SPRINGS OF Living Water

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GOSPEL IN THE CONCRETE

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Living Water

Daily Spiritual Reflections

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AUGUST 2026

PRAYER INTENTION

FOR EVANGELIZATION IN THE CITY

Let us pray that in large cities often marked by anonymity and loneliness we find new ways to proclaim the Gospel, discovering creative paths to build community.

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GOSPEL IN THE CONCRETE

The modern city is a place of astonishing nearness and profound distance. Millions live side by side in apartments, pass one another in packed metros, wait in the same bus stops, and yet remain strangers. A person may be surrounded by crowds all day and still return home to a silence that pains the heart. In many great cities of the world, the streets are full, the schedules are crowded, the lights never go out, and yet hearts remain dimmed by loneliness, anonymity, and quiet despair. In August, the Holy Father directs our prayer: that in the large cities of our time we may discover new ways to proclaim the Gospel and creative paths to build human community.

This intention is very timely in our urban age! More and more people now live in vast cities influenced by factors such as migration, movement, economic pressure, and digital life. Cities that are places of opportunity, diversity, energy, and creativity, also become places where people become invisible. The elderly die unnoticed in flats, young corporate professionals spend their days online and their evenings alone, migrants live for years in a city without ever feeling they belong to it, families inhabit neighbouring flats and never know each other's names. Faith also becomes a privatized matter in such a setting; it is reduced to something hidden, interior, and disconnected from the shared life of the neighbourhood. The city might not painfully persecute faith, it simply ignores it.

And yet the Gospel has never been afraid of the city. Salvation history is not a retreat from human settlement but an entrance into it. Yes, Jesus spoke in villages, but He also traveled through towns, went into houses, stood in crowded streets, shed tears over Jerusalem, and passed away outside a city's walls. The Church was born in Jerusalem but was carried into Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. St. Paul did not wait for ideal conditions; he brought Christ into marketplaces, ports, households, and public squares. Christianity has always known that where human beings gather, grace must also go. The final biblical vision as given us in the book of Revelation is not of isolated souls wandering in private holiness, but of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, a holy city where God dwells among His people.

This matters because loneliness is not merely a social problem; it is also a spiritual wound. Human beings are created for communion. We are created in the likeness of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—whose essence is communion. To be human is to be called into encounter: with God, with neighbour, and with the deeper truth of oneself. When city life trains people to remain always cautious, hurried, and emotionally absent, something essential in the person begins to shrink. Anonymity might offer freedom, but it can also produce indifference. Loneliness may begin as circumstance, but it often becomes a way of living. As much as it affects the lay believers, this inner corruption has also extended its cruel clutches to our priests and religious too. The Church cannot continue looking upon this quietly. If Christ came that we might have life in abundance, then the Gospel must also address the hidden famine of belonging.

That is why the Holy Father speaks not only of proclaiming the Gospel but of discovering new ways to do so. The city demands creativity, patience, and evangelical imagination. While traditional parish structures remain essential, they are often insufficient on their own. Urban evangelization frequently begins not with large events but with presence: a Scripture group in a home, a parish coffee gathering for newcomers, or a youth prayer meeting after work. This is Christ's own method. He called people by name, entered their homes, shared meals, and sought out those others ignored. Zacchaeus encountered Him through a personal invitation; the Samaritan woman met Him in the ordinary rhythm of daily life; the disciples of Emmaus recognized the risen Lord while walking in their sorrow. Again and again, Jesus meets people in the concrete realities of their lives. The Church's mission in the city is not simply to gather crowds but to build communion. A parish must become more than a place for sacraments; it must become a home. This calls for small faith communities, intentional hospitality, multilingual outreach, support for the lonely, intergenerational fellowship, and wise use of digital media that leads people into genuine relationships. Cities are transformed when strangers are welcomed, burdens are shared, and every person knows they are seen and loved.

Fr Jesvin Tom Benoy OCD

1 SAT

Faithfulness in the Face of Hostility

St Alphonsus Liguori

Jer 26: 11-16, 24/ Ps 69: 15-16, 30-31, 33-34/ Mt 14: 1-12

The readings today draw us into the cost of fidelity to God's truth. Both Jeremiah and John the Baptist suffer rejection and persecution—not because they did wrong, but because they dared to speak what others did not want to hear.

Jeremiah stands before the priests and leaders of Jerusalem accused of treason, simply for announcing God's warning that the city would fall if the people refused conversion. He speaks with calm courage: he does not defend himself, nor does he soften the message. His confidence rests not in human approval but in his mission. "As for me, I am in your hands," he says in surrender, trusting that truth, even when opposed, will not die.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist faces a similar fate. Herod respected him, even feared him, yet was too weak to stand for what was right. The prophet's voice, which called for moral integrity, is silenced by violence. The feast of lust and pride ends in death, but John's witness endures as a light of conscience.

Both figures teach us that fidelity to God's word is rarely comfortable. The prophets are not people who predict the future, but those who read the present in God's light. Their words disturb because they unmask lies and call for conversion. To follow Christ means to share something of this prophetic courage. This means to speak the truth in love, even when it costs us peace or popularity. In a world where moral compromise is often easier than conviction, Jeremiah and John remind us that discipleship demands interior strength. This strength is not human stubbornness but trust in God's presence within us. Like the prophet Elijah, we learn that God's voice is not in the storm but in the gentle whisper that gives peace to a heart made pure. This courage grows in silence and prayer. The more we dwell in God's presence, the freer we become from fear. Then our lives, like Jeremiah's and John's, can quietly proclaim the truth, and that toom without anger, without pride, but with the serene power of one who belongs to God alone.

Response: At an acceptable time, O Lord, answer me.

2 SUN

Come to the Lord!

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 55: 1-3/ Ps 145: 8-9, 15-16, 17-18/ Rom 8: 35, 37-39/ Mt 14: 13-21

The Word of God today speaks profoundly about the deepest hunger of the human heart. The readings invite us to reflect not merely on physical hunger, but on the spiritual thirst and emptiness that every human person experiences. In a world filled with anxiety, loneliness, uncertainty, and endless searching, God speaks through the prophet Isaiah: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters." This invitation is at the heart of salvation history. God constantly invites humanity into communion with Himself because only He can truly satisfy the restless human heart.

In the first reading from Isaiah, a people who are spiritually exhausted and dissatisfied are searching for fulfilment in things that ultimately cannot give life. Therefore, God asks them: "Why spend your money for what is not bread, and your wages for what fails to satisfy?" This question remains deeply relevant today. Modern society offers many promises of happiness success, possessions, pleasure, recognition but often people still experience inner emptiness. St. Augustine beautifully expressed this truth when he wrote: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You, O Lord." The Church repeatedly reminds us that the human person is created for God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "The desire for God is written in the human heart" (CCC 27).

Every human longing is ultimately a longing for divine communion. This theme reaches its fulfilment in the Gospel passage of the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus sees the crowd following Him. They are tired, hungry, and vulnerable. What is striking is that Jesus does not remain indifferent to their condition. The Gospel says: "He had compassion on them." The compassion of Christ is deeply theological. In Jesus, we encounter the very heart of God who does not abandon His people in their hunger. The miracle of the loaves is not merely about material bread. It is a sign pointing toward the Eucharist, where Christ becomes the Bread of Life for the salvation of the world. The actions of Jesus are profoundly Eucharistic: He takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it. These are the same actions repeated at every Mass. The Church teaches that the Eucharist is "the source and summit

of the Christian life" (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). In the Eucharist, Christ does not simply give something; He gives Himself. The miracle also reveals an important pastoral truth. The disciples initially respond with helplessness: "We have only five loaves and two fish." Humanly speaking, it is insufficient. Yet Jesus asks them to offer what little they have. This is how grace works. God does not ask us first for perfection or abundance. He asks us for trust and availability.

Many people today feel inadequate: inadequate as parents, inadequate in ministry, inadequate in faith, inadequate before life's challenges. But the Gospel reminds us that what is placed in the hands of Christ is transformed. Small offerings become instruments of grace. The second reading from Romans gives us the deepest foundation of such Christian hope. St. Paul declares: "Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." This is the heart of the Christian message. Hunger, suffering, weakness, failure, persecution, or uncertainty do not have the final word. The love of Christ remains constant.

In a fragmented and wounded world, many people feel abandoned or unloved. Yet Paul proclaims with certainty that the believer lives within an inseparable communion of divine love. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that Christ fully reveals both God and the human person (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). In Christ we discover not only who God is, but also our own dignity and destiny.

Therefore, today's readings invite us to move: from superficial satisfaction to true nourishment, from self-reliance to trust, from fear to confidence in divine love. The miracle of the loaves also challenges the Church pastorally. Jesus tells the disciples: "Give them something to eat yourselves." The Church cannot remain indifferent to human suffering. She is called to feed: the spiritually hungry through the Word and Sacraments, the emotionally wounded through compassion, and the materially poor through concrete charity. Today Christ continues to invite us: "Come to me." He alone satisfies the deepest hunger of the soul. He alone nourishes with the Bread of eternal life. He alone offers a love from which nothing can separate us. May we come to Him with trust, place our poverty into His hands, and allow Him to transform our hunger into communion and our emptiness into fullness of life.

Response: You open your hand, Lord, and you satisfy us.

3 MON

Even Peter Could Be a Man of Little Faith

Ordinary Weekday

Jer 28: 1-17/ Ps 119: 29, 43, 79, 80, 95, 102/ Mt 14: 22-36

Jeremiah the Prophet mandated by Yahweh, is determined to fulfill his commitment. He makes a desperate attempt to put sense into the minds of the king and his court and advises them not to rebel against Babylonians who are almost at the gates of the Kingdom, nor seek help from Egypt. His efforts are thwarted by the Hananiah the high priest who offers a consolation message to the court and people that nothing tragic will happen; everything is well and Jeremiah is chronically pessimistic and should be imprisoned for inciting the people to rebel and over throw the regime. It is a draconian instrument every regime that has lost the trust of the people resorts to. Jesus was also was put to death for the same reason; and in our times so many sincere whistle blowers are in prison too.

Jeremiah takes the leap of life and death; and confronting Hananiah declares " You have no mandate; You are imposter. The lord has not sent you. Your reassuring words will not come true; and the kingdom shall surely be overrun and destroyed by the Babylonians which happens in the year 586 BC. There is no place for presumption and excuses or cheap short cuts preached by many so-called prophets who have no mandate whatsoever. In the Gospel too Jesus who had given a pivotal role for Simon and named him solid rock Peter and promised that the powers of hell will not bring him down, suddenly calls him a Man of little faith. Peter the prospective leader of a unique religious society failed in the test of trust. His faith was mere self-confidence, that disappeared in serious threats and problems. He sank. Jesus wanted his disciples to be strong. He will surely pray for his Church that they may not vacillate. Every one of us can fail, from the top to the least. We have to walk with humility and in perennial link with Jesus who holds us by the hands when we have the honesty to acknowledge our little faith, unlike the over enthusiastic peter.

Response: Teach me your statutes, O Lord

4 TUE

True Authenticity as Right Understanding

St John Mary Vianney

Jer 30: 1-2,12-15,18-22/Ps 102:16-18,19-21, 29 & 22-23/ Mt 15: 1-2, 10-14

True authenticity lies in true understanding. In the Gospel we see a particular tension and we see how Jesus confronts this tension which remains deeply relevant for all of us. And what is that tension: the difference between external religious practice and the true condition of the heart. The Pharisees criticize the disciples for not observing ritual hand washing, a tradition meant to express purity before God. Yet Jesus shifts the focus away from appearances and toward what truly matters. He teaches that defilement does not come from what enters a person from outside, but from what emerges from within: one's attitudes, intentions, words, and actions rooted in the heart.

This passage challenges the temptation to reduce faith to customs, routines, or visible correctness. Traditions can be meaningful and valuable, but they lose their purpose when they become more important than compassion, humility, and love. Jesus is not rejecting the law or authentic devotion; rather, he is exposing the danger of a spirituality that looks holy outwardly while neglecting inner conversion. His words invite honest self-examination. It is often easier to focus on external behaviors like following rules, maintaining appearances, judging others, than to confront pride, resentment, hypocrisy, or hardness of heart within ourselves. Jesus reminds us that God sees beyond appearances. True holiness begins internally and gradually shapes the way we speak, treat others, and live each day.

The image of the "blind leading the blind" is also worth reflecting example. Jesus warns against spiritual leadership that lacks genuine understanding. Leaders who cling rigidly to human traditions without openness to God's deeper truth can mislead others. This warning applies to anyone whose influence adversely affects others, including our parents, teachers, friends, and even ourselves when we speak without charity. At its heart, this Gospel is a call to authenticity. Do I spend more energy protecting appearances than nurturing a faithful heart?

Response: The Lord shall build up Sion, he will appear in all his glory.

5 WED

We Are Already Loved

Ordinary Weekday

Jer 31: 1-7/ Jer 31: 10, 11-12ab, 13/ Mt 15: 21-28

Jeremiah's prophecy contains some of the most tender words in all of Scripture: "I have loved you with an everlasting love..." Here is the foundation of all spirituality – not our love for God, but God's eternal, unchanging love for us. Before we ever thought to seek God, God was seeking us. Before we ever loved, we were loved with an "everlasting love." Our spiritual journey is not about earning God's affection or achieving a level of holiness that finally makes us worthy of divine attention. Rather, it is about awakening to a love that has always been there, waiting for us to notice, to receive, to rest in it. Teresa of Avila insisted: God does not wait for us to become perfect before drawing close. God's love is the very thing that makes our transformation possible inviting us into a profound, lifelong intimacy with the Divine.

Jeremiah describes the exiles returning to Jerusalem. Notice who makes this journey: not the strong and capable, but the weak and vulnerable. We do not come to God as spiritual athletes displaying our achievements. We come as the blind who need to be led, as the lame who cannot walk without support, as those who weep because the journey is hard and we are weak. St Thérèse of Lisieux called this the 'little way.' She recognized her own spiritual poverty, her inability to perform great penances or achieve mystical heights through her own effort. But she discovered that this very weakness was her strength, because it made her completely dependent on God's mercy. Like the exiles in Jeremiah, she needed to be carried, guided, consoled; and God delighted to do so.

God's love is not a reward for the worthy but a gift for the needy. It is everlasting, which means it predates our sins and failures, and no amount of stumbling can exhaust it. We are already loved, already sought, already held in the heart of God. Let us humbly awaken to that transformative love today and learn to live fully in it forever.

Response: The Lord will keep us, as a shepherd keeps his flock.

6 THUR

Listen to Him

Transfiguration of The Lord

Dn 7: 9-10, 13-14/ Ps 97: 1-2, 5-6, 9/ 2 Pt 1: 16-19/ Mt 17: 1b-9

The Feast of the Transfiguration invites us to witness the moment Jesus revealed His hidden glory to Peter, James, and John on the high mountain. In silence and wonder, the disciples beheld the face of Christ shining like the sun—a brief, profound encounter where heaven touched earth and the divine beauty of the Son of God was unveiled. The Catechism teaches that this revelation was intended to strengthen the apostles' faith in anticipation of the Passion; the ascent of Tabor prepares them for the climb to Calvary. Though the Gospels do not specify the exact mountain of the Transfiguration, Christian tradition identifies it as Mount Tabor. For the Carmelite heart, every mountain becomes a symbol of the soul ascending toward God through detachment, prayer and love. Like the disciples, we are invited to ascend the interior mountain of prayer, silence, and contemplation. The presence of Moses and Elijah—representing the Law and the Prophets—further enriches this mystery. Moses experienced God in fire and Elijah encountered the Lord in a gentle whisper. Elijah, the spiritual father of Carmel, reminds us of the contemplative soul that burns with zeal while listening attentively to the Lord's quiet voice.

Crucially, Jesus was transfigured while praying. This detail is deeply significant: it reveals that prayer is not merely speaking to God, but resting in His presence and allowing His light to penetrate the soul. This is the goal of all contemplation—communion with the living God. As the Psalmist proclaims, "The Lord reigns," and all creation is invited into that sacred silence before His glory. The central message of this feast is found in the voice from heaven: "Listen to Him." This invitation lies at the very heart of the Christian vocation. To listen to Christ in the silence of the heart, to gaze upon Him in contemplation, and to allow His radiant presence to transform us from within—this is our shared journey. Like Peter, we are called to carry the light of Tabor into the world, holding fast to the memory of His majesty even as we navigate the challenges of our own daily ascent.

Response: The Lord is king, most high above all the earth.

7 FRI

Path to our eternal happiness

Ordinary Weekday

Na 1: 15; 2: 2; 3: 1-3, 6-7 / Ps: Dt 32: 35cd-36ab, 39abcd, 41/ Mt 16: 24-28

Today's liturgy invites us to reflect and examine ourselves. Are we truly followers of Christ as we call ourselves? Jesus clearly states in the Gospel of today, that whoever wants to be His followers must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him. For most of us this demand at first glance seems too costly, devoid of all joy and happiness and something we would shirk from embracing whole heartedly.

Jesus also says in John. 10:10, "He has come to give life and life in abundance." Believing in Jesus and following Him, will give us 'life' and 'life in fullness!' And truly so, if we really examine our lives, we will realize that all those moments when we have indulged in our appetites, desires, pleasures it was all temporary, lasting but for a moment. It made us hungry for more, but left us with a feeling of emptiness, disappointment, and even guilt. Sometimes, even after knowing this fact of life, that all things pass away, we seldom give up on our choices. We find comfort in gathering just the tiny crumbs that fall from the Masters table, while He awaits us, to sit besides Him and feast at the sumptuous banquet. So, even though denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, may seem as a criteria for being a follower of Christ, actually they are the requirements for our own wellbeing, for a lasting happiness, peace, freedom and wholeness! And God who loves us more than we can comprehend, desire our good, more than we ourselves do. And so, He does not give up trying to drive home this fact. Like He did in the first reading of today, warning the people to turn back from their evil ways, even threatening them of punishment, which again is a sign of His great mercy, He keeps coming after us, pleading with us to follow Him on the path He treaded and proving to us that it is the only path to our eternal happiness. Saints are those who understand this wisdom of God and gave up their lives for Him, only to receive it in its fullness

Response: It is I who deal death and give life.

8 SAT

From Powerless to Powerful

St Dominic

Hab 1: 12 - 2: 4/ Ps 9: 8-9, 10-11, 12-13/ Mt 17: 14-20

Mathew; 17: 14-20 highlights that even a tiny genuine faith like a mustard seed can overcome massive obstacles through God's power. When the disciples failed to heal a boy possessed by a demon, Jesus rebukes their 'little faith' and lack of prayer, calling them to rely on him in faith! Faith like the Mustard seed: It is not the size of faith, but the object of faith (Jesus) that matters. Even small faith, if true and active, can achieve impossible tasks.

Dependence vs self-sufficiency: The disciples' failure stemmed from relying on their own abilities rather than on God. Jesus calls for a 'Purer' faith that trusts God's will, rather than forcing our own.

Prayer and perseverance: The incident highlights that some challenges require deep prayerful dependence on God. To grow in faith we are encouraged to surrender our fears to God and rely on His power. Believers can move from feeling powerless to become spiritually strong by trusting in Jesus Christ.

Most of us would say that we have faith and that we believe in God. The problem usually is that we fail to apply faith to our daily circumstances. When problems arise (poor health, death of a loved one, loss of job) we begin to nurture fear. Then we begin to doubt and question if God really loves us, if He truly dwells in us, as he promised, allowing us to share His divine life. In times of trial, we tend to rely more on the seen than the unseen, which is the opposite of faith. As a consequence, we are often overwhelmed by our problems; we show our lack of faith.

Prayer helps us to grow in faith by turning to Jesus, by focusing on His promises and not on our own feelings. St. John of the Cross teaches us that true faith grows in darkness when we feel powerless. The disciples failed because they relied on themselves. Even a mustard seed of pure trust, rooted in surrender, becomes powerful. Lord, increase my faith! Remove my doubts and self-reliance, teach me to trust You completely especially when I feel weak and helpless.

Response: You will not forsake those who seek you, O Lord.

9 SUN

Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1 Kgs 19: 9a, 11-13a/ Ps 85: 9, 10, 11-12, 13-14/ Rom 9: 1-5/ Mt 14: 22-33

Peter is the central figure of today's gospel. Before we criticize Peter for sinking, we should first give him due credit for his magnificent, audacious demonstration of faith. He did something that the other disciples did not dare to do. Anyone can sit in the safety of the boat, analysing the storm and watching from the sidelines; but it takes genuine, courageous faith to step out of the boat and attempt to walk on the water at the Master's call. Peter's initial step was an act of pure trust, a willingness to defy human logic in pursuit of Christ.

As Peter walked on the water, however, his miraculous stride shifted into a terrifying descent. What caused this fall? His faith started to waver the exact moment he took his eyes off the Lord and began to focus on the fury of the strong wind and the crashing waves around him. He allowed himself to become distracted by his environment. That distraction immediately bred fear, and that fear led him to doubt both the power and the infallible word of Jesus and so Jesus asks, "Why did you doubt"

The moment Peter doubted, his spiritual gravity changed, and he began to sink. In his epistle, St. James echoes this exact spiritual reality: "The one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind." Peter started with exemplary faith, but ended up with "little faith" because he got distractied. He allowed himself to see two competing realities instead of remaining fixed on the ultimate Truth: Jesus Christ.

Yet, St. Peter deserves immense credit for another reason. Upon recognizing that he was losing the battle against the elements, his immediate, instinctive reaction was to cry out to the Lord for help. Crucially, he cried out when he was "beginning to sink," not when he was already completely submerged and drowning. He did not let pride or embarrassment delay his plea. His prayer was remarkably simple, urgent, and sincere: "Lord, save me!" There was no introduction; it was a tender cry of total dependence. Immediately, without hesitation, Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. Perhaps this profound, firsthand experience of divine rescue flashed through Peter's mind years

later when he penned his epistle: "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayer" (1 Peter 3:12). This terrifying yet beautiful event served as a crucible for Peter. It helped him to know both his own human fragility and the Lord's infinite mercy more deeply. Specifically, it convinced him of the Lord's immediate care and absolute attentiveness to the prayers His people make in moments of desperation.

Like Peter, whenever we lose our focus on Jesus, it is usually because the chaotic distractions of the world begin to penetrate our defences and overpower our spirits. The modern "winds and waves" take many forms: financial anxiety, unexpected illness, persistent temptations, broken relationships, and worldly concerns that whisper that we are entirely on our own. When we focus on the magnitude of these problems rather than the magnitude of our God, our spiritual vitality diminishes. Instead of rising above our circumstances through grace, we begin to sink into the suffocating depths of despair.

Therefore, the vital lesson for us is to keep our eyes intentionally fixed on Christ. Remember that faith is not the absence of storms; rather, it is the quiet assurance that Christ is closer than the chaos. Faith grows when we consciously choose to trust His presence and power more than the loud, intimidating circumstances around us.

The storms of life are rarely easy, and they are often painful, but in the economy of salvation, they are necessary. They strip away our self-reliance and teach us to trust in Jesus Christ alone, obeying His Word regardless of how fiercely the wind blows. Every trial we face is a hidden opportunity to deepen our faith, strengthen our radical dependence on God, and experience the thrilling reality of His saving power.

Therefore, when the storms of life inevitably arise and the waves threaten to overwhelm you, do not look down at the depth of the water. Keep your eyes locked onto Jesus, trust blindly in His abiding presence, and cry out to Him with honesty. He is always standing within arm's reach, ready to catch you, and He will never let you sink.

Response: Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation.

10 MON

Fire of Christ burning in us!

St Lawrence

2 Cor 9: 6b-10/ Ps 112: 1-2, 5-6, 7-8, 9/ Jn 12: 24-26

The readings of the day use the beautiful imagery from nature to explain Christian life. In the first reading, we hear that "the one who sows generously will also reap generously." This scriptural verse seems to have taken flesh and come alive in the life of St. Lawrence, whose feast the Church celebrates today. St Lawrence gave himself generously to God and loved Christ in the poor. At last he offered his own life for Christ courageously by standing for truth and justice, even in opposition to the Kings command.

In the Gospel, we hear this beautiful saying of Jesus that a grain of wheat must fall into the earth and die in order to bear much fruit. This image helps us to understand the lives of the martyrs. These saints stood for the truth, endured suffering and gave their lives for Christ. Their courage and patience bore abundant fruit in the church and inspired many hearts to follow Christ with greater faith and conviction. In this same manner, St. Lawrence too, remained faithful to Christ even in the midst of terrible suffering. He trusted completely in God's promise that "whoever serves me, the Father will honour." Truly, his reward was the crown of martyrdom and eternal life with God.

The tradition tells us that when he was tortured on a burning gridiron, he showed remarkable courage and faith. Even in the flames, his love for Christ was stronger than the pain he endured. The fire of God's love burning in his heart was greater than the flames that surrounded his body. So let us ask God to plant in us the same faith and love that St. Lawrence preached and lived courageously in his life. Like the grain of wheat, may we die to selfishness, serve God generously and produce abundant fruit through our word and actions. May our lives bring others closer to Christ and yield a harvest a hundredfold for the glory of God. Amen.

Response: Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

11 TUE

A Humble and Pure Heart

St Clare

Ez 2: 8 - 3: 4/ Ps 119: 14, 24, 72, 103, 111, 131/ Mt 18: 1-5, 10, 12-14

"Heart is more devious than any other thing, perverse too. Who can pierce its secrets? The Lord alone who can pierce the secrets of the human heart and scrutinize it."

A person can be identified from what his/her heart cherishes. Jesus teaches us that what defiles a person is what comes out of his/her heart and not the outside factor. Ezekiel was sent to Israelites who were rebellious - a characteristic that can often be applied to us too. When we neglect to nurture our heart with the grace of God, there is a tendency for it to become rebellious. Reading, reflecting and meditating on the Word of God, makes us docile and attentive to the voice of God, which is heard in silence. The Word of God sheds light on the darker areas of life, which need transformation. One has to make constant effort to change oneself according to the ways of God. The grace of God works harder in a person who tries and never gives up.

Prophet Ezekiel was invited to eat, the Word of God, and the to digest it in his words, actions and behaviour. We receive the same invitation today. At times, it may not be easy to live according to God's Word but we are called to remain faithful in times of trials and temptations. A humble heart that is attentive to the voice of God is indeed a pure heart. A person with a humble and pure heart has only God as his/her treasure and possession. Jesus invites us to be childlike, to be humble and pure. A child of God does not seek to be greater than others for it knows that God is greater than everything and everyone. Trying to be great is a sign of pride that comes from a rebellious heart opposing the will of God.

To have a humble and pure heart is a rare treasure that one can possess and those who have it are the blessed ones on this earth. The words of Jesus are open to all for he himself says, "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart."

Response: How sweet is your promise to my tongue, O Lord

12 WED

Sure Forgiveness, For True Repentance

Ordinary Weekday

Ez 9: 1-7; 10: 18-22/ Ps 113: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6/ Mt 18: 15-20

It is human to err, but forgiveness is divine. If every good deed done for fellow humans is done for God, so too every evil done against fellow humans too is done against God. So God alone can forgive in the true sense. We, more often than not, get easily hurt by the hostile actions or adverse language used by others, especially those close to us. We disapprove their behaviour and even we condemn them outright as totally bad persons excluding them from further contact. Breach is complete; bridge is broken. Thus, it is common that we are angry with the close ones in our life. Human Love can suddenly change into hatred, and even into violence and revenge.

Nevertheless if we apply our mind we can be laughing at our silly behavior simply because we are not angels; we too have hurt in different levels very many persons as those hurting us. If that is true, we have absolutely no right to be angry. Therefore, Jesus in his sermon the mount, upholds 'unconditional love' as supreme and attaches serious punishment to those who cause hatred to spread. In every hurt God is wounded since we all belong to him. For hurting any one is hurting God primarily, and forgiveness belongs to God. Jesus prayed on the cross, "Father forgive them," for they are not fully aware of the seriousness of their actions. He excused them to be free even from the feelings of hurt.

All the same Ezekiel reminds his fellow Israelites persisting in moral and social malice, that to take the goodness of God for granted would be totally presumptive. In God, kindness and justice are just two faces of one same reality. Only those who are marked by the salvific mark, as once in Egypt, will be saved from extermination. That mark of salvation is to be immersed in the blood of Christ and be purified - to be able to have the same mind of Christ to follow the repentant way. That is the sure path to deliverance from every inner enslavement and insertion into the community of the joyful holiness.

Response: The glory of the Lord is above the heaven.

13 THUR

The Debt We Carry

Ordinary Weekday

Ez 12: 1-12/ Ps 78: 56-57, 58-59, 61-62/ Mt 18: 21 - 19: 1

Brother Thomas had kept a careful ledger. Not in ink, but in memory. He had decided to remember every slight, every betrayal, every word that landed like a stone. He carried it the way a man carries a pack uphill; with shoulders bent, breath short, eyes fixed on the ground. “The soul that is attached to anything,” wrote John of the Cross, “however much good there may be in it, will not arrive at the liberty of divine union.”

Thomas knew the parable well. He had heard it a hundred times. Ten thousand talents forgiven. A debt so vast it staggers the imagination and yet the forgiven man goes straight out and seizes his neighbour by the throat over a few coins. Every time Thomas heard it, he shook his head at the servant's foolishness. Until the morning he recognized himself. It was a small thing, as most wounds are. A superior who had spoken carelessly. A trust deeply broken. Thomas had received so much grace in his own life. His failures covered, failures forgotten by those who loved him and still he found himself standing in the corridor of his own heart, hands wrapped around someone else's debt, demanding payment.

Thérèse of Lisieux, who understood small wounds better than most, wrote with great gentleness: “It is not always possible to keep quiet; but it is always possible to speak without bitterness.” Thomas sat with that a long time. Ezekiel was made a sign to a people who could not see. He dug through walls, moved in darkness, and carried burdens on shoulders, all to show a people that ‘This is what exile looks like when we refuse to turn back.’ And Thomas understood, finally, that unforgiveness is its own exile. A prison built stone by stone from the inside.

The king in the parable does not ask the servant to forget. He asks him to remember what was given, and let that remembering change his heart. "The measure of love," wrote Thérèse simply, “is to love without measure.” Thomas opened the ledger. And slowly, page by page, he let it burn.

Response: Never forget the deeds of the Lord!

14 FRI

The Promised Heart of Flesh

St Maximilian Mary Kolbe

Ez 16: 1-15, 60, 63/ Is 12: 2-3, 4bcd, 5-6/ Mt 19: 3-12

"They are no longer two, but one flesh." When Jesus says this, He highly esteems the sanctity of marriage and explains from the Old Law what God has ordained in the union of man and woman. Firstly, He calls to mind the creation story where God says "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen 2:18) and how He made woman out of the rib of man, enjoining them together. This union ordained by God and entered into by one woman and one man is sacred, holy and pleasing to God.

Although Jesus had already spoken against divorce in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:31-32), He offers a deeper explanation here in response to the Pharisees. He tells them that Moses did not command divorce (as they misunderstand from Dt 24), but allowed it, even suffered through it because of their hardness of heart. The condition of hardness of heart continues in us even to this day, when our mind is not stayed on Him. We must allow God to give us a heart of flesh as in Ezek 36:26, "I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh". It is this heart of flesh that enables us to live faithfully the vocation to which God has called each of us.

The final part of this passage shows how the disciples, feeling that marriage could be a daunting task, seek an escape. Jesus is quick to rebuke this tendency of escapism in each one of us. The call of God is never too daunting for a person of faith to undertake. The grace of God is given to those called to marriage to be in complete union with their spouse, and to those called to the single life for the sake of the Kingdom, to be in complete union with God. We rightfully rely on the grace of God and do not have anything to boast about, but the Lord (1 Cor 1:30-31). We rely on the heart of flesh that the Lord gives us, to making us more like him.

Response: Your anger turned away and you comforted me.

15 SAT

Struggle, Resurrection & Hope

Assumption of The Blessed Virgin Mary / Independance Day

Rv 11: 19a; 12: 1-6a, 10ab/ Ps 45: 10, 11, 12, 16/ 1 Cor 15: 20-27/ Lk 1: 39-56

In the dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium, the Second Vatican Council beautifully spells out the mystery we celebrate today. "…the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all guilt of original sin, on the completion of her earthly sojourn, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe…" (LG no. 59). In LG no. 68 the Council affirms that "…the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected is the world to come, so too does she shine forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come..." The biblical readings of today help us to focus on struggle and conflicts in our daily lives, the resurrection of Christ and Christian hope.

In the pericope taken from the book of Revelation there is the vision of the struggle between the woman and the dragon. The figure of the woman, represents the Church. The Church is on the one hand, glorious and triumphant. While on the other hand she is still in travail. In heaven she is already associated with the glory of her Lord, and in history she continues to live through the trials, challenges and conflicts in living our Christian life. In feasts like Assumption, Mary is both Mother of Christ and of the Church. In today's world, as disciples, we may face trials, struggles, conflicts and she does not leave us alone. Mary accompanies us on our pilgrim journey through our joys, struggles and sustains us in our efforts to live a mature Christian life. Like Mary we are invited to be faithful to God and continually place our obedience and trust in God.

The responsorial psalm reminds us that we are united by Christ in his new covenant of love. Mary shows us how to live faithfully and joyfully in God's grace. As members of the Church, just as Mary was, we are invited to live as Christ's bride by being faithful to God and rejoicing in the love God graciously pours out to us.

The second reading speaks about the resurrection. St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians insists that to be a Christian means to believe that Christ is truly risen from the dead. Our whole

Christian faith is based upon this fundamental truth. It is an event and not an idea. The mystery of Mary's Assumption both body and soul into heaven is fully inscribed in the Resurrection of Christ. Pope Francis in his homily on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary 15 August 2013, at Castel Gandolfo affirms that "The Mother's humanity is attracted by the Son in his own passage from death to life. Once and for all, Jesus entered into eternal life with all the humanity he had drawn from Mary; and she, the Mother, who followed him faithfully throughout her life, followed him with her heart, and entered with him into eternal life which we also call heaven, paradise, the Father's house." Christ is the "first fruits" of the resurrection. Mary is the first of the redeemed i.e., our Mother, our sister, our representative. For us, Mary's glorification is a sign of hope. Where she has gone, we are called to follow. We are invited to see Mary as our Mother and companion on our pilgrim journey till we reach our Father's heavenly abode.

Luke, much like Paul, in the Gospel, finds hope in God's promise, not only for Israel, but for all the nations of the world. Luke places on Mary's lips a hymn which appears to have been composed within the Jewish-Christian community to celebrate the risen Lord. The community saw in the risen Christ the fulfilment of all God's promises to them and to their people. The Magnificat Mary is the song of hope. For us, it is the song we sing together as God's people on our pilgrim journey in history. It is sung by the saints, parents, catechists, missionaries, priests, religious, young people, even grandparents, parish liturgy cell meetings at evening prayer etc. Mary teaches us to glorify the Lord even in suffering and in difficult moments in our life. Her Magnificat continually reminds us that hope is a grace, a gift from God, which is given to help us keep our eyes fixed on God.

Response: On your right stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

16 SUN

A House with no Walls

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 56: 1, 6-7/ Ps 67: 2-3, 5, 6, 8 (4)/ Rom 11: 13-15, 29-32/ Mt 15: 21-28

One day, a curious person in heaven asked Saint Peter, "How many Hindus are here in heaven?" St Peter smiled and replied calmly, "No Hindus." Surprised by this answer, the man asked, "Well, then how many Muslims are here?" "Not even one," replied St Peter. The man was completely taken aback. He said, "Oh! Then there are only Christians in heaven?" "No, there are no Christians in heaven either," replied St Peter. Stunned, the man asked, "How many Catholics?" "No Catholics either," Peter said. Seeing the man's utter confusion, Peter explained gently, "Heaven is not meant for any particular group of people. All people are invited to God's kingdom to enjoy the loving presence of God."

This lovely story captures the deep meaning of the readings for the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary time. God shows us that His heart is wide open to everyone. He completely shatters our human tendency to leave people out. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises: "I will bring foreigners to my holy mountain. My house will be called a house of prayer for all people." Saint Paul also showed this all-encompassing love in his life and ministry. He wrote with great joy about his work, saying that he was proud to serve the Gentiles, who were considered outsiders by many at the time.

There is no doubt that Jesus knew that he was sent to the Jewish people. But with his interaction with the Canaanite woman from outside the Jewish territory, he revealed that his mercy and love is not limited to one nation alone. He noticed her deep faith and healed her sick daughter. That specific action proved that he came for men and women of every faith, every race, every colour, and every background, in every time and place.

To really understand this beautiful mystery, we ought to look at the history of the word 'religion.' It comes from an old Latin root word, religare. This word literally means "to bind fast," "to tie together," or "to connect." By its very definition, true religion is meant to bind us closer to God. At the exact same time, it is meant to connect us deeply to one another. True religion is

supposed to be a bridge that brings us together, never a wall that keeps us apart.

Today, we Christians live side by side with Hindus, Muslims, and people of many other faiths. What should our attitude be toward them, knowing that God wants to welcome everyone? First, we should notice that the spiritual values and cultural gifts of these different faiths are beautiful. Because of this, we should not view other religions as a threat or something to reject. Instead, we could see them as a welcome reality. The hand of God, which breaks down walls and builds up communities, is alive and active everywhere. In fact, a world with many faiths can be seen as a wonderful gift from God, meant to bring all His children together into one single family.

Therefore, we need to drop any negative attitude toward people of other faiths. Instead, we are called to build real relationships with them. Just living peacefully next to each other is no longer enough. We need to talk, listen, and truly meet one another. By doing this, we can work together to treat each other as true brothers and sisters under the care of God, our loving Father. This is what religare looks like in real life, being tied together in love. This welcoming spirit must also be visible in how we treat each other inside our own Catholic parishes. Do all parish members feel equal when it is time to share jobs and responsibilities? Or do some people feel left out of parish life? The word Catholic simply means "universal" or "open to the whole world." Finally, God's open invitation challenges our personal relationships. Do we treat others as outsiders? Charity might begin at home, but it cannot end there. If we only love our own kith and kin, or if we are too stubborn to change our plans for a stranger in need, we stop growing. It is easy to look down on others so we can ignore their needs. But God challenges us to see the common humanity in the face of the stranger, the person who is different, and the neighbour, responding with an open heart. Let us live out the true meaning of religare and let God's love bind us all as one.

Response: Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

17 MON

What should I do?

Ordinary Weekday

Ez 24: 15-24/ Dt 32: 18-19, 20, 21/ Mt 19: 16-22

A Seeker: The one who came to Jesus in the Gospel asking a question what good deed could earn eternal life can be any one who seeks answers to the questions that arise in them. The person could be a sincere seeker or one who is inquisitive and curious who does not have real intention to follow the truth. One can seek answers only to satisfy oneself, merely for intellectual satisfaction. One can seek answers to give answers to the questions of others, for debate and teaching. One can ask questions so that he or she can sincerely follow in one's life the answers received, for finding meaning to one's life. The seeker in the Gospel seems to be sincere in his question. He knows Jesus is a teacher. But, when Jesus answers him, he seems to be over confident in following the commandments. He is certain that he has followed them perfectly. He asks further what he should do to be perfect. We can be sometimes overconfident, self approving and self praising regarding our life and the following of the commandments.

A Question: The question in the Gospel is not an ordinary one. It is about entering into eternal life. The question is very relevant to everyone. What is after-life? Our reason questions, scripture reveals the truth. The person in the Gospel wants to know the commandments he has to follow so that he can enter eternal life. What is the question that troubles me in my inner self? Am I able to listen to the answer the Lord gives? He may speak to us in the Scripture, through others, through the Church.

An Answer: Jesus gives a perfect answer to the question raised in the Gospel. The way to eternal life is to follow the commandments. When we keep the commandments, God guarantees eternal life. When the man wants to do more, Jesus tells him to sell everything, give to the poor and to follow Him. We are called by the Lord to follow the commandments and to be perfect in following the Lord.

Response: You forgot the God who gave you birth.

18 TUE

The Illusion of Self-Sufficiency

Ordinary Weekday

Ez 28: 1-10/ Dt 32: 26-27ab, 27cd-28, 30, 35cd-36ab/ Mt 19: 23-30

"True riches are found when we surrender our pride and place our complete trust in God rather than in ourselves or our possessions." The deepest poverty of the world today, is not the lack of possessions or material wealth, but the illusion that we are self-sufficient. Today's readings invite us to look honestly at the hidden attachments that quietly rule our hearts. Human beings often place their trust in wealth, power, success, intelligence, or status. Their gifts and possessions are valuable to humans. These gifts can be useful, but when they become the foundation of our security, they slowly take the place that belongs to God alone.

The tragedy of pride is that it blinds us. When everything seems to be going well, we tend to give in to the belief that our achievements are entirely our own handiwork. We may think that we are in control of our future and capable of handling our life by ourselves. Yet the bigger reality of life constantly reminds us that strength, opportunities, and even our next breath are gifts gratuitously given to us. When we forget this truth, our hearts become closed, and we lose the freedom to depend on God.

Jesus points to a different way. He invites us to hold everything lightly and to trust that God is enough. The kingdom of God is not entered through human power but through humble surrender. What seems impossible for us becomes possible when we allow God to work within us. The more we cling to ourselves, the less room there is for grace. The more we look upon ourselves, the less space we give to God, in our lives. The more we open our hands, the more God can fill them.

This message challenges us today. What am I holding onto so tightly that it prevents me from trusting God completely? Is it money, recognition, control, comfort, or my own plans? True freedom begins when we place our confidence not in what we possess but in the God who possesses our hearts. In that surrender, we discover a treasure that never fades.

Response: It is I who deal death and give life.

19 WED

From Babel to the True Vine

Ordinary Weekday

Ez 34: 1-11/ Ps 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6/ Mt 20: 1-16a

The Scriptures frequently employ images drawn from creation—mountains, rivers, fields, sheep, and especially the vineyard—to reveal God's relationship with humanity. After the flood, Noah plants the first vineyard (Gen. 9:20), symbolizing humanity's renewed participation in cultivating God's creation. Yet the account of the Tower of Babel reminds us that when human intelligence and planning seek independence from God, they result not in progress but in confusion and division. Even then, God never abandons His people. The human longing for meaning, truth, and eternal life is itself a sign that He has planted eternity within our hearts. Whenever we lose our spiritual vision amid worldly pursuits, God lovingly takes the initiative to draw us back to Himself.

This divine initiative is beautifully seen in the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3). God invites him to leave behind the security of his homeland and journey toward a future that rests entirely on God's promise. This invitation is not based on Abraham's merits but on God's desire to share His own life with humanity. Throughout salvation history, God continues to call His people to bear sweet grapes rather than wild ones (Isa. 5:1–7). The Psalmist echoes this image: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it" (Ps. 80:8). God liberates His people from bondage so that they may flourish in communion with Him.

All of this reaches its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, who declares, "I am the true vine" (Jn. 15:1–5). Human effort alone cannot attain salvation; it is God's gracious gift. Apart from Christ, we can do nothing. Remaining united to Him through faith, humility, and repentance enables us to bear lasting fruit. Whether in ministry or daily Christian life, we are called to seek God's glory rather than our own. Like Christ, we are to serve selflessly, remembering that our greatest joy lies not in recognition but in faithfully doing the Father's will. As Jesus reminds us, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk. 17:10).

Response: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

20 THUR

Heart prepared for God

St Bernard

Ez 36: 23-28/ Ps 51: 12-13, 14-15, 18-19/ Mt 22: 1-14

Sometimes the problem in our spiritual life is not that God stops calling us, but that our hearts grow distant from Him. Before we can truly respond to God's invitation, our hearts must first be renewed by His grace. Prophet Ezekiel speaks about God's promise to restore His people. Israel had failed to remain faithful to the covenant, and their actions had brought dishonour to God's name among the nations. Yet God does not abandon them. Instead, He promises a profound spiritual renewal. The Lord speaks about cleansing His people, gathering them again and most importantly giving them a new heart and a new spirit. This transformation is not merely an external reform but an inner change welcoming them to live according to God's ways.

The emphasis is striking: true obedience to God flows from a renewed heart. When the heart is hardened, God's law feels like a burden; when the heart is renewed by grace, His will becomes a path of life. Ezekiel's prophecy helps us understand how such a response becomes possible. God Himself prepares us by changing our hearts. The 'new heart' spoken of by the prophet allows us to recognize the value of God's invitation and to live in a way worthy of it. Today the Church honours Bernard of Clairvaux. He often reminded Christians that the Christian life begins not with human effort but with God's love working within us. He once wrote: "The measure of loving God is to love Him without measure." Such love becomes possible only when the heart is renewed by grace.

Today we are invited to the banquet of the Lord, to a life of communion with Him. But the invitation is not enough by itself. God desires to reshape our hearts so that we can truly live as His people. Therefore, let us ask God to renew our hearts. When He cleanses our hearts from selfishness, fills us with His Spirit and teaches us to walk in His ways, we become ready guests at the banquet of His kingdom. A renewed heart recognizes the gift of God's invitation and joyfully responds.

Response: I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.

21 FRI

Spirit's Life Revealed in Love

Pope Pius X

Ez 37: 1-14/ Ps 107: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9/ Mt 22: 34-40

The first reading from Ezekiel and the Gospel from Matthew though appear different, speak of the same reality: God bringing life where hope has died. In Ezekiel, the prophet is taken into a valley filled with dry bones. These bones represent the people of Israel in exile. They feel abandoned and defeated. Their cry is, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost." They are physically alive but spiritually dead. God asks Ezekiel, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel trusted the Lord, though he knew humanly that it was an impossibility. As he prophesies, the bones come together, flesh covers them, and finally God's Spirit, His breath, enters them. What was dead becomes alive. God promises: "I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live." In the Gospel, a lawyer asks Jesus, about the greatest commandment. Jesus speaks of the very purpose of God's creation: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

How are these readings connected?

Because the valley of dry bones is what happens when love disappears. We may have religion, rituals, traditions, and rules, but without love, they become lifeless bones. Love is the breath of God's Spirit in our lives. When we stop loving God through prayer and trust, our faith becomes dry. When we stop loving our neighbour through kindness, forgiveness, and service, our hearts become cold. We may look alive outwardly, but inwardly we become like the dry bones in Ezekiel's valley. But even in our dryness, God never abandons us! He continues to breathe His Spirit into us. He revives our faith, heals our wounds, and teaches us to love again.

Today, the Lord asks each of us: "Can these bones live?" His answer is yes. Through His Word, His Spirit, and His Eucharistic presence, He raises us up and gives us new life. May we allow God's Spirit to fill us so that we may no longer be dry bones, but a living people who reflect the very love of Christ.

Response: O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; for his mercy endures forever!

22 SAT

The Crown of Humility

The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Ez 43: 1-7/ Ps 85: 9ab and 10, 11-12, 13-14/ Mt 23: 1-12

The world crowns those who rise above others. God crowns those who stoop down to serve. This paradox lies at the heart of the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary's crown is not the reward of earthly power but the fruit of profound humility. The feast invites us to contemplate a fundamental truth of the Gospel: humility is the pathway to glory. In the Gospel, Jesus exposes the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees. They loved titles, places of honour, and public recognition. Their religion had become a performance. Against this mentality, Jesus teaches His disciples that greatness in God's Kingdom is measured not by status but by service: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Mary stands as the living embodiment of this teaching. While the Pharisees sought to elevate themselves, Mary lowered herself before God. At Nazareth she did not claim privilege or importance, she simply responded, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord." Her humility created space for God to accomplish great things in her life. The woman who chose the lowest place was eventually raised to the highest honour. The first reading offers a beautiful typology: Ezekiel sees the glory of God entering the Temple and filling it with divine presence. The Fathers of the Church saw the Temple as a foreshadowing of Mary. Just as the glory of God entered the Temple, so the Word of God entered Mary's womb. She became the true dwelling place of God's presence. Yet unlike the Temple built of stone, Mary's greatness lay not in her structure but in her surrender. God's glory filled her because her heart was completely open to Him.

Mary reigns because she first served. She was exalted because she first surrendered. Her queenship is not distant and majestic; it is maternal and approachable. She teaches us that the surest path to sharing Christ's glory is to imitate His humility. As we honour Mary today, let us ask for the grace to wear no crown except the crown of humble service, knowing that in God's Kingdom, those who kneel before Him will one day reign with Him.

Response: The glory of the Lord will dwell on our land.

23 SUN

Trusting Christ, the Rock of Our Faith

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Is 22: 19-23/ Ps 138: 1-2, 2-3, 6, 8 (8bc)/ Rom 11: 33-36/ Mt 16: 13-20

The readings of this Sunday invite us to reflect on God's authority, His wisdom, and our faith in Jesus Christ and also, they help us understand that God guides His people through those whom He chooses and that we are called to trust in His plan with humble hearts.

In the first reading from Isaiah, we hear about Shebna, who is removed from his position of authority, and Eliakim, who is chosen to take his place. God says that Eliakim will receive the key of the house of David. Whatever he opens, no one shall shut, and whatever he shuts, no one shall open. This shows authority and responsibility given by God. This reading reminds us that leadership in God's plan is not about power or personal glory, instead that it is purely about service. God chooses leaders to care for His people and to carry out His will. Eliakim is described as a father to the people. His authority is meant to help and protect others. This teaches us that every responsibility we receive in life, whether in the family, workplace, parish, or society, should be used for service to others and to the humanity in general, and not for self-glory.

In the Gospel, we see a clear connection with the first reading. Jesus asks His disciples the big, fundamental question, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answers boldly, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Peter's confession of faith becomes a decisive turning point. Jesus praises Peter because this profound truth was revealed to him directly by the Father.

Then Jesus says, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." He also gives Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. This symbolic language reminds us of the authority given to Eliakim in the first reading. Just as Eliakim received the key of the house of David, Peter receives the keys of the Kingdom. From this, we come to understand that Peter's role continues through his successors, the Popes. This is not because they are perfect human beings, but because Christ continues to guide His Church through them. Jesus promises that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. This gives us immense

confidence that despite our human weaknesses and modern challenges, Christ remains eternally faithful to His people.

Peter's confession also invites us to examine our own faith. Jesus asks each one of us the same question today: "Who do you say that I am?" It is not enough to simply know what others think about Jesus. Faith becomes truly personal when we answer from our own hearts. For some, Jesus may be a teacher or a good person. But as Christians, we are called to recognize Him as the Son of God and our Saviour.

The second reading from Romans helps us see God's greatness more deeply. Saint Paul is filled with wonder as he reflects on God's wisdom and knowledge. He says, "How deep are the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" Paul recognizes that God's ways are beyond human understanding. Many times, we want clear answers to every question. We want to understand why certain things happen in our lives. But Paul reminds us that God's wisdom is greater than ours. Even when we cannot fully understand His plans, we can trust Him. God sees the whole picture but we see only a small part.

These three readings together offer a beautiful message. God gives authority to those He chooses for the good of His people. Jesus establishes His Church on the faith of Peter and continues to guide it. At the same time, we are reminded that God's wisdom is beyond our understanding and worthy of our trust. As we reflect on these readings, let us renew our faith in Jesus. Let us pray for the Pope, bishops, priests, and all Church leaders that they may serve God's people with humility and love. Let us also ask for the grace to answer Jesus' question with conviction: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

May we trust in God's wisdom, remain faithful to His Church, and use every responsibility entrusted to us as an opportunity to serve others. In doing so, we give glory to God, from whom all things come and to whom all things return.

Response: O Lord, your merciful love is eternal; discard not the work of your hands.

24 MON

Come and See

St Bartholomew

Rv 21: 9b-14/ Ps 145: 10-11, 12-13, 17-18/ Jn 1: 45-51

Sometimes the most meaningful moments in life begin with a simple invitation. The readings remind us that God desires to be close to His people and invites each of us into a deeper relationship with Him. They also show us how He builds His kingdom through ordinary people who are willing to respond to His call. In the vision from the Book of Revelation, the heavenly Jerusalem descends from God in radiant beauty. It is not merely a city of gold and precious stones; it is the symbol of God's final communion with humanity. What is striking is that the city rests upon twelve foundations bearing the names of the apostles. The Church stands on the witness of those who encountered Christ and surrendered their lives to Him. God's kingdom is not built on power, wealth, or human achievement, but on the faith of ordinary people transformed by an extraordinary encounter with Jesus.

The Gospel presents us with one such encounter. Philip, having found Jesus, immediately seeks Nathanael. He does not offer lengthy arguments or sophisticated proofs. He simply says, "Come and see." These three words reveal the essence of Christian discipleship. Faith is not first a theory to be explained but a person to be encountered. Philip knew that if Nathanael truly met Jesus, his doubts would give way to faith. Nathanael initially approaches with skepticism. He cannot imagine that anything significant could come from an insignificant village. Yet Jesus sees beyond Nathanael's prejudice and recognizes the sincerity of his heart. Before Nathanael speaks, Jesus knows him. Before Nathanael believes, Jesus has already loved him.

This is often how God works in our lives. We may carry doubts, limitations, and imperfect expectations, yet God sees deeper than our weaknesses. He calls us not because we are already perfect but because He desires to transform us. The heavenly city described in Revelation is built upon apostles who first responded to an invitation similar to Nathanael's. They came, they saw, and they remained with Christ. Through them God built His Church.

Response: Tell among all the people the wonders of the Lord

25 TUE

The Power of Authenticity

Ordinary Weekday

2 Thes 2: 1-3a, 14-17/ Ps 96: 10, 11-12, 13/ Mt 23: 23-26

The world of advertisement coupled with artificial intelligence has reshaped our modern culture and our thinking patterns. While a lot of good has been done by this changing mindset, it has also taken away authenticity from human culture, which is essential for human growth and development. While advertisements depend exclusively on human opinions and persuade people to act according to its dictates, AI and algorithms gives you the information based on the previous encounters leading to determined conclusions. However, these lack authenticity because these are not based on the free decision, values or convictions of man.

The readings of today speak about such ethical polarities found between authenticity and hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is based on what is convenient to us and which gives the greatest gratifications of life. The Thessalonians who were lazy and escaped from work, living leisurely now finds an excuse not to work based on the false teaching of the immanent second coming of Christ. In the Gospel Jesus admonishes the Scribes and Pharisees for not paying attention to the beneficial laws of human life rather justifying the non-appropriation of trivial laws.

As against the glorification of hypocrisy as a mode of living, the readings emphasise the power of authentic living. St. Paul cautions the Thessalonians not to be deceived by such false teachings but to live always in accordance with the traditions of the Gospel and to have a firm conviction that God is ever present to them here and now. Jesus tells the Jews to clean their hearts and minds so that they may live a life of inner convictions rather than waste time with the exteriors of life. The power of authenticity in fact will lead us to a new dimension of Christian living, because authenticity is something in which we are inborn and is exclusively given to us as grace at Baptism. When we live in accordance with the gift of grace, with total freedom and with inner convictions, we become people stronger than any functional world ideology can handle. Are we courageous enough to live up to our inner convictions as against the popular functionality?

Response: The Lord comes to judge the earth.

26 WED

You will be blessed and prosper

Ordinary Weekday

2 Thes 3: 6-10, 16-18/ Ps 128: 1-2, 4-5/ Mt 23: 27-32

In today's readings, God reminds us that blessing and prosperity are closely connected with faithful and sincere work. Saint Paul is a model of responsibility. He tells the community that he worked "night and day" so as not to become a burden to anyone. Paul teaches that work is necessary for a way to earn a living as it is a participation in God's plan. Honest labour forms character, builds community, and gives dignity to human life. Therefore, laziness and irresponsibility weaken both the individual and the society. God blesses those who willingly fulfill their duties with sincerity and perseverance. The Psalm beautifully echoes this truth: "Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways." The Psalmist confirms that the fruit of labour becomes a blessing when it is offered with reverence to God. Prosperity is not only about material wealth; it is also peace in the family, joy in one's heart, and the satisfaction that comes from honest effort. A person who works sincerely and responsibly experiences the quiet happiness of knowing that they are contributing positively to the lives of others.

In the Gospel, Jesus warns the Pharisees against hypocrisy. Outward appearances may impress people, but God looks at the heart. One may appear hardworking and religious externally while internally lacking honesty, humility, and love. Christ calls His followers to integrity, to let their actions match their words. Whatever work we do, whether small or great, should be done with a pure intention and sincerity of heart.

Today's message is simple yet powerful: work is necessary, but it must be done responsibly and truthfully. We are not called to live selfishly or depend carelessly on others when we are capable of contributing ourselves. Instead, through honest labour, mutual support, and faithful living, we are called to praise God and be his witnesses. May the Lord, the giver of peace, strengthen us to work with dedication, serve with humility, and live responsibly. Then truly, as Scripture promises, we shall be blessed by God and prosper.

Response: Blessed are all who fear the Lord.

27 THUR

Grace That Calls

St Monica

1 Cor 1: 1-9/ Ps 145: 2-3, 4-5, 6-7/ Mt 24: 42-51

Many of us easily notice our weaknesses. We remember our failures and forget the many blessings God has given us. In today's first reading, St. Paul helps us see ourselves differently. He reminds the Christians in Corinth that they are called by God, made holy in Christ, and blessed with many spiritual gifts. Although Paul knows they have many problems, he begins by thanking God for his grace. This teaches us that God always looks at us with love and hope. His grace comes before our efforts and helps us grow into faithful disciples. God has given each one of us unique gifts. Some can teach, some can encourage, and others quietly serve with kindness. Every gift has value because it comes from God. We should never compare ourselves with others or consider our contribution as too small. What matters most is using our gifts with love and humility. When we place our talents at God's service, even the smallest act can become a blessing for someone else.

In the Gospel, Jesus asks His disciples to stay awake and be ready. He is not asking us to live in fear but to live with faith every day. A faithful servant is one who continues doing good, even when nobody is watching. Readiness for the Lord is shown through simple acts of love, honesty, forgiveness, and prayer. These ordinary moments prepare our hearts for His coming. The Memorial of Saint Monica gives us a beautiful example of this faithful life. She prayed for many years for her son, Augustine, who had wandered away from God. She never gave up, even when she saw no change. Her trust remained strong because she believed that God was working in ways she could not see. At the right time, her prayers were answered, and Augustine became one of the greatest saints of the Church. As St. Augustine later reflected, "The tears of my mother were more powerful than the arguments of others." Today, let us thank God for his gifts, remain faithful in our daily duties, and never lose hope in prayer. God's grace never fails those who continue trusting in him.

Response: I will bless your name, O Lord, forever.

28 FRI

The Wisdom of the Cross

St Augustine of Hippo

1 Cor 1: 17-25/ Ps 33: 1-2, 4-5, 10-11/ Mt 25: 1-13

Today's reading reminds us that God's ways are often very different from the ways of the world. People usually admire strength, success, intelligence, and achievements. They look for things that appear impressive and powerful. Yet God chose to save the world through the Cross, something that seemed weak and foolish in human eyes. The message of the Cross teaches us that true greatness is found in humble love and self-giving sacrifice. Jesus did not conquer by force. He conquered by loving completely, even when that love led Him to suffering. Many could not understand this. Even today, some people find it difficult to accept that forgiveness is stronger than revenge, humility greater than pride, and love more powerful than hatred. There are moments in our own lives when we feel weak, misunderstood, or burdened by struggles. We may wonder why God allows difficulties to come our way. The Cross reminds us that God is present even in those painful moments. What seems like failure can become a source of grace. What appears to be a loss can become a blessing in God's hands.

Saint Augustine spent much of his life searching for truth and wisdom. In the end, he discovered that true wisdom is found in Christ. The closer he came to God, the more he understood that human knowledge alone cannot satisfy the deepest desires of the heart. Today, we are invited to trust God even when His plans do not make sense to us. Instead of relying only on our own understanding, let us open our hearts to His wisdom. The Cross teaches us that God can bring hope out of despair, strength out of weakness, and life out of death.

May we never be ashamed of the Cross. May we see in it the greatest sign of God's love for us, may we learn to carry our own crosses with faith, knowing that God is working through them to shape us into the people He wants us to be. May the Lord Jesus help us to trust in His wisdom when we cannot understand His ways. May I learn to find strength in His Cross

Response: The Lord's merciful love fills the earth.

29 SAT

Integrity Over Image

Martyrdom of St John the Baptist

Jer 1: 17-19/ Ps: 71: 1-2, 3-4a, 5-6ab, 15ab and 17 / Mk 6: 17-29

Today the Church celebrates the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist. He is the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first witness of the New Testament. He prepared the way for the Messiah. He even received praise from Jesus. John was courageous, yet lived a simple life in the desert and called people to repentance. He was not afraid to speak the truth, even when it was difficult. Because of his faithfulness to God, he suffered greatly and finally offered his life to the truth.

The Gospel tells us that John was imprisoned because he openly told King Herod that it was wrong for him to marry Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. John knew that speaking the truth could bring trouble, but he remained faithful to God. He cared more about doing what was right than protecting himself.

Herod, on the other hand, was weak. He respected John and did not really want to kill him. But, due to a careless promise made to Salome, Herod felt trapped. He was worried more about what his guests would think, than about the moral rightfulness of his action. To save Herod's reputation, John had to die. This Gospel teaches us an important lesson. We should always keep our promises, but if a promise is sinful or unjust, it should not be made in the first place. No promise can be greater than God's law and the dignity of human life. Herod's mistake was that he cared more about his image before others than about the values of justice and truth. The story also warns us against taking advantage of other people's weaknesses. Herodias used Herod's weakness to achieve her own selfish goal. Such selfish attitudes continue to harm families, communities, and society today. Whenever we use others for our own benefit, we move away from God's way of love. Like St. John, we must have the courage to stand for what is right, even when it costs us something. Today, let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in truth and goodness.

Response: Blessed the people the Lord has chosen as his heritage.

30 SUN

For the Glory of God

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Jer 20: 7-9/ Ps 63: 2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9 (2b)/ Rom 12: 1-2/ Mt 16: 21-27

When Jeremiah began his ministry the people of Israel had become so hardened by the bluntness of their emotional response to their sinful ways that they no longer believed God nor did they fear Him. Jeremiah preached for many years and not once did he see any real success in changing or softening the hearts and minds of his stubborn, idolatrous people. He gave them fair warnings, but the people of Israel ignored him and went on to suffer disaster. They lost everything. Their nation was torn apart, their temple destroyed and their leaders were carried off into captivity by their enemies. In spite of this, Jeremiah responded to the invitation of presenting himself to God as a willing sacrifice and God took hold of him and filled his heart with his Word so much so that Jeremiah could no longer resist speaking and even shouting in the name of God Most High.

God assured Jeremiah of His assistance if he would obey God's Word. Jeremiah had doubts about obeying God's Word but he felt it burning in his heart and caught up in his bones. He could not endure holding it in. He had to proclaim it. He did but suffer so much including death threats. He wondered where God was and if he was duped. He felt alone as many people were chasing him. He was afraid of experiencing the consequence of His obedience to God. Through this reading, we learn that it is not easy to respond to God's call and the Lord will always find a way to bring us to Him through the Holy Spirit.

In the second reading St. Paul appeals that we all must present ourselves as a living sacrifice Holy and acceptable to God and tells us that this is acceptable and pleasing to God. Our lives must be solely meant to please the Lord. We must submit to God without resistance and reservation. To present our bodies is to submit our faculties and the totality of our being. It is total surrender to God. This total surrender is essential to a life of righteousness, joy, peace, and victory in Christ. We must conform to Christ rather than to this world. If not, we are not living for God but for our own self and this can be very dangerous.

In today's Gospel, Jesus rebukes Peter for asserting his will against God's will. It was clear that Peter did not fully understand the Jesus' affirmation of himself as the Son of God. Then Jesus proceeded to teach them about the value of earthly life against eternal life. Peter could not understand why Christ should be talking this way. However, God's call is not only about participating in his glory but also participating first in his suffering. This is what Christ did. That He offered himself as a living sacrifice means that he submitted everything without reluctance for our salvation. Peter tries to make Jesus change his mind. Jesus' reaction is extremely strong: You are an obstacle in my path, because you are thinking not as God thinks but as human beings do. When he said he must go to Jerusalem, he was saying that was the only way to be true to his vocation. Jesus did not live for himself. He lived for God the Father who sent him and died doing his will. When we deny self, we make the choice to replace our desires, thoughts, and plans with God's thoughts and purposes. We are called to live our lives centered on considering others before ourselves. This is not an easy commitment to make. Taking up one's cross daily is an expressed willingness to be His followers and to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth.

That we deny ourselves and take up our cross in order to follow him means that when we do this, Jesus himself will be with us. He will be leading us. And he will help us do what he asks. With Jesus leading us, we can deny ourselves and take up our cross. Without Jesus, it would be far too difficult. But he does not ask us to do this alone. He invites us to follow him which means to be with him.

While we live in this world, we are not of this world. We are pilgrims on our way to eternal life. We ought to be in this world proclaiming the Good News.

Response: For you my soul is thirsting, O Lord, my God.

31 MON

Faith beyond Certitude

Ordinary Weekday

1 Cor 2: 1-5/ Ps 119: 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102/ Lk 4: 16-30

Today's Gospel reading is often called the manifesto of Jesus. The passage ends with the rejection of Jesus by the people of His own hometown, prompting Him to utter the famous words: "A prophet is not welcomed in his own hometown." Yet, rather than dwelling on the rejection, it is worth reflecting on the message itself — a message so radical that it evoked such extreme and divided reactions. The book if Isaiah from which the text is taken speaks of the "Year of Jubilee," in Hebrew Yōvēl or Yovel , a sacred time when debts were forgiven, slaves were set free, and ancestral lands were restored to their rightful families, as described in Leviticus 25. Jesus deliberately stops at this passage and boldly declares that it is fulfilled in His very person. Such a statement was daring, for it stood in sharp contrast to the kind of Messiah the Jews had imagined and expected.

More often than not, this same obstacle hinders our own relationship with God. We tend to believe that everything revolves around our understanding and our expectations. The illusion of "all-knowing" becomes our Achilles' heel and often the cause of our downfall. This is beautifully revealed in the reaction of the people of Nazareth. They believed they already knew who God should be. Their questioning of Jesus' birthplace and parentage was, in reality, a refusal to accept a God who did not fit into their expectations.

This reflection takes us back to the very beginning, to the Garden of Eden, where Adam chose the "apple of certitude" — the temptation of self-sufficiency and the desire to know apart from God. That choice became his undoing, causing him to lose his rightful place in God's paradise. Jesus, the Second Adam, now presents humanity with the same choice once again: to cling to the illusion of certainty or to surrender in trust and choose God above all. The tragedy of Nazareth was not merely that the people rejected Jesus, but that they rejected a God who challenged their certainties. The Gospel invites us to examine whether we too confine God within the limits of our expectations and understanding.

Response: O Lord, how I love your Law!

Sacrament of Reconciliation (A Brief History)
Part II - Sin and Forgiveness
A Transition from the Old to the New Testament

Introduction:

The understanding of sin and forgiveness develops gradually throughout salvation history and we have seen and understood this previously. The Bible reveals God's plan step by step, moving from an external understanding of sin and ritual forgiveness in the Old Testament to the fullness of reconciliation and salvation through Jesus Christ in the New Testament. We have seen how sin, due to the misuse of human freedom, entered human history. Genesis accounts involving Adam-Eve and Cain-Abel reveals a separation from God and loss of original holiness and jealousy and corruption in human relationships respectively. There is a rapid spread of sin and division and gradually sin becomes universal as human wickedness increased. However, in all instances of humanity hurting God, He still remains merciful and forgiving, though we see some punitive actions coming from God as corrective measures.

1. Sin and Forgiveness in the Covenant with Israel

The history of sin and forgiveness in Israel is essentially the history of God's covenant relationship with His chosen people. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel repeatedly falls into sin, and God repeatedly offers forgiveness, revealing both His justice and His mercy. The covenant was formally established when God delivered Israel from Egypt and gave the Law through Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-24). The covenant relationship was based on God's faithful love and election of Israel and Israel's commitment to obey God's commandments in all circumstances. In this context, sin was primarily understood as disobedience of God's Law, violation of the covenant and rejection of God's kingship. Something worse happened. Soon after receiving and the covenant and sealing it, Israel committed a grave sin by worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32). This unfortunate episode reveals three important truths – Sin is fundamentally idolatry, sin breaks covenant and communion with God and God's mercy can restore the sinner.

Moses interceded for the people and God forgave them, though not without consequences. Here we see one of the first great examples of mediation and forgiveness in Israel's history.

2. The Sacrificial System – Means of Forgiveness

Now, to maintain covenant communion, God established a system of sacrifice for atonement. In the sacrificial system of ancient Israel, different offerings expressed different aspects of the people's relationship with God.

a) Sin Offering (Hebrew: Hattat)

It was to atone for sins committed unintentionally and to restore ritual purity. It was offered when a person became aware of an unintentional violation of God's law, the emphasis was on cleansing and purification, the blood of the sacrifice played a central role in making atonement, depending on the person's status, the offering could be a bull, goat, lamb, or birds.

b) Guilt Offering (Hebrew: Asham)

Its purpose was to atone for sins that caused harm to God, sacred things, or another person. This required not only a sacrifice but also restitution (repayment) plus an additional penalty (usually one-fifth more), applied to offenses such as misuse of sacred property, fraud, theft, or deception, usually involved offering a ram,

c) Burnt Offering (Hebrew: Olah)

It was offered as an act of worship, surrender, and dedication to God. The entire animal was burned on the altar; nothing was kept back, symbolized total self-offering and complete devotion to God, offered daily in the Temple and on special occasions, could be a bull, sheep, goat, or bird.

d) Peace Offering (Hebrew: Shelamim)

It celebrated communion, thanksgiving, and fellowship with God. Part of the sacrifice was burned for God, part was given to the priests, and part was eaten by the worshipper in a sacred meal, could be offered as thanksgiving, fulfillment of a vow, or freewill worship, expressed joy and gratitude rather than repentance.

In all the above-mentioned sacrifices, the principle was "The life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11). Blood, therefore, symbolized life offered to restore communion with God. However, these sacrifices could never completely remove sin; they pointed towards something greater.

Christian Fulfilment: We, today, understand all these sacrifices as finding their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

- Sin Offering: Jesus takes away the sins of the world
- Guilt Offering: Jesus makes reparation for humanity's offenses against God
- Burnt Offering: Jesus offers Himself completely to the Father on the Cross
- Peace Offering: Through Jesus, humanity is reconciled and brought into communion with God.

Furthermore, the Letter to Hebrews teaches that Christ's one sacrifice accomplished perfectly what the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed.

3. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

One of the most important Old Testament developments was the annual Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The High Priest: (a) Offered sacrifice for the people, (b) Sprinkled sacrificial blood in the Holy of Holies, (c) Sent a "scapegoat" into the wilderness carrying the sins of Israel. This ritual taught that (1) Sin requires expiation, (2) Forgiveness comes from God, (3) Someone bears the consequences of sin. This again, becomes a powerful foreshadowing of Christ.

4. The Prophets and the Interiorization of Sin

A major transition occurs through the prophets. These prophets insisted that rituals alone are insufficient. Isaiah proclaimed that sacrifices are meaningless without conversion. Hosea spoke God's words: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Hos 6:6). The prophets deepened the understating of the people about sin – Sin is a matter of the heart. Hence, sins are not mere external actions but they turn us away from God; knowingly and willingly a separation and rejection of God. Forgiveness

therefore required – repentance, contrition and a change of heart (metanoia – a profound, transformative change of heart and mind).

The prophets increasingly emphasize God's mercy. Jeremiah announced a New Covenant: "I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more" (Jer 31:34). Ezekiel promised: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (Ez 36:26). The focus shifted from external law to interior transformation.

5. The Psalms: Personal Repentance

The Psalms develop a deeply personal spirituality of repentance, especially Psalm 51, where King David, after his sin with Bathsheba prays: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." There are numerous penitential Psalms which, when prayed meaningfully, help to identify sins, appeal for God's mercy, avoid defensiveness attitude, ask God to heal the broken / wounded relationship and finally resolve to obey Him alone. In the entire process, there is a personal confession, deep contrition and trust in God's mercy and in His faithfulness. This prepares the way for Christian understanding of repentance.

6. John the Baptist: Call to Repentance

As we gradually move from the Old to the New Testament, John the Baptist stands at the threshold between these two Testaments. His message is clear and loud: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Thus he invited his listeners for conversion, confession of sins, baptism and thus prepared the people for the Messiah.

As Christians, we often regard baptism as a practice specific to the Christian faith. However, in reality, the Jews had practiced it for centuries. The baptism John brought was one of repentance. This baptism is known as the "mikvah" (ritual bath) which was part of the "teshuvah" (return/repentance) or repentance process. It historically began in the Garden of Eden with Adam's banishment, as recorded in the Midrash, and has since been practiced as an act of repentance in a ritual passage toward a life of purity and consecration to God.

The biblical concept and the general practice of "baptism" is not new or exclusive to the Christian faith. It is ancient, having originated among the Jews as a ritual act of repentance fulfilling the teshuvah. The Apostle Peter declares that Israel was baptized in the Red Sea after their exodus, signifying their release and cleansing from Egypt, the passing away of the old, and coming into the new life promised to them by God. John the Baptist came with a message of repentance which would prepare the hearts of the people for the LORD, returning them to their Father God. This baptism took place in the Jordan, which was the very river the Israelites crossed over when they first came into their promised land guided by Joshua (Yeshua or "Savior").

The Jordan contained ancient stones which served to remind Israel of their covenant possession. These stones bore witness to them of their journey into the promised land, and served as ancient boundaries marking their territory. John began his immersions through the institution of a mikvah at this precise location for one purpose - to fulfil the teshuvah as the people of Israel returned to their Father God. Christ seconded this motion, openly declaring that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one came to the Father but by Him. This mikvah practice was one the Jews fully understood. If they were to be purified and made ready as a people for the LORD, a mikvah was in order and completely appropriate. In fact, some would say it was mandatory, which is why Jesus Christ said it was necessary to fulfil all righteousness, being baptized of John.

To repent is to turn. In this case it was to re-turn - back to the Father. Christ opened that way for us. As such, the Gospel came to the people of Israel predicated upon repentance. As Christ said, all who believe and follow Him must repent of their sin. Repentance is a prerequisite to that rite of passage from the old life into the new. No one will be saved who does not repent of their sin and turn back to God.

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95. SERVANT

The word "servant" is derived from Latin "servus" signifying at the beck and call of others; one needs to serve. Its definition described as "male or female personal or domestic attendant, one owing duty of service to a master or lord, one employed by another and subject to his orders," from Old French servant "servant; foot-soldier," noun use of servant "serving, waiting," present participle of server "to attend, wait upon."

We hear from Jesus a very powerful statement when he addressed his disciples, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10.35-45). Jesus instructs his followers, after a bruising encounter with James and John, two of the leading followers of Jesus (Mk10.35-40) which enraged the rest of the disciples (Mk10.42). James and John wanted to claim the places next to Jesus: "one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (10.37). This was not unusual in the world of that time. Public debate that was intended to rise over the other person was common in ancient Mediterranean societies. Seeking greater honour (higher status) by getting the upper hand, or the last word, in public debate, was common. In an honour—shame society, such as that in which Jesus, James, and John lived, the culture was characterised by a constant and ongoing "challenge" enacted in the public arena. Jesus engaged in such challenges on a regular basis.

At this moment, Jesus critiques the common process of public disputation; he distances himself from the common cultural practice of seeking honour and working for a higher status. Those who lord it over others, who act as tyrants, are not to be the role models for his followers; "it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mk10.43–44). Indeed, Jesus rubs salt into the wound by inferring that James and John were acting like Gentiles (10:52). That was an insult, to be sure, for good Jews.

This was the third time, after demonstrating their misunderstanding of what Jesus was teaching, that his disciples were directly rebuked for their attitude. First, Peter represents the disciples' lack of clarity about Jesus (Mk 8.27–38); then the

disciples arguing about being great, and John failing to welcome the activity of a person casting out demons (Mk 9.33–48); and now, James and John demonstrate their continued inability to understand the attitude of Jesus towards status (Mk 10.35–40). At least in this last scene, the other ten disciples are angry about what James and John have asked for (Mk10.41). Far too often, on earlier occasions, Jesus has lamented that the disciples failed to understand. It seems that finally, at this moment, things had fallen into place for the disciples.

On this occasion, Jesus goes one step further. His own life—or, more precisely, the laying-down of his own life—is to be seen, not just as the model for his followers to emulate, but as "a ransom for many" (Mk10.45). In the context of the Hebrew prophets and the New Testament, the "Servant of the Lord" is a specific designation for the Messiah. This figure is characterized by a divine mission, suffering, and ultimate vindication. The Mission of the Servant in the prophecies of Isaiah (such as Isaiah 49) is described as the one who fulfils the divine mission of God. This servant is portrayed as "despised of man" yet ultimately the one who will "raise up the tribes of Jacob" and be a "Salvation to the ends of the earth" (Luke 4.18).

The New Testament identifies Jesus as this Servant. In Matthew 12.18, the text cites the Servant as the one whom God has "chosen" and in whom His "soul is well pleased," noting that God will put His Spirit upon him to "show judgment to the Gentiles" (Matthew 12.18). This reflects the theological understanding that the Servant's authority is derived directly from the Spirit of God. Beyond the Messianic title, the term "servant" describes the believer's relational posture before God. This is characterized by humility, dependence, and a desire for divine instruction. In the Psalms, the identity of the "servant" is linked to a request for understanding. Psalm 119.125 reads: "I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes". Here, the servant's primary function is to seek the knowledge of God's will, acknowledging that wisdom is a gift granted by the Master.

Patristic writers often emphasized that the "servant of God" does not serve because God has a need, but because the servant has a need to respond to God's grace. Irenaeus argues that God does not "stand in need of our possessions" or services,

but desires them for the servant's own benefit, "lest we be unfruitful" (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book IV, Chap. XVIII). In this view, good works are the natural expression of a servant who has received the "bread of his labour" with confidence (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book IV, Chap. XXXIV).

The "servant" identity also carries significant weight regarding the internal life, specifically the conscience and the awareness of God's presence. The servant is defined by an awareness that they live in the sight of God. The life of the servant is also viewed through the lens of divine providence. This perspective encourages the servant to show compassion to others, as Patriarch Joseph did, because the servant understands that they are a "companion in tribulation" (Genesis 40.7).

Across these traditions, the "servant" is not merely a title of submission but a comprehensive identity; the Servant is the Messiah, the agent of God's redemptive work; the servant is the learner who relies on God for understanding (Psalm 119); the servant is the individual who lives with a sensitive conscience, recognizing that their life and works are lived before the Creator. The servant is one who, like Joseph, maintains integrity and compassion, trusting in divine providence even in times of suffering.

In the final analysis of the term "Servant." we unambiguously see Jesus fulfilling and summarizing all the 'servant' titles of the Old Testament through his own life at the Last Supper, washing the feet of his apostles, and says, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet" (Jn 13.14) We are all called to imitate the "servant" spirit of Jesus in our daily lives.

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Dear Subscriber,

Greetings of peace and gratitude from the *'Springs of Living Water'* editorial team.

First and foremost, we want to sincerely thank you for your faithful support and encouragement over the years. Your commitment has kept *'Springs of Living Water'* flowing into homes and hearts, nourishing many with reflections and inspiration.

As you are aware, times have changed rapidly. With rising printing and distribution costs and a decline in subscriptions, continuing the magazine in its current printed form has become increasingly difficult. After much prayer, discussion, and discernment, our editorial team has decided that the **November 2026 issue will be the final printed edition** of *'Springs of Living Water'*.

From December 2026 onwards, with the new Liturgical year, we will continue to share *'Springs of Living Water'* digitally. This will allow us to reach more readers, reduce costs, and remain faithful to our mission of spreading reflections and inspiration in a sustainable way.

We are aware that some of you have subscribed for longer periods. Please be assured that your subscription will be honored in full through digital delivery. You will continue to receive every issue without interruption, and we are committed to making the digital format accessible and reader-friendly.

We deeply value your trust and companionship on this journey. While the medium changes, the message remains the same: to bring living water to thirsty souls. We hope you will continue to walk with us in this new chapter.

With heartfelt thanks and blessings,

The Editorial Team

'Springs of Living Water'

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THE ASSUMPTION

Believers in the Gospel
Join leaders of the nation
In gathering together
The fruits of liberation.

Freedom from sensual vices
Unjust discrimination;
Freedom from greed for money
And maladministration.

Mary's glorious Assumption
Today we celebrate,
Ourselves and our nation
To Her we dedicate.

Throughout all generations
Her virtues radiate.
What service to our nation
If Her we imitate.

- Rev Fr Paul D'Souza, OCD
(for daily liturgical poems visit
http://lyrics.carmelmedia.in)

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