

Introduction

“If you will try to live in the presence of God for one year, you will see yourself at the end of it at the height of perfection, without even knowing it” (St.Teresa of Avila). This saying of St.Teresa of Avila is applicable during this month as the readings speak of the public life of Jesus. Mostly the readings are taken from the gospel of Mark. Mark presents Jesus as a suffering son of God and depicts the inability of his disciples to believe. As disciples of Christ we too have this struggle to believe. Jesus tried to help his disciples understand the meaning of his public ministry, he was present to them always but they failed to understand him. There were many miracles performed and many believed in Jesus. Though Jesus was present to his disciples they could not understand him. In the same way this was not merely the struggle of Jesus’ disciples they are our struggles as well.

Our faith in Christ can be strengthened only through conscious effort from our part and by the grace of God. we need to be present to the lord who is always with us. The reading of this month calls us to live our life with more awareness that God is with us. The fact that God is with us demands that we cannot take our life for granted. We need to look at our life and try to renew our life.

As we begin this month let us spend some time to list out some of the concrete actions which will enable us to live a life worthily in the presence of the Lord. As Teresa of Avila invites let us try to live in the presence of God for one year beginning with God, may God bless our efforts in this Spiritual journey that we are taking.

By, Aneesh Matthew

2014 Feb 1 Sat: Ordinary Weekday/ BVM

2 Sm 12: 1-7a. 10-17/ Ps 51: 12-13. 14-15. 16-17/ Mk 4: 35-41

Humanity has gone through dramas which, like violent waves, have broken over individuals and entire peoples, particularly during the 20th century and the troubles of the 21st. Sometimes we can't help but ask «Master, don't you care if we sink?» (Mk 4,38); If You really do exist, if You are our Father, how can these things happen?

Before the horror of the memory of the concentration camps of the Second World War Pope Benedict asks «Where was God when this was happening, Why did He stay silent? How could He tolerate such excessive destruction?». It was a question that the people of Israel asked in the Old Testament: «Why are you asleep? Why do you hide your face from us and forget about our plight?».

God will not answer those questions: of Him we can ask everything except why; we have no right to demand explanations. In fact, God is there and is talking; the problem is us, because we do not put ourselves in his presence and therefore cannot hear his voice. «We cannot decipher God's secret —says Pope Benedict XVI. We can only see fragments of it and are in the wrong if what we are trying is to become judges of God and History. As such we would not be defending humanity, but rather would be contributing to its destruction».

Therefore, the problem is not whether God exists or is here with us or not. The problem is that we live as if He didn't exist. Here is God's answer: «Why are you so afraid? How can you not have faith?» (Mc 4,40). This Jesus said that to His disciples; He also said it to Saint Faustina Kowalska: «My daughter, do not be afraid, I am always with you even when it looks as though I am not».

Let us not ask him questions, but rather let us pray and accept His will and... then there will be less dramas, and, amazed, we will say «Who is he whom even the wind and the sea obey him?» (Mc 4,41) —Jesus, I put all my trust in you!

2014 Feb 2 SUN: PRESENTATION OF THE LORD F

Mal 3: 1-4/ Ps 24: 7. 8. 9. 10/ Heb 2: 14-18/ Lk 2: 22-40

Today the Church celebrates the feast of the Presentation of the Lord which occurs forty days after the birth of Jesus and is also known as Candle-mass day, since the blessing and procession of candles is included in today's liturgy.

Today's first reading gives us an important insight to understand profoundly the mystery of the Lord's Presentation in the Temple by Mary and Joseph, in accordance with the canons of Mosaic Law. The text, taken from the Prophet Malachi says, 'I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; and suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord who you seek' (Mal 3:1). From all the Gospels, we know that it is the Precursor, St John the Baptist who was born 6 months before Jesus, that God sent to prepare His way. Putting these evangelical facts together, we can comprehend the words of the Prophet Malachi. The Lord God promised that He would send a Precursor to prepare His way. Since there is only 6 months between the birth of St John the Baptist and Jesus it is clear that the prophecy meant that suddenly after the Precursor, the Lord Himself would come. So, soon after the Baptist's birth, God entered His temple. Jesus' presentation signifies God's entrance to His temple. God made man entered His temple, presenting Himself to those who were really searching for Him.

Today's Gospel introduces us to different people and events that in themselves provide numerous lessons and themes for further reflection. First of all, Mary and Joseph respect the Mosaic Law by offering the sacrifice prescribed for the poor: a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Simeon and Anna were two venerable elderly people dedicated to prayer and fasting and so their strong religious spirit rendered them able to recognize the Messiah. In this sense we can see in the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple an extension of the 'Pro Orantibus Day' (For those who pray) that is celebrated on the feast of the Presentation of Mary (21 November). On this day, the Church demonstrates its gratitude to all those in the community that dedicate themselves in a privileged way to prayer, to those who have a particular religious vocation to the contemplative life. In the figure of the venerable Simeon, Jesus' presentation in the temple, also reminds us that prayer and contemplation are not just a waste of time or an obstacle to charity. On the contrary, time could not be better spent than in prayer as true Christian charity is a consequence of a solid interior life. Only those who pray and offer penance, like Simeon and Anna, are open to the breath of the Spirit. They know how to recognize the Lord in the circumstances in which He manifests Himself because they possess an ample interior vision, and they have learned how to love with the heart of the One whose very name is Charity.

2014 Feb 3 Mon: Ordinary Weekday/ Blase, bp, mt/ Ansgar, bp, ms (Fourth Week in Ordinary Time)

2 Sm 15: 13-14. 30; 16: 5-13/ Ps 3: 2-3. 4-5. 6-7/ Mk 5: 1-20

The modern generation may laugh at us if we talk about demons and evil spirit. They call it superstitious. However, in ancient times the Jewish people believed in the existence of evil spirit and how they troubled human beings. The reading of the day shows the encounter of Jesus and the demoniac man. The people believed that the lonely, isolated, deserted place and forest regions are the places of devils. We see Jesus being tempted in the wilderness (Lk 4: 1-13). In the passage Mark shows that Jesus had power and authority over evil spirit and he is the Lord of all.

In today's world what is the evil of demon? How can this casting out of demons be applied to our life? The evil forces are active in the world. When the actions of a person are under the control of the evil forces, then, he/she instead of doing good, does something evil. In this sense, by looking at the present scenario, we can say that, vast majority of people and the world is possessed by demons. The world can be freed from the demoniac power only when the evil force is removed from the lives of people. It is then they will understand the value of love justice, forgiveness and peace.

Corruption, violence, hatred and other evil in society alienates the world from God. In this situation we need to be humble before God like the evil spirit who begged Jesus as not to send them out of the country. It is therefore necessary for us to seek the grace to fight the injustice and corruption.

Another form of demon often found in many persons is selfishness, self-righteousness, over-ambition, desire for power, craving for name and fame and jealousy. These are powerful demons who can oppress even the most faithful disciple of Christ. They are very strong and can't be casted easily. People find it difficult to get rid of them.

Developing authenticity and firmness through an authentic life enables the disciple of Christ to command any demon to leave. The world of corruption, violence, hatred is afraid of the honest and authentic prophets. Let us pray for the grace to become an authentic and honest prophet to promote justice, peace and love in our society.

2014 Feb 4 Tue: Ordinary Weekday

2 Sm 18: 9-10. 14b. 24-25a. 30 – 19: 3/ Ps 86: 1-2. 3-4. 5-6/ Mk 5: 21-43

God does things that human being always fail to understand. Yet in all these it is always for the good of his own people as Paul says, "All things work together for good for all those who love God, who are called according to his purpose". Jesus performed the two miracles; the healing of the woman who had been with hemorrhage for twelve years and raising of a girl back to life. Our God is a God who gives life and knows our very life's sorrows, pain and joy and he wanted to make sure that we attain that life in its fullness as he has desired by sending his only beloved Son who lived and then died for us that we may have life in union with him in his death and resurrection. Therefore, as we can see today that God, who is full of love and mercy continues to surprise us by his ways of doing. We need to be open to his ways and plans and to learn how to see the signs of the times that calls us to respond to his invitation to follow Him closely in our daily life. In order to do this, we need to listen to the Lord and pray to Him that he may have mercy on us and help us in our journey here on earth to walk in his ways of righteousness and peace. We pray that he may continue to instruct us on his way and to understand his plan and walk in his path to eternity.

2014 Feb 5 Wed: Agatha, v, mt M

2 Sm 24: 2. 9-17/ Ps 32: 1-2. 5. 6. 7/ Mk 6: 1-6

Jesus received his human learning from Mary, Joseph and his neighbors at Nazareth. He acquired his wisdom from the Scriptures and the culture of his people. Yet the Father gave him his spirit to judge as God does and to recognize God in all things. For him what was important was not accumulating data and experiences but to be able to appreciate all that occurred. Jesus, inspired by the Spirit, felt all the realities of life in a different way: this was wisdom.

Because Jesus always lived among the people and never did anything extraordinary, they were astonished that, in such a short time, he became famous throughout Galilee. In fact they do not know him. Most of the times people mistakenly believe they know their neighbour.

Prophets are despised only in their own country (v-4). After living with him so long and treating him like anyone else, how could they suddenly show respect and have faith in him? Who is he but the carpenter (v-3). The term the Gospel uses is craftsman. There is no further specification. Yet the first Christians of Palestine asserted that Jesus was a carpenter.

What kind of wisdom has been given to him? Many people say that because Christ was God, he knew all things, but divine knowledge is nothing less than God himself. He knows all at

once. On the other hand, humans think in ideas, and do not embrace all at the same time. That is why, from birth Jesus had to learn from experience that he was the Son of God.

2014 Feb 6 Thu: Paul Miki, p, mt, & co., mts M

1 Kgs 2: 1-4. 10-12/ 1 Chr 29: 10. 11ab. 11d-12a. 12bcd/ Mk 6: 7-13

In the first reading we hear about the death of King David. David's final speech is formed by two announcements: that he is dying (v1) and that he is dead (v10), along with a summation of his reign. Yahweh's election of Davidic dynasty was unconditional. Here the monarchy is subordinated to the Mosaic Law. We see David inviting everyone to follow the law of Yahweh. In our life sometimes we give so much importance to the human made laws and forget the ultimate commandment of love. The first reading invites us to give importance the divine law which is life promoting that to those laws that will degrade the dignity of others and one that is oppressive.

In the Gospel reading we hear about the disciples' mission. The disciples' activities are an extension of Jesus' ministry of proclaiming God's kingdom in word and deed. The thrust of these saying is the subordination of material and physical concerns to the task of preaching God's kingdom. The lack of concern for material comforts expresses in verse 8 reflects the urgency of the disciples' task and the trust in God that demands. Verse 10 indicate the fact that there is no need in spending undue time and energy in searching for better accommodations. In verse 11 we read "shake off the dust from beneath your feet". When hospitality is not offered the disciples are directed to take symbolic action only, not violent reprisal; that action has the function of provoking thought among the people. Verse 12 reflects Mark's summary of Jesus' preaching in 1:14-15, the underscoring the theme of the disciples sharing in Jesus' mission. The readings of the day invite us to go beyond human made laws and work for the Kingdom of God with urgency. How have we prepared ourselves for the Lord's missions? Do we have undue expectation in proclaiming the Kingdom Of God?

2014 Feb 7 Fri: Ordinary Weekday

Sir 47: 2-11/ Ps 18: 31. 47 and 50. 51/ Mk 6: 14-29

Do you ever feel haunted by a past failure or a guilty conscience? King Herod, the most powerful and wealthy man in Judea, had everything he wanted, except a clear conscience and peace with God. Herod had respected and feared John the Baptist as a great prophet and servant of God. John however did not fear to rebuke Herod for his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. He ended up in prison because of Herodias' jealousy. Herod, out of impulse and a desire to please his family and friends, had John beheaded. Now his conscience is pricked when he hears that some think that the Baptist has risen.

When Herod heard the fame of Jesus he supposed that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had returned from the dead. Unfortunately for Herod, he could not rid himself of sin by ridding himself of the man who confronted him with his sin. Herod was a weak man. He could take a strong stand on the wrong things when he knew the right. Such a stand, however, was a sign of weakness and cowardice.

The Lord gives grace to the humble, to those who acknowledge their sins and who seek God's mercy and pardon. His grace and pardon not only frees us from a guilty conscience, it enables us to pursue holiness in thought and action as well. God's grace enables us to fight fear with faith and to overcome the temptation to compromise good with evil. Do we rely on God's grace and help to choose his way of holiness and to reject whatever would compromise our faith and loyalty to Christ?

2014 Feb 8 Sat: Ordinary Weekday/ BVM/ Jerome Emiliani, p, rf/ Josephine Bakhita, v

1 Kgs 3: 4-13/ Ps 119: 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14/ Mk 6: 30-34

Jesus seems to be encouraging the apostles to "take a break." They have just returned from completing the task assigned to them and it appears that they didn't have time to eat and rest. Taking a break can be rejuvenating, provided one does not involve oneself in rigorous activity again. "Taking a break" would include spending more time in prayer to seek God's inspiration or taking time off with family or friends or reading good books or even visiting an orphanage, home for aged or sharing God's blessings with people who are struggling. Taking a break should invigorate you to return to your work feeling relaxed and looking forward to using your time effectively. Do you "take a break"? How? Do you set aside time for a "break" in your busy schedule and feel the refreshing deference?

2014 Feb 9 SUN: FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 58: 7-10/ Ps 112: 4-5. 6-7. 8-9 (4a)/ 1 Cor 2: 1-5/ Mt 5: 13-16

The first reading speaks about our role of being the children of God while following his commandments. What is God's commandment for us? It is nothing but to love God and love our brethren. The love of God was manifested in Christ Jesus whom God had chosen as the channel to unite God-human, human-human and human-nature in a perfect harmony. It is by our faith in Christ that we become the children of God and through love that we share in his redeeming act. We are born of God and share in his image. "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith (1Jn 5:4)". Love cannot be a burdensome because the aspect of love brings union and reconciliation in our lives. Therefore, loving our brethren and being faithful to the commandment of God is what we are called to do. In the gospel reading we see Jesus at his hometown. His arrival to Nazareth has

significance here. His entry into to the synagogue and reading the passage from the prophet Isaiah is to show the people that he is the one who was to come to fulfill the law and prophet by bringing liberty to captives, sight to the blind and to proclaim good news. All eyes were fixed on him as they heard him. How the reading draws our attention is something specific. He has come to fulfill the law and thus begins his ministry. We too are called to fix our eyes on him and to make this word of God part of our lives in order to bring changes in the lives of the people as witnesses of Christ.

2014 Feb 10 Mon: Scholastica, v, r M

1 Kgs 8: 1-7. 9-13/ Ps 132: 6-7. 8-10/ Mk 6: 53-56

Today the church remembers St. Scholastica. She was the twin sister of St. Benedict of Nursia (Italy) dedicated to God from infancy. She chose like her brother to renounce her family's wealth and status and follow him to Subiaco, when he later on moved south to Monte Casino. She founded a convent nearby for women who desired to live according to the Benedictine rule. St. Scholastica is appealed to especially during storms.

The Gospel of Mark is written to the gentile Christian in Rome during the persecution under Nero. Mark presents Jesus as suffering messiah and Son of God. Therefore, the people we come across in today's gospel are not well to do and not the healthy people. Rather the sick and suffering, the weaker section of the society. In reality only these people need the comfort and consolation of God. They need special attention from the suffering messiah because he only can understand the condition of the suffering people. We also see the progressive revelation of the mystery of Jesus' messiahship in the gospel of today. Jesus as messiah is being revealed through his words and deeds which we witness in the gospel. This text is a transition to the next event of Jesus because it summarizes all the miracle and healings that Jesus performed.

We see in the gospel that as soon as people recognized Jesus, they ran to spread the news throughout the countryside. The people are filled with joy to see their messiah and they want to share their joy by spreading the news about Jesus. The gospel invites us to introspect and examine ourselves and see. How often we share our joy with others? How often we talk about Jesus in our daily conversation? In our homes and family how often we talk about Jesus to our children?

2014 Feb 11 Tue: Ordinary Weekday/ Our Lady of Lourdes

1 Kgs 8: 22-23. 27-30/ Ps 84: 3. 4. 5 and 10. 11/ Mk 7: 1-13

We live in a world surrounded by many opportunities. In this scientific-technological world we are moving fast leaving behind many good things. In the reading today we shall see traditions and commandment. What over take us? There are two different aspects that are- tradition and Law of God. It is easy for us to make doctrine out of what is merely a human tradition. We need to be careful of some of the traditions which are perfectly reasonable and indeed very good. For instance, we hear that the Jewish people do not eat without washing their hands and they do not eat until they have washed out the cups and kettles and things like that. Who would disagree with such an idea? In our Indian tradition the elders especially our mothers do not allow us to eat without washing hands. A Brahmin would not eat without taking bath. A woman is expected to take bath early in the morning. These traditions are not only for personal hygiene but also refer to ritual purity. The Jewish people knew about cleanliness but they doctrinised it in the society. They neglected the religious practices and radicalized the external practices. It was a highest value to honour parents and give a descent burial. Honoring parents was the traditions given by God but they neglected. Jesus and his disciples, perhaps knowingly did not wash their hands and eat just to remind the Pharisees and the scribes the importance of purity of heart and not merely of that physical.

This brings us to the second point, that is, what we hear in the first reading when Solomon goes into the temple he had built. The glory cloud filled the temple, and so he goes into the temple and says to God, You keep your covenant of mercy with your servants who are faithful to you with their whole heart. If we are going to be making human traditions into something divine and pushing aside what is divine in favor of what is human, we are not following God with our whole heart.

But we tend to do the same thing. We have ways of weaseling around the Word of God in order to do other things, and we make other things more important than doing what God wants us to do. We cannot pick and choose what we want to do from Scripture or something we have always done, or has been passed down through the generations. But if it is of God, then that is something we need to keep as the priority. When we decide to get caught up into our own human things and our hearts stray from God, we see in Solomon exactly what happens. Here is a man who is zealous for the Lord. He builds a temple for God, he rejoices that the glory of God fills the temple that he had made, he goes forth and presents this beautiful prayer that we heard to the Lord, and then we know that as his life continued on he turned into quite a wretch and did all kinds of things that were completely in opposition to God, including offering sacrifices to idols and intermarrying with people that God had forbidden, and all the other things that he was explicitly forbidden in Scripture to do. But it was politically astute –

once again, trading in what is divine for what is human and deciding that politics is more important than what God's Will is.

Today we are called to serve God and be faithful to Him with our whole heart. We need to have our priorities right: to serve God with our whole heart by doing precisely what He has told us to do "love your God with your whole heart and mind and soul. And your neighbour as yourself".

Let us ask oneself as to where do I spend my time, in the internet, face book, watching movies, talking criticizing-----etc. How much time do I invest for the Lord?

2014 Feb 12 Wed: Ordinary Weekday

1 Kgs 10: 1-10/ Ps 37: 30-31. 39-40/ Mk 7: 14-23

Today, Jesus teaches us that God made everything good. But our intentions —which are not always right— may contaminate what we do. This is why Jesus Christ says: «Nothing that enters one from outside can make that person unclean. It is what comes out from within that makes un-clean» (Mk7:15). The experience of the offence against God is very real. And we Christians can easily discover the evil's deep mark in an enslaved world. The mission Jesus charges us with, is to clean —with the help of His grace— all this contamination spread by people's bad intentions all over the world.

The Lord wants all our activities to be carried out well: He expects us to show in them intensity, method, science, know-how, eagerness for perfection, not looking for anything else but reinstating God's plan for Creation. For God made everything for man's benefit: «Purity of intention. —You will always have it if, in everything you do, you only look forward to pleasing God» (Saint Josemaria).

Only our will can spoil the Divine Plan. And we must watch that this is not so. Quite often we let in vanity, pride, despondency for lack of faith, impatience when our aims are not attained... This is why saint Gregory the Great warned us: «Be not seduced by any flattering prosperity, for only the foolish traveler stops along the way to admire the beautiful landscape while forgetting where he is heading for».

It will, therefore, be convenient to pay attention to how we offer our deeds to God, to always be aware of His presence and to frequently consider the Divine Filiation. Thus, all our days— through work and prayer— will be fortified and begin in our Lord, and whatever we start in his name will reach its desired ending.

2014 Feb 13 Thu: Ordinary Weekday

1 Kgs 11: 4-13/ Ps 106: 3-4. 35-36. 37 and 40/ Mk 7: 24-30

Do you ever feel "put-off" by the Lord? This passage describes the only occasion in which Jesus ministered outside of Jewish territory. (Tyre and Sidon were fifty miles north of Israel and still exist today in modern Lebanon.) A Gentile woman puts Jesus on the spot by pleading for his mercy on her daughter who was afflicted with an evil spirit. At first Jesus seemed to pay no attention to her, and this made his disciples feel embarrassed. Jesus does this to test the woman to awaken faith in her. What did Jesus mean by the expression "throwing bread to the dogs"? The Jews often spoke of the Gentiles with arrogance and insolence as "unclean dogs" since the Gentiles was excluded from God's covenant and favor with Israel. For the Greeks the "dog" was a symbol of dishonor and was used to describe a shameless and audacious woman. Matthew's gospel records the expression: do not give dogs what is holy (Matt. 7:6). Jesus, no doubt, spoke with a smile rather than with an insult because this woman immediately responds with wit and faith -- "even the dogs eat the crumbs". Jesus praises a Gentile woman for her faith and for her love. She made the misery of her child her own and she was willing to suffer rebuff in order to obtain healing for her loved one. She also had indomitable persistence. Her faith grew in contact with the person of Jesus. She began with a request and she ended on her knees in worshipful prayer to the living God. No one who ever sought Jesus with faith -- whether Jew or Gentile -- was refused his help. Do we all seek Jesus with expectant faith?

"Lord, your love and mercy knows no bounds. May I trust you always and pursue you with indomitable persistence as this woman did. Increase my faith in your saving power and deliver me for all evil and harm. "

2014 Feb 14 Fri: Cyril and Methodius, bps M

1 Kgs 11: 29-32; 12: 19/ Ps 81: 10-11ab. 12-13. 14-15/ Mk 7: 31-37

The act of performing miracle for Jesus differs from place to place and person to person. In some cases he just healed the sick people by word, in some cases he touched. However, in the present occasion he takes the person away from the crowd before performing the miracle.

What is deaf and dumb mean? Why does he take the person away aside? In the modern world, due to the hectic life style people become deaf and dumb to the voice of God and his inspiration. The growing materialism, individualism, and fundamentalism take away the sensitivity of the people. They neither see nor hear the voice of the poor and marginalized, cry of injustice and exploitation which takes place around them. They become deaf to hear the cry of the poor and the exploitation and remain mute spectators of the oppressions and violence to life.

Modern people take holidays and go out to resort and enjoy themselves and rest, eat and have fun. In this way though they may refresh themselves physically but their minds remain closed to the reality around them. In the reading we see that Jesus taking away the man which mean we should move away from pressures of life and spent some time in silence and solitude. In this way we can be attuned to the voice of the Lord and the spirit can touch our hearts.

The whole story shows us most vividly that Jesus did not consider the man merely a case; he considered him as an individual. The man had a special need and special problem, and with the tenderness Jesus dealt with him in a way that spared his feelings, in way that he could understand. Thus through this event we are invited to be likes Jesus. We need to have the attitude like that of Jesus. Our act of charity or generosity, compassionate and love should not hurt others and be a show off rather it should enable others to experience God in their lives.

Do we realize that we are deaf and dumb? As individuals and as church we need to come to Jesus for healing. And this can happen here, far from the madding crowds, in the privacy of the Eucharistic celebration.

2014 Feb 15 Sat: Ordinary Weekday/ BVM

1 Kgs 12: 26-32; 13: 33-34/ Ps 106: 6-7ab. 19-20. 21-22/ Mk 8: 1-10

As we can see today there are many scams and many other malpractices such as corruption, exploitation and others. These things have happened in the past too as we can see in the first reading. All these happened because of the selfish interest of each person. Selfishness led to accumulation of wealth and searched for prestige at the cost of others and also acts in a sinful ways. However, Jesus as the man who is concerned about the welfare of the people took a different turn through his goodness. Therefore the goodness of one man has saved many and has also bettered their living condition even today. Jesus as the bread of life, today shares the earthly food as in preparation for the people to attain the spiritual food that will satisfy them forever in his own body which he shared for many in the last supper and subsequently by his death on the Cross. Therefore, we as Christian bearing his name and called to represent him in our very way of life, have a lot to do to really witness to his way of life and his teaching daily. As Jesus saw the crowd and had compassion towards them; Do we too have a sense of solidarity and compassion to those brothers and sisters who are hungry in life for the earthly and spiritual food? Are we serious to the call of Jesus and his teaching that the only condition to attain the Kingdom of God is to do anything good to the least of all. We pray that we may learn to love Him and follow his command in loving to one another.

2014 Feb 16 SUN: SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Sir 15: 15-20/ Ps 119: 1-2. 4-5. 17-18. 33-34 (1b)/ 1 Cor 2: 6-10/ Mt 5: 17-37

Jesus affirms that the religion founded on the Old Testament's scripture was a temporary, yet necessary, step in the history of salvation. The prophecies had to be fulfilled; the rites and sacrifices of religion were expressed in a veiled manner the mystery of sin and mercy that would be fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus. With him comes the perfect and definitive fellowship of God with humankind.

Jesus does not question the demands of the Bible, nor is he satisfied with a mere commentary; the law of Christ is a call for purification of heart, that is, of our intentions and our desires. It is a fresh enlightenment born of a new experience of God.

All of us are looking for happiness, promotion and security, but what are those criteria worth? All strive to live fully their life and enjoy without limits their own health and body. But here Jesus tells us that true life is elsewhere and that true self creates itself while accepting mutilations of the present life. Jesus speaks of a *hell of fire*, because there is nothing worse than this final result: a lost life that has not been fruitful, and the abortion of our eternal self.

Do not take oaths (v-33). This sentence must not be understood: "you shall never take an oath", but "in a general way don't take oaths". Many invoke the name of God on any occasion. Is it because they truly know him and have Him in mind? If we use his name casually, it is because we do not experience the weight of his presence. What a lack of respect to call on God to testify to our sincerity when we do not even recognize all that is false and unclean within us!

2014 Feb 17 Mon: Ordinary Weekday/ Seven Founders of the Order of Servites, rs

Jas 1: 1-11/ Ps 119: 67. 68. 71. 72. 75. 76/ Mk 8: 11-13

Today what the first reading teaches me is the lesson of being patient in times of trials. Many times in our lives we tend to react whenever something bad happens to us, and in this process of reacting we tend to lose the focus on our goal and commit many mistakes that hurt others and ourselves too. Yes, losing patient and being reactive is one of the basic drawbacks in positive human growth. Losing patient is acting on impulse and the drives of the senses. We see this same thing in the book of Genesis when Adam and Eve without giving any proper thought to what they were doing ate the fruit offered to them by the serpent, and when God confronted them on the graveness of their actions, once again without any proper thought on what they had done, they were ready to blame someone else. Therefore what the reading want

to tell us is to be aware of ourselves and turn to God who would help us regulating our own spirit, and in managing our own affairs.

On the other hand what I learn from today's Gospel reading is the message which I have always heard others preaching but I myself have not been properly practicing and that is the message of living every day of my life with the eyes of faith. To do everything with faith in God is the most difficult thing because it involves sacrifices and letting go. The readings inspire me to do today is to continue growing in faith and selflessness.

2014 Feb 18 Tue: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 1: 12-18/ Ps 94: 12-13a. 14-15. 18-19/ Mk 8: 14-21

It is clear that the Christians to whom James is writing are under strong pressure in the living of their faith. As in our own day, there were the pulls of a society which set great store by material wealth, social status and influence. In addition, there were the difficulties of living in a society where one's Christian faith could bring harassment and persecution. At times, it would seem much easier to abandon it and follow the crowd.

Blessed are those who can persevere in the face of such testing. It is the blessedness that Jesus spoke about in the Beatitudes. James praises those who come triumphantly through such times of trial and testing. They will receive the crown of life that God promises to those who remain faithful to him.

However, James reminds us that no one should ever think that these tests or temptations come directly from God. God can never be the source of an urge to do or say what is evil and wrong.

God himself, of course, cannot be tempted. In a God who is infinite Goodness, there is nothing that could entice him as more desirable than what he already is and has. Nor does he tempt anyone in the sense of leading a person to do what is morally evil. Again because God is all Goodness such a situation is impossible. Of course, we may find ourselves in situations where our faith and integrity are challenged. God does not prevent such situations arising. But, if we fail, it is the result of our own choice.

The apostles were worried because they forgot to bring bread for their trip. And that was right after Jesus miraculously fed four thousand people! How easy it is to forget what God has already done for us and to doubt what he promises to do as well. Jesus cautioned the disciples to beware of bread that corrupts, such as the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. To the Jew leaven was a sign of evil. It was a piece of dough from left-over bread which fermented. Fermentation was associated with putrefaction. Jesus warned his disciples to avoid

the way of the Pharisees and of Herod who sought their own counsels rather than the will of God. As the apostles continued to worry about their lack of bread, Jesus reminded them of his miraculous provision of bread in the feeding of the four thousand. He then upbraided them for their lack of trust in God. It's easy to get preoccupied with the problems and needs of the present moment and to forget the most important reality.

2014 Feb 19 Wed: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 1: 19-27/ Ps 15: 2-3a. 3bc-4ab. 5/ Mk 8: 22-26

In the Gospel reading we read about the healing of a blind man. If any story has a symbolic function, it is the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. Verse 24 indicates that the man's return to sight is gradual. Not cured completely at once. In verse 25 we read "and he looked, and was restored, and saw all things clearly. Three verbs serve to underline the completeness of the man's cure after the first, only partial healing. In verse 26 we have the command to the man "do not enter the village". It seems like an attempt at why the newly healed man should not enter his village. It is another command to silence after a miraculous action on Jesus' part.

The healing of the blind gives us the message to examine and see what the level of our sight. Are we like the blind man who saw people like a tree? Do we give the due dignity to the people who are around us? When we see human beings as an object we fail to see the image of God in that person. People who do not have light in life see people as objects. When the storms of life shake life, the Lord offers us peace. Most often we realize the presence of Jesus in our life when we are faced with trials. We need to believe in the healing power of Jesus. His wounded hand gives us peace and joy in our lives.

2014 Feb 20 Thu: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 2: 1-9/ Ps 34: 2-3. 4-5. 6-7/ Mk 8: 27-33

In the first reading we see the meeting of Samuel and King Saul. Samuel dares to ask Saul why was he disobedient in the sight of God because he had pounced on the spoil, thus displeasing the Lord. Though Saul was blaming the men of Israel, yet as the king he was aware that Yahweh would not want such a thing to be done by him. Samuel communicates that God wanted obedience and not sacrifice. Obedience is equal to submission to the Lord himself by the human king of Israel to the eternal King. At times we go by intention and will which is against God's own. Thus, we tend to make a deviation from the Lord. All that we need to do as created creatures in the image and likeness of him is to discern as to what he wants of us to do in our lives especially at times of fortune and misfortune. We should not be taken away by our reason guided by the intellect alone but to give a moment to the Spirit to work in us to do anything that God wants to do through us.

The Gospel reading brings forth the false intension of some who question Jesus as to why his disciples are not fasting. But Jesus with no inexcusable reaction answers them by saying 'why would the guests fast while the bridegroom is with them'. In this manner he does not neglect their question or answering wrongly but he encounters their original intension of finding fault with him. He gives the typical answer which would have never been expected by them. When God is present with us we too are so rigid in following the blind rules yet not realizing that our efforts of fasting and following the literal law cannot please God. What we need is the change of our motive and purified intension which will enable us to see things rightly and make meaning to our lives. The Gospel gives an open invitation that we shall not remain as people of lip-reciting but beings of actions. The reading strikes a reminder for us to see the goodness in what others say and do. So that we too will be people of genuine approach rather than people of mere observant.

2014 Feb 21 Fri: Ordinary Weekday/ Peter Damian, bp, dr

Jas 2: 14-24. 26/ Ps 112: 1-2. 3-4. 5-6/ Mk 8: 34 – 9: 1

Everything we have is a complete gift from God. We owe Him everything, including our very lives. We may give God our money, but not ourselves. We may give him lip-service, but not our hearts. A true disciple gladly gives up his worldly attachments in exchange for an unending life of joy and happiness with God in heaven. God's giving is without measure. The joy he offers no sadness or loss can diminish. The cross of Christ leads to victory and freedom from sin and death. What is the cross which Jesus Christ commands you to take up each day? Do you struggle with the will of God in your life? Are you ready to lose all for Jesus Christ in order to gain all with Jesus Christ?

2014 Feb 22 Sat: Chair of Peter, ap F

1 Pt 5: 1-4/ Ps 23: 1-3a. 4. 5. 6/ Mt 16: 13-19

"I now say to you, you are peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the underworld shall never prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." With this little declaration, Jesus invested peter with the right to sit in his place as the prince of the apostles, giving him, as he did so, servant-authority over the whole church. It is the Episcopal dignity and universal primacy of that high office instituted by our Lord himself that we venerate today rather than worm eaten oak wood arm chair supposedly used by Peter.

The word 'chair' derives from the Latin 'sedes' that is the holy see, or the Greek expression 'cathedra sancti Petri'. Today's feast implicitly affirms Catholics teaching concerning

the papacy: in reigning pope the church recognizes and honors the legitimate successor of st. peter as pastor of the whole church. This is the origin of the expression 'ex cathedra' from the chair referring to papal pronouncement whereby the pope infallibly defines a doctrine that is irrevocably binding on all the faithful.

Faith in the Son of God which Peter, among the apostles is the first to proclaim really comes from God. This faith is not a human opinion or a sentimental attachment. It does not come from flesh and blood, an expression that for the Jews meant what is purely human, and what a human being does and understands by his own capacity. The words with which Jesus greets Peter, it is well for you Simon Barjona are true for all the believers. For - it is the Father who has chosen us and has brought us to Christ.

As Christians and followers of Christ it is necessary that one needs to know Jesus personally. Knowing the person helps us to commit fully to him or to her. What makes Peter to commit fully to the mission of Jesus is that he knows personally who Jesus is for him. Only when we are led by the Spirit we will have the grace to know Jesus, for it is the Spirit who prays in us and intercedes for us.

2014 Feb 23 SUN: SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Lv 19: 1-2. 17-18/ Ps 103: 1-2. 3-4. 8. 10. 12-13 (8a)/ 1 Cor 3: 16-23/ Mt 5: 38-48

Today, Jesus teaches us that forgiveness can overcome hate. Talion's law meant some progress, as it limited the wish to retaliate down to a fair proportion: do unto others as you would have them done unto you; otherwise, it would be unfairness; this is what the aphorism «eye for eye, tooth for tooth» actually means. It was, however, a limited progress, as Jesus Christ emphasizes in the Gospel the need that love overcomes revenge; this is how He expressed it when, on his Cross, He interceded for his executioners: «Father, forgive them, they know not what they do» (Lk23:34).

Nevertheless, truth should always accompany forgiveness. We do not just forgive because we feel helpless or gravely embarrassed. Quite often, the expression "to turn the other cheek" is misinterpreted as waiving our legitimate rights. Certainly, nothing of the sort. To turn the other cheek means to denounce and interpolate, with a peaceful but categorical gesture. To whoever has done the injustice, it is like saying: «You slapped me on the cheek, now what? Do you want to slap me on the other too? Do you really think you are behaving rightly?». Jesus replied serenely to the high priest's rude servant: «If I said something wrong testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?» (Jn 18:23).

We can, therefore, see what our Christian behavior must be: not to retaliate, but to stay firm; to be open to forgiveness but clearly say things. It is certainly not an easy task to accomplish,

but it is the only way to put a stop to violence and show the world the Divine Grace it is lacking of, so often. St. Basil advises us: «Believe me and you will forget the offences and insults you get from your fellow man. You will see how differently you will be named; he will be called angry and violent while you will be cited as meek and peaceful. One day, he will repent of his violence, but you will never regret your meekness».

2014 Feb 24 Mon: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 3: 13-18/ Ps 19: 8. 9. 10. 15/ Mk 9: 14-29

Faith requires something to trust in. But only trust/faith that is located in the One who can save, is a faith that can save. Whether the weak faith of the father that begged Jesus for more strength to believe, or the strong faith of the one who knows Him who is able to save—both are placed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, mighty to save. That faith placed in Jesus is saving faith—hope and life-giving faith - Faith that fixes itself on the One who is near and is able to help—Jesus Christ our Lord. Apart from Him, we can do nothing, but “All things are possible for one who believes!” And the prayer for more faith, the prayer of God’s children for the gift of the Holy Spirit, never goes unanswered, but God is always willing to supply us with deeper trust in Him and His Spirit to strengthen us (Luke 11:13).

In today’s Gospel, Jesus says to His disciples that this demon could only be cast out by prayer. They learned one area where their own faith needed to grow—that of prayer. Jesus declares the incredible power of prayer, power over great and troubling evil and seemingly impossible circumstances. How often we greatly underestimate prayer, and take it for granted. And just like with faith, the power is not in prayer itself as some abstract notion or magical words—but prayer connected and directed to the One True God. Prayer to an idol, or to the mystical universe, or to a human being dead or alive, has no power whatsoever. In fact Jesus warned against the false prayers of the pagans that just heaped up empty phrases or babbled on with many words. He was teaching that God isn’t controlled by our prayer or by how many or how beautiful our words are. But rather God hears the prayers prayed to Him through Jesus Christ. ALL the power of prayer is the power of God alone—the One to whom we pray. God the Father and His Son Jesus command the demons with a word of His voice, and they must obey. Protesting or not, there’s no evil spirit that could oppose Jesus’ words.

Whatever our circumstances, we must know that Jesus, God’s Son, is in command of the situation, and that He answers the prayer to strengthen our faith, and to rid us of our unbelief. He guards and preserves our soul even through death’s darkest hour, and promises that whatever present sufferings we endure are light and momentary—before the day of glory. He does not send us anywhere He has not first gone, and He showed us His power over life and

death by His own suffering, death, and resurrection. He is the true object of our faith—the One who is powerful to save and to heal, to hear and to answer. In Him we trust. Amen.

2014 Feb 25 Tue: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 4: 1-10/ Ps 55: 7-8. 9-10a. 10b-11a. 23/ Mk 9: 30-37

“I am the greatest” This message was proclaimed by the boxer Muhammad Ali during his meteoric rise to the World Championship of Boxing. He had ample evidence to back up this claim: lightning fast hands, hypnotic foot movement, a powerful right hand and an iron chin. Despite three losses which occurred late in his career, Muhammad was and is still understood as the greatest heavyweight Boxer in history. Sadly, however, his greatness didn’t last. Now the man with the frenzied fists and flurried footwork can barely walk. His brain and body slowed by Parkinson’s syndrome. The man who once claimed “I am the greatest!” can’t even tie his own shoes. This is the way it is with all who claim greatness, one way or another the effects of our sinful world win out and we are left humbled.

This is a lesson which the disciples in our Gospel reading desperately need to learn. Jesus and the disciples are passing through Galilee when he makes another prediction of his impending death. This is one of those rare instances when Jesus blatantly states something “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” Now the disciples, of course, choose to ignore this because “they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.”

In all of this Jesus is telling his disciples that their greatness is dependent not upon them, but upon him! These 12 men, selfish, self-centered, self-seekers are focused only upon worldly wealth and power. Their sinful selves cannot even see the saviour before them, but only how he can advance their position in the world. And Jesus, ever teaching, ever reaching, seeks to remind them truly of why he has come. As modern day disciples, we sometimes find ourselves in similar spots. Perhaps we aren’t content with our situation in life. Perhaps we are overly ambitious in our workplace or in our church. Perhaps we feel that we are so great that we don’t need others in our work place or in our church, because they only slow us down. Whatever our sin is, we are all in danger of seeing ourselves as the greatest!

Because Jesus became last of all and servant of all, he now says to all of us, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” So dear friends, you can boldly say “I am the greatest”, not because of you, but because of Jesus FOR YOU! Amen.

2014 Feb 26 Wed: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 4: 1-17/ Ps 49: 2-3. 6-7. 8-10. 11/ Mk 9: 38-40

God created us in his image and likeness. Therefore we are not complete without each other. Rick Warren in his "Purpose Driven Life" says that in every human heart there is a void, a void of desire for love. We, humans always long to love and to be loved. This desire comes to completion when two individual come in contact with their mind, body and soul. This is what we call love or friendship.

Today the readings invite us to make friendship with God, human and the world. In our friendship we should not be confirmed by the standards of the world. Otherwise it will bring dispute, enmity, conflicts, selfishness, jealousy, judgment, etc. in our friendship. Our friendship must enable us to transcend, it must help us to encounter the divine, and it must give us strength to grow spiritually. It is possible only when we are moved by the spirit. To sustain our friendship we must draw near to God and he will draw near to us. We must clean our hearts and mind. Like the man in the Gospel we are called to do well. Our good deeds are signs of relationship with God. For whoever is not against us is with us. Here one needs to look at the friendship he/she has with him/her. What is the language used in conversation? What do I mean when I say something? Is my language derived by love and selfish pleasure (sex). What determines my behavior?

Today we need to expand our thinking horizon. It should not be limited like the disciple who thought only they belonged to Christ. There are many who belong to Christ and there are many to whom we become block in coming to Christ. Christ has paid the ransom for all. The only way is to be a friend of God. For he says I have called you friends, and love one another as I have loved you. (Jn 15:34). Today let us pray to God that we shall always remain as friends for ever. Amen.

2014 Feb 27 Thu: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 5: 1-6/ Ps 49: 14-15ab. 15cd-16. 17-18. 19-20/ Mk 9: 41-50

James in his letter all through spoke vehemently about the practicality of life and faith. Today, he strongly condemns the way of life led by the rich and arrogant of heart. He also insisted that all the rich will suffer in the Lord's presence for they have failed to see and help the poor and the oppressed in their riches. Similarly, Jesus too in his life time, was very harsh toward the rich and the arrogant. Today he questioned the way of life of all. He insisted that all those who have pity and helped the other will be rewarded but those who are not would bear the consequence of life. He warned that all those who have failed to help the poor and blocked any one from doing something good is punished in the fire of hell. Therefore, he called us to be salt of the

earth; which means to represent him in all that he did and spoke to us in his words of life. Today to be salt of the earth is simply to respond to his teaching and live in love with one another and support one another in times of sorrow and grief and also in times of temptation and trials. As Christians today in this world of confusion where there are eroding of values, rising of self interest and selfish motives to wealth are prioritized we have to do much more. Therefore, Let us pray that we may learn to walk in the foot step of Jesus the Lord in doing what is good for oneself and others in this pilgrim world that we can attain the fullness of life with him in heaven.

2014 Feb 28 Fri: Ordinary Weekday

Jas 5: 9-12/ Ps 103: 1-2. 3-4. 8-9. 11-12/ Mk 10: 1-12

Is it right for a husband...? (v-2) Mathew is surely more exact when he adds “for any reason he wants”, for everyone agreed that a wife could be sent away, but reasons justifying a divorce were discussed. Mark goes straight: marriage is an irreversible commitment.

Jesus takes his stand; it is one of those classes when he shocks everyone, including his disciples-going against general practice sanctioned by the Bible. Jesus invokes another law of God, in the beginning. In the beginning: that is in the narrative of the earthly paradise-we must not forget that in ancient culture the beginning was a golden age where God established ideal institutions. It is clear then that if the authors of the Old Testament authorized divorce it was because the laws of society, even those of God’s people, reflect the level of the moral conscience of an era.

Jesus compares the ideal and the practice. This ideal, however, is not something that one admires without taking it seriously, where Genesis says: the two shall become one body, Jesus adds: they are no longer two but one body over and above any discussion, the unity of the couple in ‘the’ reality in the eyes of God.

The words of Jesus cannot be jeopardized. They have been spoken in a practice of marriage universally accepted; they have the same value today in the widely spread practice of ‘non-marriage’. Throughout the Bible love and fidelity are linked, and when the Gospel speaks of losing oneself as a condition of finding oneself, it applies as well for the couple.

What if one of the two betrays the other? Here we are in the domain of human decisions where each one must solve his or her own case and solve it according to the consciousness they already have of their Christian vocation. Others must not condemn them, but Jesus takes all authority away from those who pretend to ease the conscience of divorcees as if they had not failed in some way in their Christian vocation.