ Jesus for you? What is one beautiful thing you want to do for Jesus today?

Prayer

Lord, grant me the stillness of heart to know how to love You beautifully.

10 Monday, April 10
Isaiah 42:1-7; Psalm 27:1-3, 13-14; John 12:1-11

Be Strong ... Take Heart ... Wait

What would you do, if you knew in a few days time you will have to go through pain and torture? Would you still find the time to live? Would you still find the time to eat leisurely?

A few days before His hour of agony, Jesus was found having dinner. So unhurried was the dinner that He was anointed. It was said His anointing, “filled the house with the fragrance of the perfume”. A very picturesque and idyllic scene. But what is to come – was not!

Psalm 27 is about David’s experience with God and people. Though anointed by God to be the King of Israel, time and again he had to contend with those who were evil, his enemies, his foes. Numerous were the times he had to run for his life from Saul and from his own son,

Absalom.

What can we learn today from Jesus and David about how to ‘Be Strong, Take Heart, Wait’?

Isaiah 42 talks about Jesus as the Servant-Messiah. The Servant-Messiah Who will “not falter or be discouraged” because of His trust in an unfailing God. Therefore, even in the approaching hour of pain and sorrow, life could still be savoured, be lived.

Likewise for King David. He says of God as his “Light”, his “Salvation”, “the Stronghold” of his life. Yes, evil people will advance against him; enemies and foes will attack him, but even if an army besiege him, David says, “My heart will not fear ... I will be confident”

Over To You

Whom do you fear? Of whom are you afraid? What are your fears? The people, things, and events that cause you fear, are they interfering in your walk with God? Are your fears hindering you from enjoying the abundant life that Jesus has come to give you? What are you going to do about your fears?

Prayer

Lord, help me be strong, take heart and wait on You.

Open my blind eyes to see.

Release me from my fears into Your freedom.

Grant me deep knowledge to know You - as my Light, my Salvation, my Stronghold.



Tuesday, April 11

Is 49.1-6; Ps 71.1-6, 15, 17; Jn 13.21-33, 36-38

God, My Strength

Tuesday of Holy Week and the Psalm selected by biblical scholars is Psalm 71. Tuesday of Holy Week and Jesus is nearer to the Cross. Nearer and nearer to the Cross and it seems Jesus is speaking through Psalm 71.

What is Psalm 71 really all about? Who wrote it and for what?

Psalm 71 is anonymously written; but written by someone who is old and has seen life. Someone who has experienced God. Someone who has learnt to trust God to say, “In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge ... You have been my hope ... my confidence ... I have relied on You.”

All His life, God has always been Jesus’ inspiration to live. From his birth, to his flight to Egypt (to escape from King Herod’s murderous

intent), to Nazareth where He lived the ‘hidden life’, to where He is now, the Rabbi, the Healer, the Miracle Worker – everything He did, the Person He is – gracious, gentle, compassionate ... all came about because of God.

Having looked back at the grace and mercy of God in his life, the Psalmist continues to be positive about asking for God’s help for the future.

Likewise for Jesus, as He drew nearer and nearer to His hour of greatest need, seems to be saying to God today through Psalm 71, “Be My rock of refuge to which I can always go ... save Me ... rescue me ... deliver Me ... let Me never be put to shame”.

Over To You

For those of us who are getting on in years, is your life a testimony of what God has done for you? If it is, Praise God! If it is not, it can still be - let God wholly into your life! For others who are younger, what encouragement can you draw from the psalmist's experience of God? How would you like to live this life as an inspiration to others - through your trust in God?

Prayer

God, my strength and constant help, let me never forget that I can always go to You - my Rock of refuge, my Hope, my Confidence. Open my mouth to tell of Your righteousness, of Your salvation all day long. Let me constantly declare Your marvellous deeds. Let me ever praise You, my Lord and my God!

12

Wednesday, April 12

Is 50.4-9; Ps 69.7-9, 13, 20-21, 30, 32-33; Matt 26.14-25

Listen & Speak

In the Isaiah passage the Servant-Messiah is seen in a soliloquy – He’s speaking to Himself. His thoughts are poetically expressed. He speaks about God and what God is doing in His life.

*“He wakens Me morning by morning,
wakens My ear to listen like one being
taught.*

*The Sovereign Lord has opened My ears ...
has given Me an instructed tongue,
to know the WORD that sustains the
weary.” (vv 4-5)*

Isaiah is a book in the Jewish scripture, Jesus heard and read in His life as a devout Jew. That what was written would come true for Jesus in His own life is no coincidence, for Jesus is the Servant-Messiah. The

One to Whom God spoke. The One God taught. And the One from Whom came forth God’s WORD.

Nearer and nearer we are onto the last few days of Jesus’ life. The Old Testament passages speak about persecution, distress, trouble, injustice, sufferings. In store for the Servant-Messiah are – scorn, insults, beatings, violence, rejection, loneliness. But, the Servant-Messiah does not draw back. He goes on. He sets His face “like flint”. His obedience is total. He is the Sovereign Lord’s perfect disciple. He is assured not only of God’s help but also of God’s vindication. He is so assured that He speaks of His enemies that “they will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.”

Over To You

Morning by morning, day by day, night by night, God speaks to us.

Can you hear God speaking to you?

What is God teaching you today?

Will you obey what God is saying to you?

Prayer

Lord, help me treasure and ponder all that You are saying.

Help me draw strength from You to meet the challenges ahead.

Let me speak a Word from You to encourage my neighbour.

13

Maundy Thursday, April 13

Ex 12.1-8, 11-14; Ps 116.12-13, 15-18; 1 Cor 11.23-26; Jn 13.1-15

Fulfilling A Destiny

Kneeling, with a pitcher, basin, and a piece of cloth around His waist, Jesus is washing and drying the feet of His disciples (before the Passover Meal).

A Jewish Rabbi (Teacher and Master), He is now a 'slave' – only slaves wash the feet of the guests before a meal.

Interestingly, the price for Him to be sold by one of His disciples - 30 pieces of silver, is the price for a slave.

'The slave' moves on from washing and drying feet to celebrating the Holy Communion. 'The slave' has now become 'a priest'.

From the Last Supper, Jesus moves on and is found in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is praying, groaning, pleading, surrendering ...

Then He is betrayed by a kiss. Everyone scattered. Further on down

the road He is denied, disowned. He is judged. He is found "guilty". And then blows come, incessantly.

From Rabbi to 'slave' to 'priest', He is now a condemned man – worthy of death. It is a long night – the longest night in His life.

Why go through such a long night? After all He still had the power – He healed the high priest servant's ear which His disciple cut off. So that scripture will be fulfilled. He is a Man with a destiny. He has to fulfil that destiny to become The Man.

What can we say of The Man. He is steadfast. Unwavering. He could have escaped by refusing to answer the high priest's question, "Are You the Christ, the Son of God?" His answer? "I AM". And with this answer forever sealed His destiny.

Over To You

Are you fulfilling God's destiny in your life?

Do you find it difficult to stand up for what you believe, your Christian convictions?

When was the last time, you denied who you are?

Prayer

Lord, help me know Your plan for my life.

Let me fulfil the purpose for which You have put me here.

Fill me with courage to be all that You want me to be – the person You have destined.

14

Good Friday, April 14

Is 52.13-53.12; Ps 31.1, 5, 11-12, 14-16, 24;
Heb 4.14-16, 5.7-9; Jn 18.1-19.42

My Times Are In Your Hands

Before its perfume could fill the house with its fragrance, the alabaster jar had to be broken (John 12.3). Likewise, before the fragrance of eternal life could emerge, Good Friday had to take place. The Son of God had to “become like broken pottery” (Psalm 31.12).

Good Friday was not good for Jesus. Like Maundy Thursday - His longest night, Good Friday became His longest day. Early in the morning, He stood trial before the Sanhedrin. Then He was brought before Pilate. Cornered, the Roman governor packed Him off to Herod, the ruler of Galilee (the district where Jesus came from), to pronounce a judgement. The only positive thing that happened? “That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies” (Luke 23.12). Back to Pilate, and he succumbed to

the ominous request of the Jewish religious authorities. Jesus is flogged and sentenced to be crucified. Pilate’s soldiers had a field day with Jesus. They “twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head. They clothed Him in a purple robe and went up to Him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they struck Him in the face.” (John 19.2-3).

He is nailed to the cross. The sign over Him reads, “The King of the Jews”. One of the thieves had an inspiration and asked of Him in their ‘conversation at the cross’, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus answered him, “... today you will be with Me in paradise.” (Luke 23.42-43)

There were many strange things that happened on Good Friday. The soldiers, Pilate, and the thief, all gave

Him recognition as a royalty, unknowingly. Barabbas was set free – Jesus died in his place. Darkness came over the land for three hours (12 p.m. – 3 p.m.); the earth shook; the rocks split; the curtain of the temple was torn in two; and Jesus died saying, “Father, into Your hands	I commit My spirit ... It is finished!” (Psalm 31.5; Luke 23.46; John 19.30) Is it the end of the story? No. But for the moment it seems like it. Jesus is taken down from the cross. His body is lovingly washed. He is wrapped with spices and fresh linen. He is entombed.
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Over To You

What are the uncertainties in your life that God has allowed?
What are the unjust ways you have experienced of life and people?
What can you make out of this phrase, “my times are in Your hands”? (Psalm 31.15)
How do you think Jesus lived out this phrase, “My times are in Your hands”?

Prayer

Lord, grant me to the courage to pray, “But I trust in You, O Lord;
I say, “You are my God.” My times are in Your hands.
Let me be strong and take heart, for I hope in You.”

15 Holy Saturday, April 15 Isaiah 52.13-53.12

Suffering & Glory

The passage for today is the “Gospel passage in the New Testament. It tells in the Old Testament”. It is the most about the suffering and the glory of frequently quoted Old Testament the Servant-Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Over To You

Today, Jesus is still entombed.

The observance of silence is most appropriate.

Holy Saturday is a day to watch and pray.

Watching at the tomb and offering to God our prayers and intercessions.

Read through today’s passage a few times.

Read it slowly – savouring it.

Read it from the New Testament perspective – the person of Jesus; what He did; what happened to Him, especially His last days.

Read it with love and gratitude for what Jesus did for you on the cross.

Take time and meditate on these verses (Isaiah 53.4-6, 12):-

- He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.
- He was pierced for our transgressions.
- He was crushed for our iniquities.
- The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him.
- By His wounds we are healed.
- We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his / her own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
- He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

When was the last time you made a confession to God?

Take time to examine your life today, and confess to God

- what is not right between you and God
- what is not right between you and your fellow men and women
- what is not right between you and yourself.

Prayer

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, cleanse me
Water from the side of Christ, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within Thy wounds hide me
Permit me not to be separated from Thee
From the wicked foe defend me
At the hour of my death call me
And bid me come to Thee
That with Thy saints I may praise Thee
For ever and ever. Amen.

(Anima Christi (Soul of Christ) – an ancient prayer)

16

Easter Sunday, April 16

Acts 10.34, 37-43; Ps 118.1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Col 3.1-4; Jn 20.1-9

He Is Risen!

“Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!

Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!

Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!

Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!”

Don’t you just feel joyous singing this wonderful Easter hymn?

It is true, “He’s Risen! He’s risen indeed!”

Today is a day of victory. A day of triumph.

Today, we say goodbye to Satan, to sin, to death – Satan weeps!

Today, darkness is defeated. The curse upon us is no more.

Today, we are reconciled to God, Alleluia!

What happens after **Today**?

Today remains.

Sure, we will in the days ahead meet with discouragement, frustration, temptation – but then again the days ahead are not the last word.

The last word is **Today**.

Today is when Jesus resurrected.

His resurrection gives us new life.

His resurrection gives us new power to live this new life.

It’s a whole new life altogether!

Over To You

How do you want to live this new life for God? Plan ahead.

Your daily spirituality should include a time for worship, prayer, and the reading of scripture.

Regularly there ought to be a time for meditation and study.

Annually plan to go on a Prayer Retreat – we need rest and renewal.

Plan to connect with the world through lifestyle evangelism, through involvement with that which will bring about social justice, caring for the environment, and reaching out in real and authentic ways to the marginalized, the poor and needy, the voiceless, the oppressed.

In the world that is fraught with so much violence, plan to promote peace. Be a peacemaker.

Prayer

We give You thanks O Lord, for You are good; Your love endures forever.

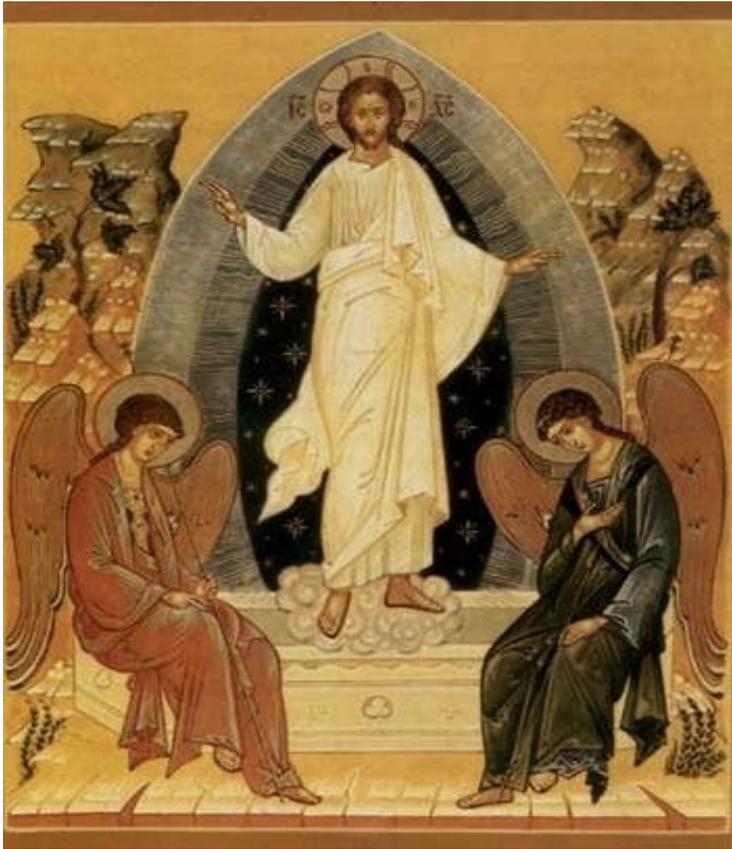
Today, with one voice, we say, “Your love endures forever”

Truly Your right hand is lifted high; Your right hand has done mighty things!

Thank You Lord we need not die but live, we will proclaim what You have done.

Indeed the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone;

You have done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Alleluia!



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