

Sabbath

Scripture Meditations For Daily Life



Sabbath

SABBATH is a study guide for the Scripture readings of each day. Its purpose is to encourage Catholics to understand with greater depth the Word of God and thereby apply it in their personal lives.

Reprinting or reproducing any part of this magazine must be done with permission from the publishers.

ISSN 0119-6561

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor in Chief

Rissa Singson-Kawpeng

Managing Editors

Tess Atienza

Joy Sosoban

Editorial Assistant

Angie Briones-Espuerta

Design & Layout

Rey de Guzman

Cover Photo

Raymund Sto. Domingo
of the Risen Lord Catholic Community
Dagupan City, Philippines

Writers

Fr. Steve Tynan, MGL

Fr. Sandy Enhaynes

Fr. Rudy Horst, SVD

Fr. Martin Macasaet, SDB

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

Fr. Joel O. Jason

Fr. Benny Tuazon

Chairman of the Board

Bo Sanchez

For more information,
please contact:
SHEPHERD'S VOICE
#60 Chicago St., Cubao,
Quezon City 1109 Philippines
P.O. Box 1331 Quezon City Central Post Office
1153 Quezon City
tel no: (632) 411-7874 to 77
fax: (632) 727-5615 or 726-9918
e-mail: sale@shepherdsvoice.com.ph/kerygma_subs@yahoo.com.ph
www.shepherdsvoice.com.ph

LIFE-CHANGING WORDS

I'm Jackie, 25 years old. I'm a call center hopper. I was of "the world" when I entered the world of call centers. I seldom attended Sunday Mass. I just focused on what I was earning.

A lot of trials, however, came my way. Since I worked on night shift, I became very sickly. It was like, sickness was my part-time job. I experienced bankruptcy not once but twice. To top it all, I felt so ALONE AND EMPTY.

Last April 2, 2007, thanks to the Internet, I committed myself to be a part of the Kerygma Family.

I am very happy to be a part of the Kerygma Family because I'm learning a lot of new things. I'm beginning to see things in a different perspective. I would like to thank you for your very inspiring and life-changing words...

This is an excerpt from the many letters I receive from members of the Kerygma Family. Kerygma Family is a borderless, non-physical, virtual community of members spanning the entire world. We provide our members a complete spiritual support system to keep them growing in their spiritual and personal life. And we are just elated every time we receive letters from our members telling us stories of how Kerygma Family has helped them in their spiritual journey.

We are happy because each letter is a confirmation that God exists, that He is present in every human being's life, that He cares, that He answers prayers.

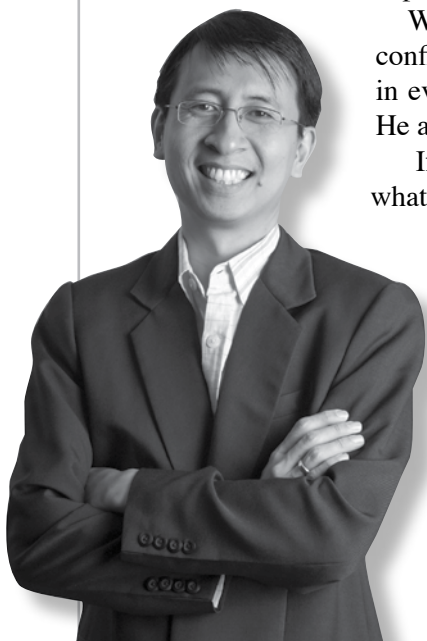
If you're not yet a member, you don't know what you are missing! Log onto

www.kerygmfamily.com for details.

I remain your friend,



Bo Sanchez





THE VIRTUE OF “SINKING” INTO PEACE

My mother is an only child; my father has but one brother. But we belong to a big extended family of cousins. Birthdays, weddings, graduations, deaths and other transitions in life are times for big reunions. Cousins and their families come and fill up the occasion with their numbers and stories. Usually they come, hang around and may even stay for a day and a night.

My mother, the eldest of cousins from my grandmother’s side, would find herself busy with a lot of details. She enjoys it thoroughly but soon, after everything is over — after everyone has gone home, after the last dishes are kept — my mother would sink into one of the chairs at the family living room. No, she’s not tired. She would be humming a tune, her face a countenance of contentment and joy. At times, she would even move over to the upright piano — a family heirloom — and for about an hour, she would fill the house with her beautiful renditions of such pieces as “Love and Devotion,”

“Czardas,” “Pamulinawen” and other Iloco favorites.

After the commotion caused by visitors, among them the shepherds who brought exciting stories about angels singing and prophesying, the Gospel also speaks about the soothing picture of Mother Mary. In the silence and privacy of her home with Jesus and Joseph, Mother Mary “*kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.*” In that peaceful silence, Mother Mary could have been glorifying and praising God in her own way for all that happened in the first Christmas, while the shepherds, as Luke narrated, glorified and praised God in their loud and excited style.

Perhaps this is the best way we can have our prayer today. After all the noise of the celebration, let us embrace the reality of the first day of the year in peaceful contemplation. Let us allow the Spirit to lead us in a prayerful sigh: “We have crossed over to another year. Thank You, Dear Jesus.”

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Relax. Reminisce your experiences as you cross over to the New Year. Embrace everything with joy and with a smile. Hum a praise song to the Lord!

Father God, as the new year begins, I thank You for all that has been and all that will be. May I recognize the work of Your hands in my life this year.

**Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us.**

FACING THE COMPLETE ME: "I AM NOT... AND I AM..."

The beginning of the year is a time for making "projections." We make resolutions for a better personal and moral life. Self-made sages and soothsayers proclaim their fearless forecasts for events, places and persons. Business persons and economists try to predict optimal trends in commerce and finance. Many even go through some rituals perceived to usher in good luck.

John the Baptizer appears in today's liturgy as a good guide for us. Amidst the tendency to overshoot our optimism at the onset of the year — a false optimism that leads many to place their faith in superstition and magic — John the Baptist stands out as a true mouthpiece of God's truth:

● ***Earthly reality has two sides: "I am... and I am not..."*** We live in a finite world and we are creatures on a journey. Perfection is not a state but a process. We are always moving: there are limits that we have to accept; there are possibilities

which we have to claim. To pretend that everything and everyone is limitless is an illusion, a heresy even. Our optimism is good but for it to be a virtue, we have to couple it with humility and tentativity.

● ***Let us always affirm that we live in God's Presence, Providence and Mystery.*** John the Baptist said it well: "...there is one among you whom you do not recognize." Our plans and projections rest on God's compassion and mercy. There is no such thing as pure science or pure rationality. We are thankful that as humans, we are the best of creation.

Our progress, our civilization, our history and our technologies prove this. But we are not gods. We remain to be humble creatures, subjects not of some unknown elemental powers, but loved images of a Loving and Personal God. To believe in something less than this makes us not Christians, but practitioners of "New Age." *Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Gather all your plans for the new year — plans for yourself, for your family and for your career. Bow your head in prayer and submit everything to "Abba, Father."

Pray this Prayer of Humility: "Loving God and Father, You see that my trust is not based on human actions. I trust in Your mercy and love. By myself I can do nothing, but with You, I can do everything. For the love of You, I want to do my best in all things. To You, my God, be the honor. For myself, I only desire to be with You in heaven. Amen."

Sts. Basil and Gregory Naziazan, Bishops, pray for us.

EVERY PERSON'S LIFE IS A GREAT MYSTERY

Today's reading is enigmatic, a characteristic common to many of the Gospel passages from John. At the high moment of the proclamation, we hear John the Baptist testify of Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world..." And we ask: what did the Baptist mean by the title "Lamb of God"? As we continue to ask this question, the Gospel narrative goes on to tell us that the Baptist himself said twice: "I did not know him (verse 31)... I did not know him (verse 33)..."

Later Bible scholars would attempt to explain that the background of the title "Lamb of God" may be a figure of the Paschal Lamb whose blood saved Israel (cf. Exodus 12), and of the Suffering Servant who was led like a lamb to the slaughter so that it may become a sin offering (cf. Isaiah 53:7-10). Other Bible teachers tell us that as we think of these Old Testament roots of the "Lamb of God," we should not lose sight

of the victorious Lamb of Sacrifice mentioned in Revelations 5-7. Putting all these things together, we are made to reflect: Jesus who came as man had a mission and a destiny to fulfill — one that involved self-sacrifice and victory.

As we meditate on today's Gospel, we are reminded that the festivities of Christmas should not be divorced from the harsh realities of ordinary living. The cute and huggable Jesus — the "little lamb" of Mary — is meant for the Sacrifice! This is human life: it has a destiny, a purpose, a meaning.

The joys of Christmas each year are meant to give us the inspiration to go on, like Jesus, that we may live our call and purpose. Like Jesus, we must grow in age and wisdom before God and before men. Transcending the world of the child, we should be able to see that each person's life is a mystery that must be allowed to unfold through good times and through bad. *Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Face the mirror, and look at yourself. In what way have you experienced your own life as the unfolding of a mystery? If Jesus' mystery is encapsulated in the title "Lamb of God," can you think of an expression/title that would summarize the mystery of your own life and person?

Great and Loving Father, I thank You for myself and my life — they are indeed Your greatest gifts to me! But there are moments when I find it hard to understand who I am. Teach me Your will. Amen.

**St. Genevieve, virgin,
pray for us.**



January Sunday

Solemnity of Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

JESUS: OUR POWER BEYOND ALL MAGIC

As I was switching through the local TV channels a few days before the celebration of the Chinese New Year, all the morning talk shows featured renowned “feng shui” masters. Each one tried to to attract viewers and TV hosts with their fearless forecasts for the coming year and with their confident prescriptions about lucky charms that were supposed to be a “must” for the year. Then I remembered the quotation from the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner printed in one of the Christmas greeting cards a Jesuit friend gave me. Its messages goes something like this: We have the “Name of Jesus” over our doors as we cross from one year to another. The “Name of Jesus” is enough for us and should give us confidence as we face another year.

This Sunday, our last big feast for Christmas before we cross over to the grind of the ordinary times, underlines precisely the “Epiphany” or the “Manifestation of the

Lordship of Jesus to All.” The Gospel tells us how the chief priests and the scholars among the Jews studied the coming of the Messiah as the focal point of the prophetic utterances. The Gospel likewise narrates how pagan astrologers and their study of the planets and stars in relation to human affairs pointed them to Jesus in Bethlehem. Somebody gave me a classic picture of the “Adoration of the Magis.” It shows a procession of weird-looking, multi-racial sages prostrating and leaving their gifts at the feet of Jesus who

is held by the Blessed Mother. This picture reminds me that all human studies and all wisdom on divinity and spirituality should lead us to Jesus who is Wisdom the Word Incarnate.

So many sages, so many wisdom books written, so many philosophies, but one fact remains: After 2,000 years, the Bible is still the best-selling book of all times.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Retrace your journey to Jesus. How did you come to recognize Him as your “Alpha and Omega?” What great learning and realization have you had with Jesus as “guru?”

Enthroned a meaningful picture of Jesus in your private room as a manifestation of your allegiance in Him.

Lord Jesus, may we learn to recognize that You alone have the power to transform our lives from here to there, from a life of mediocrity to a full life in You.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us.

WORDS LIGHT US UP

One of my good friends, a contemporary in high school, once fetched me for an appointment. Throughout our one-hour ride on her brand new car, her youngest son showed off his “newly-acquired” ability to recognize letters and read words. As the proud mother kept affirming her son’s struggling reading ability with basic words that he saw on signages and billboards along EDSA, I observed how the boy’s face would light up everytime he was able to successfully make out what the letters and the words meant.

As Jesus commenced His Galilean ministry, He went around teaching and proclaiming. The Gospel reading today, quoting the prophet Isaiah, comments that Jesus’ words were “a great light” for people who sit in darkness.

How can words light us up?

● **Words enlighten and explain.** It is with words that instructions are made and with these, comprehension becomes possible.

With these, persons are equipped for their various tasks.

● **Words enliven and inspire.** We share wisdom, realizations, wit, jokes and light moments with words. With these, we evoke laughter, relaxation and fellowship among us.

● **Words encourage.** We communicate our learning experiences and faith-experiences with our eloquence in words. With these, we prop up the hope and the basic goodness in people’s hearts and minds.

● **Words express.** Feelings and sincere thoughts need words to

be shared and, once shared, we lighten up with the feeling of release, reconciliation and even healing.

● **Words emancipate.** We communicate demands and challenges; we voice out expectations and frustrations with words. With gentleness and prudence, our words can become a bridge for the blossoming of mutual trust and goodwill.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What words of wisdom and wit shared by other persons ring loudly in your heart and mind until now?

How have you positively helped and molded another person with your words? How does this make you feel?

Resolve to persist in making the Word of God a part of your daily experience.

Lord Jesus, we pray that through our words, we may be able to build up one another. Guard our tongues so that we may not utter any word that will put other people down.

**St. John Neumann, bishop,
pray for us.**

A TRUE DISCIPLE NEVER LETS OTHERS GO EMPTY-HANDED

Phobias come in different forms. Some persons have “claustrophobia” (fear of being enclosed); others battle “acrophobia” (fear of heights). In the Gospel, the disciples seemed overwhelmed and even fearful of the crowd that had gathered to hear Jesus speak. More fearful were they of the possibility that they had to be responsible for feeding such a big crowd. So when it was getting late, they approached Jesus and advised Him to dismiss the crowd *“so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”* The business-minded and mathematically gifted among them calculated that they would need *around two hundred days’ wages worth of food* to feed the crowd.

The way Jesus reacted was interesting. He said: “Give them some food yourselves.” When the disciples brought up to Him the possible expense for

feeding the people, Jesus said: “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” Jesus seemed to say: do not be afraid to be involved. See, feel, act. Christian duty does not expect us to answer for all the needs, but we are asked to do what we can. Only, we should never turn down people. At the very least, anyone who approach us should feel listened to, loved and respected.

The Book of Revelation reminds us that Jesus is “The Amen, the

faithful and true witness” (3:14). Jesus is the “Yes” of God. The story of His coming as man in the Mystery of the Incarnation was His first unconditional “Yes” to us. Later, St. Paul eloquently explains that “God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The Cross, indeed, is Jesus’ continuing “Yes” to us all.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Think of your experiences in life now... and try to see which events/situations of your present life challenge you to apply the Gospel message.

What personal and particular struggles do you have whenever you are challenged to help people materially and financially? Pray about this to the Lord.

Lord Jesus, grant us the courage to be involved and not be afraid when our Christian duty demands that we give and do more than what is comfortable for us.

Blessed Andre Bessette, religious, pray for us.

OUR GOD-EXPERIENCE CAN BE DANGEROUS

The disciples' reaction to Jesus' act of walking towards them as they were tossed about in a storm at sea, merits our close examination. Biblicists say that the fear of the disciples is one that supports the classic theory of a "theophany." They say that Jesus, by walking over the waters, revealed Himself as someone who shares the power and divinity of the Father, since in the Old Testament the sole powers over the waters was one of Yahweh-God. Yahweh alone walked over the primordial waters in Genesis 1:1-2, and with this He initiated the creation of the universe. Yahweh alone made the waters swell and subside during the time of Noah. Yahweh alone parted the Red Sea to enable the Israelites to cross on dry land. In all these revelatory acts of Yahweh, the Bible recorded the standard reaction of fear and trembling among the people.

Beyond the biblical theory of a "theophany," the fear

of the disciples continue to puzzle us. The terror that the disciples experienced, I believe, was rooted not in Jesus but in themselves. The Gospel narration says they still lacked understanding and had not really internalized their discipleship. Perhaps a good number of them followed Jesus because it made them feel good to be identified with a fast-rising, young preacher. The storm at sea exposed their limits, their collective hang-up.

What happened in the Gospel

can become our experience, too. When we initially touch God's presence and God touches us with His grace, we rejoice. But as our experience of God deepens, He allows us to see our limits, our inner conflicts and issues, our favorite sins and our immaturities. God allows us to enter the "Dark Night" of storms so that we may get to know and allow Him to purify us.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

In what ways have you experienced God's presence as "disturbing"? Why were you particularly disturbed?

What issues/limits/personal conflicts and realities of life did God allow you to experience, own and resolve through your prayer life?

Reflect on this: God does not change our lives; He only transforms us.

Lord Jesus, grant us the courage to face ourselves, our limits, our inner conflicts and issues, our favorite sins. May we allow ourselves to be purified so that we may follow You without fear.

**St. Raymond of Peñafort,
Confessor, pray for us.**

GOD'S WORD IS ALWAYS INTERACTIVE

The wonders of multimedia have made it possible for us to be present to people in various places, and in various time zones on “real time.” In this new culture of communication — through written texts, SMS or short texts, MMS or hypertexts, chatrooms, video conferences, VoIP — we become present at the same time to different places. In all of these, our words (at least) carry our presence.

In our Gospel today, Jesus also tried to educate the people that God’s Word is a “living word” that communicates His presence to whomever it is proclaimed. The people referred to God’s Word as “the scroll.” In fact, thrice in the Gospel narration, God’s Word was called “the scroll” — some kind

of an archaic, dilapidated, historical document. Jesus amazed the crowd when He said: God’s Word is not just a historical manuscript... it continues to have life. He also said: “Today this scripture (this written scroll) is fulfilled (is acted upon)...”

We should read Scriptures, then, not only to know how God worked in the past with Israel and with the early Christians. We should read Scriptures to let us contemplate God’s face now. The foremost value of Scriptures is to enable us to fix our gaze on God, on Jesus... and then, to lead us to enter into “real time” conversation with

God who becomes present to us not in abstract thought, but through a real story.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What is your purpose in reading the Bible?

Try this out: Read a Gospel story. Imagine the story. Contemplate on Jesus as He is revealed in the story. Enter into the story by taking on the role of one of the characters in it. Then dialogue with Jesus.

Lord Jesus, inspire me to read Your Word daily and allow it to take root in my soul. May Your Word be my guide in life.

**St. Severinus of Noricum,
Hermit, pray for us.**

WE WISH... GOD WILLS...

I am drawn to reflect on the different ways of talking that the leper and Jesus manifested in the Gospel passage. The leper, feeling timid and with a self-confidence that was possibly eroded by his illness and his disfigurement, came to Jesus and, with an air of tentativeness, said: “Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.” In contrast, Jesus stretched out His hand with deliberateness and He proclaimed: “I do will it. Be clean.”

Indeed, human nature is flippant, always changing, unsure, tentative... because we are not only taken aback by our faults and sins.

Our view is rather restricted and limited. Therefore, when we speak, we speak with consciousness about tenses – past, present, and future. God is eternal, all-knowing, and is therefore firm and absolute. He moves not with wishes, whims or caprices but with a will.

In our life, plans and decisions, we may have our *wishes* and *wouldn't*... but it is always very important to be guided by the Divine Will. The Divine Will may not always be pleasant and agreeable for us. It may include certain things which we want least to happen. This Divine Will, however, is rock. *Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Reflect on instances in your life when your wishes were contrary to what finally happened. How did you take the turn of these events? Were you able to transcend your negative feelings? What Divine Wisdom did you discover behind each turn of events?

Make this your prayer-word today: “Your Will be done.”

St. Adrian of Canterbury, Abbot, pray for us.

JESUS WANTS US TO BE HIS BEST MAN

My youngest sister decided to marry her workmate, an Indian Malaysian whom she met in the course of her work as a trainer in a cruise ship company. They decided to have rites for mixed marriage because they thought that it would be best for both families. My sister comes from a devout Catholic family and I, her brother, happens to be a religious priest. Her man's family, on the other hand, belongs to a family of Brahmins. Her man's grandfather, in fact, was a Hindu priest. For the peace of all, we had a Catholic rite celebrated at the Ermita Church, with me as presider and solemnizer. After a couple of weeks, our family went to Malaysia to witness the Hindu wedding.

My brother-in-law, a silent and ever-smiling fellow, decided that I be his "best man" in the Hindu rite. While the ceremony was going on, I realized that in the eastern wedding rite, the best man practically carried out all the significant acts, such as putting on the rings on the toes of

my brother-in-law, and preparing the flower petals, coconut milk and water near the dais where the wedding was to take place. I guided my brother-in-law to his place at the dais. I sat by his side while the Hindu priest chanted the preliminary rituals. When all was set, after about half an hour, my sister in her beautiful bridal dress came in. Then I stood by the side of the couple throughout the rites and later, led them to the shrine for offerings.

My role in the Hindu wedding makes me now appreciate what John the Baptist says in the Gospel: that he is the best man of Jesus and that he had now to decrease while Christ increases. As best man, his job was to prepare the bride and the bridegroom

for the wedding, and to ensure that the wedding proceeds well.

As Christians, we all are best men for Jesus the bride. We have to do our share so that His union with the Church, and with humanity becomes more and more a reality.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Are you doing your share so that others may come to know the beauty of a relationship with Jesus? Who are the persons whom you have helped introduce and be "married to" Jesus?

Make this your prayer-word today: "Jesus, may You increase while I decrease."

**St. William of York, Bishop,
pray for us.**

Isaiah 55:1-11 (or Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7)
Isaiah 12:2-3, 4b-c-d, 5-6 (3)
(or Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 9-10)
1 John 5:1-9 (or Acts 10:34-38)
Mark 1:7-11

January
Sunday

11

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

SECURITY IN THE FATHER

I am the only son in a family of three siblings. I am also the eldest and my father's junior.

My father passed on to me a lot of his practical skills. When I was young, he encouraged me to learn these and learn them fast. My father taught me basic things, such as crossing busy streets. He taught me to first survey the street – left and right – then make a careful decision: Can I cross the street faster than the speed of the approaching vehicle?

My father also taught me how to flag down a taxi. He advised me to sit next to the driver so I could direct the driver where to turn. Later, my father let me do carpentry work with him. Then, he also coached me as I was learning how to balance myself in a bicycle. My father was the source of my great confidence while growing up and I thank God for giving me such a wonderful man to grow up with.

Jesus, in His whole earthly life, also got a lot of His strength and confidence from His "Heavenly Father." In fact, this was a radical

part of His life and His teaching: revealing to everyone that God is not just "Yahweh" but "Abba." Before He embarked on His three-year public ministry of preaching and healing, He sought baptism at the Jordan and there the Father affirmed Him as the "beloved Son." Later on, before Jesus made His final ascent to Jerusalem, He went up the mountain where again the voice of the Father is heard: "This is my Son on whom I am well pleased..."

On the cross, Jesus would hang on in unquestioned fidelity as He again called on God as "Father..."

Many people these days miss their fathers which has become a handicap. Some are missed because they work abroad to make both ends meet. Others are missed because they have neglected their role as fathers, preferring instead to be with friends and with some other women. As a result, many children of this age have very poor self-image and very low tolerance for challenges and pain.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What fond memories do you have about your father? What good things have these memories done to you? Take the time to thank God for the gift of your father.

Slowly pray the "Our Father" (Lord's Prayer). Then... just sink into prayer with the phrase – "Our Father." At this point, lift up to God all your cares and anxieties, and allow His peace and strength to envelop you.

St. Victorian, Abbot,
pray for us.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

GOD'S WEIRD SENSE OF TIME

Consider the details of the Gospel passages: John the Baptist is arrested and imprisoned... Jesus disturbs Simon and Andrew while the brothers cast their nets into the waters... Jesus walks and calls James and John away from their father and the hired men. All these, Mark says, signify God's best time — "the time of fulfillment."

The Bible contains many other references to God's strange sense of time: Abraham and Sarah finally had their own son when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was past the normal child-bearing age. Moses was allowed to waste 40 years of his life in the court of Pharaoh while Israel languished in forced labor. He was later to

spend another 40 years on the run in the desert. Then at the age of 80, Moses finally leads Israel out of Egypt. After Malachi, God sent no prophets to Israel for around 400 years, and when John the Baptist came, his mission was cut short by Herod's sword. Finally, Jesus came — as the awaited Messiah. He spends 30 years of hidden life, and He dedicates just the last three years of His earthly mission for preaching about the Kingdom.

I believe that this is one great challenge about following God: to synch with His plans and timetable, we need to have either patience (lots of patience) or a never-ending sense of humor.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Go back to your adventures of time and timing with God. What are your unforgettable experiences in this regard? In what ways have you experienced that God's time — no matter how it initially appeared strange — always turns out to be the "best time" for you, for your work, for your relationship?

Lord Jesus, make me sensitive to Your time, to be always aware that my time isn't necessarily Your time. Grant me patience to wait for the perfect time for the unfolding of Your plans in my life.

***St. Benedict of Biscop, Bishop,
pray for us.***

TRUE AUTHORITY COMES FROM AUTHENTICITY

I believe that God's great gift for persons are also persons who inspire, teach, correct and empower. One person whom I consider as God's gift in my walk as a priest and as a religious was a Pauline nun, Sr. Lucina Sarmiento. Before she died of cancer, she was one of those considered an authority in the field of Catholic mass media apostolate. It was, however, noteworthy that her being referred to as an "authority" happened even if she claimed she never had any formal education on media apostolate. In the course of one of our light conversations, she even said that there were other nuns in her community who had better training in television, in cinema and other media technology.

Jesus Himself is referred to as a "different authority" compared to the scribes and the Pharisees. These people had formal and arduous training, and many of them even descended

from a bloodline of and were ordained to be scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was self-made. Compared to many of them, Jesus was probably half their age.

So where does authority come? Some have authority because of their *learning*; others possess authority by virtue of their *position* and *office*. Some have authority because of relationships or connections with those in *power*; others are perceived to be an authority because of their *practical wisdom* and *experience*. But

the strongest authority flows from *integrity* and *uprightness*: one that flows from the convergence of one's words and actions. Others refer to this as credibility. This is marked by a combination of deep qualities — such as passion, authenticity and dedication. This authority is earned, not bought; freely bestowed and recognized by others, not simply claimed for oneself.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Reflect on persons whom you consider to be authorities. Why do you see them as authorities?

The Bible speaks of three authorities: priests (religious authorities), prophets (moral authorities), kings (political leaders). The renowned Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner says, "Christians have to be, above all, prophets." In what way can you be a moral leader in your own circle of friends and sphere of influence?

Lord Jesus, may my words and actions be rooted in You, the True Authority of my life.

**St. Hilary, Bishop and Doctor,
pray for us.**

LISTENING CANNOT BE UNLIMITED

As Jesus entered the house of Peter, He manifested His great sensitivity to the family of His disciple. He empathized with them, and this led Him to go and heal the mother-in-law of Peter. Jesus' humanity made Him feel the pains and discomforts of the sick people who came to Him and so He went on healing everyone who came with various diseases even when it was already evening. When He woke up the next day, though, He found His quiet place with "Abba" and when Peter came to Him with the words "Everyone is looking for you," Jesus responded by telling him that it was time to stop and move on to other places.

Jesus teaches us that it is good to listen, to have a heart, to empathize. It is good to be open to people's groans and to hear out

their complaints. However, we should also know how to discern and discriminate: when to stop and listen, and when to move on; where to listen, and where not to listen; whom to listen to, and whom not to listen to. The disciples seek one approval: God's and not men's.

As we prepare to meet different persons every day, let us make it a part of our morning prayers to ask for God's wisdom in all our encounters. Yes, we should have a preferential love for the poor and the needy, but we should also know that the poor and the needy can be manipulative, demanding and unreasonable. Our charity should not create in us and in them a culture of dependency. *Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What practical measures do you use to put limits to your involvement with people's concern? Do you maintain a healthy balance between your public and private lives, between your ministry and your need for solitude?

Lord Jesus, help me to be sensitive to my own need for solitude and self-care. Help me to find my own nourishment in You because only then will I be able to effectively care for the people You send to me.

**St. Felix of Nola, Confessor,
pray for us.**

THE WORKS OF THE SPIRIT ARE SUBJECT TO US

Personal choice and reason are two wonderful gifts that God never cancelled out in our human person, even after the fall of the first man and woman. This shows how much God loves and respects our human individuality, even when the first man and woman used their gifts of reason and choice to go against Him. Authentic life in the Spirit of God sustains every man's freedom and intellect. The Holy Spirit, even as He possesses us, does not cripple our being. In fact, true giftedness in the Spirit of God enhances human freedom and understanding. The Apostle Paul wrote about this in his first letter to the Corinthians (14:32.33.37): "Indeed, the spirits of prophets are under the prophets' control, since he is not the God of disorder but of peace... If anyone thinks that he is a prophet or a spiritual person, he should recognize that what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord..."

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and it blooms in persons truly

touched by God's presence. The leper in the Gospel surely had his joy overflowing. He was not just restored to a handsome human appearance. The leper, long separated from society and from his family because of the skin disease (cf. Leviticus 13:46), now goes back to normal interaction with family and friends. But Jesus wants the healed man to contain his joy. Biblicists say Jesus did not want to be known as just a wonder worker. His wonder works were meant to authenticate His greater mission: that He has come as the Messiah. Further, Jesus wanted to be able to move around freely to preach and teach. Jesus did not

want to be recognized simply on His own merit. He wanted to be known as the Yahweh's ambassador.

Genuine and sound spiritual life is not built on sporadic and instantaneous healings, miracles or visions. We need to nurture everything with constant prayer, patient endurance and everyday faithfulness.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:
Have you experienced the overflowing and overwhelming touch of God's Spirit? How did you manage yourself and the event?

Are you one who easily reacts to spectacles of cure and miracles?

Lord Jesus, may my eyes remain focused on You rather than the wonders that You do in my life.

**Blessed Arnold Janssen,
pray for us.**

HOME FOR THE DISCIPLE: NO PERMANENT ADDRESS

In the Gospel of Luke (9:58ff), Jesus the Master frankly tells a would-be follower who was eager to follow Him wherever He goes: “Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Today’s Gospel narrates how, during the course of His Galilean Ministry, Jesus left the comforts of His nurturing home in Nazareth — the place of His hidden life for around 30 years — and He now spends His days moving around as an itinerant preacher and healer whose known “home” is Peter’s house in Capernaum. Later, when He goes to Jerusalem, He would lodge in Martha’s and Mary’s house in Bethany whenever He goes to the south. Jesus lived a restless life as He went about fulfilling the work of the Father.

The enthusiastic and committed follower of Jesus should be willing to have this experience, too.

I am particularly reminded about a number of foreign missionaries belonging

to the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) whom I came to know when I was studying and growing up in Paco, Manila. These tireless missionaries — many of them Belgian — nurtured what are now the Parish of San Fernando de Dilao and Paco Catholic School. They generously gave of their time and treasures to develop the parish and the school. Most known among them was Fr. Godo, the founder of the school. Many of the CICM missionaries considered the Philippines as their country and the parishes that they served as their home. They easily

learned Tagalog and the dialects of places they were assigned to. Fr. Godo, for instance, was well-loved by my maternal grandmother because he could hear her confession in Ilocano.

A good number of these CICM fathers died and are buried here. By the side of the old church in Pasig, they have their graves.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How open are you to go to new places, to assume new assignments, to meet new people, to learn a new language and to adjust to a new way of life?

Do you have the tendency to be attached to persons, places and things?

Lord Jesus, grant me a missionary heart so I may freely go to wherever You want to send me.

St. Marcellus I, Pope,
pray for us.

THE SIMPLE, THE SICK, THE POOR

February 23-24, 2008 — a weekend I will never forget. I did not finish the Mass for the priestly ordination of Fr. Lito Layug. Right after laying my hands on him as the Rite of Ordination prescribed, I left Makati to catch my 12:00 p.m. flight for Cotabato City. Upon arrival at the Cotabato City airport, I was fetched by enthusiastic parish lay workers of the Immaculate Conception Parish and brought to their place in Alamada, North Cotabato. For over a month, the entire parish had been preparing for the Healing Mass the next day, February 24 (Sunday). It was the first Healing Mass in the place, an idyllic town at the foot of the mountains. Fr. Ike, the pastor, told me that his parish covers 18 villages with 82 chapels, mostly accessible only by foot — by hiking, crossing narrow footbridges and climbing bamboo poles.

As early as 4:00 p.m. of February 23 (Saturday), many parishioners from upland villages

descended to the parish church for the Healing Mass, bringing their old and sickly folks. They spent the night in the cramped parish facilities, bringing along their food provisions. As early as 5:00 a.m. of the next day, they flocked to the Church and patiently awaited for the Healing Mass, the only Sunday Mass that day. After the multilingual Mass, we started the individual pray-over and finished by noon. Most folks stayed on and joined the Rosary prayer and the 45-minute praise and worship that followed. Their faces lighted up. Many came to kiss me and talk to me in dialects I felt and sensed but never fully understood. I am sure they felt Jesus' embrace for they came as they were — simple, unsophisticated, transparent, genuine and so easy to love.

I then realized why Jesus loved to spend more time with the simple and sinful flock — the tax collectors and those looked down upon by the Jewish authorities.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Who are the people you love to be with? Why? What makes them attractive to you?

Do you also have a genuine human and Christian love for the sick, the sinners and the poor? What do you feel deep inside you when you are with them?

Lord Jesus, grant me a genuine love for the poor, the sick and the sinners in our midst. Help me to be Your presence to them.

**St. Anthony, Abbot,
pray for us.**

THE STO. NIÑO: A POPULAR DEVOTION WITH A SOCIAL CHALLENGE

While on vacation in the United States, after attending the annual Religious Booksellers' Trade Exhibit in Chicago, I enjoyed my late breakfast while viewing the Maury Show. It has a segment that features children whose biological links are put to question by the known father or mother. This situation developed as the men or women — in relationships that are without the blessings of a formal civil or church marriage — accuse each other of infidelity. The show tries to help solve the issue by subjecting the suspected “adulterous partners” to DNA tests that are later matched with the DNA of the children in question. Under the guise of helping regularize the situation, the program, I believe, has reduced the poor children into helpless pawns of quarrelsome, self-centered and irresponsible adults who are only after their own pleasure and comfort.

The Gospel today underlines the same thing: the children were regarded as “nothing”

during the time of Jesus. They were considered as beings without any juridical rights. This bias conditioned even the manner with which the apostles responded to the presence of the children.

The Feast of the Sto. Niño invites us to reflect on the importance of the infancy of Jesus who, in becoming Incarnate, chose to grow in wisdom and in age as normal children do. As we celebrate with lavishness and clothe with extravagance the various images of the Sto. Niño, we should hear the echo of Jesus' words: “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me...” (cf. Mark 9:37).

Let us reflect on our response to the basic rights of children:

1. Children deserve homes with a true family spirit.
2. The best gifts for children are fathers who truly love and honor their mothers.
3. Children have a right to enjoy a wonderful world.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What personal value has the devotion to the Sto. Niño for you? What social problems and issues about children are you aware of? Take time to pray for children whose sad fate have come to your experience.

Lord, grant me compassion so I may care for children the way You do.

**St. Margaret of Hungary,
pray for us.**

PERSONS ARE MULTI-MEDIA

I think I have enough of so-called spiritual renewal speakers and priests who, in an effort to make their audience laugh, paint caricatures of simple people's acts of religiosity. One priest makes fun of an old woman bent with osteoporosis who would approach the image of St. Roque after her daily Mass. She would reach out with her handkerchief, but succeed only in devoutly wiping the feet of the saint and his dog. Then in a very audible tone she would ask the saint's help for her aching legs. I heard someone make fun of how a person lights a candle in Baclaran and then prays with moving lips and closed eyes while tinkling her rosary beads... while all the time, Mass was going on.

The point that Jesus raises in the Gospel today is simple. Fasting, prayers, almsgiving and all forms of religious acts are not meant to be carried out in precise, technical and mechanical ways. The

Roman Missal, the big red book with ribbons that the priests and bishops use to guide them in the Eucharist prayers, has cues when and how the ordained minister ought to make his gestures. These cues on how the ordained minister must conduct himself are called rubrics. Now let me say this: God, for sure, is more interested in what goes on inside the human hearts than in the rubrics. Hence, fasting should not be a mere exercise of deprivation from food. It should focus more on the heart's longing for something

more than the physical food... and that is the presence of the groom: Jesus.

It is not our business to judge people's expressions of faith and religiosity. For all we know, their acts, no matter how simplistic, really express what is deep within them. As such, their rather naïve ways of praying may mean more than our studied, theologized and liturgically-sound rituals and ceremonies.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are your usual expressions of prayer and religiosity? What makes you do these "expressions?"

What rites and traditions does your church have that prove to be a challenge or an obstacle even to your deeper understanding of God and true faith? Why?

Yes, Lord, I sometimes join the so-called "pious" ones and judge and condemn others. That is not what You want me to do. Help me to become a more compassionate healer than be a harsh, hypocritical judge.

**St. Canute, King and Martyr,
pray for us.**

THE FIRST NORM OF MORALITY: UPHOLDING THE DIGNITY OF EACH PERSON

Pope John Paul II contributed greatly in the collapse of communist regimes in Poland, Russia, East Germany and other parts of Eastern Europe. A native of Poland, he came to know about the excesses of totalitarian regimes through his own hometown experiences. However, the 1997 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, promulgated under his pontificate, teaches that "...the choice of the political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free choice of the citizens. The diversity of political regimes is morally acceptable provided they serve the legitimate good of the communities that adopt them...and...the fundamental rights of persons..." (#1902). In short, the Church espouses no specific political system. The evils of communism do not necessarily make democracy the best form of governance. The abuses of state-controlled economies do not make free

capitalist states the ideal.

In whatever system, the important thing is to safeguard and enhance the dignity of the person, whatever may be the individual's gender, creed, culture or party affiliation. Jesus underscores this in the Gospel today — that the authenticity of various religious traditions is measured in this: no religion can be true if its being truly God-centered is not coupled with a concern for the good of every person. In the Judeo-Christian religious movement, the

creation story of the Old Testament stresses the creation of man and woman as the high point of the creation of heaven and earth. The New Testament underlines Jesus' choice to be born as one among humanity.

Some religious associations (even Catholic ones) may become cruel in their teachings and practices if they do not keep this in mind.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFECTION QUESTION:

Do the prayerful traditions and religious disciplines of your group respect the uniqueness of each person's capacities and needs, even as these underline the need for "oneness of mind and heart?" How compassionate are you with persons who may differ with their ways and rites?

Lord Jesus, guard my heart against being too judgmental of other persons. May my heart always see the value and dignity of each person.

**Sts. Fabian and Sebastian,
Popes and Martyrs,
pray for us.**

SILENT MOMENTS ARE SACRED TIMES OF REVELATION

We live in a culture of communication. No generation has ever experienced leaps and bounds in the development of communications technologies than ours. Cellular phones evolved from analog models to GSM and 3G models, from dual band to triband with wi-fi capabilities. Our computer processors have turned from word processor models to high-speed gadgets for global interconnection. In a way, the speed with which communication has overtaken our world — from communication as essentially being technology, to communication as culture — has also trained our senses to process words, graphics, sounds and videos in an interactive rather than simply linear way of comprehension.

The Gospel today, however, makes us focus on another aspect of communication: the “space” called “silence.” The narration points out

that it was after “they (the critics) remained silent” that Jesus healed the man with the withered hand. The silence of the critics communicated to Jesus that after they have said a lot of things against Him and His ways on the Sabbath, these people were mouthing words. But the essential meaning of Sabbath they did not grasp. The mandatory cessation from work decreed by Moses was for people to recover their health and strength for the morrow.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How do you react when you encounter silence in groups or in persons? Do you tend to respect the silence? Or do you move to break the silence soonest? What makes you do this?

Are there moments in life when you also turn silent? What personal feelings and experience do you prefer to communicate in silence?

Lord Jesus, teach me to love moments of silence so I can truly hear You.

**St. Agnes, Virgin and Martyr,
pray for us.**

Silence is pregnant with meanings. It could mean submission and tacit agreement, or a state of deliberation and discernment leading to a final choice. It could be a moment of prayer, or an acknowledgment of guilt and surrender. It could mean emptiness and loneliness.

Let us respect the silence that persons may opt to have in their relationship with us. Let us learn to understand persons in their words and in their silence.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

BEWARE OF THE FAITHFUL!

When I celebrated my first year in the priesthood, someone gave me an interesting gift: a white t-shirt printed with the figure of Jesus whose hands are shown stretching out. Underneath the icon of Jesus are words of supplication which read “Jesus, protect me from Your followers.” Whenever I wore that t-shirt, people asked me what the message meant. I had trouble trying to rationalize what the interesting words in the shirt meant.

This year, without me being too aware of it, I realize I have been a priest for 21 years. And the words printed on the t-shirt has become clearer. Danger in the priesthood does not come from outsiders or people who have no interest in priests. Danger in the priesthood is normally occasioned by people who are within the parishes and various Catholic organizations. It is they who quarrel over

priests, often comparing their old favorite pastors with the newly installed well-intentioned ones. It is they who watch every priest’s move — with the zeal of being “vigilantes against sin.” It is they who are oftentimes unforgiving with the priest’s human imperfections. It is among them that avid fans also arise: persons who demand a lot of the priest’s time and affection, to the point of suffocation.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Have you ever experienced “being crushed” by people you minister to or people you minister with? What happened? How did you manage to rise from the experience?

How is your relationship with priests and pastors? What are oftentimes your expectations of them? How do you show your support for them?

Let your priest/pastor share about his experiences and try to empathize with him.

Lord Jesus, help me to understand other people’s need to keep distance some of the time.

St. Vincent, Deacon and Martyr, pray for us.

Meditating on the Gospel today, we find that Jesus — to a certain extent — felt the same way about the crowd around Him. The Gospel states that Jesus feared being crushed by the crowd, so He asked His disciples to provide Him the safety of a boat from where He could preach. Jesus appreciated the need to keep a healthy distance from the demanding horde. In fact, Jesus would many times escape from the crowd and spend moments of solitude in prayer.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

SALVATION: NOT SIMPLY AN INDIVIDUAL AND PERSONAL AFFAIR

Pope Benedict XVI's second encyclical is entitled "Spe Salvi" (Saved in Hope). Ever reflective of the experiences of humanity the world over, the Pope observed that hope and the ability to hope are now a challenge for us. In our time, we realize how worldly things that made us hope — science, technology, medicine, socio-political structures — have their own limitations and bankruptcies. He teaches that more than ever, we realize there is no better hope than salvation: our personal belief in Jesus Christ who shows us God's power over sin and death.

Strongly based on Jesus, salvation is not something that makes us individually devoted to Jesus. Jesus' Gospel reveals to us that He lived and preached a life that is "being for others." Jesus then rebuked the purely pietistic and deeply individual way of religiosity. The Holy Father, at one point of the encyclical, explained how St.

Augustine, after his conversion, wanted to be simply a prayerful and repentant monk. Yet, he was prevailed upon to accept ordination which paved the way for him to serve the Christian community as a bishop. St. Augustine, obviously Pope Benedict's favorite, could not ignore the fact that many people around him needed to be touched by the Gospel through his humble words and works. The hungry had to be fed, the ignorant needed to be taught and instructed and the lost needed to be guided.

In one instance in another Gospel, Jesus — while He is the true light — says that we are to be the light of the world. Discipleship is not membership to a fans club, but a mission partnership with Jesus who came to this world to bring us all back to the Father. His aim was not to save individuals but to call forth a people for the Father. The seed of the Kingdom is a community.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What needs of people around you challenge your way of Christian life? How do you respond to these needs?

Make it a point to intercede for your community's needs in your prayer time.

Lord Jesus, help me to live a life that includes a concern for other people and not just for my own and my family's needs.

Blessed Henry Seuse, pray for us.

“KARMA” IS UN-CHRISTIAN!

“Karma.” This is an expression that many of our people use to explain their motivation to do good and to be good to others. Unknown to many, the concept of “Karma” is un-Christian (that is, not Gospel-based), and un-Filipino. The culture and the philosophy behind “Karma” is Hindu and Buddhist. Deeply considered, what “Karma” espouses is a teaching of “conditioned goodness.” That is, I do the good things I do with a somewhat selfish personal motive — that others may return the goodness, or that life may reward my goodness even more.

Jesus in His Gospel, on the other hand, stresses doing good even if others do not. In fact, Jesus gave His life for us while we were yet sinners. Jesus went about doing good even to the soldiers who came to arrest Him. He restored the severed ear of one of them. Emphatically, Jesus taught in the Sermon on

the Mount: “... For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? ... And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?” (cf. Matthew 5:46-48).

Healthy living, I believe, is more than “Karma” living. Our numerous human experiences tell us that although we are helpful, many more will be those who will

criticize and malign us. Some will malign us because we help persons whom they may perceive as undeserving. Others will criticize us because our goodness challenges their own brand of goodness. Healthy living then is a readiness to face life for what it really is — that life is a harvest of ungratefulness. To this, we always add the Christian prescription of forgiveness and letting go.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Beginning today, resolve to delete “Karma” from your usual way of explaining your goodness.

A prayer by St. Ignatius of Loyola: “Take and receive, O Lord, my liberty. Take all my will, my mind, my memory. All things I hold and all I own are thine. Thine was the gift to thee I all resign. Do Thou direct, govern all and sway. Do what Thou wilt command and I obey. Only Thy grace, Thy love on me bestow. This makes me rich, all else will I forego.”

Lord Jesus, make my heart pure so that I will do good deeds without expecting any reward or goodness from others.

St. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor, pray for us.

BUILDING THE KINGDOM: AN INTER-GENERATIONAL CONCERN

I joined a father of a family in celebrating another passage of a year in his life. While we were celebrating with food and drinks aplenty, he proudly told all the guests that the year for him has been extra gracious. He claimed that he received the best gift he ever could dream of: his only son, whose birthday was also forthcoming, just passed the engineering board exams, the same one he himself managed to pass years ago. The proud father said he now has the confidence that his son will carry on with what he has courageously started in the family business.

The Almighty Father works out His plan for the universe in the same way. First, He raised up the patriarchs: Abraham,

Isaac, Jacob and their children. Then He sent the prophets who interacted with the kings in building up Israel as the Chosen People. John the Baptist came. The Gospel story says that after John, Jesus began His most important ministry as the

Only Son sent by the Father. The Gospel goes on to tell us that Jesus also selected the first disciples whom He trained to be the next “fishers of men.”

The rationale for the generations is not to simply have a mere continuation of tasks. Rather, each generation is to build on — in a taller way, a better way — what the forefathers have established. Each generation has a valuable contribution in the grand plan. Each generation is this important.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Reflecting on events and developments in your family, what unique contribution does your generation make in the family's history?

In your community or in your parish, try to appreciate the previous generations of volunteers who made valuable contributions to advance the community and/or parish.

Spend some time in your prayer in lifting up to God the new and forthcoming generations in your family, in your company, in your community and in your Christian groups. Pray for God's protection and anointing for the persons concerned.

Lord Jesus, help me to do my humble part in building Your Kingdom on earth. I thank You for the work of the past generations in strengthening the Church as it is now.

St. Paul, Apostle, pray for us.

WILL POWER

Last year, the Archdiocesan Office of Exorcism in Manila conducted a “first” seminar on deliverance and exorcism for priests and religious. The resource person, a priest from the Diocese of Rome, shared his experiences that highlight the relevance of spiritual warfare in our age. While demonstrating that the power of the devil and his minions is not simply superstition but reality, the Italian cleric however strongly said that we should never be paralyzed by fear of the devil. The devil and his cohorts are fallen angels whose powers and abilities could never be greater than God’s.

The devil loves to harass men and women because they envy our unique dignity as the image and likeness of God. They harass us through temptations. They try to let our faith waiver by their infestation of places

that can render us fearful. They try to shake our trust in God even more by way of obsession through which they can make us suffer physical and emotional illnesses. And they also try to overcome us with their threat of possession.

We can gain strength from the truth that God is the One and Only Creator whose power is truly Absolute over all. We must also draw our strength in this truth: no one can enter the house, as the Gospel proclaims, unless he ties up the master of the house first. The devil and

his minions cannot do anything to us if we resist with all our God-given will.

The Italian exorcist also said that sinning is worse than possession because to commit sin is actually opening the door of one’s life for the devil to come with the person’s will and gusto.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How strong is your ability to control yourself? How good are you at saying “no” to certain things — even good things — that come to you in life?

Which of these things have you found most helpful in sustaining your will power to do good: Prayer? Fasting? Being with others in community?

Which of these have a strong influence in your thoughts and actions? Family expectations? Pressure from friends? Demands of school or work? Dialogue with Jesus about your realization.

Lord Jesus, help me to anchor my will to Your Will so that I may not let the evil one enter my life.

St. Timothy and Titus, Bishops, pray for us.

THE STRONG BOND OF FAITH

We have many times heard the saying that “blood is thicker than water.” These words of wisdom tell us that there is nothing that could rival natural family affinity in binding persons. It is to the family that we go back to so that we may find our life’s bearing amidst life’s ups and downs. Our family is always our haven, our refuge, our reference point.

Going through life, though, we learn that not all family members and close blood relatives are reliable allies. Many times we have also heard how siblings go against each other in scandalous court cases. Serious political differences and ambitions brought bloodbath to persons who are supposedly of the same ancestry and lineage. In contrast, we hear how non-related couples who just met in Marriage Encounter weekends refer to one another as “Tito,” “Tita,” “Brother” or “Sister.” We witness how Christians who

meet in renewal groups, such as the charismatic movement, greet each other with sincere embraces of fraternal love and concern. Members of these Christian groups claim that their relationship with one another have made them even closer to each other compared to their not-so-casual relationships with their blood relations.

Indeed, our spiritual ties of faith in Jesus do not only make us come close to God in prayer. Necessarily, true faith builds up our friendships into deeper ties conditioned not by any financial or material considerations. Faith makes us more open to sincerely share our experiences, our trials and triumphs. Faith makes us more generous to give and receive, even beyond the guarantees of material resources. Faith makes it more possible for us to forgive and to ask forgiveness in the face of human frailties.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Count the persons who have become family to you, not by blood or marriage, but through faith in Jesus.

Even with persons who are related with you by blood, how has the gift of a common faith renewed in Jesus helped deepen your relations?

Lord Jesus, may my faith be strong enough to enable me to embrace sincerely my fraternal relationship with the rest of humanity.

**St. Angela Merici, Virgin,
pray for us.**

GENERATION ON THE GO

A well-known Japanese filmmaker made a very emphatic cinema about our culture by putting together without any commentary a collage of various daily scenes: people rushing through street crossings, trains churning with lightning speed, cars speeding up on freeways, elevators shooting up and down the building, etc. In the rush, everything seems reduced to being a component of a mechanical movement. Art, leisure, meditation and mysticism seem all lost.

Jesus is right. Seeds of wisdom and divine inspiration can do nothing in a “footpath” culture. The heart, under such condition, is busy pumping the needed biological sustenance for muscles and veins. The heart has no time to ponder.

Instead, note the divine rhythm that unfolds for us from Genesis:

- Evening came, and morning followed...
- On the seventh day God rested...

- After raining for 40 days and 40 nights, the rains stopped for 40 days and 40 nights... and dry land appeared during the time of Noah...

- After the slavery of 400 years, came the twilight Passover...

- After 50 days of journey from Egypt, the Israelites journeyed on a staggered basis to the Promised land for 40 years...

- Prophecy was silent in Israel for 400 years until John the Baptist appeared...

- Jesus waited for 30 years in hiddenness and silence, then He embarked on His public ministry for three years.

- After the intensity of Good Friday, there was darkness and the silence of the tomb that led to the Resurrection.

- After the Damascus experience, Paul spent three years of retreat in the desert of Arabia before he had his three mission journeys.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do you often hear yourself making a convenient alibi out of your being busy? What is the Lord telling you about this?

Meditate on this truth: When we are sick, all urgencies about work stop. Money, work, deadlines and people's demands all take a backseat.

Lord Jesus, help me to take the time to pause and let Your Spirit fill me and invigorate me for a more fruitful life.

St. Thomas Aquinas, Priest and Doctor, pray for us.

TRUTH IS TIMELESS

Working for truth and justice and for all other good causes can be frustrating. Many times, it may seem that luck and graces are on the side of evil. Evil men tend to prosper; the righteous ones suffer and are put to shame. Media men are silenced with bullets and facts are muzzled with money that comes from drug lords and gamblers. Church people are chided; corrupt people walk with unruffled brows in the corridors of power. These lead many to ask: Is there a God? If God is there, He seems too silent.

The Good News today reminds us never to despair. Truth is eternal and it is never altered although it is hidden. In due time — that is, God’s time — the truth will come out. Initially dubbed as Germany’s

charismatic leader, Hitler is now history’s ignominy while Maximilian Kolbe’s martyrdom is constantly recalled.

This world may seem to be the realm of the powerful and the crooked. Here they wallow in their influence, in their wealth. Soon though, we remember that this world is passing. Death comes; cancers strike, proud hearts burst in their arrogance. Eternity and light are God’s alone. Towards the conclusion of Pope Benedict’s “Spe Salvi,” he wrote, “This is our final school of hope — that in God there is judgment.” In that judgment, the Holy Father muses, “the victim and the victimizer will not recline at the banquet table side by side, as if nothing happened.”

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are your own personal pains and frustrations about issues of truth and justice in our own society? Re-read the Gospel text today and lift up to God your heart’s disappointments.

Take the time to pray for the following: innocent prisoners who languish in prison, political detainees, groups experiencing religious persecutions, persons marginalized by their own communities because of differences of ideas. For us all, pray for the renewal of hope.

Lord Jesus, strengthen my hope that in You there is judgment so that I may continue to walk in the right path despite the lure of material blessings if I walk the other way.

**Blessed Joseph Freinadimetz,
pray for us.**

GROWING IN GOD, GROWING WITH GOD — GROWING WITHOUT TRYING HARD

As I write these verses, I am about to celebrate 20 years of priesthood. I had no plans of celebrating, for I thought it would be better to celebrate later, when the silver anniversary comes around. Frankly, I also have not been keen about counting the years that passed by since that Easter Sunday morning that I received my priestly ordination. There was much to do in my assignments in the Society of Saint Paul and in my various priestly ministries. Hence, I lived each day and was content to face each day as it came. I dared not project myself too far into time; I dared not be bothered by schedules that are yet two or three months away. Each day was enough with its own concern and worries. I am just surprised that I have passed through

all — even the worst and the most grinding of days.

Our Gospel now invites us into this graceful and grace-filled way of living. Plant. Do your share. However, let God also have His own space and time. Never be overwhelmed. The world existed before us and it will move on without us.

Life is a gift to be savored, an adventure to be discovered. The best thing is to go with the rhythm. Way back our school days, we often heard the teacher say: “Finished or not finished, stop and pass the papers.”

Yes, spirituality is also about learning to let go with God and in God. Finished or not finished, stop and let God take control.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Evaluate the rhythm of your life. Do you get enough sleep and relaxation? Do you find it easy to sleep and relax? Why? Or why not?

Let this be your prayer today: “Lord God, give me the peace of not always having to know what is going to happen next. Help me to trust in You at all times. Amen.”

St. Martina, Virgin and Martyr, pray for us.

STORMS IN LIFE: SETTINGS FOR DIVINE ACTION

August 2007. I got bitten by a mosquito. At first, I treated the bite as I often did — with indifference. But this bite proved to be something else. It was stubborn and resistant to ointments and antibiotics. Swelling and infection developed and soon there was a gaping wound on my right feet, just above the ankle. The situation forced me to take my condition with seriousness. I went to a doctor who told me that my condition was aggravated by a high blood sugar level. Yes, what I had been fearing would happen had finally happened: my elevated sugar condition has now become a certified case of diabetes. I had to bear with the wound for almost four months. I had to go through a pilgrimage in Turkey and Greece, retracing the steps of the Apostle Paul, with my right leg in bandage. Finally, just before Christmas, I was just too glad to see the fresh and delicate skin that began to cover the wound. Many times, I found myself commenting:

“This is taking too long.”

The inconvenience I went through, though, also provided me with moments of surprises and realizations. First, I was forced to go and see a doctor and I began to take care of my health as truly a gift. Second, I marvel at how the Lord led me to expert medical people for my wound. In what I considered a stroke of Divine action, a good friend of mine showed up one day in the office to talk with me about a project. She noticed that I worked with my feet propped on a chair. When I explained to her my predicament, she arranged for me to see a doctor specializing in the management

of diabetic wounds through special gels and dressings, sans the usual painful operation which I was, by the way, being asked already to consider.

Yes, there are no accidents but all are “settings” being put together by the Divine Architect for His acts to be appreciated.

Fr. Domie Guzman, SSP

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What life experiences made you see more the greatness of God’s actions? Was it easy to have this attitude of faith at the start? Why?

Have you also used these words in your prayer moments: “It is taking too long, Lord, too long.”

Lord Jesus, help me to see the work of Your hands amidst the trials and sufferings that I have to endure in this life.

**St. John Bosco, Priest,
pray for us.**



AMAZING GRACE

At various times in the Gospels, we hear of Jesus entering into a synagogue and preaching. It was customary for the Jewish Rabbi to comment on the Scriptures, exhorting the people in the ways of God. Jesus, as it were, was the guest preacher who would often speak in the synagogue. The Rabbi would quote from that source or another, and bring out the treasures, both new and old, by expounding on a given topic.

Mark tells us that as Jesus taught, people were astonished. He didn't quote from this one or another but spoke as "one having authority." People were amazed at this grace in which He spoke. Of course we know, not like the people of old, that Jesus is the Son of God and He spoke the mind and will of God in all His preaching and teaching. To have the mind and heart of God is what we should always pray for. There will be times when we,

too, will be asked to give advice or counsel to someone. Without the help and guidance of the Spirit we will be merely noises and sounds, making no influence on those who listen to us. Isn't it strange that while some misunderstood the ways of Jesus and could not comprehend His teaching, let alone accept it, the demons shout at the top of their voice, "I know who you are!"?

We are told that His fame spread far and wide because of the way He taught — with authority. We have been given authority to live out our Christian life in faith and love. Through the grace of our baptism we have been anointed by the Holy Spirit and are able to speak and live in the authority of Jesus Himself. This is never something to boast about. This authority is a service to the people whom we associate with, an authority that is gentle and lowly, yet powerful because it comes from God. *Fr. Brian Steele, MGL*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

In my life, where do I hold position/s of authority and responsibility? Do I pray to the Lord to help me and guide me in using this authority given to me? Do I abuse the authority given to me as a Christian?

Lord, thank You for Your mercy and grace. Help me to speak Your word, to counsel those in need, to offer advice when asked of me in the power and authority of Your Spirit which is love. Amen.

**St. Brigid of Kildare, Virgin,
pray for us.**

Malachi 3:1-4
Psalm 24:7, 8, 9, 10
Hebrews 2:14-18
Luke 2:22-40

February
Monday

2

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

CONSECRATED TO THE LORD

Every year, we celebrate this wonderful feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

It was a Jewish custom whereby after 40 days, the parents would offer their firstborn to God as commanded in the laws of the Lord. It was an offering made to God, a thanksgiving for all gifts given to humanity by the Lord. I often wonder what was in the mind of Mary and Joseph as they heard these words spoken from the mouths of those holy people, Simeon and Anna, whom we hear about in the Gospel today.

The Presentation of the Lord is also a special day for those who live a consecrated life. It celebrates their lives given to God in service as priests and religious. It celebrates the light and life they manifest in the world today. Even though the feast we celebrate today is a Jewish custom, there is also something prophetic about it. Just as Mary and Joseph offered their Child to the Lord, the life of this Child will be an offering to God. On behalf of all humanity, 30-something years

later, He will present Himself to God on the gibbet of the Cross, revealing to all the love and glory of God.

Along with this feast, we also celebrate the coming of the Son of God into the Temple. Simeon and Anna were very conscious of this, in their prayers and prophecy. God had chosen to be a God-with-us, Emmanuel, which we celebrated in the season of Christmas. In this feast, we remember and celebrate a God who is always with us, who never abandons His people and a God of faithfulness and without deceit.

As we celebrate this feast, let us remember that we too have been consecrated, set apart for the glory of God. God has called us out of darkness into His own glorious light and we also must present ourselves to God. At each Mass the priest offers the bread and wine to be consecrated as the Body and Blood of Christ. Let us offer our lives and present them to the Lord in union with the gifts of bread and wine offered at Mass.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What offering can I make to the Lord? What areas of my life need to be presented to Him for His light and glory to shine?

Lord, I offer my life to You. As Jesus was presented in the Temple, I also present myself to You through the prayers of Joseph and Mary. Use me as You will and let my life be an offering, a pleasing sacrifice for You. Amen

**St. Joan of Lestonnac, Widow,
pray for us.**

THE POWER TO HEAL

There are many wonderful stories in the Gospel about the healing power of Jesus that make beautiful meditations for us. The reason that there are so many stories on healing, I believe, is to teach us that we are in need of the healing power of God. We have been trapped in the grasp of Satan, the prince of this world, but the healing power of Jesus sets us free from sin and death. To heal is to save. In fact, the word for healing is equivalent to the Greek word “to save” (*salous*). Jesus is the Healing, the Salvation/Savior of the world.

Imagine yourself as a beneficiary of Jesus’ healing in today’s Gospel — the woman healed from her condition or the little girl brought to life. We are told by the evangelist about the woman who spent everything she had on medical resources yet found herself becoming worse. In faith, she trusted that if she could merely touch the cloak of Jesus she would be cured. Jesus felt that power had gone out from Him, and seeks the one who is healed. The woman,

as Mark informs us, approaches Jesus in fear and trembling. Jesus does not condemn the woman but affirms her healing and sends her in peace. She stands straight, giving praise and glory to God.

The little girl that we read about is dying. On arrival, she is found dead. However, Jesus doesn’t think so — she is only sleeping, which in itself causes some to laugh and ridicule Jesus. And yet by the word of Jesus, the little girl comes to life. For both these people, salvation had come into their lives.

In the first instance, it’s the touch that brings healing and comfort. In the second incident, it is the word of Jesus that brings life to the girl. The

healing power of Jesus, in word and action, is available to us if we but reach out and touch Him.

Let us allow the Lord to touch us today. Let us reach out and touch Him today. Let us also listen to His word. He tells us to rise out of our sleep, the sleep of sin and death. His words bring life and healing to us. *Fr. Brian Steele, MGL*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Where do I need to experience the healing touch of Jesus? Where do I need to hear the word of Jesus to arise out of darkness into His light?

Lord, I come before You. Stretch out Your hand and touch me. Allow me to hear Your word of life and set me free from the power of sin. May I know Your healing power in my life. Amen.

St. Blasé, Bishop and Martyr, pray for us.

FAITH: A GIFT OF GOD

The Catechism teaches us that faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him. Often we take this for granted. Faith needs to be developed, strengthened and matured. There has to be cooperation on our part. God doesn't just give us faith — the human will and intellect submit to divine grace and allows it to be moved by interior grace of the Holy Spirit. In the Gospel today, we hear that Jesus was amazed at the people's lack of faith. They could not bring themselves to submit their intellect and will to the truth that Jesus wished to convey to them.

We are the same. At times, we fail to submit to God's ways. We analyze, rationalize and criticize the truth of God, but God is bigger than our minds. The people during Jesus' time were certain they knew Him: the son of a carpenter, the son of Mary. They had analyzed, criticized and rationalized all about Him. But Jesus was bigger than their minds.

We do the same. We think we know all about God. We put Him in a box and say we

have Him all worked out. But God is bigger than that. Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. They weren't willing to think otherwise — their minds were already made up as to who He was. We also have a tendency to think that way. We know who Jesus is and have already made up our mind. Isaiah the prophet says about God, "Your ways are high above our ways; Your thoughts high above our thoughts."

What a shame it was that Jesus could not work many mighty deeds there except to lay hands on a few. The Lord wants to give us many blessings. He wants to perform many mighty deeds in our days, yet like the neighbors of Jesus, we have too often closed our minds and hearts to Him.

Let us ask the Lord to increase our faith in Him. Perhaps we need to let go of our old mindset about Jesus and ask Him to reveal Himself to us anew. Let us be among those whom the Lord will be pleased with because of our faith — like what we heard about in the Gospel yesterday.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do I believe in Jesus? Do I place my faith and trust in Him?

Lord, I believe but help my unbelief. Strengthen my faith in You. I thank You for this wonderful gift of faith You have given to me. Amen.

St. Rhabanus Maurus, Abbot, pray for us.

SENT BY JESUS

It was a common scene in Israel to see a band of people following one master. The rabbis would gather their disciples to learn the ways of God. The political groups were vibrant with people wanting to serve the common cause. Religion, too, had set up their groups of people seeking to witness to the better life. Jesus was one of many who gathered a group of disciples to Himself. He would teach and send them out to continue the work to be accomplished — that of establishing the Reign of God.

The disciples moved from place to place, preaching, teaching and healing so the Kingdom of God would be advanced more effectively. This is where the structure of the bishopric was adopted — the one who would send his priests to be pastors of a given flock. They were to trust completely in God for their provisions. Their work focused on calling people to repentance and belief in God. These men were apostles (apostolos) to be sent, messengers of God, as Jesus Himself was.

It must have been amazing for these men

to witness the action of God in their midst. Many people were cured from their sicknesses, heard the Word of God and submitted to faith in God's grace, repented from their old ways of life and seek new life in the Lord.

In the same way today, many have heard the call of God and dedicated themselves to preaching the Word. We must pray for the apostles of our modern era: bishops, priests and clergy, religious, those consecrated and all who give their lives in service to God.

We are all called to be apostles (apostolos), to be sent. Some are sent to the workplaces, schools, offices and other places where the seed of the Gospel can be planted. We must be tireless in advancing the Kingdom of God. It is our duty as baptized Christians to preach and teach the Word of God. Francis of Assisi once said to his brothers, "Preach the Gospel and if you must, use words." Our actions speak volumes to people around us. We must seek to be genuine witnesses in our age.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Where can I be an apostle for the Lord? What are my areas of work where I too must sow the seed of the Gospel?

Lord Jesus, You sent the disciples to preach. Use me in my daily life to witness to Your love and grace.

St. Agatha, Virgin and Martyr, pray for us.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

THE POWER OF REVENGE

I find it horrible to imagine the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod is known for his blood-thirsty acts. His wife, who happens to be his brother's wife, is no different. We see in this story how far revenge and resentment can go if we allow it to take its stronghold on our lives.

King Herod has heard raving reports about Jesus. He thinks John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. The evangelist goes back in time to narrate in detail the beheading of the Baptist — the forerunner of Jesus' mission.

Herodias, the wife of Philip and then Herod, we are told, harbored a grudge against John the Baptist because he spoke the truth. John informed Herod that it was wrong to take another man's wife, let alone his brother's wife. And so Herodias was outraged by this and held onto the grudge. She wanted to kill him but was unable to fulfill her desire, until an opportunity came. Herod, on the other

hand, liked John. He liked to listen to him, even though it perplexed him. One day, the daughter of Herod delights her father through dancing. The king offers her anything, even up to half his Kingdom — generous King that he is! Reluctantly, he gave into her daughter's wish, which was in fact the wish of her mother, and presents her with the head of John. This is outrageous! Horrendous! Disturbing! All this time the wife of Herod held on to this grudge and finally got her way. Sin is always crouching at our door ready to enter if we give way to it.

We must be rid of all revenge, resentment and all evil. It is like a cancer that will eat us up and erode all sense of moral values if we

give into it. How many years did Herodias entertain this thought of revenge? She must have been restless for years before and after the beheading of John the Baptist. What a terrible way to live, waiting for revenge to raise its ugly head.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Am I holding onto grudges in my life? What are these resentments?

Lord, I choose to let go of sin in my life. I ask You to forgive me for my resentments and revenge that I have held onto, often hidden in my heart. Help me to be more like You, compassionate, loving and forgiving. Amen

St. Paul Miki and Companions, Martyrs, pray for us.



COME AND REST FOR A WHILE

We all know how it is to live busy lives. Our lives are determined by the clock. We race throughout the day attending to this or that, meeting that person, running errands and attending to our duties. And then we ask ourselves at the end of a day, “Where did the time go?” Then we say, “Where did that week, month, year go?”

Jesus knows what it’s like to be busy but He, too, knows the value of rest and recreation. Of all the Gospels, we see the humanity of Jesus most evident in the writings of Mark. Today’s Gospel is no exception.

The apostles return from their mission and are glad of what they have achieved. They report to Jesus everything. Jesus, aware of their fatigue and need for rest, tells them to come and “rest for a while.” They were to go to a deserted place and take time out — for they didn’t have time to eat. There was no shortage to their work. Many people were coming in great numbers.

The words of Jesus brought comfort to the

disciples. Those same words apply to us: take a rest, come to Jesus and rest for awhile. This is the beauty of our faith. We can take time out and be with the Lord, to listen and to receive counsel from Him. Often we make ourselves busy because we are afraid of what silence can reveal to us. Some, sadly, are prone to be workaholics, which has dangerous side effects. Perhaps Jesus is saying to you today through the Gospel, “Hey, I know how busy you have been and now I call you to come and rest for a while!”

Sometimes we can be our own worst enemies and deprive ourselves of the necessary things in life. So I say to you, it’s OK to rest. The work that is put on hold for a while will still be

there. And in fact, you will be more energized and strengthened if you rest for a while. Rest can mean anything from a prayer period, vacation, drive to the countryside, a relaxing meal or bonding with friends and family. All these are means by which we can come to Jesus and rest for a while. *Fr. Brian Steele, MGL*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Are you busy? Do you need to come and rest for a while?

Lord, You know that my day can often be filled with duties and activities. Help me to find time to rest for awhile. Strengthen me and refresh me, so that I can be a good servant for Your Kingdom. Amen.

St. Richard, King,
pray for us.

ONE DAY

Most of our favorite old-time stories begin with the phrase “one day.” In the Gospel of Mark today, we read about one day in the life of Jesus. Mark is a great storyteller. He tells us in today’s Gospel a common scene in the life of Jesus’ daily ministry.

Jesus leaves the synagogue after He had taken part in the service, listening and discussing the Word of God. He enters the house of Simon’s mother-in-law for a meal and hears that she is sick with fever. He says a prayer, lays hands on her and she recovers. Then she goes about at once offering hospitality and service.

Next, the whole town gathers at the door, waiting for the touch of Jesus to heal their sicknesses. Then we are told that Jesus rises early in the morning to start again. As Simon tells Jesus that everyone is looking for Him, Jesus heads off to other villages, preaching and healing. This seems to be a common scene in Jesus’ life — preaching, teaching and healing — which was the purpose of Jesus being sent by the Father.

Jesus takes time to pray early in the

morning and receives energy and strength to do what is needed for the day. He rests in the arms of the Father to commune with Him and be reassured of His presence throughout the day. There was no way that He was going to survive the demands on Him if He didn’t pray early in the morning.

Usually, morning is the best time of the day to pray. I go through my agenda of activities with the Lord in prayer, asking Him to anoint, guide and protect my plans. Of course, we have our own agenda but unexpected things crop up and so we ask the Lord to bless all that may happen during the day. At night, we give thanks for His presence and the way He has revealed Himself in the activities of the day.

This was Jesus’ secret for being tireless in His ministry: He gave time for prayer. Perhaps you already have set aside some time for daily prayer; if not, today is the day to begin. Once you do, you will notice the difference — you will have more energy, joy and peace. We have to pray to make it today.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do I set aside time each day to pray? Do I surrender to God all that is to come throughout the day?

*Lord, teach me to pray.
Amen.*

**St. Jerome Emiliani, Doctor,
pray for us.**

THEY RECOGNIZED HIM

These people were smart. As Jesus crossed the other side with His apostles, they were already on the other side watching and waiting. As soon as Jesus appeared, they recognized Him. We read in the Gospel many accounts where the people recognized Jesus. In the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist recognizes Jesus as the Lamb of God. The disciples recognize Him and follow Him. Zaccheus climbs the sycamore tree and recognizes Jesus. The woman who wipes the feet of Jesus with her tears recognizes Him at the house of the Pharisee. Mary Magdalene recognizes Him when He called her name.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta recognized Jesus in the poor. Francis of Assisi recognized Him in the leper. Countless people down through the ages have recognized Jesus. In the Gospel of John, to see or recognize Jesus is to believe in Him. Many times, He reveals Himself to us but our hearts are closed to recognize Him. Do we recognize Him every day in the

bread and wine consecrated as His own Body and Blood?

The people in the Gospel accounts recognize Jesus as wonder worker, healer and prophet. But did they recognize Him as Lord and Savior? This is the test of our faith. We, too, can be caught up in the wonder of miracles, the power of healing and the faith-inspired teaching. All of this is good as they help us to come to the Lord and experience Him, but it must go deeper than this. We need to recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior — the only one who can save us and lead us to His Kingdom.

Too often, we look for other things to save us. We have our habitual sins, outbursts of violence and anger, uncontrolled drinking and eating habits — using these to escape from life's burdens.

Let us place our lives and our needs on Jesus — our one and only true Lord and Savior. When we do, we will recognize Him more in our daily life and we will be surprised at the way He makes Himself known to us. *Fr. Brian Steele, MGL*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do I recognize Jesus in my life? In what ways does He reveal Himself to me?

Lord, help me to recognize You in my daily life. How wonderful are all Your works, Lord. In every age You have been our refuge and strength. Amen.

St. Apollonia, Virgin and Martyr, pray for us.

PURITY OF HEART

Jesus calls “blessed” those who are pure in heart for they shall see God. This is a grace that we must continue to ask from the Lord. We know too well that our hearts are often far from the Lord, as Jesus Himself says in today’s Gospel. “This people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.” Jesus is replying to the complaint of the Pharisees who asked why is it that His own disciples do not follow the tradition of the elders, especially the purification rites.

Jesus challenges their hypocrisy. The hypocrite is the one who hides behind a mask. In ancient Greece, for example, the actors of the play would hide behind masks, their faces concealed and their character hidden from the audience. They were on show. The hypocrite is one who conceals his true character. What you see on the outside is for show and is not the true identity of the person.

The Pharisees were hypocritical. They were on show as religious, law-abiding and good-living people, yet their lives were masked by falsehood and

deception. Jesus could see that their hearts were far from pure. They may do all the right things yet their hearts were not in right order. God judges the heart, not the appearance of man. The prophet Jeremiah says that the heart is most devious; who can understand or comprehend the ways of the human heart?

We are hypocrites at times. The Pharisee resides in us also and this must be purified. We must always check the motive of our heart. What is the motivation behind my thoughts, words and actions?

Let us take St. Scholastica as an example, who the Church honors today. Scholastica was the twin sister of St. Benedict. She desired to live a life wholly surrendered to the Lord and was always keen in participating in spiritual matters. The Lord had captured her heart

and Scholastica burned with a holy love for the Lord. When the Lord sets us for Himself, we can be consumed with a longing for Him to purify our heart. Let us invoke her intercession that we might be of pure heart. *Fr. Brian Steele, MGL*

REFLECTION QUESTION:
Is my heart pure? What areas in my life do I see impurity?

*Lord, purify my heart.
Cleanse me from my sin.
Make me holy and let me be
an instrument of Your grace
and love. Amen.*

**St. Scholastica, Virgin,
pray for us.**

OPEN-HEART SURGERY

I hear many stories about people undergoing open-heart surgery. One can be diagnosed and treated properly and experience a transformation of the heart! I am not a doctor so I won't get too technical but it's amazing to hear of success stories of people who went through heart surgeries.

The greatest sickness of the heart today is more than what the doctors tell us — and I call it sin. Sin is the greatest sickness of the heart because it has eternal consequences. We all need to go through an open-heart surgery to remove the residues of sin in our hearts. As we hear in the Gospel, from within the heart of man come evil thoughts, evil intentions resulting in evil deeds.

The late John Paul II said that man has lost a sense of sin. We are no longer aware of what sin is or we have become immuned to it. We have become comfortable with sin in our lives.

I believe that we need to be reminded of the beauty of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We need to avail of this sacrament often, not

only to have our sins forgiven, but to continue the work of conversion that is desperately needed in our lives.

Sin is serious stuff. It may seem sweet and innocent but once it has a grasp on our life it can result in habits that are hard to break. Jesus knew only too well the dangers of sin — evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, envy, licentiousness, blasphemy, arrogance and folly.

Perhaps today we can examine our conscience. This is a good practice in our spiritual journey. Take a moment to reflect on how you have been drawn to the Lord — count your blessings. And then take time to reflect on when and how you have withdrawn from the Lord, the times you failed to acknowledge

Him. Perhaps the vices that Jesus lists in today's Gospel can help you examine your conscience. Of course, Jesus does not condemn us when we sin. As St. Paul says, we simply turn to the Lord and seek His forgiveness, love and mercy. *Fr. Brian Steele, MGL*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are the sins in my life that I need to confess? Am I willing to undergo open-heart surgery?

Lord, I give You my heart. I open my heart to Your healing love and forgiveness. Give me a humble and contrite heart that I may always follow You. Amen.

St. Gregory II, Pope,
pray for us.

HAVE FAITH IN GOD

Jesus is traveling around the outskirts of Galilee. He is trying to avoid opposition and to have some private time with His disciples to teach. Since the feeding of the five thousand, He had been on the run, avoiding the crowds. Moving away from Galilee, He wanted to avoid Herod Antipas who was in power at the time. Many people in Galilee wanted to make Jesus king and this caused Herod to be hostile towards Jesus. But Jesus could not escape notice, even in the pagan territory, which was good news. In Jesus' mind, He had been sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus is in Tyre, a developing city in the district of ancient Greece. Mark tells the story of a woman from that district who comes to Jesus requesting His help for her daughter. In Matthew's Gospel, where this story is repeated, Jesus seems sterner. He does not say a word. Jesus is sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, yet the woman is happy to settle for second best, for "crumbs that fall from the master's table." Jesus is impressed with her

faith and heals her daughter.

This story beautifully conveys the heart of Jesus and the faith of a pagan. Jesus came to save the lost. The woman represents those who have lost the way and are seeking to find their way to God. She has heard about Jesus somewhere. The faith of the woman touches Jesus. So many times in the Gospel, Jesus is impressed with the faith of those who come to Him. Many are healed because of their faith — they believe in Jesus.

Interestingly, in this Gospel, the woman calls Jesus "Lord" — the only time this title of Jesus appears and is mentioned by a pagan. She recognizes Him as the one who is to save and bring healing to her daughter.

Notice this woman's audacity to seek Jesus, her persistence even when it seems that He won't budge,

her humility in her willingness to settle for second best. Jesus rewards her faith and she leaves satisfied and strengthened in her faith in Jesus. Let us imitate her in faith, humility and trust in the Lord.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do I persevere with the Lord? Do I place my trust in Him no matter what?

Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief and strengthen my faith. Amen.

St. Eulalia, Virgin, pray for us.

BE OPENED

Can you keep a secret? This is what we see developing in the Gospel of Mark — the Messianic secret. Many times in the Gospel, we hear Jesus ordering someone whom He has healed not to tell anyone about it. However, as Mark tells us, the more He orders them not to, the more they proclaim it. We do that, too, right? When secrets are entrusted to us, we can't wait to tell someone about it even if we made a promise not to, right?

One can read amazing stories of healing without getting too excited about them. But I think we should. Jesus comes to bring the Good News — the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear — this is exciting indeed. The Jewish nation understood that the Messiah would come and bring liberation — physical and spiritual. Jesus is the Messiah who came to set the captives free.

The deaf man in the Gospel today went away from Jesus a changed man. He could now hear and speak properly. Imagine his life up to this point. He could see but not hear. He could not hear

the sound of people's voices, the chirping of the birds, the gentle breeze rustling through the leaves, the rain falling on the rooftops. Imagine how often he would try to talk and others could not understand. Everything changed when he met Jesus. Isn't it exciting?

The words Jesus spoke, "ephphatha," were Aramaic for "be opened." They are the same words the priest or deacon prays over the baptized child — that they would be open to the Word of God in their lives. We, too, need to have these words addressed to us every now and then. Often our hearts and minds are closed to God's voice of healing and freedom. Perhaps we are afraid of hearing Him. We allow ourselves to be opened to the voices of others and forget that it is the Lord who brings

life and freedom into our lives. As we open our hearts to the Lord, we receive the grace and help that we need to live a life worthy of His calling. As we open ourselves to this grace, we are called to share with others what God has done to us.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Where do I need to have Jesus say the words "be opened" in my life? What areas of my life do I need to open before the Lord?

Lord, open my heart to Your love. Let me hear Your voice that brings freedom and peace. Amen.

St. Amand, Bishop,
pray for us.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

FILLED WITH COMPASSION

Do not be mistaken if you are thinking you have read this story before — in fact, it is twice recorded in the Gospel of Mark and also found in the other Gospels. You will notice, however, that in Mark 6.30-44, there are some slight differences.

In this Gospel story (Mark 8), the disciples are outside the territory of Galilee; in the other story (Mark 6), they are within Galilee. In Mark 6, Jesus is filled with compassion for the people because they are like “sheep without a shepherd.” Here, Jesus’ compassion is felt because “they have no food.” In the Gospel today, they have seven loaves; in the other, there were five. Here they have a few small fish, while in Mark 6, we are told there are two. Here also, seven basketful of leftover were collected, while back in Mark 6, 12 were collected.

It’s amazing when you read the stories and find slight differences. Each writer has his own story and purpose to convey. In Galilee, the feeding of the crowd symbolizes the feeding of the whole children of Israel — 12 tribes, 12 baskets. Here, outside the region of

Galilee, in the Decapolis region or Gentile territory, the feeding of the crowd teaches us that the love of God knows no bounds. The seven baskets were large enough to contain all the left-overs. The number seven is the complete number in Jewish mentality. Both Jews and Gentiles are fed here; such is the compassion of God.

Jesus is worried that they may collapse due to hunger. The disciples are worried about how they were going to feed the crowd. Jesus and His disciples work together to feed them. In the end “all are satisfied.”

Many of us hunger for love, healing, mercy, peace and so on. Here, Jesus ministers to the hungry in a physical and spiritual way. They are satisfied; no one is left wanting. So, too, with us. Jesus provides for our nourishment in all areas of our life.

Let us ask Jesus to bless our lives out of the little we can offer Him. As we turn to Him in our need and hunger, we shall find satisfaction. He will never leave us unsatisfied — He is filled with compassion.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What do you hunger for?

Lord, thank You for Your love and compassion. Thank You that You fill my hunger and satisfy my needs. Amen.

***Sts. Cyril and Methodius,
Bishops, pray for us.***

BE MADE CLEAN

A leper comes to Jesus. Leprosy was a common affliction in the ancient times. It may not necessarily have been leprosy; it may have been any kind of skin disease — boils, white spots, rashes, open wounds and burns. If these symptoms changed rapidly, it was not leprosy. Leprosy was considered a terrible curse on a person. Lepers were pronounced as unclean by the Levite priest and could not participate in any ceremonial service, had to stay away from the Tabernacle and Tent of Meeting area, and had to isolate himself away from people and public places.

Certain regulations had to be followed by the afflicted person. He had to wear torn clothes, his hair had to be unkempt, and should cover the lower part of his face. In approaching people he was to shout out, “Unclean, unclean.” Anyone who made contact with such a person was regarded as unclean.

Imagine the attitude of the leper who comes to Jesus. He knows his desperate situation. He knows as well that by approaching, he can make Jesus unclean. That is why the leper,

says, “If you want to, you can make me clean.” Yet Jesus overlooks the ceremonial and is moved with compassion. He stretches out His hand, touches the leper and pronounces him clean. The leprosy leaves immediately at the touch of Jesus.

Certain requirements had to be met as proof of healing from the infectious disease. Jesus tells the man to go and do these things. The man can’t keep it a secret; in fact the report spreads abroad.

Each of us has leprosy. It may not be a skin disease but a sin disease. We are afflicted with uncleanness through sin. Perhaps we, too, are desperate, “If you want to, Lord, you can make me clean.” For sure the Lord wants to, but do we? We say we want to be clean, to be rid of sin, but are we serious in our commitment to follow Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are the diseases in my life that I must bring to the Lord for healing and cleansing?

Lord, if You are willing, make me clean and help me to live in purity, faith and holiness. Amen.

**St. Lucius, Bishop,
pray for us.**

Jesus is moved by any person who approaches Him in humility. Jesus is moved to cleanse and heal us from our sin disease. He is moved to reach out and touch us with His grace and mercy. He is moved with compassion and pity.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

GIVE US A SIGN

Throughout the Bible, we read about people asking Jesus for a sign. The Pharisees request a sign from Jesus to give them proof that they should believe Him as the Messiah. They could not accept the miracles; they wanted more compelling proof to believe in His divine authority. However, Jesus refuses to give in to their demands because He knows the motive is disbelief and failure to recognize Him. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus answers their request by reminding them of Jonah. Just as Jonah was inside the whale's stomach for three days and nights, so too would Jesus die and be buried, but on the third day rise again.

There are people who seek signs for confirmation. I, for one, am reluctant to do so. I do not want to put the Lord to the test. Either I believe or not. I need no other sign than that of Jesus crucified and risen from the dead. That is enough sign to believe that the Lord will act. However, I know many who request for signs and they receive it. I commend them for their faith.

In human life, signs and symbols are important. They direct us towards God and help strengthen our faith. The sacraments are signs given to us of God moving among us, feeding, nourishing, healing, forgiving, uniting and serving us. But people can get fixated on signs, just as the Pharisees were.

I do not disagree with asking for signs but I have seen many who get fixated on signs and stop there. Signs, rather, should lead us to God. Genuine signs will awaken our belief in God who is with us. Among Charismatic groups, this is common. A people of faith seeking the Lord for healing and mercy are given miraculous signs. God in His goodness and mercy has given us signs and wonders in the Eucharist. The Virgin Mother at Fatima pointed to the sun as a sign

of God's presence. The sun danced and changed color. Communism was broken in Russia. People have suffered the stigmata.

S i g n a n d
w o n d e r s a b o u n d .

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:
What are the signs of God's presence in Your life?

Lord, I believe in Your presence in my life. The greatest sign of Your presence You give me is Your body and blood in the Eucharist. Amen.

**St. Gilbert, Religious,
pray for us.**

DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

The Gospel of Mark seems to place the disciples in a constant state of disbelief and misunderstanding. They just don't seem to get what Jesus is all about. In the Gospel today, we catch a glimpse of the stupidity of the disciples. Mark gives us the opening clue — they forgot to bring bread. So when Jesus tells them to be aware of the yeast of the Pharisees, they were wondering about the amount of bread they brought with them.

Yeast was a common metaphor for evil and corruption. A little yeast was mixed in with a batch of flour and water to assist the dough. A little corruption on the part of the Pharisees could see the rising of anger and dissension among the people of the nation to see Jesus put to death.

Be aware of the yeast of the Pharisees — the teaching and false interpretation they give to sway others from the truth. If our faith is not strong, we will also be swayed by every kind of strange doctrine. We must seek to learn and understand our faith. At times we are called to give an answer for our belief as Catholics. Many are confused and do not understand and will look to us for counsel and advice.

People will have opinions and interpretations of one kind or another. We should allow our conscience to be formed through the resources available to us — the Bible, teachings of the Church, the Catechism and traditions of the Church. Our lives must be formed in truth and not corrupted by the yeast of false interpretation and misleading doctrine. *Fr. Brian Steele, MGL*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are the areas of my Catholic faith that I do not understand? What can I do to understand my faith better?

Lord, give me grace of wisdom and understanding as I put my trust in You. Amen.

St. Alex Falconieri and co-founders, pray for us.

THE BLIND WILL SEE

The people bring the blind man to Jesus. They beg that Jesus would touch the man. See the faith of the people. The blind man meets Jesus, not able to see, and leaves the presence of Jesus seeing clearly. Interestingly, Jesus leads the blind man away from the village. The healing is done privately so as not to make a commotion and reveal the messianic secret, at least not yet. Another interesting point that Mark tells us is that healing of blindness is gradual. It is a process. Jesus had to place His hands on the man twice for the healing to happen.

When we come to meet Jesus, conversion does not usually happen overnight. Of course, some have the “Damascus Road” experience like St. Paul. But for most of us, our conversion develops gradually. Our faith needs to mature so we can “see” Jesus.

There are many stories in the Gospel of the blind being able to see. This is a manifestation of the Messiah. Remember when Jesus opened the scroll in the temple and read those inspired words of the prophet? “The Spirit of the Lord

is upon me...the blind will see...” (Luke 4.18-19/Isaiah 61.1-2). By placing our faith in Jesus, believing that He is the Son of God, we begin to see again.

Blindness is a metaphor for sin. Sin distorts our seeing Jesus. Often we cannot see because we are blind — not physically but spiritually, which is the worst blindness anyone can have. What blinds us are our selfishness, our lack of love and understanding, our unforgiveness, anger and unhealthy attitude towards each other. This blindness is epidemic in our society. We need to have the courage to admit this sin, to repent and seek healing. Sometimes we need others to support us and lead us to the One who alone can heal and set us free. The people who brought the man to Jesus are to be commended for their faith and love by bringing their friend to Jesus. Sometimes we are the blind who need healing; sometimes we

are like the people who must bring our brothers and sisters to Jesus. In whatever circumstance we find ourselves, let us come to Jesus, for He will heal us indeed and the blind will see.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:
What are the areas of “blindness” in my life?

Lord, heal me and touch me. Remove the blindness from me that I might see again. Amen.

St. Flavian, Bishop,
pray for us.

WHO AM I?

For three years Jesus traveled around with men and women proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He preached, taught and healed many. All this foretold the coming of the Kingdom of God in their midst. The question that Jesus asks His disciples is pivotal in the Gospel of Mark. From here, Jesus sets His face towards Jerusalem: the destiny of His death and ultimate sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

First, Jesus is interested in the consensus of the people, “Who do they say I am?” Having received a reply He turns to His disciples and asks them, “Who do you say I am?” It is very important that the disciples grasp who Jesus is. Peter replies “You are the Christ.” Jesus then speaks openly of His fate and destiny — something that Peter, after all the years with Jesus, cannot accept. Jesus’ reply is the same given to us: You are thinking as human beings do and not as God thinks. True, in Isaiah, God speaks through His prophet. “My ways are high above your ways and my thoughts are far above your thoughts.”

We need to place our minds and think above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Who do you say I am? This question must be answered by each and every one of us. At different times in our lives, the answer may change but the question remains. To quote our late Holy Father, John Paul II, “Christ is the answer” but you may ask what the question is. The question is whatever it is in your life that needs the answer. We are constantly assailed by doubts and concerns, issues and experiences. In all of these, Jesus remains the answer. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus is the answer. Indeed in every age it remains the answer. We are constantly reminded to gaze upon Christ crucified and see there our deepest needs and longings fulfilled. Once we can come to that grace to accept this answer, it remains the foundation and goal of all our lives. Come what may, we find the strength necessary to go through whatever life brings us.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Who do you say I am?

Lord, You are my Savior, Redeemer and Friend. In every age, O Lord, You are our refuge and strength. I love You, Lord, my hope and guide. Amen.

**St. Conrad of Piacenza,
Hermit, pray for us.**

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

BE PREPARED FOR AN ORDEAL

The wise man says if you want to serve the Lord be prepared for an ordeal. It will involve sacrifice, suffering, discipline, persecution and endurance. To follow the Lord is not easy. Jesus Himself said the gate is narrow and few choose to follow the narrow way. Are you afraid? Jesus tells us not to, but to place our complete trust in Him. He will assist those who are prepared for the ordeal, who want to take up the cross and follow Him.

I remember how that hit home to me once in prayer. I was meditating on the Agony in the Garden and was wondering whether there was an easier path to Christianity. Even Jesus was known to say, "Let it pass." It is difficult being a Christian — sometimes you just want to give it all up. It seemed easier not being Christian, but that is a lie that the enemy loves to spread. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Christianity demands certain responsibilities — taking up the cross, denying one's self and following the Lord. Jesus endured agony, blood, sweat and tears. It was only through embracing and accepting all these that Jesus was able to experience

the resurrection. We, too, must be prepared for dying so as to rise again. Sounds like an ordeal, and it is. But thanks be to God who has sent His Holy Spirit to strengthen us for the journey.

To deny oneself is the hardest thing to do. Unfortunately, we have allowed our lives to become too comfortable. We live in a consumerist society, to buy happiness and to indulge, always seeking the biggest and best. We seek to be indulgent because life is too stressful, too busy, too time-consuming and so the body, mind and spirit say, "What about me?" It's all about me — I, me and myself. Never mind about the rest of humanity — let them take care of themselves. Yet isn't it amazing that when we reach out to others, when we forget our self (not to the detriment of our health) that we feel so much better? There are many people who

are absolutely selfless that you wonder how they do it. The secret is the power of the Spirit, a personal relationship with Jesus and communion with God every day.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are your God-given ambitions?

Lord, grant me the grace of Your Spirit to follow You. Help me to be selfless today. Amen.

St. Sadoth, Bishop and Martyr, pray for us.

SECRET!

This is a famous Filipino expression — “secret!” It is not learned in language schools but is learned by way of relating to the Filipino. A number of people I know say this to me and I am often frustrated. “Why can’t you tell me? Why is it a secret? Tell me!”

Jesus uses this form of expression in the Gospel. He tells them not to relate what they had seen to anyone — secret! Throughout the Gospel of Mark, there is a tension building up: the messianic secret, which is to be revealed at the death and resurrection of Jesus. Until then it remains a secret. However, like all “good” secrets, some had the better advantage of knowledge.

What an experience it must have been for the companions of Jesus: Peter, James and John. There they were on top of the mountain with Jesus, Elijah and Moses. No wonder Peter wanted to capture the experience — a Kodak moment. Let us make three tents. Let us keep this moment, Let us make it last. And we have the same kinds of experiences

— moments of consolation. We need these times to strengthen our faith and to aid us on the journey of life. On the mountain, the companions caught a glimpse of who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, the one who was to free the people from slavery through the passing over from death to life.

However, as all good things must come to an end, so, too, this experience. But the disciples remembered this. Peter wrote to his community that he was there on the mountain with Jesus. We, too, must remember the goodness of the Lord in our own lives. The Lord is always with us. He reminds us of His presence in many and various ways.

Let us listen to His voice in the events and circumstances of our daily lives, in the Word proclaimed at Mass. Let us listen to His voice through wise counsel, in confession, in pastoral care, in the signs of the times. As we listen, let us respond and not allow His voice to fall on deaf ears. His voice is not a secret but there for “anyone who has ears.”

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What is the Lord saying to me in my life at this time — through Mass, wise counsel, the events of my life, the signs of the times?

*Lord, it is good to be here.
Help me to listen to Your
voice. Amen.*

**St. Peter Damiani, Bishop
and Doctor, pray for us.**

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

YES

Moses, Noah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the prophets, Mary, Joseph, Peter, Paul and Jesus. What do these people have in common? They all said “yes” to the Lord. God was doing a new thing in their lives and they all said “yes.” For some it took a while to come to that point but, in the end, they were all obedient to the call of the Lord in their lives.

Yes! I like that word. It means affirmation, surrender, permission, consent, agreement and obedience. In some circumstances, this word has negative connotations – “yes” to sin, immorality, war, corruption and violence.

At baptism, we said “yes.” As infants, we didn’t have the faculty of speech, but our parents or whoever stood on our behalf stated an affirmation to the Lord. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and in Him is the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus said

“yes” to the Father and was obedient unto His death on the Cross. At every moment, we are called to renew that “yes.” The Spirit has been given as installment, as the guarantee, the “yes” of the Father who has welcomed us and accepted us into His Kingdom

In today’s Gospel, the “yes” of Jesus is expressed through the healing and the pronouncement of forgiveness. The friends of the paralytic express their “yes” by bringing their friend to Jesus even if it meant damaging the roof. The paralytic himself expresses this “yes” by submitting to the command of Jesus by taking up his mat and walking in front of the crowd. However, there are some who say ‘no.’ The Pharisees denounce the act of Jesus as not from God, they reject

His forgiveness, and they refuse to believe in the power of God.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What do you say — yes or no? Whatever your answer might be, there will always be repercussions — good and bad. But the decision is always yours.

Yes, Lord. Amen.

**St. Peter, Apostle,
pray for us.**

HELP MY UNBELIEF

There is a scene in the Gospel today that is quite dramatic. Jesus has just returned from the mountain. Down below, there is an argument and tension going on as the disciples struggle in bringing healing and peace to a boy possessed by an evil spirit. The boy, upon being brought to Jesus, is thrown into convulsion. And again at the command of Jesus, the boy is thrown into convulsion, shouting and making a commotion. Dramatic.

The boy and his family suffered immensely because of this predicament. The boy is thrown into water and fire by the possession of the evil spirit. The father has come to the end of his tether having found no resolution to his boy's suffering. Jesus comes to set the prisoners free. This boy has been imprisoned and bound through the mute and deaf spirit.

The faith of the man is tested here. He is a believer. He has faith but like most of us he is often riddled with doubt and uncertainty. The response of the faith is

our response. Lord, I do believe, but help my unbelief. Faith is often tested. It is a gift from the Lord given to us and we must at times ask for it to be strengthened. We should never take faith for granted. How many of our friends do not have faith, are struggling in their faith, have given into unbelief and uncertainty? The evil one has won the battle if that is the case. Therefore, we must never tire of asking the Lord for the gift of faith. The man seeks the Lord to have compassion. The Lord is willing and brings restoration to the boy and his family. Their faith is strengthened through this event.

Do you struggle with unbelief? Do you sometimes doubt the Lord's compassion and love? Do you know some people who are in need of healing and seemingly not receiving it? Let Jesus take you by the hand and increase your faith. Let Him take away all the things that bind you and possess you. Let His Spirit come and make you whole.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Where in my life do I lack trust, hope and belief?

Lord, I believe in You. Help my unbelief. Amen.

St. Polycarp, Bishop and Martyr, pray for us.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

Mark reveals to us a grim picture of the disciples of Jesus. They are often seen as dull, ignorant and just plain stupid! Jesus' patience often seems tested — but He loves them nevertheless. Mark reveals to us in his Gospel a “human” Jesus working with a broken and vulnerable people. Many times we hear Jesus telling the disciples about His fate and destiny — His arrest, death and rising up again. Jesus had to put up with their misunderstanding and failure to recognize the ultimate truth.

We are like the disciples. We fail to understand the ways of the Lord even when they seem most obvious. We fail to comprehend why God is doing whatever He is doing in our lives. We fail to recognize His truth and wisdom in the events of our lives. Admit it! “I don't understand You, Lord. I cannot see beyond. I fail to see You in my life. I don't get it!” The Lord is kind, unflinching in His tenderness and compassion. He understands our failure to understand completely. Sometimes

we need to beg the Lord for wisdom and insight.

God is a mystery. Life is a mystery. Is our lack of understanding perhaps a way in which we try to understand? Perhaps we do understand the ways of the Lord but we don't want to because we are afraid of what will be revealed to us. I think this is something of the tension of the disciples. They were with Jesus for a number of years. They could see the tension rising — unless they were totally stupid. They witnessed the persecution and rejection of Jesus. They knew He would face suffering, cruelty, and ultimately, death, but maybe their failure to understand was their way of coping with the inevitable. Their

lack of understanding was a sense of security. They wouldn't get hurt, they wouldn't be responsible, they could hide in the popularity of the moment — if they didn't understand. Their failure to understand, in a sense, was their own way of living the dream of success and popularity.

Do you understand?

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How do I seek to understand the ways of the Lord in my life? Is my failure to understand a means of security and hiding from the truth that might be revealed to me?

Lord, help me to know You, to love You and to follow You. Give me wisdom and understanding to know You more and more in my life. Amen.

**St. Ethelbert of Kent, King,
pray for us.**

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

THE FATHER WHO SEES ALL

It is that time of the year again: Ash Wednesday. We reflect on what to give up, what will be our penance this season, what will we do... Wait a moment. The season of Lent is not so much about what we are giving up but what we are gaining. There is so much to gain during this season of Lent. Beginning today, Ash Wednesday, we gain a new opportunity to grow in the love and goodness of God. Today is a day when we begin again to receive a new sense of forgiveness in our life, a new release of the mercy, tenderness and healing of God. It is not so much about what we do but who we are. We are loved by a God whom we can call Father, the father who sees all.

Jesus outlines three kinds of ways of growing in our relationship with God — a relationship of mercy and love. They are traditional ways that the Church sees as a way of growing in a life of holiness: prayer, fasting and charity. They are given to us with the intention of fostering new life that Jesus gives to us: selfless, loving

and filled with the grace of the Spirit.

Almsgiving is a way of growing in selflessness. It helps us to focus outward and not inward. It purifies us from being ego-centered. What can you share today that will be an act of almsgiving? Sharing your time, ears, gifts, talents, finances? The list goes on.

Fasting is a way of growing in self-denial. It helps us to focus on other things that satisfy, not necessarily food. Fasting purifies us from the “fat-residue” of sin. What are the ways in which you can fast — from sin, sinful attitudes, selfishness? Prayer helps us to grow in relationship with God. It helps stoke the fire of love and devotion to God. It makes us more dependent on the One who knows who we are. How can you grow in prayer, in a loving and faithful dialogue with your God? By growing in the ways of prayer, fasting and charity, we will see this Lenten season as a time of growth in holiness and being in the presence of God.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What can I gain from this season of Lent?

Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall declare Your praise. Amen.

***St. Walburga, Virgin,
pray for us.***

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

The people led by Moses are entrusted with the Law of God. The Law was God's way of communicating life to His people. To obey the Law was to obey God, the Deliverer and Savior, who had led them thus far. The people had experienced blessing after blessing from God, who provided for them throughout their journey and who would be with them as they entered into the "promised land" of Canaan.

Moses reminds the people about God who has always been with them. He tells them very simply that in order to live fully under the blessing of God, one must love the Lord, heed His voice and hold fast to Him. To do this, life was theirs. But then there is always the "if." If you turn away from God, if your hearts and minds refuse to listen and obey, then death will be their fate. The choice is theirs. Moses exhorts them to choose life.

The Israelites were moving into foreign territory and their eyes must have widened when they saw the idolatry and pagan worship before them. At this time they only

knew the One God, the Lord of Heaven and earth, yet as they moved further into territory, a new world was waiting to tempt and entice them. Already some of them had heard stories of their ancestors and experienced the idolatry of the people when Moses found them idolizing the gold calf.

In life, we have to make many decisions, from the moment we wake up to the time we sleep. Some of those decisions have good repercussions; others bad. We live and learn by the choices we make daily. We decide what path to take regarding career, study, vocation. We decide what food to eat, what clothes to wear, what to do today. And we live with the consequences of our decisions!

Whatever choice we make, life should always be the motive, not death. The Lord wants us to live life to the full. He Himself came to give life and abundantly. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live — by loving the Lord, heeding His voice and holding fast to Him.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What decisions do I need to make today? Am I choosing life?

Lord, I choose life today. Help me to love with the power of Your life and love through the grace of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

**St. Porphyry of Gaza,
Bishop, pray for us.**

FASTING

Fasting is a spiritual discipline. The Church gives us certain days and times of the year whereby we are required to fast. Traditionally, Friday is a day of abstinence and fasting in honor of Jesus who died on Good Friday, offering His life for us on the Cross.

Lent is a penitential season whereby we are called to fast. Traditionally, fasting is seen as the denial of food but, in more recent times, fasting has taken upon a broader practice. Fasting is associated with repentance and sorrow for sin. The Day of Atonement was a day of fasting for the Jews to atone for sins. It involved a day of ritual observances. Even to this day the Muslims celebrate annually the ninth month of the Muslim calendar as the Ramadan — a month of fasting. The Pharisees fasted twice a week. During Lent, the Church unites with Jesus and His fasting for 40 days in the desert.

Jesus is approached by some of the Pharisees. They question His lack of ritual observance. Jesus suggests that it is hardly relevant to fast when the Bridegroom is here.

Fasting was associated with sorrow; Jesus came to bring happiness and life. Jesus is the Bridegroom who has come to wed His Bride, the Church.

What good would it be if you are invited to a wedding feast and did not eat? What a shame and cause of embarrassment to the one who invited you as guest. Jesus understands His time of being present in the world as a time of marriage, a celebration, an occasion of festivity and joy just like any marriage. There will come a time when the Bridegroom will not be here (referring to His death). Then will the time come for fasting.

The best fast we can make is that of fasting from sin! In today's First Reading, God speaks through His prophet about the kind of fast acceptable to Him. Things such as: releasing the prisoner, setting free the oppressed, sharing bread with the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked and not turning your back on your own.

As God says, what good is fasting when you end up quarrelling and fighting one another?

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:
In what ways can I grow in fasting?

My sacrifice, O God, is a humble and contrite heart.

St. Veronica, pray for us.

CONVERSION OF HEART

The whole point of this Lenten season is to grow in holiness of life by way of conversion. Conversion is a turning around in the opposite direction, a 180-degree turn. It involves commitment, discipline and trust. For us, conversion began at Baptism, though most of us were unaware of it. The second point of conversion is reconciliation in areas where we have misused the gift given us at Baptism. We turn to the Lord in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and are reunited again to God in mercy and love. Throughout our life, there are many moments of conversion. Conversion is a process that will end when we are dead and buried.

Jesus calls people to conversion. Throughout His life, He calls men and women to abandon their ways of sin and to follow Him. Levi is no exception. Levi, turned Matthew (gift of God), is called by Jesus to follow Him. Luke tells us in a beautiful way that “leaving everything behind, he got up and followed Him.” Now, that is conversion. Levi left everything. His

booth, his money, his old way of life, everything. And to prove this, he invited a large crowd of people to celebrate with him his conversion.

There is a beautiful image of St. Matthew in a parish I once visited in Australia. It depicted Matthew with a Bible on one hand and a money purse beneath his feet. It shows the powerful image of Matthew trampling his “old” life and looking forward to his new life as a preacher of the Good News. It is cast in magnificent bronze and tells a story.

We, too, must leave everything and follow Jesus. This will be hard; it has its challenges. It is hard to separate from what you have allowed yourself to be attached to. For Matthew, he was attached to his wealth, corruption, and cheating. We, too, can fail to detach from those

attitudes of heart and mind. But the reward is great; conversion involves commitment, discipline and trust. It won't be easy but we have one who walks alongside us offering e m p o w e r m e n t , strength and assistance.

Fr. Brian Steele, MGL

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What areas of my life need to be converted to the Lord?

Lord, I pray for the gift of conversion in my life. Change my life that I might love You, serve You and follow You all the days of my life. Amen.

St. Hilary of Ephesus, Pope,
pray for us.



“IF TODAY YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS”

One cold winter night, a priest was on his way home from an appointment. A mugger stopped him, demanding his wallet while pointing a knife to his side. The priest opened his jacket and revealed in view his clerical collar.

“Are you a priest?” the surprised mugger asked.

“Yes.”

“So sorry, please forgive me.”

The priest saw this as an opportunity for evangelization so he offered the man a cigarette hoping for a short conversation. The man plainly refused.

“No thanks, Father. I give up cigarettes during Lent.”

Be it coincidence or conscious liturgical intent on the part of the Church, the season of Lent usually falls on the winter season, or at the latest, when winter is on the wane and spring beckons. But this does not mean that Lent’s seasonal timing with winter reduces its significance to places that experience it. Far from it.

With the cold of winter, mother nature eventually “hardens” as it is covered by snow. Winter is also that time of the year when plants and vegetation “die” as they are enveloped by snow.

CNN recently re-ran a documentary on “children soldiers” — boys who are lured to join private armies in exchange for money and land for their families. A 15-year-old boy narrated that he has killed nine people so far, all political enemies of a drug lord he was serving. “The first time you’re nervous. But in time you get used to it, people dying right before your eyes.” The cold of winter has descended in his heart.

No wonder then that the Church proclaims repeatedly during Lent, “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.” Lent is that time of the year when we are called to a collective “defrosting” of our hardened hearts — hardened by sin, unforgiveness and mediocrity in the spiritual life.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What is it in my heart that I have buried to the point of hardening? What is my attitude towards the sacrament of Reconciliation?

Lord, I thank You for the grace of the Lenten season. Open my heart and my mind that I may hear with effectiveness the invitation of Your Word. Amen.

St. David, Bishop,
pray for us.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

FOLLOWING WITH LOVE

Obedience is part of our day-to-day living. As man lives, he cannot but encounter situations that require him to oblige. When we ride a bus we observe that we follow direction. When you go to the supermarket, you follow directions. In simple things that we do, we find that there is always structure that is given to us. Do we think a structure is given just for the sake of having structure? Every structure provides an objective and with this objective, we are required to look into its meaning. How can we find this meaning? This meaning can be found in the sincerity of our heart.

What I am trying to say here is that love should be present in all that we do. This is looking at obedience in the context of love.

In today's readings, we see the commandments being given by the Lord to Moses. These commandments are the standards that man should follow.

Following these commandments means following the will of God. God wills it because of His love for His people. And as God loves His people, He also wants His people to love one another. Thus, the consequence of His love is for us to love one another. In fulfillment of this, we connect this commandment to the Gospel for today. As Jesus said: "Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

Jesus is now inviting us to a higher level of obedience. He wants that the things that we follow and do be deeply rooted in love. Maybe, in

our day-to-day living, we cannot see the relevance of what we do or what we follow. Oftentimes, we see the things that happen to us as ordinary. But with these things that we do, Jesus is inviting us to see the importance of what we are doing. Try to do things, no matter how simple, with love.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

God gave us freedom to obey or reject Him. Only a human person is capable of saying "No" to God. But with the same freedom, only a human person can genuinely and sincerely say "Yes" to God. The choice is yours.

Lord, teach me to love the way You love us. Let Your love overwhelm my entire being so that through love I can understand deeply the meaning of the commandment You have given to us.

St. Chad, Bishop, pray for us.



THE MODEL OF PRAYER

Perhaps the most popular prayer that there is in the Christian world is the Lord’s Prayer. Almost everyone, from little children playing in the streets to old women selling in the market, knows the Lord’s Prayer. Jesus taught His disciples this prayer when they saw Him praying and asked Him, “Master, teach us how to pray.”

Jesus’ life was a life of prayer. Prayer should be brief because it is for our good, not for the good of God since He already knows what we need. The Lord’s Prayer is a simple prayer and despite its brevity, one of the Fathers of the Church called the Lord’s Prayer “truly a summary of the whole Gospel” — the expression of our chief beliefs that serve as an “Identification Prayer,” like a distinctive badge that bind believers together.

When Jesus gave to His disciples the Lord’s Prayer, He intended to

give it to them not as the only prayer but rather as the model of prayer. It is the model prayer since we will be able to see in it the four elements of prayer that we have been taught of, which Catholic tradition remembers as the ACTS (Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving and Supplication). In it, we ask not only for the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. Speaking with God is an intensely personal event.

In this season of Lent, let us never forget to call on God our Father as Jesus had taught us. We have a right to call God our Father if we treat other people as our brothers and sisters, especially those who are closest to us and those who are most in need. Now is a good time to improve our prayer life and our relationship with God as we observe the season of Lent.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do I treat other people as my brothers and sisters? Have I lived out the words that I always say whenever I recite the Lord’s Prayer?

Heavenly Father, teach me to pray. May You always be with me and guide me as I live out this journey of life. May I truly understand the words that Your son Jesus Christ had taught us and to live out the words that I utter as I recite the Lord’s Prayer.

**Blessed Katherine Drexel,
pray for us.**



LISTEN!

The most common thing we do when we pray is talk, talk and talk. We tend to beg for the graces that we need. The most common prayer that we do is a prayer of petition. Somehow, it has been the easiest way for us to pray.

However, we usually forget that prayer is a two-way communication. It is a dialogue. We cannot call prayer a dialogue if we do not give God the chance to speak in the silence of our hearts. We fail to remember the words of the boy Samuel in the temple: “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Oftentimes, we change it to: “Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking.”

In these modern times, most people would like to do the talking. They would prefer to be heard than to be the one who listens. Besides, listening is not that easy. It demands a form of discipline to the one who is listening. Somehow, listening has now become a commodity — something that is difficult to find.

But wouldn't it be better if we let God do the talking? Besides, God knows what is best for us. He clearly knows what would be helpful and what would be harmful for us. If only we would let God speak to our hearts, then His will may not be that obscure for us.

Let us not be afraid, then, to turn our hearts to God. He is more than willing to listen to us but we must not forget that we must also let God do the talking. Besides, His ways are better than us.

In this season of Lent, we are being asked to listen more and talk less. In this age wherein people have no time to listen, let us take the extra step to give a listening ear. To give time for people who are asking for a little attention. Who knows? Maybe God would speak to us through a friend in need. But if we let that opportunity pass, God may not have another time to talk to us. And maybe, we won't have another time to silence our hearts. *Fr. Joel O. Jason*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Am I a listening person?
How generous am I with my time dedicated to prayer?
Have I listened to God lately?

Loving Father, You have listened to my groaning and appeals. Help me open my heart so that I may listen to Your loving will. Open my ears that I, too, may listen to my brothers and sisters in need. Amen.

**St. Casimir, Confessor,
pray for us.**

WAIT

People nowadays would prefer to accomplish many things within a short period of time. They treat time as something very precious and valuable. Some of them would even prefer to shorten their meal times by eating instant and ready-to-eat food so that they can save time. Students also have a quick, easy and instant access to information through the Internet. This would require them a smaller amount of time to spend in research. These are just some realities that make our lives more convenient. These realities spare us from waiting for a long time to accomplish things through the long and traditional processes.

But there are certain tasks in life that require us to take the long process and wait. And I think this is what Jesus was referring to when He said, “Ask and it will be given to you, search and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” When Jesus said these words, He does not mean that we can easily get what we pray for, just like eating instant noodles.

When we come to meet Jesus in prayer and ask for something, He does not readily give us the answer to our prayer. Instead, He gives us certain situations in life that form part of the process in achieving what we pray for.

Why does God want us to undergo the long process? Perhaps it is because He wants to teach us something that we might miss if He would readily give us the answer to our prayers. It is the waiting and going through the process that matter most. We are not mere passive recipients. And this is what Jesus taught us. In the desire of God to save us from our sins, He chose to undergo the long process of becoming man like us. He chose to suffer and to experience the excruciating pains as He was nailed to the cross. God had

the option to save us by just a single stroke of His hand. But He did not choose that. He chose to wait and to undergo the long and hard process so that people may truly learn and believe in Him. *Fr. Joel O. Jason*

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

How willing am I to wait and to choose the long process?

Lord, help me to learn Your ways. May I be patient enough to wait and to choose the long process so that I may learn more the lessons You want to teach me. Amen.

**St. John Joseph of the Cross,
Confessor, pray for us.**

THE PRACTICE OF ABSTINENCE

This Friday of Lent is offered as a special day of abstinence. How does the Christian tradition understand abstinence? It is not only a physical sacrifice but a spiritual one, too. It is a spiritual sacrifice because it is a way of showing our contrite heart to Jesus who bore all the suffering of man — sin. It is an expression of repentance for our sins and a manifestation of our humble imploring of His mercy and sincere regret of the transgression of His will.

Bishop Fulton Sheen told of his experience one Lenten season while on a plane to a speaking engagement. When the flight attendant offered him his lunch, he excused himself saying, “I’ll just have a sandwich, it’s Lent.” The woman beside him also settled for just a sandwich. “So you’re also Catholic,” Bishop Sheen asked. The woman with a surprised look said, “No, I’m a model.”

The fasting of Lent differs in essence from just plain dieting. When we diet, the aim is usually to look better. When we fast (although beautification may be its consequence), our aim is beatification — to be beatified, to be better. We become better because we are able to control our desires. Instead of being dominated by the senses, we regulate our senses because we are ruled by the Spirit. Then we become blessed, then we become better disciples and witnesses of our Lord. The discipline of Lent can never be dissociated with discipleship. Discipline without discipleship is like practicing for a marathon without running it. Discipleship without discipline is running a marathon without practicing.

In these 40 days of spiritual preparation, may we all become disciplined disciples of the Lord.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What can I give up this season of Lent? What spiritual sacrifice can I offer for the conversion of sinners?

Merciful and loving God, help us in our quest for repentance. May You be our light. Make our humble hearts sincere and clean. We ask this through the Divine Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Coleyye, Virgin, pray for us.



THE CHALLENGE OF LOVE

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “I love you. The Father loves you and God created you out of love,” are indeed comforting. These very words please us simply because they give us an assurance that God is always there to love us. He is always with us. The words serve as our way towards eternal life. However, these words do not merely please us but they also challenge us in our daily lives as human persons loved by God. The assurance that we are loved challenges us to love others in return. We are loved by God and we are also called to love. We are blessed, so we are also called to be a blessing for others. It is a two-way love story between God and us, between me and God.

Our Gospel for today speaks about “love.” It presents us two things, namely God’s love and the challenge of love. We are asked by Jesus to become perfect like the Father. Is it possible for us, limited human beings, to become perfect as the Father? Perhaps the answer is

“yes,” because we are loved by God. We are loved so that we may be able to know what love is all about. And we may learn how to express that love. Therefore, we can be perfect as the Father when we put our love into God’s love and love like Him. How does God love? God’s love is unlimited. He makes the sun shine on the good and the bad. He gives rain to those who do evil and good. God’s love is for everybody.

The challenge now of love is to love God above all and to love your neighbor as Jesus loves you. Sisters and brothers in Christ, we are asked to share and express the love that we feel from God not only to our friends but also to our enemies. We

are challenged to love not only the people who love us but also the people who hate us. We are asked to be a lover like God who loves us and embraces us wholeheartedly with our sins, weaknesses and wounds. God did not love only His Son and His Holy Spirit but rather He also loves us.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do I experience God’s love in my life? When did I share that love to my neighbor especially to the persons whom I hate?

Lord, I will give what You want me to give. I will do what You want me to do. I will go wherever You want me to go. I will be what You want me to be and I will love whom You want me to love. Amen.

Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, Martyrs, pray for us.

Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19
Romans 8:31b-34
Mark 9:2-10

March
Sunday

8

PLUGGED IN, TUNED OUT

“This is my beloved Son, listen to him” (Mark 9:7). Today I believe we have a crisis in listening. Let me share with you a not-so-recent experience of mine.

It was at Mass and I was delivering my homily. In the congregation, I noticed a girl intently looking at me with what seemed like a half-smile on her face. Every now and then she would nod (in agreement I suppose) after each point I raised. I felt affirmed and encouraged. I think I spoke longer than usual that time.

Back on my seat, I happened to look back at the girl. The half-smile was still there. “I made a lasting impression,” I proudly said to myself. But surprisingly, I noticed she was still nodding.

The congregation stood up for the Credo. It was then that she quickly but discreetly put away her earphones. That explained the half-smile. That explained the nodding. There went my self esteem.

I believe this thing happens often — in Church, in the workplace, in our homes. We seem to

be listening to one another but we really aren’t. We seem to be present but really we are somewhere else. And with the advent of handy music players, do-it-all cellphones, handheld personal video players, global communication gadgets, we have the perfect excuse to be “occupied” and even look hip. Sadly, we are constantly plugged in but tuned out from one another.

Herein lies the challenge for the human family. This requires the prudent and critical use of our God-given gifts of intelligence and dominion over nature.

The God who is a “communion of Persons” endowed us with the gifts to keep our families (both personal and global) in communion with one another. It remains our

task never to allow the same technology, whose purpose is to make us accessible to one another, make us “inaccessible” from one another.

As for me, my task right now is to rebuild my self-esteem. I hope you are nodding as you read this reflection.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:
How “open” am I to the many ways God speaks to me?

Heavenly Father, help me to listen to others and thus listen to Your Beloved Son in my daily life, that I may always follow Your will in everything I say and do. Amen.

**St. John of God, Religious,
pray for us.**

PLAYING SAFE

Life is, first and foremost, life “with” someone, a life relation to the other, in relation to God, to those whom we love, and to those who love us. In our day-to-day living, it is inevitable that we find ourselves judging others and even condemning them as if we’re perfect, incapable of committing any mistakes. Why is it that people have the tendency to gawk at others’ imperfections, a transference wherein he exactly acts as a faultfinder just to justify and cover up his limitations? Over and over again, unconsciously, we fix our eyes on others’ face dirt. It is really a sad commentary that we indulge ourselves in doing things that we should not, such as gossiping and judging others, and hastily get away when the things get rough. On the other hand, we have a propensity to get infuriated when someone does the same thing to us. We tend to be self-righteous and notice the other’s speck and forget to look at ourselves first.

We also seek out for forgiveness, right? At some stage in our personal prayer, we beg for God’s forgiveness for the wrongs we have done, am I right again? Yes, it is easy to say sorry and beg for forgiveness every time we do something wrong but we become stone-hearted to accept another’s shortcomings. With that conduct, we are like the unforgiving servant in the parable. Now, I challenge you to take a look at your life: do you have an admirable relationship with others — with your family, friends, co-workers, neighbors? You may come to realize that you’re miles apart from them even though they’re just around. Learn from the parable of

the unforgiving servant whom the Master has forgiven and punished later for he did not forgive his fellow servant. Let us be guided by the biblical maxim, “The measure you give will be the measure you receive back.” *Fr. Joel O. Jason*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

The practice of abstinence in Lent is far from mere dieting or refraining from certain types of food. Why not make this Lenten season an occasion to practice spiritual abstinence from righteousness and harsh judgment?

Lord, incline my heart to forgive. Teach me to love others rather than condemn them. Amen.

St. Frances of Rome, Religious, pray for us.

FALSE IDENTITY

The Gospel reading for today may sound familiar for the unusual reason that some fundamentalists would use this as a basis for rejecting the Catholic practice of addressing priests as “Father.” But let me lead you to a deeper reflection on that part of the Gospel, so you would see clearly what Jesus is trying to say.

Jesus denounces the hypocrisy of the faith of the Pharisees. They don’t practice what they preach while assigning titles and honors to themselves. Some Bible commentators say that it is precisely for this reason that Matthew wrote these prohibitions: don’t call yourselves rabbi, father or teacher.

Jesus therefore showed them what being a true rabbi, father or teacher is. It is not just by dictating what is to be done, leaving others to do the job, while you just sit and watch, saying that I am the master and they are the laborers.

It is this false identity of being a rabbi or master that Jesus was denouncing. Our Lord tells us that to be a true leader, one

must not “lord it over the flock,” but to be the first one to serve.

Confucius would talk about the rectification of names: If you’re a father, be a good father. If you’re a servant, be a good servant. Yet sometimes, what we have are false identities of who we are and the roles that we play.

It is good for us to see our own false identities in life. You may be a father who works so hard because you are the bread winner, but you fail to talk to your children and become a real father. You may be a politician who is so intoxicated by power and honor, but you fail to even talk to simple people. You may be a priest who is so awed by people’s attention, but you fail to become a real pastor to the people.

In this time of repentance and conversion, all we need to do is look at Christ’s suffering on the cross and see how the Most High King and Son of God stooped down to serve and offer His life for us, giving us the model of being a true Master and Lord.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are my false identities in life, the masks that I wear to hide my insecurities? Do I live up to who I am as a Christian?

Lord, make me faithful to my identity as a true Christian, and follow You in Your loving service. Amen.

St. Attalas, Abbot, pray for us.

I AM YOUR SERVANT, LORD

I remember a professor of mine who said that one of the problems of our country is the problem of power, authority and position. If you are powerful, then you can dominate the powerless. Almost all dream to be powerful, to be authoritative, to own a position and especially to be the greatest among all. Filipinos will move things in order to get the position even though it will cause them harm and this happens during elections. I remember being so disappointed reading of corruption and cheating even at the level of the *Sagguniang Kabataan*.

In our Gospel for today, Jesus invites us not to be the great but to be a servant and slave. He wants us to be in service with others and with the Church. Jesus showed us an attitude of humility and simplicity. These can be expressed in three things: commitment, self-giving and stewardship. First, our commitment is very important in showing

our fidelity to Jesus who was faithful to the plan of His Father. Second, by giving ourselves totally to God and by showing our love and concern to our neighbors. Lastly, we are invited to be stewards of all the things that God has entrusted to us. Therefore, we are servant and slave to each and everyone. Even those in higher positions are invited to become servants because their function is to serve the people and not for the people to serve them. Jesus is the best example of this humility as He said,

“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

As we celebrate the season of Lent, we should remind ourselves that we are servants for others. “Lent” is the present tense of the word “lend.” Meaning, our life was given and lent by God to us and He has the right to take this life from

us. Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Our world values the maxim “first come, first served.” Jesus inverts the process. For the Christian disciple, it is “first come, first to serve.” Find ways and opportunities today to live out this Christian admonition.

Heavenly Father, we praise and thank You for the gift of life You have given us. May this reflection help us overcome all our anxieties, fears and reservations in life. May You be the center of our life as we celebrate this season of Lent. May we grow deeper in Your wisdom and love. Amen.

St. Eulogius of Cordova, Spain, Martyr, pray for us.

OPPORTUNITIES IN LIFE

Poverty is one of life's sad realities. Everywhere you go, you would see poverty-stricken people. They are the poor people — lying down on the streets and sidewalks, selling different things to earn a living and some asking for alms to buy food.

In today's Gospel, we hear the parable of the rich man and a poor man, Lazarus. The rich man is very fortunate and privileged because he has everything he needs. On the other hand, Lazarus was a poor man; he was lying outside the door of the rich man. The heartbreaking fact was that the rich man was not bothered by the situation of Lazarus. He has all the opportunities to share what he has. He could have given some of his clothes or he could have shared some of his food to Lazarus, but he did not. The rich man did not utilize

his opportunity to help a poor man. In the end, when they both died, Lazarus was comforted in heaven while the rich man was tormented in hell.

The challenge for us is not to waste the opportunities in life that come our way. Are you in a position of abundance? Then God is placing before you the opportunity to give. More often, we pray to God to teach us to be generous, but God will not make us an instant generous person. Generosity is something that develops through practice. God gives us opportunities to practice being generous. God gives us opportunities to practice sharing and giving especially this Lenten

season. Almsgiving is a concrete expression of not ignoring the opportunity to help the poor. *Fr. Joel O. Jason*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Today, pray over that beautiful phrase taken from the Plenary Council of the Philippines, "No one is so rich that he has nothing to receive. No one is so poor as to have nothing to give."

Lord, help us to realize the meaning of the many opportunities in life. May we continue to love and serve You through these opportunities we have.

**St. Aurelian, Bishop,
pray for us.**

STEWARDSHIP

When I was young, I used to play priest (*pari-parian*). I would cover a table with curtains and then I would call my friends and cousins. We would buy Coke and Fita biscuits and this would represent the bread and wine. Everyone would wish it was communion time already.

This got me thinking: why do we call it *bahay-bahayan*, *doktor-doktoran* or *pari-parian*? Because after the play, there is no longer any house. After the play, one no longer is a doctor. After the play, I am no longer a priest. It is only temporary, not forever. Is this the reason why we call our possessions *ari-arian*. Everything that we have is given and we cannot hold on to them forever. Even the very life we have is simply an *ari-arian*. Time will come when we have to turn it over to the Lord of Life.

The Parable of the Tenants reminds us of the Christian meaning of stewardship. God is the source of everything that we have and are. In a telling line from the Gospel, we are reminded, "Therefore

I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit" (v. 43).

God expects us to be fruitful with the gifts He has given us. When we come face to face with the Lord, He will ask us how much we have used all that He has given us. What do we bring with us before the Lord?

There was a dying man who told his wife, "When I die, I want you to put all my money in my coffin. I want to bring all of them with me." The wife took all of the man's money, deposited it in her bank account, issued the man a check and put it in the man's coffin.

When a man dies, his palms remain open. No one dies with palms closed. We bring nothing with us when we die. The only thing we can bring with us are the seeds of goodness we have planted in our hearts and in the hearts of others. What would you bring with you when that time comes?

REFLECTION QUESTION:

When was the last time you thanked God because of the blessings that you have received? When was the last time that you humbled yourself before God and said, "My God, all of these gifts are from You. I offer them back for you"?

Lord, teach me to be Your humble servant and let me offer the gifts that I received from You by sharing them to other people. Amen.

St. Roderic, Martyr,
pray for us.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

HOMECOMING

In one Catholic parochial school, two boys were brought to the principal's office. They were suspected of stealing items from the school bookstore. The guidance counselor, who happens to be the religion teacher of the boys, was also called for. Disappointed, the teacher said to the principal, "I can't believe it. They are very good in my religion class." Then sounding defensive and wishing to exonerate the boys, he added, "Just to prove to you, I'll ask them a simple religion question." Then he turned to the boys and asked, "Where is God?" One of the boys turned to his mate and whispered, "We're in big trouble. God is missing and they think we're the ones who took Him."

Is God really missing or is it us who are missing? When Adam and Eve sinned against God in the book of Genesis, He asked them the question, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) Did God really not

know where they are? Of course He does. The question was not one seeking information; God was looking for confession on the part of the first man and woman. God wants them to own up to what they had done. God wants them to return to Him.

Chapter 15 of Luke is known to be the Mercy parables. The parables of the lost coin and the prodigal son remind us of the God who constantly longs for the return of His wayward children. In one poignant scene in the Gospel, the Father sees the prodigal from afar. It shows that all along, the Father has been waiting for the son's return. In this season of Lent, we repeat that beautiful prayer-antiphon, "As I live, says the

Lord, I do not wish the sinner to die but to turn back to me and live." Friend, *nawawala ka ba? o nagwawala ka ba?* The season of Lent calls for your return. Don't take too long.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How many times have you postponed your homecoming? Look at the confessional and see in it the Father's embrace ready to warm your heart.

Lord, forgive the numbness of my heart. Let Your grace flow into my heart and share it to others that I may forgive them and love them. Amen.

**St. Mathilde, Widow,
pray for us.**

THE CLEANSING POWER OF LENT

The third Sunday of Lent speaks of the cleansing of the temple. Incensed by what He perceives as the people's desecration of the temple, Jesus made a whip of cords and drove out the money-changers' tables as well as their merchandise. And in reference to His impending passion, death and resurrection, Jesus told the Jews to destroy the temple and in three days He will raise it up again. In this episode in John's Gospel, Jesus made an association between the temple and the temple of His own body.

As St. Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Here the temple He refers to is our own body. Jesus is inviting us to purify our body for it is pleasing to Him. He wants us to offer our entire body to God for it is not our own. In the letter of St. Paul to the Romans, he said that we must offer our bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, our spiritual worship (Romans 12). Our body therefore should be used for our spiritual

worship to God. We are given a body that we may embody God's love for His people.

There are forces within us that seem to pull us into different directions. We know what is good but we seem to desire what is evil. This is why we need the discipline of Lent. Fasting and abstinence give us the opportunity to purify our desires and subject them to the jurisdiction of our wills. Purification is the end-product of the discipline of Lent.

A man went to a monk to consult him over his struggle to control his passions. Offering an imagery, he said, "I feel like there are two wolves within me constantly fighting. One is good, the other bad. They are pulling me into different directions. Which one of them will prevail?" The monk said, "Simple. The one that you feed constantly will prevail."

Vanity and indulgence are the food of the senses. Fasting and abstinence, coupled with prayer, are the food of the soul. Which one do you feed constantly?

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Does vanity rule the way I look at my body? How has charity purified the way I look at my body?

Lord, grant me the grace to perfectly serve You. Purify my body as a perfect offering that I can give to You and may Your Spirit dwell in me forever. Amen.

St. Klemens Maria Hofbauer, Hermit, pray for us.

THE IRONY OF THE CROSS

In our readings for today, we see similarities and differences. Let us first look into the similarities. In the first reading, we hear of the story of Naaman, a great commander of the Syrian army. Great and famous though he was, Naaman was a leper. He seeks total healing from leprosy. In Luke's Gospel, the Jews are seeking salvation and deliverance from Roman occupation. Now, we look into their differences. When Naaman was told by the prophet Elisha to wash seven times in the Jordan River, he first rejected the idea, thinking that there are better rivers than the Jordan. But after a while, Naaman submitted himself to the idea and he gets healed. On the other hand, when Jesus told the Jews that He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, they totally and stubbornly rejected Him because they claim that nothing good can come from Nazareth.

The Lenten season presents to us the idea of the cross as the way

to deliverance and salvation. We could be like Naaman or the Jews in our response to this invitation. We can shun the cross to avoid suffering and pain. Or we can willingly and with faith carry the cross of our lives. We can bear our individual crosses with patience and perseverance, believing that in the end God will alleviate our suffering and pain.

The choice is ours. We can take the wide road but it will lead us to damnation, or the narrow road which can bring us to eternal life. Jesus presents the idea of the cross as a way to our salvation. Jesus could have chosen another option but He did not. Jesus willingly submitted Himself to the Father's will to gain for man the salvation He seeks. Our Lenten observance reminds us that there is no other way we can reach heaven except through the cross. As faithful disciples of our Lord, we should be always willing to follow Him, even if it takes the cross.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How do you view the trials that come your way? Do you see them as obstacles or as means to increase your faith? How do you carry your cross? Is it with complaint or grumbling, or with patience and perseverance?

Heavenly Father, teach me to carry my cross with patience, perseverance, humility and love. Help me to have the faith to see the trials that come my way as Your means to strengthen me. Amen.

**St. Heribert of Cologne,
Bishop, pray for us.**

LOVING AND FORGIVING WITHOUT MEASURE

The Lenten season gives us the opportunity to reflect, to give alms, to pray and to practice penance by fasting and abstinence. Lent is also the season to examine our conscience. Try to write down the sins you have committed before the Lord. Perhaps you will be surprised with what you will see in your list. Recall the number of times you have committed those sins; that is also the number of times God has forgiven you. Our God is merciful and He immediately dispenses His forgiveness whenever we approach Him with a contrite heart.

For us humans, it is very difficult to forgive others because of our own pride. But we should be thankful to God because He had shown us humility as an example by forgiving others. God always extends His mercy by stooping down to us. And He wants us to do the same. He expects us to forgive our fellow human beings. The unforgiving heart is a proud person. In the same way, a person who does not acknowledge his

sinfulness is also a proud person.

Lent gives us the time to grow in love by forgiving. The more we feel the loving forgiveness of God, the more we should forgive. We do not forgive only during Lent but every time somebody offends us. We also practice asking for forgiveness whenever we offend someone.

Yes, it is very hard to forgive, but this is how we express true love to our neighbors. When our Lord said to Peter to forgive seventy-seven times (cf. Matthew 18:22), this does not mean that forgiveness is something quantifiable. Jesus is simply saying that to forgive and to love should be without measure, because the love of God is without

measure. This is the consequence of being a Christian. When it comes to loving and forgiving, there are supposed to be no limits. It is contrary to being a Christian not to forgive and not to love. Let us ask the Lord for the grace that we may really internalize and live out the value of forgiving.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

1. Whenever someone offends me, do I show love by forgiving?
2. Do I ask pardon immediately whenever I offend someone?

Dear Lord, help me to grow in love by forgiving those who have offended me. Make my heart be like Yours, a heart that is merciful and forgiving.

St. Patrick, Bishop,
pray for us.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

Before it was revenge, but now it is forgiveness. Before it was punishment, but now it is love. Before it was the Letter, but now it is the Spirit. Before it was Moses, but now it is Jesus. Jesus came not to abolish the Mosaic Law, but to fulfill it. His advent is not a period of destruction, but a moment of fulfillment and perfection.

In the Gospel, to fulfill the Law is not the same as simply doing or obeying it. Fulfillment happens in the realization of the Spirit of the Law — wherein there is no pressure, force or even a desire to violate it. Moreover, “to fulfill” refers to the realization and perfection of the Law and of the prophecy. Jesus Himself is the fulfillment of the Law and of the Prophecy. He is the center of our faith. Everything is seen in relation to Him.

Jesus assures us that not the slightest commandment of the Law will be abolished. We see in Him and in His life how even the

smallest and insignificant demand of the Law is lived and fulfilled in Him. Jesus is the true and perfect example of obedience to the Law, for He lived not in accordance with what the Law requires, but according to the love that He professes. He lived obediently, not because it is what the Law commands; but because it is how it is to be. Jesus is not concerned with what He should do, but we see that He lived according to His nature — to love. Being is more important than doing and this is what we should aim for: to be the person we really should be.

Jesus wills us to be fulfillers of

His commandments — to obey and to teach them. Moreover, it is Jesus whom we truly obey and teach. He is the fulfillment and Light of the Law. He is the reason, the central and core element of our faith and life. Thus, we live not of the past as it was in the Law, but at present as it is in the heart of Jesus.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

The Christian life is not about, “How far can I go before I break the law?” This is minimalism. It is about, “How far can I love in every situation?” That is Christian perfection. How do I live and fulfill the commandments of Jesus?

Lord, grant me a humble and obedient heart to fulfill Your commandments. May I fulfill them with deep joy, firm trust and great love in harmony with my neighbors. Amen.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Bishop and Doctor, pray for us.

THE GENEROUS GIVER

In today's Gospel, we read about the infancy narrative of Jesus, the plan of Joseph to divorce Mary silently so as to spare her from humiliation and death, and the acceptance of Joseph of the divine Will of God. In the acceptance of Joseph as his son, the prophecy of old was fulfilled. Jesus became part of the house of David. Jesus is the son of David.

In the Gospel, the Virgin Mary was betrothed to Joseph. She was to marry Joseph, who belonged to the house of David. But when Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant before they came together, he decided to silently divorce her. During those times, when a woman gets pregnant and has no known father, it was a great humiliation to her and her family and she may be stoned to death. She might be accused of infidelity which, during those times, was considered adultery and punishable by death. Joseph wanted to spare her from humiliation and death so he decided

to divorce her. While he was in this thought, the angel appeared to him in a dream and told him that he need not be afraid to take Mary as his wife for she was carrying in her womb the Son of God, the Savior of the world, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He did as the angel told him and accepted Mary and her son, Jesus the Savior.

Joseph was described by the evangelist as a just man. Joseph is just not only because he spared Mary from humiliation and death but most especially because he followed

the will of God. He accepted his vocation as the foster father of the Son of God and he did it with his whole heart. He gave away his very self to the will of the Father. He was a humble servant of God, a man of great faith and a very righteous man. Even when he knew about the situation of Mary, he did not will her misery but, on the contrary, how he could help her to avoid humiliation and death.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

By Jewish law, it was Joseph's "right" to have Mary persecuted because she broke the law. Joseph did not claim that right. Christianity is not just a matter of claiming what is my right. It is more importantly claiming what is right. Joseph did claim *his* right — He did what *is* right.

Holy and Almighty Father, teach us how to give and to give without asking something in return. Teach us to have that strong faith and obedience to Your will even when we don't understand everything. Amen.

St. Joseph, Husband of Mary, pray for us.

WELL SAID...WELL DONE!? WHICH ONE?

In *Bits and Pieces*, it says, “To look is one thing. To see what you look at is another. To understand what you see is a third. To learn from what you understand is still something else. But to act on what you learn is all that matters.”

Jesus said a commendable remark to the scribe, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” The scribe is neither “far” nor “near” from the Kingdom of God. He is rather “not far” from the Kingdom of God.

Loving requires no minimum requirement. It is always two dimensional — love of God and love of neighbor. The scribe in the Gospel has excellently expounded his understanding on the commandment. However, the commendation of Jesus seemingly suggests that verbalization is not enough. It rather involves concretization of what we learn. We should act on what we learn.

Our Gospel for today reminds us of our attitude towards our identity as Christians,

that we are loved, loving and lovable children of God. It is definitely good to hear, very well said. But is it well done?

Love is and should never be floating in the air. Christian love should be concretized and lived out. Words will only remain as words if we just keep them in our minds. But words concretized in day-to-day actions are life-giving words, words that heal and words that bring us near to the Kingdom of God.

A father had three men put on a contest as to who will win the heart of his daughter. One man recited a haunting poem to which the father said, “Well said.” The other quoted a portion of the Song of Songs in the Bible and adapted it as a poem for the woman. The father said, “Very clever, well said.” The third man was nowhere to be found. Looking out of the window, the

father saw him watering the garden and chopping wood for his daughter. The father said, “Well done!”

What is better than well said? Well done!

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:
Christianity is not a matter of saying but doing. Which brand of Christianity do you practice?

Lord, teach me to love You more fully and to love my neighbor wholeheartedly as You love me.

**St. Cuthbert, Bishop,
pray for us.**

THE ATTITUDE OF TRUE PRAYER

Today's Gospel speaks about prayer. Oftentimes, we pray because of petitions, favors and requests we ask from God. Most of the time we rush to the church whenever calamities strike, such as the 9/11 bombing and the tsunami phenomenon that killed a huge number of people in the South Asian countries. The Princess of the Stars sea tragedy that happened last year also drove the people to clasp their hands and pray. We have many reasons for praying, some are personal and some are communal. But in today's Gospel, Jesus presents two attitudes and contents of prayer. One kind of attitude and content is that of the Pharisee who in his prayer uplifted himself and considered himself better than the public sinners. Another kind of attitude is depicted by the tax collector who humbled himself, admitted his sinfulness and recognized the goodness of God.

The prophet Hosea in the first reading calls for repentance. In a way, he affirms the attitude of the tax

collector as he prayed in the Temple. God is telling us through the prophet Hosea that He doesn't need our burnt offerings and sacrifices. What He desires is our steadfast love and that we grow in the knowledge of Him. Yes, we have different intentions, manners and styles of praying but prayer should bring us to a deeper knowledge and relationship with God. Prayer helps us to know God, to love Him and humble ourselves before Him and learn more from Him. If our prayer is "full of ourselves," God cannot fill us in any way.

Prayer brings us closer to God. The closer we are to God, the better

we come to know who we are. In prayer, as God reveals Himself to us privately, we also recognize our sinfulness and unworthiness. A humble prayer is a school wherein we know God and hence by knowing Him we come to love Him. We cannot of course love somebody without knowing Him.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

1. What is the usual content of my prayers? How do I pray? Do I recognize God in my prayer moments?
2. Do I see my own unworthiness and sinfulness as I pray? Do I spend quality time talking with God in spite of my busy schedule?

Lord, teach me how to pray for I really don't know how to pray. Allow me to know You more and more so that I may love You even more.

St. Enda, Abbot, pray for us.

YOUR PRESENT IS MY FUTURE

Jesus Christ became our present so that we may become His future. Simply put, Jesus became man, that man may have the opportunity to become like God. This is the mystery of the Incarnation. God's Incarnation is the passageway to man's divinization. In the Gospel, we hear from John, "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."

There was once a story about a little girl who likes spending her time in her studies. One day, this girl was introduced to some arithmetic symbols. One sunny day, she accompanied her father to the nearby church in their village. Upon their arrival at the church's door, the little girl quickly asked

her father, "What is that big plus sign doing in front of the altar?" The father answered the little girl, "My dear daughter, that is not a plus sign, that is the cross; it is where our Lord Jesus Christ was nailed for us to be saved!" Looking back at the story, the little girl was in a way correct in saying that the cross is a plus sign. The image of the cross as the plus sign pictured our redemption because, through the cross, a big plus had been added into our life, something that we could not have accomplished by our own power.

Had it not been through the cross of Christ, man would have remained alienated to God. Had it not been through the wood of the cross, men would have been alienated from fullness of life.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

The next time you bless yourself with the sign of the cross, try to do it with conscious reverence and gratitude. We adore You, O Christ and we bless You, for by Your holy cross You have redeemed the world!

Lord, You have shared the life that we have for us to be able to share Yours. Help us always to mirror and share to others the love that You have given us. Amen.

**St. Deogratias, Bishop,
pray for us.**

CERTAINTY IN JESUS

The highlight of today's Gospel is the interaction and conversation between Jesus and the royal official. The royal official who heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea went to see Him and ask Him to come down and heal His dying son. In that interaction of Jesus and the official, we notice that the royal official's faith was not perfect. Why? Because as stated in the Gospel reading, he begged the good Lord to come down, not thinking that Jesus could work or perform a miracle even from a distance. Our Lord Jesus also noticed the imperfect faith of the official that's why he immediately retorted to the man by saying "unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe." After hearing the words of Jesus, the official once again begged the Lord to come down before his child dies. But instead of coming down, our Lord gave direction to the royal

official to go on his way because his son will live.

With this instruction from Jesus, the royal official's faith was put to the test. Would he accept Jesus' word without proof? The hope expressed in Jesus' words is the desire of all who are coming from sin to forgiveness, from death to new life in the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation. Trusting the words of Jesus seems so natural in this story. We rarely find it so clear and simple. Usually, we are either unsure about what to do or we discount what might happen. We always want certainty. Yet the direction for our lives is usually not that precise or apparent. We need to trust that God is with us. We are often not sure of what we "hear" initially, so we need to ponder it a while. We also have to trust our prayer, our intuition and the promises in the Scripture which assure us of God's guidance.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Do I really trust the words of God? Or do I only come to Him and trust Him when I am facing problems and difficulties in life?

Lord, help me to always trust and believe in Your words.

**St. Turubius De Mongrovejo,
Bishop, pray for us.**

DO GOOD

Jesus cured on a Sabbath. But some people around Him had problems with this. They cannot understand that Jesus, who is the Son of God, would do everything to show His love and care for every man, especially those who are in need. This is a way of showing that there really should be no hindrance if we are to truly love and care for others. But more often than not, we find excuses that would hinder us from showing our love and care to the people around us, especially those close to our hearts. “I am so busy in the office.” “I am so sorry, I forgot about our schedule.” “Traffic is so bad!” We have many excuses from showing our love and care for the people around us. We have placed love and care as secondary priorities in our lives.

We have placed persons below our material and financial concerns. We have made the state an institution to enslave its citizens.

Jesus in the Gospel is now showing us an example of how it is to put love and care as first priorities. Even if it means going beyond what the law dictates, He did not hesitate for it is the will of the Father. People matter more than laws. Love and care for man matter more than any other concern. Everyone who comes from the Father must be able to show and express his or her love and care for other men as it is the will of God for all.

We are now being challenged to live a particular reality in our life that we seem to have forgotten already: We are born to love and to

care. *Fr. Joel O. Jason*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Have I made a fine art of making excuses for doing good? When the opportunity to do good presents itself to me, do I grab it with excitement?

Heavenly Father, teach me to love and care above all just as what Christ has shown us. Amen.

**St. Catherine of Sweden,
Virgin, pray for us.**

25

March
Wednesday

Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Isaiah 7:10-14; 8: 10
Psalm 40:7-8a, 8b-9, 10, 11
Hebrews 10:4-10
Luke 1:26-38

“FIAT”

Have you ever met an eccentric person? Have you ever tried to be a kind of person who is out of place?

It is fitting to know that during the time of Mary, to conceive without a husband is to commit a grave sin which is punishable by death. A woman is stoned until she dies. Our Blessed Virgin Mary could have sensed the fear of being peculiar in her time.

“How can this be since I have no relations with a man?”

But then, with her trust and faith in the Lord, our Blessed Mother said her “fiat” (yes) to the call of God to be the bearer of our Lord Jesus Christ, *Theotokos*. In so doing, she became the world’s first tabernacle.

Our Blessed Mother did not allow herself to be intimidated by the pressures of her time. She said her “yes” with courage and with a firm trust in God, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to

me according to your word.” Thus, our Blessed Mother is the model of faith. She obediently accepted the plan of God, though it seemed so eccentric or strange or even weird in the eyes of the people during her time. She trusted the plan of God though it seemed so unclear to her. She still gave her “yes” to the Lord.

Mary always says “Yes” to God.

This Sunday we celebrate the Annunciation of our Lord and in this celebration, may we imitate the “fiat” of our Blessed Mother. Let us stand under the mystery of God’s plan for us, so that we may understand the saving power of

God. We may become eccentric, strange or even weird in the eyes of others. But if we give our “yes” to God with firm faith, we can never be out of place.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Think about this: God expects us to do the natural. Then He will supply the supernatural. In extreme cases, God may demand that we do the ridiculous, then He will supply the miraculous.

Lord, with the Blessed Mother, grant me the grace to be courageous in living out Your will.

**St. Lucy Filippini, Virgin,
pray for us.**

THE POWER OF TESTIMONY

One Monday, I was having lunch with a group of priest-friends after playing some rounds of bowling. It was our day off and all of us were dressed rather casually. When we asked for the bill, we were surprised to be informed that somebody already paid for it. When we inquired who it was, the manager told us a woman was intrigued by the sight of us young men collectively making the sign of the cross before taking our meals. Knowing from the manager that we were priests, she offered to pay our bill without our knowledge. The moral of the story? If you want free lunch, you know what to do.

That is the power of testimony. Sometimes we give our testimony unknowingly. At times we need to do it consciously.

Every Sunday, a man and his neighbor would usually come out of the door at about the same time. One is

going to play golf, the other goes to Sunday Mass. Every time, the man would invite the other to join him for a round of golf. The other would politely decline. After a series of tries, the golfer said, "You know, I always ask you to join me for golf every Sunday. How come you never invited me to join you in Church?" At times, we "believers" tend to keep our faith to ourselves. We tend to be timid in inviting others to the faith. Today in the Gospel, Jesus challenges the Christian to be a powerful testimony for all the world to see. Unless we are willing to do this, a great aspect of our Christianity is missing. Christianity began when a small group of impassioned men

shared to the world the Christ event. Evangelization is not about numbers. It is about passion, it is about being excited in the faith.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Does your practice of the faith manifest excitement and enthusiasm? What areas of your faith is suffering lukewarmness and dryness? Today, pray for the renewed outpouring of the Spirit in your life.

Lord, help me to become true witnesses of Your Word so that I may proclaim Your glory through the depths of my faith in You. Amen.

**St. Liudger, Bishop,
pray for us.**

PUTTING GOD IN A BOX

You wake up everyday, perform your morning rituals, work with the same bunch of people, do things at their appointed time in the same manner. This is what you go through every single day. Everything seems so easy to do, so convenient, so comfortable. You develop your comfort zones — in your work, in the people you relate with and sometimes even in what you believe. You have put yourself in a box and when that happens, you tend to put others in a box, too.

In today's Gospel, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were confused about the identity of Jesus. They were confused because they had a pre-determined notion of who the Messiah would be: a political liberator, a strong one who would deliver them from being subject to the Roman empire. They knew where Jesus came from, so how could He be the Messiah? How could this itinerant preacher be the liberator they have long been waiting for? Apparently, with their idea of the Messiah, they have put God in a box.

Often, we fall into the same mistake. For most of us, God should be this and that; he must not be otherwise. Even God has become part of our comfort zones. Our relationship with Him has become one of convenience so much so that when He disturbs our “smooth-sailing” journey in life, our faith is easily shattered.

Yes, it is important to know God. It is important that as Catholics, we learn what the Church teaches about our faith. But God leaves a mystery to Himself. We can never contain all there is to God. Let us not

allow our knowledge of Him to lead us to pre-determined notions that reduce Him to a mere function in our life.

Instead, our knowledge of God must lead us to discover how greatly He encompasses us. There are not enough words to describe the immense love He has for us. In the end, when human reasoning falls short, we realize that we can never put God in a box. *Fr. Joel O. Jason*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Has my prayer life become routine that I take my relationship with the Lord for granted? Have I become so comfortable with my beliefs that I no longer cherish the mystery that is in God?

Lord, I want to take You out of the box of my preconceived notions about You. This Lent, help me to renew my relationship with You that I may give You my genuine love — outside my biases, without my masks, outside my comfort zones.

St. John of Egypt, Hermit,
pray for us.

JESUS, THE CHRIST

In the Gospel of John, we can see the different judgment of the characters. Based on what they have heard, seen and known about Jesus, they come up with their various judgments of Him. Some would judge Jesus as a prophet, others would say that He is the Messiah. But on the part of those who know that Jesus is from Galilee and knowing that He is an uneducated outsider, they did not believe that He is the Messiah because they said that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem and not from Galilee. But through Jesus' words and deeds they were amazed. So, their further questions would be: "Why can Jesus be amazing in His words and deeds? Where does He get His wisdom?" We can clearly see in the life of Jesus that He is sent to us by the Father in order for us to be redeemed. It is really God's plan for our salvation.

The Gospel for today speaks of the controversy regarding

the origin of the Messiah. Where did He come from? What is His origin?

People in the Bible are often named after their place of origin: Simon of Cyrene, Mary of Magdala, Simon of Arimathea. Jesus, too, for a time was designated by the place of His origin, thus, Jesus of Nazareth. But you will notice that later in His life and ministry, Jesus will come to be known as the Christ, from the Greek word, meaning the Anointed, the Messiah, the one sent by the Father. Jesus came to be known not only by His physical origin but more so by His spiritual and divine lineage. We, too, have a spiritual lineage. That is why even though we have different names, we all share a common name — Christian. We

are to be known not only by our physical places of origin. We are to be known by our truthfulness to our spiritual lineage.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

How have you lived up to your name as Christian? Have you given a good accounting of your spiritual lineage?

Lord, teach me to judge my life and the life of others as You do so that we can be worthy of the love and salvation that You have for us.

**St. Guntramnus, King,
pray for us.**

FEAR FACTOR

One time I was having this animated conversation with some of my friends regarding a hit reality TV series that deals with defying one's greatest fears. In that show, the contestants are shown to swim with alligators, to eat exotic and unfamiliar food, to walk through broken glasses and other death-defying stunts that would truly challenge and confront one's fears. Then, one of my friends asked each of us what our greatest fear was. And majority of my friends responded death.

Why are we afraid of death? Why is it so difficult for us to talk about death? I think it is because death is often associated with darkness and decay, with sadness and hopelessness, with pain and weakness and mortality. More than anything, I think it is difficult because death has to do with losing something or someone. It is about the loss of the people we love, the loss of familiar things that we have gotten so used to, the loss of life and energy and vigor, the

loss of beauty and opportunity.

But, in today's Gospel, Jesus was very much aware of the coming of His death. "The hour has come," began Jesus, "when the Son of man should be glorified." It was clear to Him that He was getting nearer and nearer to His death. But what was His attitude? He took it with calmness and He even gave symbolisms and imageries of death and what it brings forth. "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain but if it dies, it produces much fruit." He was saying here that it is only by death that new life is attained and made possible.

Yes, death can be a painful experience but if we only look at it on a deeper level and transcend our fears, anxieties and biases, then we would see the beauty of it. For death leads us to new life. It is never an end. It is just a phase. It is just a step towards eternal life, a life without fear for it would be a life in union with the Father.
Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Why do I fear death? When I wake up in the morning, what dominates my thoughts? How can I prepare myself to accept the reality of death?

Lord Jesus Christ, help me to view death not as a painful reality but in the light of the promise of life eternal. Inspire me to live this life with love and kindness that would lead to the attainment of a life in union with You. Amen.

St. Rupert, Bishop,
pray for us.

Daniel 13:1-9, 15-17, 19-30,
33-62 (or Daniel 13:41c-62)
Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
John 8:1-11

March **30**
Monday

TOLERANCE, INTOLERANCE

“Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw stone on her.”

Jesus manifested great compassion towards the woman caught in adultery in the Gospel. In the classic Christian writings, this scene has often been described as Mercy meeting Misery. It is comforting to know that Jesus only has mercy towards us sinners. Condemnation is alien to the heart of Jesus. But let us note that in dispensing mercy, Jesus highlighted a crucial distinction. He does not condemn the sinner, but He condemns the sin. Verse 11 of the Gospel has Jesus reminding the woman, “Go and sin no more.”

Today we notice a modern attitude which is actually a misinterpretation of this Gospel episode. We see today our unwillingness to correct evil and wrongdoing. Not wanting to be labeled judgmental, we shy away from

legitimate occasions of fraternal correction. This is far from the spirit of the Gospel. We are to be tolerant of the person but never of the sin. Sometimes we become tolerant both of the person and the sin. The other word for this attitude is indifference. The opposite is just as wrong. We can become intolerant of both the sin and the sinner. The other word for this is extremism.

In showing mercy to the woman caught in adultery, Jesus was far from being indifferent to any wrongdoing. Never in the Gospel do we find Jesus also going to the side of extremism. Today, let us examine ourselves. In what situations do I find myself uninvolved to the point of indifference? In what situations do I find myself too aggressive as to be extreme? Let us allow the virtue of Christ to guide us into integration.

Fr. Joel O. Jason

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Have there been times that I cower into indifference? In what situations do I find myself too aggressive as to be self-righteous?

Lord, make me an ardent but gentle proclaimer of Your Gospel. Amen.

**St. Osburga, Virgin,
pray for us.**

I KNOW WHO I AM

One thing very hard for us to do is to speak about ourselves or to say who we are. Every time we introduce ourselves to a group of people, we grope for a word or words that would describe us. And we often end up saying only our name and surname or just describing our body such as our height and weight, or saying our favorite food, hobbies, interests in life, likes and dislikes or giving an adjective that will portray who we are. Introducing one's self is not easy perhaps because we don't know who we really are and our goal in life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus twice said to the people "I AM" and by saying those words He was confident because He knew who He is. He knew where He came from and He knew His purpose in life. He knew everything about

Himself and there is no doubt about it. Jesus did not describe Himself by saying His name or His favorite food but by saying who He really is and His relationship to the Father. He was speaking about the Father because He did what the Father told Him.

As we continue our reflection in this season of Lent, we are reminded once more of who we are in relation to the Father. Our real identity was restored by Jesus Christ as He gave Himself on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. And because of this we become once again children of God and this is our identity. Just like Jesus doing what the Father's will, we are being challenged to do also the will of the Father. *Fr. Joel O. Jason*

REFLECTION QUESTION:

Can I say confidently that I am a Christian? What is the purpose of my life?

O God, many times I forget to know my real self because many times I do not follow Your will. Help me to know You more so that I may know myself like Jesus. Amen.

**St. Balbina, Virgin,
pray for us.**

Prevent Soul Malnourishment.

Receive a Mountain Load of Blessings for Your Spiritual Life by Joining KerygmaFamily.com **FREE!**

Here's what will happen to you when you join the Kerygma Family...

- 1.You shall receive *Kerygma* Magazine each month to inspire you to grow closer to God...FREE!
- 2.You shall receive Bo Sanchez's Novena to God's Love...FREE!
- 3.You shall receive daily emails of God's Word — *Didache, Gabay, Companion*...FREE!
- 4.You shall receive the KFAM Insider Notes to let you know what's happening in the ministry that you are part of...FREE!
- 5.You shall receive surprise gifts from Bo Sanchez at different times during the year — his way of saying Thank You to your support... FREE!
- 6.You shall belong to a borderless, global, non-physical community spread all over the world connected through prayer and the desire for personal growth...FREE!
- 7.You shall have the special privilege of supporting this expansive work of the Lord, which includes Anawim, a ministry for the poorest of the poor, and Shepherd's Voice, a media ministry that uses TV, Radio, print, and the Internet to broadcast God's love to spiritually hungry people worldwide.
- 8.You and your intentions shall be included in our intercession team's prayer.

To join the Kerygma Family, log onto www.kerygmfamily.com or call up Tel. (632) 7259999. Don't delay God's blessings for your life.

