

A JOURNEY *with*
JESUS
TO THE CROSS

Meditations for Lenten Season

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A JOURNEY *with*
JESUS
TO THE CROSS

Meditations for Lenten Season

Faith and Tradition Series

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TO THE CROSS
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Faith and Tradition Series
(English)

January 2017
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Preface

*In the name of the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit✠*

Faith, beliefs, traditions and rituals are tangible truths which bind and hold institutions and individuals. They hold people together, give them an identity and help them through the travails of birth and existence till the end of being. Symbols and rituals are thus reminders of that belonging and that common bonding.

A flag and an anthem are icons of national identity. All countries have their flags and anthems. When the flag is hoisted and the anthem played, citizens are expected to rise in reverence as a mark of respect to their flag and anthem.

Now let us consider this. What would happen if a few separatists decided to have a different flag or an anthem for their country? That would be tantamount to rejecting the symbols that had been unifying the people of their country for years. Such an act would be treated as treason, punishable by the law of the land.

The church, too, has its own symbols and traditions to unite all her children. When we go back to the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the church understood its identity and formed icons and set up practices to sustain it through the ages. The Cross, the Holy Communion, the passing of peace, and other sacraments are just a few invaluable symbols that hold us together.

The faith and practices of the Believers Eastern Church go back to those that the Apostles handed down to the founding fathers of the church and who in turn handed them down to us. We hope and believe that as you learn about them and the way they help you to focus your lives on Jesus, you will also be blessed with the feeling of oneness, of being united with the spiritual family, the church, which will enrich your life.

This publication is part of the Faith and Tradition Series of Believers Eastern Church. This humble endeavour of mine has been enriched by the support and help of a team of bishops and priests who have given their all for our church. I thank them and pray that the Lord blesses them.

Praise be to our God who is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). Let us give ourselves to Him in this Lenten season through meditation, preparation, repentance and confession, seeking to become more like our Lord Jesus Christ. Our reward will be the overwhelming joy of experiencing Easter - the power of Resurrection - made available in renewed measure. May we be renewed in our love and affection for Him through each day of this wonderful season of the Christian Calendar.

This is a season of hope and renewal of forgiveness and of blessings to be received in abundance.

May the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be with you and me now, and for always. Amen.

Synod Secretariat
January 15, 2017

✠ Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan
Metropolitan

Introduction

This is a devotional book that we can use more particularly during the season of Lent. Lenten Meditation is one of the ways to spend the season of Lent in a meaningful way. These are prepared to help each member spend the season, focusing on Jesus, and humbling lives to learn of the Lord.

It is prepared according to the number of days in Lent Season and has a meditation for each day. The meditation for each day is written by people just like you, people who are listening to God and trying to live by what they hear and are instructed. We seek to build on what unites us as members of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church to connect together from around the world in prayer and learning from the Lord. When we meditate and pray the prayers, we join with those around the world, who aspires to know our Lord as they too read the same Bible passages and bring similar concerns before God.

These meditations are closely tied to the Holy Scripture and have practical applications giving light to specific needs and make the Word of God come alive to individual life and walk. This devotional will provide richness and variety to complement to our daily quiet time and prayer. May God our loving Father speak and guide each of us as we go through this Season of Lent and meditate upon Jesus our Lord.



Meditations for Lenten Season

Week 1

It is time! Let us **return to God,**
our loving Father.

Call to holiness

Leviticus 11:44-45

Isaiah 6:1-13

Psalms 96

1 Peter 1:14-22

*"We must become holy not because we want to feel holy, but because Christ must be able to live His life fully in us."
- Mother Teresa.*

Holiness is a call from God! How do you react to this call? Do you say: "That's impossible?" In a sense, that's the right reaction, for none of us can ever aspire to be as holy as God.

God never says: "Be holy the way I am." Instead, He tells us thus: "You shall be holy, for I am holy." This is your stand, your status in Christ. In other words, it declares your position as who you are in Christ, where you stand in Christ. The indicative is usually followed by an imperative, a command. Since this is who you are in Christ, act like one chosen.

Holiness is reflected in faithful obedience to God's commands. Holiness means the affirmation of the new reality of seeing the world around us through God's Word and living in the world through God's perspective.

Many of us are bound by too many desires, longings and interests. It is not wrong to have them, but when we are overwhelmed by our desires, we fail to see them in the light of God's Word. And this

gradually goads us on to love and hold on to material possessions. In the process, we fail to see the most merciful and tender heart of our Lord. A child of God should continually seek His will, to see through all his desires and longings, the way Jesus would want him or her to be. This attitude of leaning towards godliness will enable us to grow and evolve in God's nature. This will lead us to a life of godliness, a beacon of light, which will guide us in our daily encounters with life. May we live in this experience of holiness and grow in it as we seek God all through these days of the holy season.

Let us Meditate

1. What more should I do to understand the holiness of God?
2. What are my traits which obstruct my journey towards holiness?
3. What steps should I take to become as holy as God and grow in all my ways?

Application

I will reject all that comes between me and God and I will discipline my thoughts and attitude so that I become holy and find approval in the eyes of God. I will find time to read the Word of God and meditate on His Word. This will help me to acknowledge the presence of God in my life.

Prayer

Dear God, help us in this Lenten season, to cleave more unto You, to live a life of holiness. In Jesus' blessed name, I pray. Amen.

The deadly sin

1 John 1:7-9

Romans 3:23-24

Isaiah 1:18, 43:25-26

Acts of the Apostles 3:19

2 Corinthians 5:17

He is the loving God. He is more than willing to help you and free you from the clutches of sin.

Let us stop the progress of sin in our soul at the first stage, for the farther it goes the faster it will increase," said historian Thomas Fuller. Sin is a dominant theme in the Holy Bible. We understand that the Holy Bible directly mentions the word 'sin' more than 400 times. Although it has just three letters, it's impact is heinous and dreadful.

Sin is the soul's enemy. It is constantly at work, inflicting pain and total damage. It comes across as a harmless and innocent creeper, but eventually has us completely in its control. It goes on us, feeds on us and devours us. Initially, though, it appears as weak and flimsy as cobwebs, as the days go by, it becomes as strong as an iron chain, capable of strangling us. This deceptive force destroys the very immune system of our soul.

Ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin got its control over human beings and they have been falling prey to its crippling clutches. The increasing influence of sin makes life miserable and deprives us of peace and joy. Not only does it set the rot in our personal lives, but it also hampers interpersonal relationships.

But the question is, for how long? Isn't there a way out of this deadly ordeal? Of course, there is a perfect

solution to this misery. The one and the only available remedy for this deceptive, yet devastating foe is the Cross and the Blood of Jesus that was shed for humankind.

The season of Lent reminds us over and over again of what Jesus did to deliver us out of this devastating power called sin. The Messiah died on the cross of Calvary as an answer to all of man's ills inflicted by sin. No sin is too big for our Lord not to forgive. And there's no sin, deadly and irredeemable as it may seem, which the blood of Jesus cannot cleanse. He is the loving God. He is more than willing to help you and free you from the clutches of sin. The only response the Lord expects from each of us is that we fall at the foot of the cross and yield all that's holding us against the power of the blood of Jesus. Only such a surrender can free us from the shackles of sin. Are we ready to humble ourselves and fall at the foot of the cross and surrender to Him?

Let us Meditate

1. Am I struggling with a sin that needs to be overcome?
2. What is it that robs the joy of the Lord from my heart?
3. What are the things I can do consistently to enjoy the presence of God in my life?

Application

I will not tell lies...big or small. I will pay full attention to the Word of God. I will avoid sin in any form which will ruin my relationship with God and my fellow beings.

Prayer

Loving Lord, it is so refreshing to know that You care for me. Thank You for Your promises that brings assurance and joy in spite of my wavering. Forgive me my sins and restore the joy and happiness that come only from living in Your presence. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Repentance: coming back to the father's house

St. Matthew 3:1-8

Psalms 51

Romans 3:23, 6:23

St. John 1:9

St. Luke 15:20-24, 19:1-10

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord” (Isaiah 55:7). “... I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you...” (St. Luke 15:17-20).

Once a group of journalists asked Charles Dickens: “Which is the best short story you have read?” Without a shade of doubt he said it was the story of the Prodigal Son. The story is a dramatic and decisive change in human life. A man’s realization of a world without his father, awareness of the plenty in his father’s house, his return to his father, the father’s acceptance of his wayward son and the consequent celebration speak volumes for that great word called REPENTENCE.

A theological dictionary defines repentance as radical conversion, a transformation of nature, a definitive turning from evil, a resolute turning to God in total obedience (St. Mark 1:15; St. Matthew 4:17, 18: 3). Repentance is an inward response. Genuine repentance pleads with the Lord for forgiveness and deliverance from the burden of sin and the fear of judgment. What comes to our mind is the picture of the publican who, fearful of even looking toward heaven, beat his breast and cried: “God, be merciful to me, the sinner” (St. Luke 18:13).

Repentance is not merely a behavioural reform. It is a change of total behaviour, because true repentance involves a change of heart and purpose, it inevitably results in a change of behaviour.

Like faith, repentance has intellectual, emotional, and volitional impacts. Berkhof, the theologian describes it thus: The intellectual element of repentance is "a change of view, recognition of sin as involving personal guilt, defilement, and helplessness." The emotional element is "a change of feeling, manifesting itself in sorrow for sin committed against a holy God." The volitional element is "a change of purpose, an inward turning away from sin, and a disposition to seek pardon and cleansing." Each of these three elements is incomplete apart from the other. Repentance therefore, is a response of the total person; and thus a total surrender.

A feeling of remorse after a sinful act is not repentance. Judas Iscariot felt remorse, but he didn't repent (St. Matthew 27:3). Repentance is not just a resolve to do better. All who have made resolutions know how easily they can be broken. Repentance certainly is not penance, something done to atone for one's sins.

The first message of Jesus as He ministered unto the people was that of repentance. He said: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (St. Matthew 4:17). Repentance is one of the most positive of all words. Repentance is the right attitude toward God; it marks a return to God. Repentance means "to stop going in one direction, to turn around completely or to go the opposite way." According to the Word of God, true repentance will result in the way we act. Repentance is incomplete without confession and the determination to forsake what lies concealed in our hearts. Repentance should make us choose the service of God and live for Him and not for ourselves. Repentance is not just confession of sins before God, but our readiness to confess our sins in all humility, which will ultimately change the course of our actions (2 Samuel 23:1-17).

The Lord Jesus knows each of us and loves us. What matters to Him is our heart, our attitude, promptness and honesty in turning to Him. Let our Father's kingdom be our priority. Let us live for Him. The season of Lent is a reminder of God's grace and mercy for us. Let the thought of and the presence of God guide us. His hatred sin is so intense that He will never allow us to prosper if we live in sin. Sin takes a toll of one's physical, emotional and spiritual health. It is better for us to repent and confess our sins and seek the mercy and forgiveness of God.

"Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves. Joy-based repentance makes us hate sin," said Tim Keller a renown Theologian.

Let us Meditate

1. Am I quick to accept my sin or do I try to cover it up and justify myself?
2. Don't I realize that I can't hide my heart from God?
3. When was the last time I wept when I prayed?
4. When was the last time I cried over my sins?

Application

I will not hide my daily mistakes from God. Every night
I will find time to sit with God and share my life with Him.
I will make a sincere attempt not to repeat my sinful acts.

Prayer

*Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner
and I don't want to hide my sins before You.
I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for
my sins and rose from the dead.
I trust and follow You as my Lord and Saviour.
Guide my life and help me to do Your will.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

From the ashes

Job 42:3-6
2 Samuel 13:19
Jeremiah 6:26
Daniel 9:3
Acts of the Apostles 3:19

“For dust you are and to dust you will return”
(Genesis 3:19).

This is one of the last verdicts of curse given to Adam and Eve when they sinned. It is the definitive proof of truth that man is a sinner and has fallen short of the glory of God. But the salvation brought by Jesus has provided us the opportunity to repent and come back from the ashes to be in the fellowship of God.

Sackcloth and ashes were some of the external signs of repentance in the Old Testament. People in the Old Testament smeared ash all over their bodies and wore sackcloth to seek forgiveness from the Lord, so that their strained relationship with Him would be restored. God accepted this symbolic expression of repentance and showed His favour to the Israelites and even to the Gentiles.

Today, as we commemorate Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of Lent, let us remind ourselves that it was dust we came out of and to dust we will return. Dust symbolizes the weakness, fragility and vulnerability of man. He needs a saviour. In this season of our Saviour, we need Him like never before. We have to renew our commitment to daily repentance and remember with confidence and gratitude that Jesus conquered sin and death.

A traditional Ash Wednesday service sees the faithful marking their foreheads with a cross made from ash. The Scripture describes ash or dust as symbols of mortality (Genesis 18:27), mourning (Esther 4:3), judgment (Lamentations 3:16), and repentance (St. John 3:6). An ashen cross serves as a reminder that we come from dust and to dust we shall return.

As we begin this journey of Lent, we must examine our hearts. Let us tear our sinful selves away from selfishness and deception and hold on to the Messiah. Here is a fine advice from the Bible. "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13). After all, Lent is not about our faithfulness, but about the faithfulness of Jesus on our behalf. He is the faithful One!

A Christian who has stopped REPENTING has stopped growing. "It is only the dead who don't bend, the living are flexible." It is nothing but arrogance that keeps us away from being humble. May this solemn day and the upcoming season, offer us yet another opportunity to renew ourselves spiritually. Now is the time to spring up to renewed life, to start, to rise.

The great men of God, who were called by the heavenly Father were conspicuous not only for their ability to speak for God but also for their humility to kneel before Him and declare their loyalty to Him.

Be still and know your God. Let the Spirit search us: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalms 139:23-24).

"Repentance is the key with which we can unlock the prison from inside. We hold that within our hands, and agency is ours to use it," said Boyd K. Packer a renown educator.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I see hindrances in my journey of Lent?
2. What habits/tendencies of selfishness/sin do I need to tear myself away from?
3. Have I distanced myself from the Lord?
4. Has going to church become boring, a waste of time or just an option in my life?

Application

I will always remember how fragile I am. I will not boast of anything other than God's grace. I will remember to thank God and to ask forgiveness of sins.

Prayer

*Lord, I understand that I am just dust.
My sinful life and pride have taken me
miles away from You. I'm sorry Lord
for the mistakes I have committed in
Your sight. Forgive me, for I repent and
have come back to You. In Jesus' name,
I pray, Amen.*

From fear to faith

St. Mark 9:17-27

Isaiah 38:1-7

Psalms 107:10-22

James 5:13-18

Faith and fear cannot be compatible. When we begin with fear, we end up with fear; but when we begin with faith, we see hope, healing and deliverance.

Walking in Faith. Faith is what every Christian struggles with in his spiritual journey.

A Christian is constantly on a journey. It's a quest, a search for abiding faith. While some are big on faith, some have it in small measure. The Holy Scripture says thus: "Faith is the confidence in what we hope for and the assurance of things we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1). It means that we place our simple trust in something or someone we cannot see with our naked eyes.

This lesson tells us about a father whose son was possessed by an evil spirit (St. Mark 9:17-27). With great difficulty, he brought his son to Jesus in the hope of a miracle healing. He longed for his son to be well and had a little faith in Jesus' power to heal. But the faith was not strong. He was wracked by doubt and anxiety. So, he told Jesus: "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us". The Lord replied: "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes." And then the man confessed his lack of faith and requested Jesus to help him overcome it. It was his genuine confession which laid the foundation of faith in his heart.

And once he had placed his trust in Jesus, he saw his son delivered from the bondage of the evil spirit.

Faith and fear cannot be compatible. When we begin with fear, we end up with fear; but when we begin with faith, we see hope, healing and deliverance. Fear paralyzes us. It deters us from looking for faith. Instead, we see only hurdles, impossibilities and hopelessness ahead. The man in the parable was so afraid that he went on to underestimate the power of God, but when the Lord challenged him to put his trust in Him, he overcame his fear. For him it was a big leap of faith.

This is the story of many Christians. Struggling, doubting, wavering, and tossed back and forth, they grapple with human inclinations and rational thought. This is precisely why we fail to experience breakthroughs and find light and hope. We have read stories and heard of God moving in powerful ways. Yet our experiences and the people around us stifle the little faith we have. We thus get bogged down in a swamp of miseries.

How can we replace fear with faith? The answer is Prayer! It's Confession! It's trusting in God's Word! Start praying now. Ask for more faith to believe in God's promises, to believe in His sovereignty over your circumstances, and to trust Him to do the impossible for you. Prayer and belief in God's Word are the keys to building up your faith.

Let us schedule a fixed time for prayer and meditation this season. This is a season when the Lord is lovingly asking us this simple question – "Can you?" He wants to deepen our faith in Him. God will answer your prayers. He will grant you what you have been praying for all this while. Allow the Holy Spirit to let that door of faith open in you and you will find all of God's possibilities and promises opening up like floodgates for you.

Wait upon Him all through this season.

"He who believes is strong; he who doubts is weak; strong convictions precede great actions," said Louisa May Alcott a Novelist.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I harbour doubts and fears or do I see the sovereignty of God even in the darkest situations?
2. What are the doubts and fears that normally haunt me?
3. What steps will I take to sustain my faith in Jesus?

Application

I will not doubt, but trust in my God and His promises for my life.

Prayer

*Dear God, I am Your servant.
Strengthen me in faith.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Honour God with your body

1 Corinthians 6:18-19

St. Matthew 5:28-30

Genesis 35:11-12

"You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

There probably would be no subject which was not touched or dealt upon by Paul the Apostle as he shepherded the churches. One of the cardinal lessons he taught the church at Corinth was about "honouring God with our bodies."

As we fast, pray and abstain from the vanities of life during Lent, this commandment of the apostle would be one of the greatest truths we need to meditate upon.

We love our bodies, probably more than anything else in the world. The Bible has a lot to say about it. God's most holy gift to man is his body. It is unique. It was not crafted after a whim. The Psalmist says: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalms 139:14). Our body is a well-thought out design representing God's handiwork. Hence, it deserves to be treated with the respect that's due to it. Though He created the physical body and gave it to man, it was our Lord who had to pay for our sins with His body, by shedding His blood on the cross. He did it for man's abuse of his own body. We, therefore, owe Him our lives. Thus we have an obligation to "Honour God with our body".

The context in which St. Paul teaches the subject

'honour God with our body' is attributed to one's sexual life. We need to understand that the scriptural view of bodily union as designed by God was to bind together every living being of both sexes powerfully, permanently and spiritually. The Bible has its own sermon on it: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). There is, in fact, something spiritual, something that cannot be observed by physical means, going on here. Therefore, live a life as God designed it for you. Live with your chosen partner and be faithful to each other. It's not for a Christian to have multiple sexual partners or indulge in extra-marital relations.

St. Paul counts it so serious and explains: "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18). He goes on to impress upon us the gravity of our sins: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Adultery, fornication and sexual immorality are detestable in the sight of God. Hence we are to be well aware of them. We need to be faithful to our partners and most importantly, to God.

Let this holy season bring you to the Lord. Ask Him to pardon you if you have strayed away from His commandments and sinned. It's not the body alone that commits a sin, but our thoughts too become sinful when they are of the flesh. "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of

your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (St. Matthew 5:28-30).

Hence, protect and warn each organ of the body.
Be careful where it goes. Be careful what it does.
Be careful what it watches. Be careful how it reacts.

Let’s keep away our bodies from sinful acts. Use them in God’s service. St. Paul says: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Romans 12:1). Let’s use our body to glorify God. “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess His name” (Hebrews 13:15).

In this Lenten season, let us remind ourselves to be pure in our deeds. We all struggle with sinful desires of our body. Let us overcome them through prayer and fasting. Our merciful Father will help us in our earnest desire to repent.

Let us meditate

1. Do I allow my body to live in sin?
2. How do I save myself from the sin of adultery?

Application

I will take care of my body through regular exercise.
I will use my body for God’s ministry. I will give my life to spreading the gospel. I will worship my God and be involved in the activities of the church.

Prayer

Dear God, You have given me Your grace though I sinned against You and failed again and again. Yet You gave me an opportunity to be Yours. Pardon me my iniquities and help me to use my body for Your ministry. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Following Jesus everyday

St. John 1:35-39
Philippians 3:7-11
St. Matthew 16:24-26

"Follow Me, I will make you fishers of Men"

There's nothing more thrilling than to recall the series of events which occurred on the day we began following Jesus! The Bible passage here is a first-hand narrative of John's personal and probably first encounter with Christ. Andrew and John were already disciples of John the Baptist who was preaching the message of repentance, baptism and forgiveness of sins. They had heard this message about the "Lamb of God" and just like any other devout Jew, they too were eagerly waiting for the Messiah. As they saw the "Lamb of God" passing by, the decision to follow Him was instant.

They did not follow Jesus for personal gains nor did they look for fame or fortune. They had heard so much about Him and a mere glimpse of the Lord would in no way satisfy their longing to know more. They sought to stay longer and learn all about His life and His teachings. We can see a progressive growth and commitment in their desire to follow the Lord. First they heard, then they saw and followed Him. They stayed with Him to learn from Him. This progressive growth led to a progressive transformation in John's life from the day he started following Jesus. John who was the "Son of Thunder" was later known as the "Apostle of love."

This is what Jesus meant as He called out to each of His disciples: "Follow Me, I will make you

fishers of Men" (St. Matthew 4:19). To follow means that someone is leading from the front or is ahead of the one who follows. And the follower only needs to put each step of his upon that leader's footsteps or the marks of his feet. And when we choose to walk in those marks or footsteps, we are going, walking and nearing the place where He has reached. This exactly is what's called daily discipline, daily commitment, daily resolution and daily choice to follow the Messiah. It is heartening to know that we do not necessarily have to pave our paths; He has already done it for us. And we are called to walk daily in His footsteps to reach our destination. That is the simple truth behind the statement, "follow Jesus!" Shall we then learn to walk in His footsteps? May the Lenten season help us to be a faithful follower of Jesus.

Let us Meditate

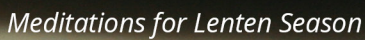
1. Do I have the real desire to follow in the Master's footsteps?
2. Have I become spiritually mature since the day I met the Saviour?
3. Am I consciously seeking to be His true disciple? And, what steps do I take to guarantee my daily and consistent walk with Jesus?

Application

I will seek ways to see Him, hear Him and know Him more closely and intimately. And, I shall make a cautious effort to be a reflection of the love of Jesus in my daily life.

Prayer

*Dear Jesus, help me to seek You diligently,
walk with You and follow You all the days of my life.
In the precious name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.*



Week 2

Put God First

and you will never be last

The discipline of fasting

| 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

| Isaiah 58:3-7

| St. Matthew 6:16-18

“Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah” (2 Chronicles 20:3).

Fasting is one of the most important spiritual designs God has given to His people. Fasting has come to mean abstaining from food. Fasting can include several kinds of denial, but the main concept would be a commitment to refrain from food. And, this is one of the spiritual weapons we have. It's the art of sharpening our spiritual weapon.

The story of King Jehoshaphat is a classic example in case. Jehoshaphat and the Israelites were surrounded by the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites. The Word of the Lord came to Jehoshaphat that the enemy's plan was to invade the land and kill the people. There was no way the Israelites could defeat them. They were weak and defenseless before this mighty army. What option did the king have? What did king Jehoshaphat do in the face of this adversity? The Scriptures say: “Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the LORD, and he proclaimed a fast for all of Judah” (2 Chronicles 20:3).

King Jehoshaphat knew that without God's intervention, they were doomed. The king called for landwide fasting and prayer, and exhorted everyone to seek the Lord in humility and repentance. As a result of people

humbling themselves before the Lord, his desperate cry was answered. In verse 15, Jahaziel says: "Thus says the Lord to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's.'" What happened there? God had taken over; and the situation was under His control. The next day when the Israelites went out to meet the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites, they didn't even have to raise a sword. All their enemies were dead. God had turned them against each other. All that Israel had to do was collecting the spoils and celebrate the victory and God's faithfulness.

Jesus the Messiah fasted on many occasions. He, by His personal example, taught the disciples how to fast and pray. We find other scriptural examples of those who have fasted: Abraham's servant when he was seeking a bride for Isaac, and Moses, on several occasions. King David, Prophet Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Hannah, the Apostles and a host of others have fasted and sought the grace and mercy of God.

The primary purpose of fasting is to bring back our focus to God; for Him to reset our priorities, to show us what is important and not, to meditate on His Word and listen to Him, to worship Him in awe and reverence and become true and living worshippers. When we fast, we wait to hear from God; and He speaks. We hear and obey what He says.

We must remember to set apart a day to fast and pray, to humble ourselves before the Almighty God to receive His grace and power. We must do it regularly. This cleanses and purifies us from sin and brings God's blessings to us. Let this be the spiritual discipline that you follow. Know that prayer accompanied by fasting had worked wonders for God's people in tough times.

Let us make this a strong spiritual discipline to experience God in all closeness as Daniel did. "I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over" (Daniel 10:3).

Fast for your friends, family and loved ones who need to experience Jesus' love. Use God's formula and invite Him into their hearts. What is keeping you from fasting and praying? What holds you from asking the Lord "to loosen the bonds of wickedness" that control our friends, relatives, community, neighbours or nation and maybe our own selfish self?

Let us as a community learn to take all decisions of our church and mission with fasting and prayer, just as the early church had practised. "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts of the Apostles 14:23). Let us support the ministry of our church through fasting and praying for all the ministers of the church.

This Lenten season therefore, becomes a God-given opportunity to seek and find God for all our needs. That is the reason why the founding fathers of our church have incorporated this as an integral part of our church calendar. Seasons come and go and they rejuvenate, revive, renew, clean and purify our lives. And so let us take this season and devote it to seeking God through fasting and prayer. Let all individuals, family units and the church join in. Breakthroughs and miracles are on the way!

Let us Meditate

1. Have you faced overwhelming situations that were beyond you?
2. What are those areas of personal or family life that you are struggling with? Do you feel it's never going to be right for you?
3. When was the last time you set apart a day in fasting and prayer in your bid to seek God?
4. Would you make a decision to fast at least once a week to grow in this spiritual discipline?

Application

I will cultivate a discipline and habit to fast and pray.
I will fast and pray for my church, bishops, priests and
leaders of mission work.

Prayer

*Dear God, I have failed to understand that
it is You who calls me to seek You in fasting and
prayer. Forgive me and grant me Your mercy and
grace. I want to grow in You and allow my life to be
fully devoted to You. And, thank You, for receiving
me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Growing strong in the Lord

Ephesians 6:10-12

2 Corinthians 9:10

Ephesians 4:15

Colossians 1:10

We may get knocked down on the outside, but the key to living in victory is to learn to get up on the inside.

Our spiritual life is always at risk unless we address it with care. Just as we nurture our body, the needs of the mind too call for special care if we are to sustain ourselves. Our lives are constantly challenged by life's adversities. How often do we recover and go forward?

What do we do when our vehicle breaks down bang in the middle of a journey? Before seeking help we check the fuel level. If the fuel is over, help is of no use. This truth holds good for our spiritual life too.

How can we be strong and grow from the inside?

Consider this example. When we fall ill, we need time to recover and a great deal of rest too. Taking up strenuous work would surely make us ill again. After an illness we need to recover our health. The right food at the right time, in right quantities, with a dash of exercise should surely bring us back on our feet. In the same way, we need to regularly feed on God's Word and practise spiritual discipline like fasting, praying, and meditating. We need to be involved in fellowship with God's children. Sin makes us spiritually ill. But through the sacrament

of confession, we shall be healed. It's better to avoid spiritual overloads at one go. The first call is to recover our health through prayer. Prayer is the fuel of our spiritual life, the inner being.

Another challenge in our spiritual journey is the problem of bad habits. St. Augustine said: "Evil is the adversity of goodness." A hole in a floor can never be fixed by moving it out. Try it and the hole gets bigger. So we fill it up. Likewise, we try for years and years to get rid of our sinful dispositions and bad habits. It is like trying to take away a hole. Every sin and drawback is a privation; fill it with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Invite the Holy Spirit to help you and make you stronger where you are weak. We can't take away darkness without bringing in light. The problem is that darkness is not an entity in itself, but the absence of light. We can become spiritually strong by filling ourselves with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Becoming strong from within is a process of shedding our ill-conceived and unrealistic concepts, thoughts, beliefs and ideas, and becoming more conscious and aware of our inner being. It is the process of inner awakening and becoming conscious of our inner self. It means the rise of our consciousness beyond ordinary existence to merge with eternal and universal truths.

The season of Lent normally is a time when we abstain from indulgences of all kind, be they food, drink or anything one chooses. We engage more in prayer, silence and meditation. The purpose of all this is to strengthen our inner self—our spiritual life. Our inner, spiritual part is what relates to God. If the inner being is not strong, everything else in our life begins to deteriorate. Our spiritual life, professional competence, family ties, community living, relationships and every other aspect begins to disintegrate and fall apart.

Nehemiah says: "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). What he means is when we please

God with our clean lives, what we get is goodness. What do we get by pleasing God? When we serve a company, a factory, a school or a government well, it leads to our growth. In the same way, by serving our community, we grow in favour with others. When we serve the church, it helps us bond with fellow believers. That's how we serve God and receive richer and more intense spiritual blessings.

David did not respond like Saul who sought ways other than that from God to solve his problems. "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (1 Samuel 30:6). David knew the source of his strength was outside of him and was in God—and so he ran to Him. He knew that while he was at his weakest and was unable to fight on his own strength, he could "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might." We could even say that David preached the gospel to himself—that is, reminding himself of who God is and what He had done, how the heavenly Father had nurtured and sustained his inner soul and spirit. After strengthening himself in the Lord, David cried out to Him and he was led to defeat the Amalekites. He recovered all he had lost.

The Lenten season is the best time for us to engage in discipline. Make a list of things you would like to develop this season; enjoy reading God's Word and spend time alone in His presence. Just like the Psalmist says: "You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand" (Psalms 16:11). Also remember the promise of God as it is said by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 40:31: "But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." We may get knocked down on the outside, but the key to living in victory is to learn to get up on the inside.

“When a man has no strength, if he leans on God, he becomes powerful,” said D.L. Moody an renown evangelist.

Let us Meditate

1. How are you in your inside? Are you attending to the health and growth of your inner person? Spare a few moments for self-evaluation.
2. When was the last you spent time alone in God’s presence... reading, meditating fasting and praying to strengthen your spiritual life?
3. What decisions and steps will you take today to take care of your personal spiritual growth?

Application

I will meditate upon God’s Word consistently and memorize the promises. And I will not rush to make decisions, particularly when things seems difficult and gloomy, but will wait upon the Lord and yield to His Word.

Prayer

*Dear Lord, help us not to wander
away from Your presence but to wait upon You.
Help us to grow in mind. Help me to trust in You
and find strength in You.
In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*

Taking up my Cross

*Hebrews 11
2 Corinthians 11:16-33
Habakkuk 3:17-19*

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (St. Matthew 16:24).

Jesus said: "We have to carry a cross." What did he mean by that? We interpret "cross" as some burden we are forced to carry all our lives...like a strained relationship, a thankless job, a physical illness or anything unpleasant for that matter. With pride tinged with self-pity we say: "That's a cross I have to carry." This is not what Jesus meant when He said: "Take up your cross and follow Me." Although it is not wrong to refer to some problem as a "cross" we must bear, to carry the cross is not what it's usually meant. In Jesus' day, a cross was a symbol of suffering. We all have our afflictions, very often hard to bear...even with God's help.

But Jesus meant something far deeper than this when He told His disciples to carry their cross. He told them: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (St. Luke 9:23). In Jesus' day, a cross wasn't just a symbol of pain and suffering; it was mainly a symbol of "death." What Jesus meant was that they had to put to

death their plans and desires, turn their lives over to Him and do His will every day.

Jesus doesn't simply call us to believe that He existed, or even to believe that He can save us. He calls on us to commit our whole lives to Him—to trust Him alone for our salvation, and then follow Him as His disciples. He said: "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be my disciple" (St. Luke 14:27).

How to take up your cross? When Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me," they probably were intentionally reminded of the time He had called each of them. Some of them earlier had left families, friends, occupations and everything else to follow Jesus.

To unbelievers among the multitude who were present on that occasion (St. Mark 8:34), Jesus' words "come after Me" applied to the primary surrender of receiving new birth, when a person comes to Christ for salvation. To the believers there, including the twelve disciples, "come after Me" reiterated the call to a life of daily obedience to Christ.

It's a tempting proposition to compromise our commitment when the cost becomes high. The fact is that we all tend to succumb to disobedience; but the character of a true disciple is manifested in obedience. Although imperfect in obedience, the basic desire and life-direction of the true Christian is obedience to the Lord.

Discipleship is on God's terms, just as coming to Him is on His terms. The Lord is reminding us that the key principles of winning by losing involves in following Jesus Christ is self-denial, cross-bearing and loyal obedience.

The first prerequisite to taking up the cross is self-denial. A person who is not willing to deny himself cannot follow Jesus and be His disciple.

The second prerequisite of discipleship is loyal obedience. Only after a person denies himself and takes up his cross, Jesus said, is he prepared to follow Me. This is submission to the lordship of Christ as a follower that becomes a pattern of life.

The third prerequisite of discipleship is to take up one's cross. This idea has profound meaning which must be understood. Taking up one's cross is not some mystical level of selfless "deeper spiritual life" that only the religious elite can hope to achieve. Nor is it the common trials and hardships that all people experience some time in life. A cross does not mean having an abusive husband, a nagging wife, or a domineering mother-in-law nor is it to have a physical handicap or constant suffering from an incurable disease. To take up one's cross is simply to be willing to pay any price for Christ's sake. It is the willingness to endure shame, embarrassment, reproach, rejection, persecution and even martyrdom for His sake.

For those people in the days of Jesus, the cross was a very concrete and intense reality. It was an instrument of execution reserved for the worst enemies of Rome. It was a symbol of torture and death.

When Jesus carried His cross up to Golgotha to be crucified, no one was thinking of the cross as a symbol of burden. To a person in the first century, the cross meant one thing and one thing only: A most painful and humiliating death beyond human endurance.

Two thousand years later, Christians view the cross as a cherished symbol of atonement, forgiveness, grace and love. But in Jesus' day, the cross represented nothing but tortuous death. Following Jesus is easy when life runs smoothly; our true commitment to Him is revealed when life throws up challenges. Jesus said trials would hit His followers (St. John 16:33).

Discipleship demands sacrifice, and Jesus never hid that cost.

Consider these questions if you want to put yourself to the test and know if you are ready to take up your cross:

Am I willing to follow Jesus if it means losing some of my closest friends? Am I willing to follow Jesus if it means alienation from my family? Am I willing to follow Jesus if it means the loss of my reputation? Am I willing to follow Jesus if it means losing my job and position? Am I willing to follow Jesus if it means losing my life?

It does not mean all these things will happen, but the crux of the matter is whether we have the intense willingness to take up the cross. What will I choose if there comes a point in life when I have to choose between Jesus or the comforts of this life?

This is the kind of commitment to Christ that calls for daily choices of taking up the cross, giving up hopes, dreams, possessions, even one's life, if needs be, for the cause of Christ. The reward is worth the price. Jesus followed His call of death to self and offered us the gift of life. So here unfolds the profound truth behind the statement from Jesus the Messiah: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (St. Matthew 16:25-26). Don't be satisfied with anything less, for there is no greater joy in life than following Christ every day.

Let us Meditate

1. What are those doubts and questions I struggle with as I follow Him?
2. Is Christ the master of my life?
3. Have I put to death my own plans and committed myself to His will all through my life?
4. What are my decisions today to help me follow my Jesus unhindered? Write them down.

Application

I will focus on Jesus, as I carry my cross. I will not be distracted by carnal thoughts. I will love Him with all I have.

Prayer

*Dear Lord, I want to take up my cross
and follow You. It looks tough and I am tired and
scared. Nonetheless, I put my trust in You
and believe that You will take care of my needs.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Self-discipline in discipleship

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Philippians 3:12-14

Romans 5:3-5

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11).

Discipline does not happen automatically. It needs sincere, tough and strict training from the self, driven by a desire to have control or power over self. Self-discipline often means reining in ourselves from doing something we wouldn't ever want to, but find it difficult not to. A tough task to accomplish, but the struggle is worth it. A self-disciplined Christian should be able to resist temptation and focus on those things that bring honour and glory to the Lord.

The Bible lays a lot of stress on discipline of the self. So we ought to understand how important the subject is. The Greek word for "discipline" 'enkrateia' comes from the root 'krat', which denotes power or lordship. Self-discipline means to exercise power over one's self. It's the ability to keep one's self under control. The word indicates mastery over one's inner desires, thoughts, actions and words.

As we meditate on the topic, we also need to go through the following verses that drive home the concept of discipline. "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). "No, I strike a blow to my body and

make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27). "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly" (1 Timothy 4:7).

A disciple, complete with knowledge, and skills, but lacking in self-discipline can easily fall into temptation. In fact, self-discipline is part of the fruit of the Spirit which is the characteristic of a mature Spirit-filled believer.

So how does one acquire this skill of discipline? In 2 Timothy 2:4-6, St. Paul describes the examples of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer. The soldier commits himself to a life of hardship, struggle and denial, for a moment's honour and a glorious death.

The athlete prepares for the greatest of games. He undergoes rigorous training for years on end to win a race which takes but a few seconds to finish and earn a medal. Finally, St. Paul talks of a farmer working his fields for days together under vagaries of the weather, ploughing, removing rocks and preparing the soil for sowing. When the harvest comes and he reaps his crop.

If this be the case of lesser mortals, how much more should Christ's disciples be disciplined! He has to wage a battle and be sure of victory!

Let this year's Lent see us committing ourselves to be true disciples of Jesus. When others waste their time, we need to read and study the Holy Scripture. While people sleep we should be up in prayer. While some revel in food and wine, we must fast. While the laggard takes it easy, we need to work hard. When the angry lose their temper and bad-mouth others, we must guard our tongue, heart and mouth.

"The heights by great men reached and kept were not attained by sudden flight, but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night,"

said H. W. Longfellow in his beautiful poem 'The Ladder of St Augustine.'

So let us strive to the heights of self-discipline and not sleep!

Let us Meditate

1. What are the areas you lack discipline in?
2. What areas do you want to work on right now?
3. What will happen if you fail to take action now?

Application

Practice what benefits you to achieve your goal in Christ. Whatever you practice, do it consistently for at least 21 days.

Prayer

Lord, I give You all I have this day. Please brush away my weariness, so that I may be inspired in my work. Help me to discover new ways to reveal Your love to all I meet. Keep my mind clear and focused on all I need to achieve, and give me the wisdom to overcome difficulties and find solutions. I look to You and trust You are with me this day. In Jesus' loving name, I pray. Amen.

The altar of sacrifice

Exodus 38:1-7

Romans 12:1-2

1 Kings 1:50

2 Samuel 24:24

You Cannot Bypass the Place of Sacrifice and Expect to Find Yourself in God's Presence.

The Lord said to Moses: "Build an altar of acacia wood ..." (Exodus 27:1); "... to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God-this is your true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1).

Nothing of real value comes to us without real sacrifice! We don't really appreciate those things that come to us without real sacrifice. A Biblical faith is one that recognizes a priority of sacrifice and the willingness to give rather than to receive.

The entire design of the tabernacle teaches us several things: The design of the building, the furnishings and the type of material used in making it. There was only a single entrance to God in the design which was the eastern gate. Jesus is now that door, the entrance to God's abode. Now that we have entered, where are we? What's the first thing we do once inside? God has a very important message for those who are now at the door.

The first thing we see after entering the door is the altar of Sacrifice. Some of us would have preferred

to find the table of the showbread where God makes provisions for us. But we meet at a place of sacrifice.

It's all about a faith that understands the imperative for sacrifice. A sacrificial character is a must for those who seek the presence of God. There was no way one could bypass this altar on the way to God's presence in the tabernacle.

Self-preservation is a natural instinct, but sacrifice is divine and far above the mundane. Someone once said: "A faith that is not worth sacrificing for is not a faith worth living for. There is no such faith for a Christian that does not include the truth called "sacrifice." It cannot be ignored.

The way to God always embraces this place of sacrifice; any other route that bypasses this altar and sacrifice will not lead to God. Today much of Christianity and preaching promises all kinds of earthly and material blessings and prosperity. Christianity that does not believe in sacrifices is a hollow Christianity. There's too much shallowness in Christians today who only crave for, but do not give. Jesus the Messiah taught this in His own words: "I came not into the world to do my own will ... but the will of Him who sent me." The search for the real God and true practice of faith in God will always bring us first to the place of sacrifice. Sacrificial giving is the very character of true Christian faith: in our lifestyle, in our faith, in our resources, in our mind, word and deed.

A dynamic faith is very real; it will not just have the appearance of sacrifice. Our life and service to God calls for everyday sacrifices but this gives a dominant value to our witness. Jesus' sacrifice of Himself was the greatest and costliest but it also brought to us the greatest and most valuable gift of eternal life. The price Jesus had to pay to give us this great gift was costly. Our faith and the quality of our spirituality will only be

as good as the sacrifices we make because of it. The faith of those who seem vibrant and tangible are those who have learned the service of sacrifice.

The basis of our spirituality is in sacrifice, even in our worship; as St. Paul says: "This is our spiritual act of worship." Many of us think that a good worship service comes from what we get out of it. But the truth is, a good worship service happens from what we put into the service. That is why it is called, "a sacrifice of praise." A genuine and active worship service is not about what I get as much as what I give. They are the sacrifices of praise, our material resources, and tithes and offerings, time and talents. Thus the altar indicates the very purpose and goal; and that is not to gain but to give. Ironically, however, when we give we do gain and always the most lasting and beautiful gains come from giving.

When we begin with the altar of sacrifice we end up in the presence of God. And if we bypass this altar of sacrifice then we forfeit the highest quality of faith and miss out on the real presence of God in our lives. The secret to living in faith and practising the presence of God in a powerful way is possible when we make the altar of sacrifice our lifestyle. The question is have you been there yet? The Lenten season is our best opportunity to draw closer to this altar of sacrifice and experience the real essence of God's presence.

Let us Meditate

1. What is my understanding of sacrifice? Is it positive or negative?
2. Is God the first and most important being for me?
3. How am I going to be the altar of sacrifice? What are the ways that I can choose to please God?

Application

I will use my body to please God. I will spend my time to serve God. I will use my wealth or the little money that I have for the ministry. I will be faithful in giving my tithes and offerings.

Prayer

*Dear God, I thank You for being gracious to me and teaching me throughout my life. I accept that I have not lived a sacrificial life even when I knew about it. But now as I am reminded, I commit my life to Your hands, requesting Your favour that I may lead a sacrificial life.
In Jesus' precious name, I pray. Amen.*

Pleasing God

St. Matthew 3:13-17

Ephesians 5:1-13

Psalms 147:10-20

"God does not require us to succeed, He only requires that you try," said Mother Teresa.

St. Paul exhorts believers at Ephesus being children of Light, to live as children of light (Eph. 5:8). And to do that, he further explains: "Find out what pleases the Lord" (Eph. 5:10), expecting that children of light need to be mindful of their obligations and may seek to conform their active life to the light to which they belong. Do it by making an experiment of, or investigating and determining what is "acceptable to the Lord."

One needs to be hungry for God. Pleasing God is, or should be, the goal of all believers—all who call upon the name of Christ for salvation. And St. Paul says: "You make your efforts to do that." It is your responsibility and obligation to find out. In short, this is the sum of Christian duty, a brief compilation of bearing, an all-sufficient manual of life.

Suppose you were part of a congregation of a 100 believers, and if your parish priest were to ask you thus: "How many of you think God is really pleased with you?" How many will raise their hands? How about you? Will you raise your hand? One of the reasons why God is not happy with us is because we are unmindful of His ways.

Let's look at a few Bible passages on which we have a lot to meditate.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

"For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:6-8).

"The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy" (Psalms 147:11). "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (St. Matthew 17:5). "And a voice from heaven said: "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (St. Matthew 3:17). "Has the Lord great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). "May God make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:21). "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Hence, pleasing God is a matter of living according to His precepts and commandments and doing so in love. It may seem impossible to do so, but God wants us to please Him, and He makes it possible for us to please Him. Also let us not misunderstand the theory that only those who act the best will get accepted, and those who are at their worst get rejected. Instead, understand the heart of God. He looks into your heart and not at your actions. We

do these things by the power of His Spirit which lives in our hearts.

And the season of Lent can give us the right beginning. Let us be devout and devote our time and life to the service of the Lord. Knowing Him intimately will make the path easier for one to please God. Let us know His precepts and His intentions and live them out, so that we may please Him. Take heart, because there were people who could please God like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, David, Job and many more. May you too be on that list.

Let us Meditate

1. Is my life pleasing to God at all times?
2. Am I aware of the areas that are not pleasing to the Lord?
3. What steps do I take to please Him?

Application

I will read the Bible every day and know His precepts and understand the heart of God to please Him.
I will follow the footsteps of Jesus, and implement His teachings in my daily living.

Prayer

*Dear God, let this be the purpose of my life,
that I may strive hard to do Your will. I pray that
You show Your favour to me and reveal Yourself to
me, Your desires and intentions. Thank you.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Submission is all about godliness

Ephesians 5:22-6:9
St. Matthew 22:15-22
Psalms 39

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (1 Peter 2:13-14).

Imagine an universe without order! Our massive galaxy, the Milky Way, would spin out of control. The solar system and the planets would function chaotically. Collisions and eventually, total ruin would be the result.

Now, as we look into the skies, we see God’s perfect alignment of the system - the way He fashioned them. We may have never considered it, but the reason we don’t have a disorderly universe today is because creation submits itself to God’s laws. If the moon were to complain: “I’ve been reflecting the sun’s light for a long time. I choose not to submit to that arrangement anymore,” it would, of course be nothing but a dark spot in the sky. Our Creator thus established order and peace for humankind through authority and submission to authority.

The Metropolitan Dr. K. P. Yohannan says: “You can make choices in cooperation with this universal law that will enable you to live a long and healthy life. You can also choose to disregard the law of gravity and

foolishly walk off of a 10-storey building. But as soon as you do, you will end up injured for life—or be the guest of honour at your funeral service. Submission to authority is a thread that runs throughout every aspect of our lives.”

The apostle Paul explains to Christians how to live a Christian life: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). The word submit is surely one of the most difficult and disliked of words. Some think of submission as belittlement, inferiority, or worthlessness. But it is not. St. Paul tells these Christians: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Whatever the word submit means, it is something the Apostle Paul thinks every Christian can and should do. He then illustrates how to submit by giving three examples from relationships of his day—wives and husbands, children and fathers, and slaves and masters. In each example, one person has more power and the other, far less.

Whenever there’s this kind of imbalance of power, what’s the person holding greater power or authority likely to do? Lord it over the other, or make life easier for the one with power. And what’s the person holding less power or authority likely to do? Resist, rebel and make the life of the other person miserable.

But apostle Paul offers a better solution, a way to move beyond power struggles. It’s called submission. He says: “In life, when you are in a place of less authority and power”—which in his day included wives, children and slaves—“don’t resist, resent and rebel. Out of reverence for Christ, respect and honour and work hard at pleasing the other person. And when you are in a place of more power”—which in his day included husbands, parents, and slave masters—“don’t lord it over the other person. Don’t use them to make your life easier. Instead, use your power to benefit them.”

Submission means I voluntarily limit what I might do naturally in a mutual relationship in order to

benefit you. If I have more power, instead of doing what I might do naturally and use that power to make my life easier, out of reverence for Christ, I will use my power instead, to serve you. I will give up even my life for you. Submission also means that if I have less power, instead of doing what I might do naturally and fight you every step of the way, I will respect and honour you.

Submission in the Bible comes from a person as a voluntary act of obedience and faith. Submission is also the key to unity and harmony in human relationships. In this Christ is the model for our leadership. In the Godhead, in the church, in marriage, and in any relationship, submission is the basis of unity. Submission is at the core of man's relationship with God. Submission is the will and command of God. God says that if we imitate and emulate Christ, it is powerful enough to silence all accusations against you (1Peter 2:15).

In our day, it challenges a culture of power wars. Submission says, "use your power for the benefit of the other person. As Christians, we are to submit ourselves to each other in the fear of the Lord. The issue of submission is an unavoidable principle of how we should be living our lives as Christians, by serving others with the love of Jesus, and at the same time keeping in mind that we do not ever want to displease Jesus, which is what the fear of Christ means.

The prerequisite for obtaining the strength needed to submit comes with surrender. Godly submission isn't something you try to perform; it is the natural fruit of a close walk with Christ. When we are born again by faith in Christ, we submit to God, to the authority of His Word, and to Christ as His means of salvation. Once we have truly surrendered to God, submission will be the natural outworking of the Holy Spirit within the Christian.

True submission is the will of God, it is from the heart, and it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is voluntary; a voluntary act of obedience and faith. We cannot force anyone to

truly submit any more than we can force one to believe in Christ. We cannot force anyone to submit. The way to deal with someone who refuses to submit is to turn to the one who can change hearts. Instead of trying to force people to kneel in submission, we should be falling on our knees in prayer.

Submission is motivated by faith, hope and love which will always result in self-sacrifice—the perfect role model being Jesus the Messiah. Submission is the attitude with which men and women turn to God in faith for eternal salvation. I submit to you that no one can truly be a spiritual leader until he or she submits to those being led. We must be humble before those whom we lead. We must put their interests before that of ours. When our self dies, we live; when we give up our lives, we find them; when we abandon our pursuit of pleasure, we become totally fulfilled. And so submission is the path to great blessing.

“They follow the Lamb wherever he goes”
(Revelation 14:4). “I desire to do Your will, my God; Your law is within my heart” (Psalms 40:8).

Let's become followers of the Lamb with a distinct mark named 'Submission.' The path for Him was submission and obedience—"The Lamb on the throne!" Whether at home, at work, in church or in society, let's manifest a quiet and gentle spirit of submission. May there be no rebellion in our attitudes. May we become like our Master, the "Lamb" who epitomizes surrender and submission. Be a part of this community which follows the "Lamb," but then the choice is yours. Follow Him in life, and you will follow Him in eternity. The door is open before you this season, to draw deep for yourself from this fountain of faith and be like our Jesus who walked the Way of the Cross.

Let us Meditate

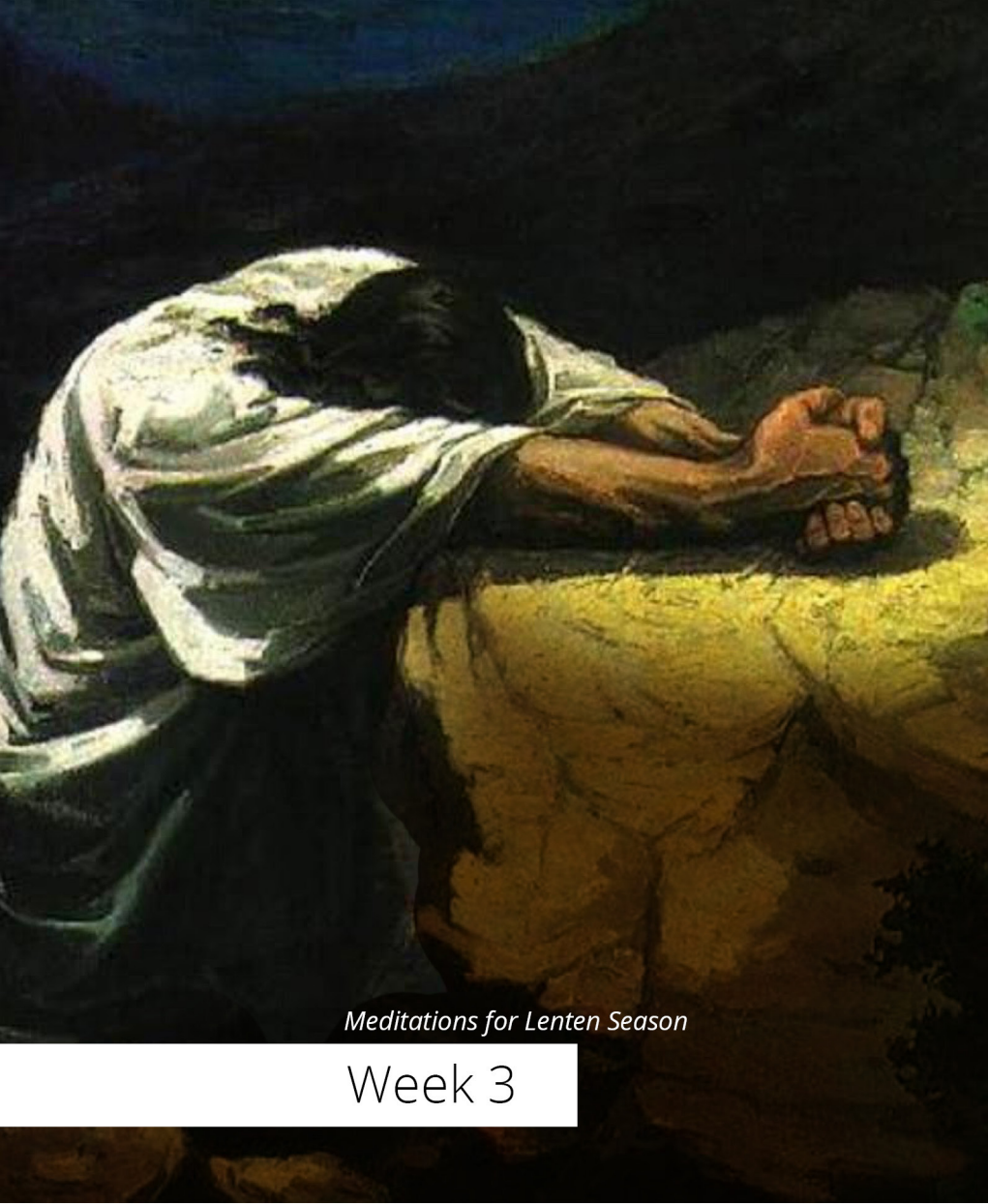
1. Have I understood the importance of submission?
What is my personal thought pattern on it, whether it is in accordance with the scripture?
2. Why should I be called a believer or follower of Christ?
3. Do I follow the "Lamb"? if yes, how?

Application

I will obey and respect my parents no matter what the circumstances I am in. I will respect the elderly and never despise the old. I will not talk back to my parish priest, however justifiable it might be. I will follow the rules and regulation of the institution I am in.

Prayer

Dear loving Lord, I am overwhelmed by the model that You have set before us. I am deeply grateful to You for reminding us of this truth of godliness. Grant me Your grace that I may always look to You before I react or respond to any given situation. And may I always represent the people who follow the Lamb. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



Meditations for Lenten Season

Week 3

In God...
our hope and restoration

Life...from rejection to acceptance and dignity

St. Luke 19:1-10

Genesis 18:1-15

Psalms 51

2 Corinthians 5:16-19

Rejection is one of the most painful and Ranguishing experiences a human being can be subjected to. Zacchaeus was a living example of life's such harsh turns. He was a chief tax collector and like those engaged in such jobs, he too was treated as an outcast because he taxed people mercilessly and amassed wealth at their expense. Consequently, Zacchaeus was hated and rejected by the people. Likewise, Jericho was also a city despised, but Jesus chose to go there. On hearing that Jesus would be in Jericho, Zacchaeus longed to see the Messiah.

Jesus had the distinct trait of meeting and making friends with the "unloved" and the "uninvited" – the poor, the lame, the rejected, the despised and the disregarded. Zacchaeus was one such soul. He was in great need of God's mercy, love and forgiveness. When he came across Jesus, he realized he was a sinner who needed a Saviour in his life. He cried out for God's mercy and longed for repentance. His repentance was found genuine, when with a contrite heart, he announced he would give away half of his possessions to the poor and pay back four times of what he had cheated.

Repentance is not an act of escaping from one's past and its consequences. On the contrary, it's a decision to face the past with courage. And this courage comes from the confidence we gain by our confession and repentance combined with the readiness to make restitution and correct ourselves from wrongdoings of the past. Zacchaeus did this and his testimony was his deed, not word. His change of heart resulted in a change of life—a change which a whole community stood witness to. Repentance is a change of mind and heart. Its truth lies in turning away from sin and turning to God for forgiveness.

Zacchaeus's courage and honesty are sacred examples of taking personal responsibility for one's wrongdoings. His repentance is not passive, but active. It's genuine and honest. For a good relationship with God, a right relationship with people is a prerequisite. Zacchaeus' change came from within. An act of true repentance, it became the foundation of a harmonious relationship between humanity and God.

This Lenten season is given to us as a gift from God, to check and evaluate our personal lives, to reflect on our failings. Our flaws are not too big as we tend to think, but before God they are boulders which block His blessings and prevent the flow of salvation to us. Can't we too be like this man in the story...not hiding, of course, but quick in confessing and seeking mercy? Can't we kneel before the Almighty who sees everything with His all-searching eyes?

Let us, in these days of Lent and meditation, kneel down and be honest before the Lord like Zacchaeus. The Lord will then receive us and make our life His abode. And, that would be a true Lenten promise to God from us.

"I realized after reading the fourth chapter of St. John's Gospel that Christ was truly the Divine Saviour He claimed to be, and no one but He could

transform and uplift the downtrodden women of India...Thus my heart was drawn to the religion of Christ," said Pandita Ramabai from India.

Let us meditate

1. Do I truly wish to see Jesus in my daily life? What steps should I take to see and receive Jesus in my life and home?
2. When did I last repent of my sins and failures?
3. What steps do I take to cultivate a life of daily repentance and confession before God?
4. What sin do I repent of today to be able to walk a step closer to the newness and freshness of this changed life?

Application

I will cultivate a sincere desire to see Jesus, no matter where I am. I will discipline myself to the habit of daily devotions and prayers to know the ways of God and to keep my life pleasing and acceptable to Him.

Prayer

*Dear Lord, please give me wisdom to understand my ways so that I may truly repent my sins and have a right relationship with You and my fellow beings.
Amen.*

From wretchedness to redemption

Isaiah 1:16-20

St. Luke 19:1-10

Psalms 75

Wretchedness is that state of despondency from which there's no redemption except through the grace of the Lord. St. Paul expressed a similar concern when he desperately longed to be delivered from the influence of indwelling sin. He struggled to deal with his carnal and shallow nature. Redemption and salvation come when the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness. It is true that the power of sin can continually torment us with its snares and enticements. Human frailty is such that we fall prey to our depravity and weakness of the flesh. This was why St. Paul cried out: "What a wretched man I am!" (Romans 7:24).

Here is a true picture of humanity's wretchedness. We just have to turn on the TV to watch titillating ads, or listen to all those stories of horrific rapes, maimings and killings. The newspapers too are replete with tales of torture, sleaze and lust. Page after page is a representation of the evil in man.

Is there not a solution to these ills? Is there not a way out? Can we not hope for any deliverance? Can I (we) even dream of living a clean moral, ethical and spiritual life? Yes. It's possible! Look unto Jesus. Is that all? Is it that simple? Is there anything more that I (we) need to do? Is there something more that God expects of us? No! Nothing!

Jesus died on the cross to take away the power and influence of sin. He was buried and rose again to grant us the hope of a new life. He is now seated at the right

hand of God the Father (St. Mark 16:19). What must He be doing there? He is interceding on our behalf before the Father (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). Christ Jesus has our names on an intercession list and is pleading with the Father to save us from our struggles, difficulties and despair.

So let us carry on the good fight. Let us not be put off by our weakness. Take heart and hold on to the promises that we have in God. Remember the Holy Scripture which says: "Anyone who looks unto Him will never be put to shame" (Romans 10:11). In this holy season, go to the throne of grace and learn to trust Him; ask for His unlimited strength and grace to be given to us. Ask Him to clothe you with His righteousness. And, believe that He is our righteousness, our salvation and our all.

Let us Meditate

1. What is it to feel wretched and how does this feeling surface in my daily life?
2. Who am I in Christ and where do I stand with my Saviour?
3. What should I do when Satan reminds me of my sins? How do I find the courage to live a righteous life?

Application

I will always work hard to keep myself clean and righteous before the Almighty and ask for the blood of Jesus Christ to keep me humble. I will not take pride in my accomplishments and successes. On the contrary, I shall be thankful to Him for His mercy and I will always rely on His grace.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, give me the strength not to give up but to trust in Your kindness, knowing that You are interceding on my behalf. Help me to overcome my woes. Thank You for Your grace and mercy. In the precious name of Jesus, I pray. Amen!

The God of lowly ones

St. Luke 2:8-16
Genesis 18:1-10
Psalms 70
1Peter 2:1-10

*The prophet Isaiah said the Lord who is high
and mighty dwells among the lowly
and the contrite in spirit (Isaiah 57:15).*

The entire events covering the birth of Jesus reveal the very heart and nature of our Lord. Born in a manger, He chose to be the “lowly” one. The birth of the Messiah was first announced to the shepherds who were tending their flock. Shepherds were regarded as lowly beings those days and were placed at the lowest rung of the social ladder. They were poor, unlettered and accustomed to the silence of Nature. So they lived in the stillness and communion of their hearts.

They calmly and promptly responded to the angels’ announcement of the birth of Jesus. It was as though they were eagerly waiting for the Good News. “Let us go and see,” said the shepherds. The flock was taken care of. This was a matter of utmost importance which called for a prompt response. A word from God, the voice of the Holy Spirit, a command or duty pertaining to heavenly life surely deserved precedence over everything else. Instant obedience is the hallmark of lowliness; and the way to blessings.

Lowliness is not just an outer expression of being poor and humble. Philippians 2:5 says thus about Jesus: His mind – the very centre of His inside - that He emptied Himself. God desires to be the God of those who are meek and lowly in heart. Did He not tell us thus: “Blessed are the meek; for they will inherit the Earth.”

May this year's Lenten season help us to be meek and lowly. Let us cry out to the Lord to make us more like Him in humility. Ask the Holy Spirit to endow us with grace to follow the Master's footsteps. Let there be more Good News for all of humanity.

Today's lesson teaches us how God chooses the lowly and the humble as His instruments rather than the high-minded and the haughty. The prophet Isaiah said the Lord who is high and mighty dwells among the lowly and the contrite in spirit. The birth of Jesus is a reflection of God's very nature, a clarion call to be humble and lowly in heart. It's only through humility and lowliness that we can truly enjoy His presence and worship Him. Let us learn and grow in this nature of our Lord as we contemplate upon our Saviour this season.

"To stoop is the mark of humility. The proud refuse to stoop. And, therefore they miss the Divinity," said Fulton J. Sheen a renown speaker.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I truly understand the ways of my Lord and choose to become humble?
2. What are those things that hinder me from humbling myself?
3. What are the steps I will take to cultivate humility and a lowly spirit in my life?

Application

I will discipline my life to simplicity and humility. For God seeks those who are lowly in spirit. I shall not hurt the weak and the lowly with word, deed or thought.

Prayer

*Thank You, Lord Jesus for coming into this world as a lowly servant to be an example for me. O Lord, help me to live my life as a dedicated and humble child of God.
In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Human needs and divine provision

St. John 2:1-12
Numbers 20:2-11
Psalms 78:15-29
Revelation 21:6-8

The lesson we learn here is the need to acknowledge the role and power of divine grace and the plenteous supply in response to that acknowledgement.

We witness the great glory of God only after we fail and exhaust all our capabilities and resources. One such great event where people witnessed the glory of God and experienced divine intervention was the wedding at Cana (St. John 2:1-12). It was here that Our Lord Jesus Christ blessed water into wine. Cana was a remote village and nothing possibly could have been done there when the host realized that the stock of wine, the mainstay of the festivities, was running out. Mary, Jesus' mother who was at the wedding intervened and became a means for God to step in. He met their needs beyond measure and became the answer to the insufficiency and frailty of human reality.

"They have no wine," confessed Mary. Many a time God has demonstrated His infinite power in the face of man's helplessness. He provided manna to the hungry multitude traversing the desert wilderness. He again deemed that a man be born blind for His work to be manifested in Him. In the same way, the short supply of wine at Cana gave God an opportunity to demonstrate the power of Jesus. The lesson we learn here is the need to acknowledge the role and power of

Divine grace and the plenteous supply in response to that acknowledgement.

“Whatsoever He saith unto you do it,” exhorted Mary. Jesus’ mother knew her son. She gave Him due reverence and knew what wonders He could work. She had her reasons for thinking so and talking thus about her divine son Jesus. Her assessment of Jesus came forth unconsciously from her lips. But the subject of importance is this: Do I know Him as Mary did? Do I give Him due importance to act on my behalf? Do I give Jesus the right to act for my need?

The result of the miracle was abundance which made the master of the banquet say: “But you have kept the best until now.” Divine grace knows no limitations. It knows only how to abound in blessings. Thus God’s blessings come in abundance to those who are in need; more specifically, to those who confess their need and frailty and seek His help.

Let us give God His right place in our lives. Let us call Him into our lives for Him to do His divine work. Let us confess our frailties, failings and nothingness to Jesus and allow Him to abide in us with His divine grace. In this season of blessedness, God has ordered us to draw closer to Him and find Him.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I allow God to show me my failures and frailties so that I can do His sovereign work of transformation?
2. Am I someone who makes excuses and delays God’s act in my life?
3. What do I do today to trust and obey Jesus over and above my rational thought and logic?

Application

I will sincerely confess to Jesus my inability to trust His sovereignty. I will allow the Holy Spirit to help me, build me up in faith and trust by bringing my faculties to focus on Jesus Christ my Saviour.

Prayer

Loving Lord, help us to turn to You in our need and insufficiency rather than unto our circumstances.

Please be our fortress and teach us to rely on Your abiding grace. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Embracing love

St. Luke 15:1-6

1 Samuel 9:1-6

Psalms 23

Acts of the Apostles 9:10-18

God's all-embracing love awaits those who come to Him realizing their need.

God is love. He looks to embrace you with His love. His love that embraces and engulfs you with blessedness is what's portrayed in this passage. We have examples of tax collectors and so-called sinners crowding around Jesus to hear Him. As part of His mission, Jesus used to call such people to Him and break bread with them. They were those who were looked down upon by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. To them, what Jesus did was an affront to their self-righteousness! On realizing this, Jesus told them the parable of the lost sheep.

The parable says that one sheep was lost out of a fold of a hundred. The good shepherd went out to find that one lost sheep. This act clearly demonstrates the shepherd's love for the lost one and the value he bestowed on it. Eventually, the shepherd found the sheep and brought it back to its joyful fold.

The shepherd is Jesus the Messiah, and the lost sheep, the sinner, who ultimately repents. Jesus is the Good Shepherd of humanity, of you and of me! Jesus receives every sinner who repents and turns to Him. Therefore, there is great rejoicing in heaven.

Jesus never condemns us. He only wants to embrace us with compassion and love. He will forgive when we turn to Him, just as we are. It hardly matters what others think of us. All that matters is His all-encompassing love which envelops us in His infinite mercy, forgiveness and acceptance. This love goes all out to forgive and accept us as His own.

Jesus knows us well. He will understand our circumstances if we are ready to be humble and acknowledge our need for Him. He will be our shepherd and carry us on His shoulders. He will be our comforter. God's all-embracing love awaits those who come to Him realizing their need. Lent gives us an opportunity to meditate and feed upon this love of God. God is inviting us to experience His great love and care. The question is—are we drawing closer to Him or are we straying away from Him? Do we long to enter in and be embraced by this love or are we busy feeding our personal egos and interests? Come to Him fully! Come to Him as you are! Come to Him with a repentant heart!

"It's crazy, if you think about it. The God of the universe – the creator of nitrogen and pine needles, galaxies and E-minor—loves us with a radical, unconditional, self-sacrificing love," said Francis Chan.

Let us Meditate

1. Have I been tempted to walk away from Jesus?
2. How much am I longing to be drawn into the unfailing love of the Shepherd and His embrace?
3. How discerning am I to the voice of God?
4. What decisions am I taking today to experience this love unhindered?

Application

I will tune my heart, mind and soul every day to the voice of the Shepherd so that I will not be lost along the way, but be found in Him always.

Prayer

*Dear Lord, I wanted to be with You always
and walk in Your ways. Grant me the grace to be tuned to
Your voice which will lead me all through my life.
In Jesus' loving name, Amen.*

Loving is God's nature

1 Corinthians 13
St. John 13:31-38
Psalms 103

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (St. John 13:34).

"Each time people come into contact with us, they must become different and better people because of having met us. We must radiate God's love." - Mother Teresa.

We live with an unbelievable amount of expectation from one another. The concept of unconditional love seems to have fallen by the wayside, as more and more of us crave for love, but are not ready, willing or prepared to give or even receive it.

To love someone whatever be the circumstance is a true test of love. Although it sounds simple, it is probably one of the toughest attributes to possess. This love, first of all requires an unconditional love of oneself, so that one has the heart and mind to give the same to another. This is where we all fail. Our society puts much pressure on us to be perfect, that to love oneself seems to have become an unattainable feat. Yet, it is the key to the total, unconditional love that we can offer others. If you've never received unconditional love it can become hard to give it too.

Jesus Christ has demonstrated His value and worth for people through His love and compassion for them. He healed the sick, showed mercy to the poor, cared for the weak and the helpless, freed the oppressed and healed the broken in spirit. That's how

He demonstrated the power of love to all and taught them to love one another. Jesus very well knew that His life on earth would soon come to an end and His disciples would be required to carry His mission and message forward. He, therefore, worked hard to help them bond with such strength that no power on earth could break it. This was the only vital link between Him and His disciples. So this was his command to them: "Love one another."

Jesus brought this beautiful connection of the commandment in the Old Testament, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself", to this new command, "Love one another as I have loved you". The principle of "loving one another" was to emphasize selflessness and consideration for others.

This is a command. It is not a matter of personal choice. Being a command we are bound to obey it. "A new command I give you." Further, this command is enforced by Christ's own example: "As I have loved you, so must you love one another." So how do we start practising unconditional love and keep growing in it? The season of Lent portrays nothing else but the unselfish love in the life of Jesus the Messiah who is the key figure in the story. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the grace and power to have these principles become part of our life as we continue the following portion of our meditations today.

First of all, love is not how you feel; it is more about how you act. When we treat love as a feeling, our love depends upon what we get or not from a person, and our feelings will change along with our behaviour and experience. An example of this is when you try to be someone you're not, or perhaps you have to do something to receive love: these then make love conditional. However, if you act in any particular way and you don't expect someone else to be something he or she is not, then that love is unconditional. When our love is not based on what someone else does or says,

it will continue to be the same regardless of how others behave.

Secondly, adapt your love to that of others. Love is received and given in many different forms and there may be no one worthy of it. Unconditional love is a daily and conscious decision we make in every new situation that comes along.

Thirdly, love can sometimes be uncomfortable. To truly love someone, we must be able to take the rough with the smooth. Trying to protect someone from being uncomfortable is not a sign of genuine love. Pain and growth are part of life, and shielding people from this is not necessarily love. If we only set out to make others feel pleased and contented all the time, we will do more harm than good. Unconditional love allows letting others experience pain so that they will find their way and grow at their pace.

Fourthly, learn to forgive. If someone has hurt you or let you down, choose forgiveness by letting go of the anger and resentment you have towards them. An act towards a specific person will not only change depending on what has happened but also when you choose to act lovingly and not hold on to negative feelings.

Fifthly, give your love to those whom you think don't deserve it. Normally, when someone is negative towards you, it speaks of some lack in their own life that is preventing them from truly loving themselves. It has more to do with them than with you. It's here that you should decide to give unconditional love and give it more frequently.

Sixthly, practise this kind of love every day. Try giving something without expecting anything in return at least once a day. It can be very small things like allowing someone else to enter a room before you do, or giving way to another car while in a traffic jam, or telling someone you love them without expecting

them to reciprocate the sentiment. Once we give such unconditional love, the joy we get out of it becomes immeasurable. By loving others, we are in reality sharing the message of the cross.

Concentrate and meditate on this concept this season. Make your mind and heart calm in His presence and wait upon Him to help and lead you to a deeper understanding and experience of the Lord Himself.

Let Us Meditate

1. How much love do I have for my fellow beings when the Lord looks into me?
2. Am I consistently growing in the practice and expectation of the Lord in obeying this command?
3. What are those practical things I can do to have a gradual growth of receiving and giving away God's love to others?

Applications

Today I will deliberately look for opportunities to love and serve others. It may be giving a glass of water to someone or even sharing a smile with a stranger.

Prayer

*Loving Lord, help us to grow in love for others.
Let us emulate this love in all circumstances
as You have loved us with such unconditional
and unfailing love. In Jesus' loving name, Amen.*

Looking forward with hope

St. Luke 13:24-35

Genesis 45:1-15

Psalms 91

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Hope is something which keeps us afloat though the going may seem tough and hard. In this story, our Lord Jesus tells us how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God. It's like squeezing yourself through a very narrow door. It becomes all the more narrow when sinners and the self-righteous try to get in.

The soul has to struggle, wrestle and grapple with sin before it can qualify for a chance to get in. It calls for readiness to make any sacrifices, however great they might be; and go through struggles, though severe, before it reaches the doors of God's abode. Once the soul succeeds, it will enjoy the rewards of having undergone so much to attain the Kingdom of God. No man can give or no circumstances can take away that priceless peace and abiding joy which only the Kingdom of God can give us.

Jesus Christ warned those who always tend to show off their spirituality and self-righteousness. Jesus says "Then those who are now last will be first and those who are now first will be the last" (St. Matthew 20:16). The Jew, who took pride in being the first favourite of God, was now to become the very last in God's esteem. Only those who come as sinners, with repentance, seeking mercy, and desirous of being cleansed of all unrighteousness can pass through that narrow door. The assurance and hope of the gospel is that all who

come with repentance, hope and faith will never be denied entry into the Kingdom of God.

This is followed by the request of the Pharisees who wanted Jesus out of their province since Herod wanted to kill Him. But Jesus very strongly responded: "It is not right for a prophet to be killed anywhere except in Jerusalem." Then He mourns for Jerusalem and expresses His love for the place. He said He longed to hold on tightly to Jerusalem just like a mother hen would her brood, under her wings. "How often would I have gathered!" The Saviour desired and endeavored to gather the children of Jerusalem under His gracious wings, not once, or twice, but forever. His effort was a frequent act of mercy; it was repeated and unfailing.

Even today, it's with deep sorrow that Jesus looks at His people. He knows they have rejected His grace just as Jerusalem did. However, the ray of hope is the brightness of His everlasting love. Jesus the Messiah continues to call us that He may save us. He seeks to win us, to warn us, to help us become humble, and lead us to Salvation. Unfathomable are the ways of our Saviour when it comes to seeking us. How often does he try to gather us under His love care! There is hope as long as we are guaranteed the love of the Saviour.

The Lord Jesus expects us also to pass on this hope to those who live without hope. He emphasizes the need to empathize with the poor, the marginalized, the lonely, the rejected and the hopeless (St. Luke 14:13-14). When we are in solidarity with their struggle and become their "saviours," we are in reality entering the narrow door. This experience will lead us further to live a life as Jesus lived—giving hope and healing others. The church takes every effort during this season to allow us to imbibe this unlimited power and feed on this hope and the source of it all—Jesus the Messiah.

Let us Meditate

1. How do I perceive hope and hopelessness in my day-to-day life?
2. Am I someone who gives hope to others? What are those things I can do today to bring hope to someone who really needs it?
3. What practical decisions do I take to be hopeful and be a “hope-maker?”

Application

I will be sensitive to the situations and needs of others and be a source of hope to those around me and help others to see God in them.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we pray that You shake us up from our self-centeredness and selfishness. Help us to learn to walk the narrow way as You've walked, that we may become Your agents of hope and healing to others. In the precious name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.



Meditations for Lenten Season

Week 4

The **higher the calling...**
the narrower the road would be.

Facing difficulties... my attitude in hard times

2 Samuel 24:14-25

Job 13:15

Romans 8:28

St. Matthew 26:42-43

David had the freedom to go to the Lord because he shared a very personal relationship with Him. As a result of his cry for mercy, God relented. His anger disappeared.

King David found himself in a very tough situation when the prophet Gad told him that God was angry with him because he had taken the census. He was deeply disturbed when he heard that. He was sure God would punish him for his sin. But look at David's reply to Gad: "Let me fall into the hands of God, because He is a God of compassion and mercy." David in his struggle was not looking for help from the prophet, his vast army or his well-established kingdom. He placed himself in God's loving hands and put his trust in Him. Though David's heart was troubled, he did not lose faith nor did he opt for a short-cut.

King David knew he had sinned against the Lord and hence had to accept His punishment. But instead of looking for a way out, he threw himself before the Lord Almighty. He said: "Let God's will be done." His attitude was one of total surrender to the Lord. David was the king and he had thousands to help him. People were ready to die for him. But he was not affected by power or opulence. This was his only concern: "How can I save my people from God's anger? How can I please my God?"

King David decided to face the Lord who was angry with him. He did not ask God to save him. He said: "Lord, please save Your people. Let Your anger come upon me and my father's house" (Vs.17). How did David dare to talk to an angry God? Because he knew his God would listen to his cry for mercy. Knowing our God is crucial to our search for peace and happiness. David had the freedom to go to the Lord because he shared a very personal relationship with Him. As a result of his cry for mercy, God relented. His anger disappeared. Remember, God will listen to your cry for mercy if you are confident of His love for you. The secret of unalloyed joy is to admit one's sins and failures and walk in a growing personal relationship with God.

Ponder over your relationship with the Messiah as we walk through the season of Lent, meditating on His Passion and suffering. The Messiah faced immense struggle and all kinds of abuse. Yet He endured. His attitude was that of love, forgiveness, compassion and kindness. Anger, retaliation, vengeance or even self-pity never figured in His life. He always wanted to please His Father and sought strength and courage to face his trials and tribulations. Can we cultivate this hunger and yearning to become more like Jesus? Can we ask the Lord to teach us to cast all our burdens on Him? Can we ask for David's attitude of committing ourselves to the Lord in times of adversities? Here is the blessed of all seasons when we look deeply into our lives and seek to strengthen our quest for faith.

Let us Meditate

1. In tricky times where do I go? In whom can I repose my trust?
2. Will I be able to accept my flaws, submit myself to God and repent?
3. What steps am I taking now to reflect Jesus' attitude in times of difficulties?

Application

I will discipline myself and admit my sins and mistakes.
I will confess to the Almighty and seek strength and courage in times of difficulties and challenges.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus, please help me to come closer to You.
Help me to call on You always, whatever be the circumstances. I know You are a loving God. Even when You know I have sinned and failed, You do not condemn and destroy me. Instead, You have saved me. Restore me to serve You. I know You have a place for me in Your heart and plan. Thank You Lord for accepting me as I am!
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Suffering

Deuteronomy 30:15-19

Romans 8:18,28

St. Matthew 11:28-29

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Suffering is central to human existence and one of the saddest. Suffering comes to us through evil, frailties of the flesh or unavoidable circumstances.

There's another suffering that's totally different. It's distinct from the suffering of this world. It's a redemptive choice. It is the suffering of Christ — Who chose to suffer ... Who was, in fact, "The Suffering Servant." Jesus Christ did not "have to" suffer—He chose to suffer.

There are infinitely smoother paths before us in our encounter with suffering: We must make it a matter of choice. We choose to elect suffering. It's something we willingly take upon ourselves. We must bear it for others, as Christ bore His suffering for us. Jesus said to His disciples: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (St. Matthew 16:24).

We must pray that we be united in our suffering with the suffering of Jesus Christ in the Garden, at the Pillar and on the cross — for only in this will our suffering become meaningful, for it will become redemptive!

St. Paul tells us: "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24).

In other words, we can share, even participate in the suffering of Christ if we choose to and for the same end for which He Himself suffered... the redemption of the world, the salvation of souls. Through this mysterious union in suffering with Christ we exceed ourselves, surpass all that is possible to us apart from Him, by becoming one with Him, one in suffering and one in purpose.

Jesus counsels us: "Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy." (St. John 16:20-22).

This passage alone is proof enough that Jesus sees suffering in a completely different light than the world does and that his concept of suffering is radically different from how we would view it.

Lent calls us to become like Christ, to be conformed to Him in this life – so that after the cross we will be conformed to Him at the hour of our death and following Him, join Him in Heaven where He has prepared a place of everlasting for us that where He is, we may also be!

"Suffering is nothing by itself. But suffering shared with passion of Christ is a wonderful gift, the most beautiful gift, a token of love," said Mother Teresa.

Let us Meditate

1. What are your concepts of suffering?
2. What do you learn from the Holy Scripture about suffering?
3. What does God promise you when you suffer?
4. How would you like to suffer for Christ?

Application

What can you do today to lighten someone's load, to comfort someone? Perhaps a visit, a phone call, a card or a gift would help. Even a meal would suffice. Make a deliberate choice to join in the suffering of others and comfort them in all ways possible.

Prayer

*Jesus, teach me to embrace the unavoidable sufferings of life, and keep me ever mindful of those who suffer more than I do.
In Your blessed name I pray, Amen.*

Called to be faithful

Exodus 20:1-20

Psalms 37:25-35

1 Timothy 2:1-13

St. Matthew 25:14-23

“God is not human, that He should lie, not a human being, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?” “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown himself.” “But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house” (Numbers 23:19; 1 Timothy 2:13; Numbers 12:7).

To be faithful is to be reliable, steadfast and unwavering. The Holy Bible speaks of this type of faithfulness in four ways: as an attribute of God; as a positive trait in people; as a characteristic many lack; and as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Faithful is also used in the sense of “believing,” as in the case of the Christians in Ephesus and Colossae (Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:2).

The Holy Bible often speaks of God’s faithfulness. Over and over we learn that when God says He will do something, He does it (even when it seems impossible). When He says something will happen, it happens. This is true of the past, the present and the future. If this were not the case—if God were unfaithful even once—He would not be God, and we would not be able to rely on any of His promises. But as it is, “not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave” (1 Kings 8:56).

God is eternally reliable, steadfast, and unwavering because faithfulness is one of His inherent qualities. God does not have to work at being faithful; He is faithful. Faithfulness is vital to who He is (Psalms 89:8; Hebrews 13:8). In His faithfulness, God protects us from evil, sets limits on our temptations, forgives us our sins, and sanctifies us (2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 John 1:9; Philippians 1:6; 1 Corinthians 1:9).

Faithfulness affects all our relationships. The Bible says it is a gift from God. When we receive Christ as Lord, the Holy Spirit indwells us and brings the blessings of love, joy, peace and faithfulness (Galatians 5:22). The fullness of these blessings depends on our walking with God and yielding to His Spirit. We should be faithful in reading and abiding by God's Word and to seek the Lord in prayer (Psalms 1:1-2; Ephesians 6:18). A person who walks continually with God in humility and devoted service, can be called "faithful." In Christian life, without faithfulness one cannot expect to grow into deeper spheres of spirituality. The first two of the Ten Commandments deal directly with us being faithful to God and is vividly clear that God will not tolerate unfaithfulness. Our faithfulness should be vertically and horizontally sound and healthy.

The Holy Bible also warns us of the consequences of unfaithfulness. These warnings are necessary because, as the hymn says, we are "prone to wander...prone to leave the God I love." Our hearts too are often indecisive, despite our best intentions (Proverbs 20:6; Jeremiah 20:6; St. Matthew 26:75). Our spiritual journey begins with the faithful One; for the Scripture says: "The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it." Being faithful to God gives us the anchor of peace and assurance that we will be brought through by His eternal promises and the reward of eternal life in Heaven.

In 1 Samuel 2:35, God says: "I will raise up a faithful priest who will serve me and do whatever I tell him to do." God defines faithfulness as obedience to the commands of Christ. We can be skilled leaders and communicators, but disobedience disqualifies us from being seen as faithful as God defines it. There is tremendous emphasis in the Bible on using the gifts and the talents God has given us. God has made an investment in our lives and He expects a return on it. Faithfulness is based on what we do with what we have (1 Peter 4:10).

God is pleased when His people are faithful. Jesus in the parable says: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things..." (St. Matthew 25:21). St. Paul gives us direction in this regard: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

Think about faithfulness to the transferring process leading to multiplication that the Scripture has a lot to talk about. We are to commit what we learnt to faithful men, and those faithful men are to give it to others, and so on. None of us would be here today if there hadn't been faithful men and women in the last 2,000 years of the church who willingly passed on what had been entrusted to them by God.

The Bible says that faithfulness is a matter of keeping our word or promises. The number one cause of resentment is unfulfilled promises. When God evaluates our faithfulness, He is going to look at all the promises we have made (Proverbs 20:25).

When God evaluates our faithfulness, He won't look at our communication skills, but will check the way we

interacted with those inside and outside of the faith. In other words, a mark of faithfulness is the kind of testimony we maintain with those around us. And secondly, He will look at our relationship with other people. Did we care about or value our relationships?

Faithfulness swims against the stream of present-day and is not driven by “my” culture. God says faithfulness is proven by our others-centredness and by giving our life away, by looking at others rather than concentrating on ourselves.

A faithful person knows what is important and what is not. A faithful person knows how to invest his or her life. A faithful person makes his or her life count. A faithful person knows the significant from the petty... the gold from the dross. Faithfulness is saying that there is more to life than just accumulating things. The Bible says we are to live like fish, swimming upstream in a materialistic world. Faithfulness is proved by our refusal to succumb to the system and go after material pleasures and wealth. Faithfulness is often proved by choosing a simplified lifestyle to allow more time for ministry (Proverbs 28:20).

God is looking for faithful people He can use (2 Chronicles 16:9). God is physically, visibly, actively, taking the initiative to look for faithful people whom He can bless (2 Chronicles 16:9). Faithful people are hard to find (Proverbs 20:6; Psalms 53:2-3). Faithfulness is the key to blessings and victory (1 John 5:4-5; Proverbs 28:20). God tests our faithfulness in different ways. Will you allow Him to shape you up and polish you up in this area so that you can be a person of faithfulness?

Let this Lenten season be marked with a life of faithfulness. Let's be faithful in our relationships, at our workplace, in money matters, in keeping our promises and in everything we do. May we become models for the world and represent Christ through our faithfulness.

Let us Meditate

1. What do you think are the ways God uses to test our faithfulness? Think about them.
2. Who are the people you look up to because you consider them faithful? What attributes do they have in common?
3. What are those areas where I struggle to be faithful to God and man? List them.
4. What shall be my decisions and the practical steps I take to become faithful to the Lord?

Application

I will work hard to keep my word and fulfill my promises. And I will remain faithful in my relationships, value others and deceive none.

Prayer

*Dear God, I'm sorry for the times I have been unfaithful to You and ignored Your Word. Lord, have mercy on me and grant me the grace to grow in my faithfulness to You, my church and the people I live with.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Bearing fruit

Ruth 1:15-19

Psalms 65

Galatians 5:19-23

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?'

" 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down' " (St. Luke 13:1-9).

Jesus was informed of the murder of some Galileans while they were in Jerusalem. They were offering sacrifices. Pilate came suddenly upon them and killed them, and "their" blood was mingled with the blood of the animals they were offering as sacrifice. From Jesus' response, the attitude of the people towards

those killed is made evident. Jesus also said that in another incident 18 people were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them. Through this Jesus tells us that people die for various reasons and in various ways, not necessarily because of sin. The mode of death is not a means of measuring who is more sinful. It is not even a means to justifying oneself. Jesus made it clear that unless there is repentance all will perish. People will perish for not repenting from sin.

Sin is something which separates us from God. Therefore, we are commanded to turn away from sin and turn to God. Only if we repent, will we receive forgiveness. Repent, and we will experience God's love in all its fullness. Repentance is a step we take before abiding in God and bearing fruit. Only if we repent can the Holy Spirit work in us to help us bear godly fruit.

The importance of bearing spiritual fruit is repeatedly emphasized in the Bible. Especially significant is the link between the failure to produce good fruit and divine judgment. Jesus makes this connection by telling the parable of the barren fig tree. It's the story of a man seeking fruit. The tree had no fruit when its owner came looking for them. The disappointed owner asked the caretaker to cut it down as it would only rob the soil of manure, instead of bearing fruit. But the caretaker requested him to wait for one more year. He told the owner he would do whatever was necessary to make the tree bear fruit. By the end of the year, if the tree was still barren, the owner would have every right to cut it down. God is patient with us all. He does not want anyone to perish. He waits for everyone to come to repentance and bear fruit. Bearing fruit shows the fullness of God in you. Seek more of Him, turn more fully to Him, Live as set apart for Him.

"I never saw a fruit-bearing Christian who was not a student of the Bible," said D. L. Moody a renowned speaker.

Let us Meditate:

1. Are you ready to forsake evil? Why do we tend to be self-righteous? How do we overcome it?
2. Do we recognize God who is waiting for us to turn to Him?
3. Will you allow the Holy Spirit to work in you to help you bear spiritual fruit?

Application:

Try to identify the ways in which we keep clinging on to evil. Let's turn our mind and soul to seeking God so that He may work through the Holy Spirit to help us bear spiritual fruit.

Prayer

*Lord, help us to recognize how passionately
You are waiting for us to turn to You.
Help us to be with You always!
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Being a comforter

St. John 11:17-44

Isaiah 40:1-5

Psalms 23

Romans 8:25-28

"Listen to God with a broken heart. He is not only the doctor who mends it, but also the father who wipes away the tears." - Criss Jami, philosopher and essayist.

Who wouldn't want to be comforted? Will there ever be anyone who would never need to be comforted? Surely, no human being can be above this emotional need and touch. We were made to be so. It is as Confucius a Chinese teacher said: "The superior man thinks always of virtue; the common man thinks of comfort."

Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says: "Comfort, comfort my people, says Your God" (Isaiah 40:1). And the Psalmist said: "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalms 34:18). This is what the most merciful God does always. No one who comes to Him goes back in suffering, pain, tears or crushed in spirit.

Comfort is like a balm; it brings hope to the dying and the hopeless. People confront inexplicable trials all through their lives like financial woes, educational hassles, ethnic and cultural chaos, poverty, mental and emotional hurt, pain and illnesses and a host of other sorrows. There are no permanent solutions to these ills. Money and power can't fix a broken

heart or a crushed spirit or emptiness and vacuum in human relationships. But a comforter can bring hope and solace in the midst of severe trials, hopelessness and difficulties.

We live in a world where the Book of Ecclesiastes 4:1 echoes what the universe is going through today, "Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter."

"One must really have suffered to help others," said Mother Teresa. Think about St. Paul, Job of ancient Israel, King David, Esther and a host of greats from the Holy Bible. Numerous saints and spiritual fathers have gone through suffering, heartache, emotional wounds and physical torture. How did they live and sustain themselves to accomplish their God-given vocation?

Our Lord and Saviour has set an example and instructs us to face and live this life by rising above vulnerabilities. In the house of Lazarus, Jesus became the Comforter. In the midst of the great grief of Martha, Mary and their friends, Jesus empathized with them and was with them in their sorrow. He wept with them. With a very heavy heart He cried out to the Heavenly Father and asked Lazarus to come out of the grave.

Jesus was fully involved with their pain and grief. Thus, He became a great comforter for the family and their friends. He showed the same empathy on the cross of Calvary. Even though He was struggling with pain, Jesus cared for His mother and disciples. He asked the women not to cry for Him. That's not all. Even as Jesus was on the cross facing excruciating pain, He did not forget to comfort those who were weeping for Him. "Therefore, Jesus having seen His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, says to His mother "Woman here is your son." This empathy is akin to a deep and passionate commitment to enter people's hearts and emotions and

be a source of solace and comfort to them.

The Lord gives peace and calm to troubled minds and raging passions. It is our Saviour who says: "Let not your heart be troubled." All comfort comes from God. He speaks peace to souls by forgiving sins, comforts them by the refreshing influence of the Holy Spirit, and by the rich mercies of His grace. He heals the broken-hearted, and gives hope and joy to those bent with the burden of their sorrows.

He sends comfort to those who trust and serve Him. Our experiences of having received hope should place us under an obligation to trust in God. And it is our duty not only to help one another with prayer, but also to comfort and provide solace through those experiences of life God has led us through, and in praise and thanksgiving make suitable returns for benefits received.

This season of Lent is a powerful occasion for us to learn more about the Master as we wait, ponder, contemplate and deeply take in the very life of the One who walked this road and showed the way. Comfort comes from Him and we are ministered by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit as we humbly seek His face and tune our lives accordingly to His will. May this season teach us to become comforters.

"Sometimes the best way to help someone is to just be near them," said Veronica Roth a Novelist.

Let us Meditate

1. What is my attitude and response while confronted with difficulties and pain?
2. What is my attitude and response to those who are weighed down by suffering?
3. Do I look for opportunities to show God's love to the ones who suffer and be a comforter to them?
4. What decisions do I make today to actively help others in their pain and suffering and lead them to Jesus?

Application

I will use every opportunity to visit and be near those who are hurting. I shall ask the Holy Spirit to help me to be a true friend and comforter to someone in need, thereby being an example of Jesus to them.

Prayer

Loving Father, we believe that You have sent the Holy Spirit as the Comforter to this world. Grant us the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life, home, church and community to be able to help others as You would for them. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

The love for God's Word

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Hosea 4:6-9

Psalms 119:105

Romans 15:4

"The stars may fall, but God's Promises will stand and be fulfilled." - J. I. Packer, the Christian Theologian.

The Holy Bible is a book of history and facts which proves there is a God that created all things. Most important of all, the Holy Bible is the Word of God that reveals the mind of God and His will for each one of us. This is why the Holy Bible is our most precious possession.

The Word of God is like a test. It subjects our lives to scrutiny and helps us to correct ourselves and evolve into perfect human beings. It helps us to grow spiritually and carves out a holistic change of the whole person. The Word of God is a powerful weapon for all our needs and challenges as said in Ephesians 6:17-18. "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching there unto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

The Word of God reveals to us the ways of the maker which carries us closer to Him. Creation itself is God's great work and all of it bows down to His laws.

Why should we cultivate a love for God's Word? Why should we read, study and meditate the Word of God? It is answered very well in this one statement of Christian leader John R. W. Stott: "We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thoughts and behaviour."

The person who delights in the Word of God and meditates on it day and night will be "like a tree firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season." That person will be like a tree whose "leaf does not wither" and he will "prosper in all that he does" (Psalms 1:1-3).

The Word of God is infallible and inerrant. There is no error in God's Word. The law of the Lord is perfect concerning our soul. The purity of His Word does not need anything added to it. The Word of God is complete and does not need new chapters or verses. It is complete for all our human needs. The Word of God is totally authoritative and is settled in heaven. The Word of God is the only source for absolute divine authority. This divine authority is for you and for me as children of the living God. Only when we take delight in it do we know that the Lord is speaking to us and will recognize that He is leading. God's Word is totally sufficient for all of our needs. We don't need anything else. We can be totally secure in the Lord because it is God's plan for our life. The Word of God will accomplish what it promises. If God has promised you something it will happen; and as we wait, it will surely happen. God has sent His Word to accomplish His perfect will in our lives and the universe. If God has made a promise to us He will fulfill it in His own time. These promises reassure us and bring comfort to our lives in times of trial.

During this Lenten season let us take up this challenge to separate productive periods of time to read, meditate and study the Word of God. Let us commit to it as individuals, family and church. The Lord will show His wonderful plans and reveal His will that will bring us closer to the Messiah and transform our lives into His likeness.

Reading the Bible provides an opportunity to better and deeply understand the “big picture” of God and the world. Reading God’s Word must become a delightful part of our daily routine. Our faith will grow since faith comes from God’s Word. It is the food for our soul. And as we act as per the Word of God, we will grow into the very nature of Jesus the Messiah who is the epitome of this season of Lent and the Lord of our lives.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I enjoy reading God’s Word and depend on it as my teacher and guide in critical life situations?
2. Do I have a daily discipline of reading, studying and meditating upon God’s word? How strong and deep is my love toward these spiritual disciplines?
3. What steps do I take to develop the habit of meditating and reading the Bible every day?

Application

I will read the Holy Bible every day before breakfast.
I will carry my Bible wherever I go and use every opportunity to read and meditate on it. I will also share the Word with someone every day.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we are grateful to Your eternal word. Your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path through the darkest hours of our lives in this sinful world. Grant us Your grace to understand what we read and to live by it. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Be a servant

St. Matthew 20:25-28

Exodus 3:1-14

Psalms 37:1-11

2 Peter 2:18-25

Servanthood demands that we always honour others and hold high their dignity and honour.

Service is the hallmark of Christian life. The example of servanthood as demonstrated by Jesus Christ is the foundation of our journey in Christian faith. It always demands that we bear the cross and be willing to count the cost. The cross has not only been a symbol of great struggle and sacrifice, but also one of love and compassion. The Kingdom of God as envisioned by Jesus Christ has always revolved around this truth of servanthood.

Just as God is love, Jesus Christ too is an embodiment of love. He instructs us to shed our pride, arrogance and ego and take up the role of a servant. Jesus Christ has exemplified the concept of leadership by being a servant and not a master. He said: "And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (St. Mark 10:44). This stellar truth was exemplified when the Lord in all humility washed the feet of His disciples. The Messiah showed His disciples that if one wants to be great, one has to learn to be a servant first. Servanthood demands that we always honour others and hold high their dignity and honour. In other words, we should never seek to draw the world's attention to us. To be Christ's servant we need to grow in true freedom to serve everyone.

We are therefore, called to serve each other in humility and kindness. When we demand things using our power and position, we fail to follow Jesus Christ. We, as true disciples of Christ, fail in “serving” our brothers and sisters. Let us do a bit of soul-searching and ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the willingness to humble and lower ourselves to see Jesus as He truly is! Our Father, allow our minds and hearts to search and know Jesus so that we too can be true servants of God!

Let us Meditate

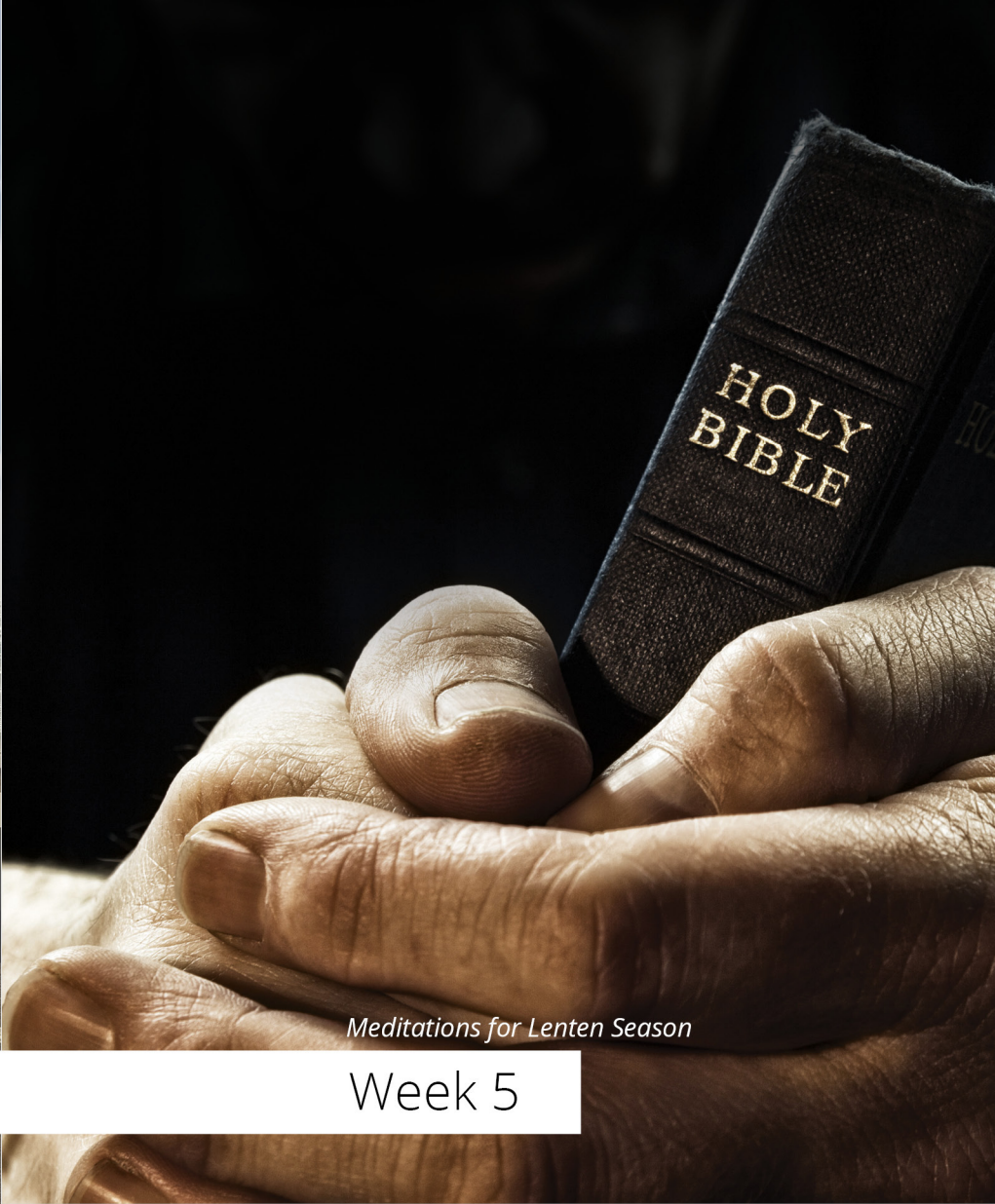
1. Can you think of ways to be a true servant wherever you are right now...be it in your home, the neighbourhood, office, school or the ministry?
2. Can you be a servant and be an example in humility, self-denial and compassion?
3. Can you find practical ways to serve others and still be a leader?

Application

I will seek for opportunities to serve and not be served.
Read St. Mark 10:45

Prayer

*O Lord, give me Your wisdom to be a servant and to be effectively involved in my own community so as to fulfill Your Word and be an agent of transformation.
In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



Meditations for Lenten Season

Week 5

Grounded in the Word...
a life that overflows

Keeping up the spiritual fervour

Romans 12:9-21
Revelation 3:14-22
St. John 2:12-25

“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord” (Romans 12:11).

We are called to a life of FERVOUR. The word St. Paul uses to describe “spiritual fervor,” literally means “to bring to a boil.” The example of a young David fighting a champion for the sake of His God and His people, the faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the three young Jews on the edge of a fiery furnace, and the passion and commitment of St. Paul are but a few examples of FERVOUR we have in the Bible.

Spiritual fervour is a must for living for Christ and His service. God is pleased only with those whose life is filled and driven by the Spirit. That’s why St. Paul said: “Never be lacking in zeal” (Romans 12:11) This command also indicates how liable we are to take things easy and be lethargic. Spiritual fervour easily evaporates and complacency can creep in. Complacency can dampen our love, joy, and passion and eventually anesthetize our entire christian life and testimony. This is why we must learn how to keep our spiritual fervour alive and strong.

Keeping our spiritual fervour is about confidence in the gospel, it’s about the fire, passion and excitement that comes from understanding that the gospel works

for me and for the world. It is also about conviction. We cannot convince others of what we believe unless we ourselves are strong in our convictions.

The Bible says we should maintain a spiritual passion no matter how long we have been in the service of the Lord.

John Wesley the famous preacher and theologian was once asked how he attracted huge crowds. He replied: "I set myself on fire, and people come to see me burn." The great missionary David Livingstone said: "I have found...I have no unusual endowments of intellect, but I...resolved that I would be an uncommon Christian."

When St. Paul raises the issue of spiritual zeal in serving the Lord he exhorts us not to be lazy or inactive. Instead, we have to keep up our spiritual passion. He uses the word 'service' which relates to a bond or an issue of bondage...like that of a servant... someone who could not pay a debt and therefore served the person to whom he owed the debt, until it was repaid. This usage has a lot of similarity to our christian faith and service. We were sinners and become 'slaves' to righteousness, servants of the Lord. We know that the debt we owed God was far more than what we could ever pay and we gave our lives to God that He might transform us.

We serve the Lord because we know we were made by God for His glory. We are connected to, intertwined with and cast upon God, as His ambassadors and bonded servants. This bond generates our spiritual fervour and zeal.

The question is... how do we keep this spiritual fervour?

First of all, it is through the Holy Spirit that we receive fervour (heat, passion) to serve the Lord. This fervor and zeal do not come from our circumstances or understanding. It comes from the Master we are serving. It is the Holy Spirit working through us that

causes us to overflow, to boil with passion to serve the Lord.

Secondly, our focus needs to be on the Lord and how to serve Him. If we focus on other things we lose our zeal and passion to serve God. Sometimes we get lost in the middle of serving people and nurturing our values rather than serving Christ and Him only. Serving Christ might cost us our reputation and comfort. It can also cost us something we greatly value. Sometimes when serving the Lord we don't know or can't articulate where we are, what we're doing or why we're doing it; but we enjoy peace in the knowledge that we are in the right place...that God is sovereign and in control and knows what He is doing with us. Serving God sometimes requires us not to understand but to stand where God has put us.

The life of continual transformation, as St. Paul described in Romans 12, is a life where we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice (12:1), where we are transformed by the renewal of our mind (12:2), where we use our spiritual gifts (12:3-8), where we love without hypocrisy (12:9), and where we are fervent in spirit (12:11). In the last appeal, we are not told to do something, or to not do something. We are told to "feel" passionate and ardent about our faith.

In other words, to keep passionate in the service of the Lord, we need to keep our hearts alive by turning to God.

There's a saying: "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." You need to make the heat, to be in the kitchen. You need to be in the kitchen to feel the heat. We need to guard our hearts. Let us ask ourselves what our focus is on. Let's turn our focus on living for and serving the Lord. Look around today and see where you can serve Him right now. Ask the Holy Spirit now for what you cannot do by yourself.

God does not work with a shallow spirituality. The Bible teaches that when it comes to our zeal in loving and serving God, we should turn up the heat. We find Jesus speaking against the lukewarm state of the Church at Laodicea, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other" (Revelation 3:15). What better opportunity than the Lenten season for us to bring ourselves before God and ask Him to kindle that fire, that passion, that zeal and that fervour in us.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I still have the same love for my Lord or have I missed it somewhere?
2. Have I shifted to another degree of fervour in serving the Lord?
3. What decisions and steps am I to take in achieving a growing fervour in the service of the Messiah?

Application

I will deliberately guard my heart from all that brings complacency and coldness to my spiritual life and service to the Lord. And I will seek out godly believers and spiritual leaders to spend time in fellowship and receive help and counselling.

Prayer

Loving heavenly Father, I am grateful to You for inspiring me to be excited about Your life and service. Increase in me the desire and passion to serve You and keep me from drifting away into complacency. I will follow and serve You with fervour. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Hold on to what is good

Revelation 3:7-13

2 Timothy 4:6-8

Psalms 15

*“But test them all; hold on to what is good”
(1 Thessalonians 5:21).*

A caution has been sounded. St Paul exhorts believers to choose the good, embrace the good and love the good. A Christian's constant battle is to have his or her emotions and actions under control.

As we meditate on the given verse we need to ponder over two aspects of it. One is to know what is good and the second, to hold on to it. Let's first examine the good. Every Christian has and ought to have what's called discretion. Christians should be endowed with the gift of discerning what's good and what's evil; what's true and what's false. “But strong meat belongs to them that are full of age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). But understand that we don't decide what's good and what's bad. God decides what is good and what is bad and we follow that, because what God says good is good for us, and what He says bad is bad.

We must search the Scriptures to see whether the things that come our way are true or not. We must not believe every spirit, but must try them. All the same, we must not always be trying, always unsettled. We must not always be seekers, fluctuating, vacillating, tossed

about in every wind of doctrine. Know that the ultimate good is the God-Man, Christ himself. He is our good. Nothing is better for us than Christ. All other good things are evanescent.

Now let's understand what holding on to the good means. "Hold on to what is good," means embrace it, love it. Don't let it slip away. Remember what Jesus told the church at Philadelphia: "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 3:11). Let us hold fast to true values, to the word of truth and perseverance and cleave unto Him and not let go of our faith, whatever opposition or whatever persecution we may meet with for its sake thereof.

We see Job doing it perfectly, holding on to his integrity and his God. He lost all he had, his children died and he fell ill. His illness depressed him. At the point when his wife could not see any ray of hope, she gave up and told Job: "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die" (Job 2:9).

A poem written by Nancy Wood is a beautiful exhortation to hold on to the good and understand its importance.

Hold on to what is good even if it is a handful of earth.

Hold on to what you believe even if it is a tree which stands by itself.

Hold on to what you must do even if it is a long way from here.

Hold on to life even when it is easier letting go.

Hold on to my hand even when

I have gone away from you.

Hold on to what is good - Nancy wood - 1974

During Lent, my brethren, please remember that we must hold on to God's spiritual treasures, to the spiritual fundamentals and God's truth! We should strive to persevere as faithful servants of Christ, doing

His work. We need to rejoice in His love and always remember His message: "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

As we move through Lent and go through a process of spiritual renewal, let us take a solemn vow that we will do good, follow good, preach good, act good and live good. Let us continue to hold on to Jesus.

Let us Meditate

1. When did I last check on my values and virtues in the light of the Bible?
2. Am I careless while accepting others' beliefs and thoughts? Am I aware of the fact that I'm in a spiritual battle, with Satan who is scheming to defeat me?
3. How prepared am I to know the good from the bad in my spiritual journey?
4. How is the Holy Spirit working in my life?
5. Do I make compromises for a comfortable life?
6. Will I hold on to the truth even if it may cost my life?

Application

I will read the Bible always to know what truth is. I will seek the guidance of mature spiritual elders in times of doubt and dilemma. I will learn to be consistent and persevere in my walk with the Lord.

Prayer

Dear God, I humble myself as I come before You, knowing that I am weak and frail and in desperate need of Your grace. This meditation has reminded me of my failures and the times when I could not hold on to You and follow You. I long to be near You, walk with You. Grant me Your mercy that I may remain in You and You in me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Thankfulness

a Christian way of life

Exodus 15:1-21

Psalms 103

Colossians 3:15-17

*“One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice; He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan”
(St. Luke 17:15-16).*

Have you helped anyone or done someone a good turn? Have you been kind to anybody? Has anyone thanked you for your kindness? If they did, how did you feel about it? Were you happy, satisfied? Did you feel encouraged? Yes, of course, you did. Well then, let’s change the scene. You helped someone for which you were neither thanked nor appreciated. How did you feel then? How did you react? You were hurt, for sure.

Reflect on this. God does such a lot for us. He loves us, cares for us, protects us and provides for us. Are we grateful to Him? Do we even bother to say thanks? Thankfulness seems to have vanished from the Christian’s list of virtues.

Here is the story of those people, shunned by society, the scum of the earth, the lepers. It’s people like these who teach us to be thankful for all we’ve received. Thankfulness is the foundation upon which Christian virtues are built. It means showing sincere gratitude to those who do good to you. It always reveals a conscious response that comes from looking beyond our blessings to their sources.

The lepers in Jesus' time were social outcasts. Leprosy was considered the worst of all diseases. It horribly disfigured those afflicted. Two thousand years ago, to be a leper was the worst fate that could befall anybody. Along with their physical suffering, the lepers also had to go through intense emotional agony. Those afflicted by the scourge were despised and cast away from their homes. They were not allowed to come anywhere near the fringes of human settlements.

They were a curse, but not to the living Lord Jesus Christ. He healed them. But before that, he asked them to go to a priest to be checked. They left to see the priest. On the way, they realized they were healed. Out of the ten, one came running back, praising God in a loud voice; He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked Him—and he was a Samaritan. He knew that the Man who had healed him was God. He could not hold back his praise, he could not restrain his worship, he could not delay his thanks. So he fell at the Lord's feet to say: "I want to be Yours, I want everything You have to give." He knew he was in the presence of God, because "he was not just healed and but was saved."

How about us? Are we like the nine lepers who went home, or like the one who came back to Jesus? Do we thank God? Do we pause to remember Him? Do we thank Him for a great day spent or a peaceful night's sleep? Thankfulness is the way to pleasing God and it is just a small thing we give God in return.

Let us renew our lives and relationship with God this season. We need to thank God for the great relationship we share with Him. Let us build the habit of thanking God for what we have and stop grumbling about what we don't. Be thankful to God and to all that you see around you...the world and its people. Life without thankfulness is empty, devoid of love and passion. Faith without thankfulness lacks strength and fortitude. Hope without thankfulness lacks perception. Hence, be thankful all the time.

"The Christian's life should be one of thankfulness to God," said Charles Spurgeon a renown Preacher.

Let us Meditate

1. What are those things that prevents me from thanking God?
2. Have I been faithful in praying before going to bed?
Do I thank the Lord before I hit the pillow?
3. When was the last time I thanked God in all sincerity?
4. Do I thank God every day?
5. Do I thank people for their help and appreciate them for their good work and performance?

Application

I will thank God every morning as I get out of bed. I will thank Him before I have my food. Every night as I go to sleep I will thank God for His grace all through the day.

Prayer

*Dear God, I admit I've been ungrateful to You.
I have never thanked You for the blessings I receive every day. But I am really thankful to You for reminding me of the importance of showing my gratitude to You.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Watch and pray

St. Matthew 26:36-46

Psalms 37:1-10

Proverbs 3:1-10

"Be on guard! Be Alert!" (St. Mark 13:33)

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (St. Matthew 26:41). Jesus reminds us that we are in a perpetual spiritual battle with Satan, striving hard to win us over. He also knows our vulnerabilities and frailties and grabs us when we are at our weakest.

“Stay alert! Watch out for your greatest enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Let us go over the verse in Matthew to understand the terms used in it. The word for ‘spirit’ in this passage is the Greek word ‘pneuma,’ which in this context refers to man’s soul or mind. The word for ‘flesh’ refers to the human body and nature, with its moral and physical frailties.

By affirming that “the spirit is willing,” Jesus was saying that He knew the disciples wanted to stay awake and pray, but the weakness of the flesh overpowered the spiritual desire to watch and pray. Jesus was not scolding them, but exhorting them to beware of the weakness of the flesh. The Lord Himself was fighting the same struggle against the flesh, but He overcame it (St. Matthew 26:39).

The story of the disciples in Gethsemane rings true for all of us. We experience “the weakness of the flesh” all through our lives. We get so easily distracted from the call to prayer and worship. Weaknesses like physical exhaustion, boredom, sexual urge, the weather or even a slight itch can deflect our thoughts from prayer. The demands of our body, our desires and fears often pull us off the right track, much to Satan’s delight. Satan’s world appeals to the carnal in us. His world is replete with greed, gluttony, sloth, lust and a heady brew of all that’s sinful. “This I say, walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). This is what Christians are exhorted to do. But when the Spirit is willing to do whatever God asks, the flesh remains weak. The answer lies in what Jesus said: Watch and Pray. What does watch and pray mean? How can that help us succeed against the weakness of the flesh?

Prayer is a straightforward answer to all our problems and difficulties. Our spirit is strengthened by the presence of God. This is why staying in God’s presence in the form of prayer is crucial for us. Prayer is God’s strength and our weapon. Can there be a better promise for mankind than this: Whatever we ask “in His name” He will do (St. John 14:13). The phrase in His name means “according to His will.” Does this mean we will have the strength to obey, worship and do what is right and true according to God’s will? Of course! Jesus will answer our prayers for spiritual strength over weaknesses of the flesh.

Watchfulness is the other weapon we have against weakness of the flesh. But then it needs to be sharpened by our efforts combined with the Grace of God. It requires your attention and deep desire to win the battle you are in. It saves you and guides you. Spiritual watchfulness wards off all temptations. The Bible says: “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty” (Proverbs 22:3).

If we want to please God or win a spiritual battle, we need to put in our effort too. And our efforts are Jesus' words: Watch and Pray. This is a discipline that one needs to come up with. This is what Lent prepares us to do. It's a blessed occasion to pray and ask for self-control. Let's remember that we need to wage a constant battle against the devil's machinations. We cannot take things casually. We need to be alert, watchful and ready to fight. Jesus fought the devil and won his battle. He will help us. Let us take heart and strive hard to please God and win our spiritual battle.

Let us Meditate

1. Have I ever struggled the way the disciples did?
2. Am I disciplined enough to spend my time in prayer?
3. How vigilant am I against Satan's attack on my spiritual quest?
4. How can I have the discipline of prayer throughout in my life?
5. What are the things I need to be watchful about?

Application

I will not forget to pray every morning and submit myself to the Lord, before I start my daily work. I will do all my work with prayer. I will not be casual in making decisions. I will be watchful in making friends and make sure that they don't affect my walk with the Lord.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, I thank You for understanding my struggles with sin. I know that when You are with me I will not fall into Satan's hands. Help me Lord to follow Your instructions to be watchful. Help me to be strong in prayer. Thank You, in Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Prayer is my privilege and power

Daniel 9:14-27

Psalms 6

St. Luke 19:9-1

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right." "... and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people"(1 Samuel 12:23; Revelation 5:8).

Jesus says that the true test of spiritual integrity is our personal life in prayer. Personal prayer is an important test of whether we are real. But personal prayer is not just a test of how true we are, but also an answer to our shortfalls and a remedy to the lack of desire we often feel for God. Renowned spiritual leader John Piper says prayer is "not only the measure of our hearts, revealing what we really desire, it is also the indispensable remedy for our hearts when we do not desire God the way we ought to." Personal prayer shows who we really are spiritually and is essential in healing where we are broken.

Prayer is the context of a relationship. Tim Keller, a Theologian says prayer is essential for "a genuinely lived relationship with God as Father." This is the heart of prayer—not getting things from God, but getting God. Prayer is where we talk to God, in response to His Word to us, and experience what it means to enjoy God our Father as an end in Himself, not just as a means to our requests. In prayer, we enjoy the gift of having God's attention and discover for ourselves that we are not just servants, but friends (St. John 15:15). We are

not just listeners of His Word, but His own children who have His heart (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6-7). He wants to hear from us. Such is the power and privilege of prayer.

This is the reason Jesus practiced so well what He preached about prayer and found time to be alone with the Father. He had no inadequacies to make up for, and no doubts about His trueness, but He desperately desired fellowship with His Father. And so, again and again, He prayed alone (St. Matthew 14:23, 26:36,42,44; St. Mark 1:35,14:32-42; St. Luke 5:16, 6:12,46). Not just once, but as a regular habit, He “would withdraw to desolate places and pray.” From the beginning of His ministry to the Garden of Gethsemane, He had the practice of this private prayer as an essential part of His relationship with the Father. Prayer, in many ways is the measure of who we are spiritually.

Prophet Samuel had great influence over God through his prayers. His prayers began shaping the history of the people of Israel. We find St. Paul in all his letters praying for those who wanted him to pray for them. He not only prayed, but also instructed them in prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

The church or the people of God must give themselves to unceasing prayer. Never should prayers cease in the church. This was the will of God concerning His church on earth.

Here are a few suggestions to enrich personal prayer:

1. Create your regular place for private prayer and if you can't locate a ready spot, make one.
2. Begin your time with the Holy Bible. It is because prayer is a conversation we didn't start, but a response to God's initiation.
3. Take time to adore, confess, thank, and ask. It's a time to voice whatever is on our hearts. The sequence of doing it would be of great help. First, adore God with

praise for the truth revealed in your reading of and meditation of the Scriptures, then confess your own sins, failings and weaknesses, then give thanks for His grace and mercy, and finally supplicate, ask Him for requests related to personal life, family, church, and more.

4. Make known your desires and develop them in the pattern found in the Word of God. He wants to hear it from us. This is an unspeakable privilege and there is power in it. Prayer changes our hearts like nothing else and guides in shaping and expressing our desires to God.

As we reinforce and renew our relationship with the Lord this Lenten season, let us understand there is no greater means than an ardent devotion to personal prayer to revitalize our relationship with the Lord. And it shows our test of relationship and deeper sense of our privilege and power as God's children.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I pray and begin my day? Do I pray before I leave home daily?
2. Do I lean on God in prayer for the various concerns of my life?
3. Am I a man of prayer who intercedes for others?

Application

I will set apart a time every day to kneel down and pray. I will take special effort every day to strengthen my relationship with the Heavenly father and be close to Him as a child would.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, give us a heart which will always long to be in Your presence ... to hear from You and talk to You. Forgive my lack of eagerness and commitment to You and please take me deep into Your care, my Father.

I want to be Yours and Yours alone.

In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Practice the Word of God

St. Matthew 7:21-28

James 1:22-25

Psalms 1

"We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thoughts and behaviour." - John R. W. Stott .

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (St. Matthew 7:24). These are last instructions recorded of what is called the greatest sermon of Jesus Christ. People were in awe of the Messiah and were exalting Jesus for what He had taught and the way He expressed it. But Jesus had only one thing to say: "The will of My Father should be practised."

Reading, receiving, researching, remembering and reflecting on the Word of God will be of no consequence unless we put them into practice...live by them. We have to be doers of the Word (James 1:22). It is a command to be obedient to the Word of God.

A man walking late into church one day asked one of the ushers: "Is the sermon done yet?" The usher replied: "The sermon has been preached, but it has yet to be done." What an answer! We need to delve deep into its meaning! The Word of God is not just meant to be preached or listened to. It's meant to be practiced, it's meant to be done!

Let us think this over. If we were to listen to a sermon every day, if an angel were to preach, and if we were only to listen to it instead of living by it, of what use would the whole exercise be? It would neither sustain us nor see us grow in the strength of the Lord. The implanted Word is accepted and then put into action. Spiritual growth and blessings come to us only if we live by God's Word. Too many Christians make Bible markings, but their Bibles never mark them! God wants His people to translate His Word into action.

Only if we question ourselves, can we evaluate ourselves. How many sermons have I heard by now? How have they impacted me? Have I evolved into a mature human being or am I still a child? The author of Hebrews says: "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truth of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12). When we live by the Word of God, we become mature. It's a maturity that helps us stand tall when the storm rages around us. Maturity in Christ is what saves us from the ravages of this world. When we know that the Lord is with us and is happy that we live by His Word, He will guide us and we acquire the great strength to move on, however traumatic our lives may be.

Let us know that no acquaintance with the Bible, apart from the practice of its precepts, will avail the Christian any more than it did the Jew. "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers shall be justified" (Romans 2:13). Let us also understand that the Scripture does not teach a salvation by works, nor does it teach a salvation for those who do not obey God by obeying His Word. Christ's sheep are marked on the ear and on the foot, they hear His voice and follow Him. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (St. John 10:27).

Let us remind ourselves that it is not talking, but walk-

ing, that will lead us closer to Christ and bring us nearer to heaven. A mere reading or listening to the Word will not be enough, but acting on it should be our motto. Lent is a season designed for us by God to act on His Word. So let us practice God's command in these days of fasting and prayer. Let us give alms to the poor and needy and bring tithes and offerings to God's house. Forgive others as God forgave us. Let us overcome sinful habits by replacing them with christian acts of virtue. Pray consistently that we be victorious in this spiritual battle. Keep the spiritual fervour burning. Set our minds on things above. Come, let us practice the Word of God, let us be doers of the Word of God!

Let us Meditate

1. Who am I? The hearer of the Word of God or the doer?
2. What do I do after reading the Bible or listening to the Word of God?
3. Is there anything I forgot to do which God had asked me to?
4. Am I genuine in my walk with the Lord?
5. With whom am I sharing what I learn from God's Word?

Application

I will look for immediate ways to apply the Word of God as soon as I read or listen to it. I will consider each message or exhortation as a piece of valuable advice and implement it in the best way I can. I will not delay in practicing the Word of God.

Prayer

*Heavenly Father, let Your Law become my delight.
Help me that I will live by Your precepts and value Your
decrees. May this be the desire of my heart.
In Jesus' loving name, I pray. Amen.*

Obedience

1 Samuel 15:13-26
Romans 5:12-21
St. Matthew 21:28-32

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying Him? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.” “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (1 Samuel 15:22; James 1:22).

“Our enemy is more aware than we are of the spiritual possibilities that depend upon obedience,” said Amy Carmichael from Dohnavur mission.

How true it is! Yet obedience finds favour with none today. The Holy Bible, however, makes it very clear that obedience is necessary and is a crucially important part of our life as Christians. Obedience to God and His Word is the key to a believer’s personal access to Christ. When we obey God, we demonstrate our love for Him and give Him reasons to bless us. Obedience means doing what God wants in all that He says. The *when* and the *how* hardly matter. Anything less becomes rebellion. Obedience is not an option. Either way, be it in obedience or rebellion, with God there is no middle ground.

There is this profound statement: “God requires our obedience before our understanding.” The obedience expected of us is not forced upon us out of fear. On the contrary, it’s an obligation fraught with love and

sincerity. Jesus said: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching" (St. John 14:23). Obedience has to be instant; delayed obedience is not obedience.

What we call "morals" is simply blind obedience to words of "command," said Havelock Ellis, an English physician and social reformer. King Saul disobeyed God. He tried to dilute the gravity of his disobedience by offering the best animal sacrifices to God. Prophet Samuel confronted him and told him how displeased God was with Him. The story is one of the principle lessons which highlights the significance of obeying God just as we are told.

"Be obedient even when you do not know where obedience may lead you," said theologian Sinclair Ferguson. Jesus the Messiah was unswervingly committed to do the Father's will. "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work" (St. John 4:34). All that Jesus did and said was exactly what His Father wanted Him to do and say. "For I did not speak on my own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak" (St. John 12:49). All that Christ did in His life on earth was done according to the Scriptures. St. Paul said it was the obedience of Christ that gave us salvation. "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

Hence, let this be our desire... to go by the will of God, with all our strength, all our mind, all our heart and all that we have. Let us learn to obey Him in totality.

Let us Meditate

1. Am I willing to obey God in every aspect of my life?
2. What were the reasons that led me to disobey God?
3. What steps must I take to become an obedient child of God?

Application

I will obey the gentle whisper of God as I hear Him while reading the Bible. I will practice applying God's words in my daily life. I will not hesitate or delay in obeying God. God will be my priority in all that I do and think.

Prayer

Dear loving God, I am thankful to You for Your Word that has reminded me of my need to obey You. Let me be Your child. God, grant me immense grace that I may obey You and do Your will. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.



Meditations for Lenten Season

Week 6

See others
as Christ would see them

Accepting one another

St. John 13:31-35

James 2:1-7

Psalms 133

"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..."

Have you ever felt unaccepted and desolate - at home, school, work, church, or neighbourhood? Do you know of others who feel rejected and sad? Have you done anything to cheer them up? Has the church come out to help? Many such questions pop up when we read Romans 15:7 "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

This is an exhortation and command from St. Paul that we form a great fellowship which is the basic need and desire of all human beings. He admonishes believers in Rome who refuse to accept one another as they believe they are not like-minded. This exhortation is for all and all times. God so desires that the entire creation finds fulfillment in living worthy and dignified lives. St. Paul says that Jesus Christ displayed patience and forbearance towards all and we are therefore urged to do the same in our life with others in the community. The word "acceptance" means much more than just extending a polite welcome. It actually means bringing in another as a partner; that requires a responsible action of trust, investment and togetherness.

The church is a profound entity; it is an assembly of imperfect people linked together to fulfill God's perfect plan. Accepting one another is part of that plan. However,

this concept does not come easily and is a big issue as we look into and see how we relate to one another. Typically, rejection happens more often than we'd care to admit, and the saddest truth is that it happens even within the confines of the church.

That was also the concern of the Apostle about those in the church at Rome. And it is God's concern for all of us even today. The Church in Rome had a mix of Jewish community as well as those outside of this group regarded as gentiles, worshiping under the same roof, which was most unusual in the first century. Life was tense and fraught with friction.

The present day scenario is no different. The church is ridden with differences like never before. People are independent. They no longer care to live as a community. Families too are no more close-knit units. Togetherness and fellowship are fast becoming history. Folks go to church, but are strangers to one another. Where has the sharing and caring gone? People just come, pray and move on.

This is not God's command for His children. It is the will of God that we rise above differences and divisions and welcome and accept one another as He would. This is our christian witness which brings praise and honour to God, the Father.

This is exactly what St. Paul demonstrated to Philemon as he talks about Onesimus; "...no longer as a slave, but better than a slave. For he is a very dear brother to me, and he will be even dearer to you... receive him as if he were I myself," this is the will of God for us. This is the way to bring glory to God. And this will be our identity that we belong to Jesus. Let this be the time for us to move on and may this holy season give us an opportunity to be united, to overcome our differences, to get soaked in Christ's love and belong to each other. Let us be that kind of church, a church that accepts one another as Christ accepted us.

Let us Meditate

1. Is there anyone in the church I saw several times but never talked to?
2. Am I ignoring the weak and the poor of the congregation?
3. Have I ever been partial in relating to people of the church?
4. Do I despise anyone for their lower social standing?

Application

From the next fellowship, I will start interacting with those I have never talked to. I will make an effort to draw out those who keep holding themselves back. I will be the one to welcome new members and I will interact with them.

Prayer

*Dear God, it is Your grace that keeps reminding us of our responsibilities. And I pray that I will go by everything that You remind me of. Lord, as I look to accept Your people, give me the grace to overcome my inability in relating to people. Help me to show them Your love.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Carrying each other's burden

Galatians 6:1-5
St. Matthew 18:15-17
Psalms 41

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

We are commanded to love and help one another, but knowing when and how to takes wisdom and prayer. Christian life is not always easy. In fact, it is seldom easy. We have the same burdens as others, perhaps more, because we must be an example to the world, and we need to defend our faith. When we walk with the Lord, these burdens seem light; in fact, they often do not seem like burdens at all. When we don't walk close to the Lord, we have the added weight of our "load" to carry.

The worries of this world are many and persistent. It's not easy to stay strong and follow the Master. Though we live for the world to come, we need to live in the present too. So we worry, grieve, stumble and fumble both spiritually and physically. We get bogged down by the weight of our labour, we endure the burden of guilt, we are assaulted with adversities of various kinds. These are just a few of the huge burdens that keep our thoughts from going heavenward.

What is the difference between a burden and a load? A burden is something that's been deliberately thrust on our shoulders for no fault of ours. A load is something we pick up from the road of life and carry

on our back. The Bible says each one should carry his or her own load. A burden may be something we have to endure because we may have been deceived by someone we were in a relationship with. A load is something we carry when we become the source of suffering we inflict on our loved ones. To see our dear ones hurting because of some thoughtless act of ours is a big load indeed. There are times when we act inappropriately in response to how we are treated. Walking about with the consequences of our actions too becomes a load. A load is something we bring upon ourselves. Each one of us has caused someone to suffer the consequences of a poor or wrong decision of ours. Doing wrong to a person who has hurt us does not make things better. In fact, it makes our load heavier.

But that is where our role as brothers and sisters come up. It is our duty as members of the family of the Lord to help "carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). When someone staggers, we help steady the load. If someone is straining, we help bear the burden. And if someone stumbles, we lift them up. Helping one another carry the weight of this physical and spiritual life is the call that ought to consume every Christian. The Christians of the early church were characterized for their commitment to love and care for each other. St. Paul wrote a lot on endurance by advising believers to be compassionate and patient (Colossians 3:12-13; Ephesians 4:2).

If a fellow brother or sister is weighed down or jeopardized by some burden or threat, we are the ones who need to make sure he or she is helped. Don't let them be crushed. Don't let them be destroyed. Don't be like the Scribes and Pharisees who only talked about rules and regulations to show off their righteousness. Jesus said: "They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (St. Matthew 23:4). Let us not add to others' burdens. Let's make them lighter for them.

Jesus the Messiah was always compassionate to the struggles, pain and burdens of those who were weighed down with issues of life. He said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (St. Matthew 11:28). Develop a desire for and skill in sensing the burdens of others and devote yourself daily to making them lighter. St. Paul defines "burden" as anything that threatens to crush the joy of our faith—be it a tragedy that looms large to make us doubt God's goodness, or a sin that threatens to drag us to the miry pit of guilt and judgment.

How do we bear someone's burdens? Bearing someone's burdens can be as simple as carrying food for someone who is sick or driving someone to the doctor for a medical check-up, or sitting near someone who is sorrowing and hurting or even praying for a person. Prayer is so powerful, and is often the best we can do for someone who has a burden too heavy to bear alone. Praying for our Christian brothers and sisters is the best thing we can do. It eases their as well as our burdens and lightens the load. So by all means, bear the burdens of your friends but do them a favour—don't carry their loads. Only the Lord can lift the load that weighs us down when we have caused life's burdens to turn into loads.

Let us make a promise that during this Lent we will help each other carry our burdens. Let us lean closer to the Lord who has demonstrated by His life how we can grow in this quality of life. And let us fulfill the Law of the Lord.

Let us Meditate

1. What is my attitude to those who have failed or erred in life? Is there genuine pain and concern for them or do I rejoice in their loss?
2. When was the last time I helped someone who had failed and found it difficult to move on?
3. What are the things I plan to do to cultivate this quality of life in me?

Application

I will not accuse anyone. I will help those who are too weak to rise and find the fullness of life. I will lovingly hold the erring one and correct him or her with gentleness.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, I am overwhelmed by Your love and that of those whom You raised to guide and support me in my difficult times. Dear Lord, I also want to be the one to help those who are weak and infirm. Help me to be someone who can carry others' burdens so that they may walk to You to be Yours always. Grant me Your grace and power of discernment. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Live in peace with all men

St. Matthew 5:38-48

Romans 12:9-21

Psalms 15

"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." - Mother Teresa.

"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

The commandment of God is His call to us, and we are called to obey His commands. One of those calls is to be a peacemaker in a world that's disfigured by evil. Jesus wants us as peacemakers and we need to understand that. Obedience to this command is our identity. Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (St. Matthew 5:9). Because peace is God, He wants us to live in that Image.

We are not called to be at war with each other. We are put on earth not to spew venom by being quarrelsome, disagreeable, unpleasant and offensive. Nor are we sent down to see how much bitterness and sorrow we can sow. As the followers of Jesus, we are called to spread peace. We are to make it happen by living in peace with others. Peace-making is a divine task.

Peace means reconciliation and God is the author of peace and of reconciliation. It is to carry out this noble task that Christ has called His people. We are called to take the first step. We are asked to initiate it. We ought

to make every effort to see that peace prevails over strife. Our lives are surrounded by and often filled with turmoil and uncertainty. Life is filled with moments and even cycles of storm and disarray. It's here that we, as Christians, need to step in. Peace should reign over everything.

No one is our enemy. But if we feel we have enemies, we are called upon to love them. St. Paul reminds us of this lofty truth. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:14-18).

Another aspect of it is that God wants our personal issues to be settled. God has great concern for our individual issues. We find Jesus teaching us how to address our woes first even if it means delaying our prayers. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (St. Matthew 5:23-24).

Having understood that, let us make an effort to live in harmony with everyone. The season of Lent can become God's designed time for us to do so. Let's go about settling our differences. If we need to forgive, let's do it, if we need forgiveness, ask for it. Need to clear debts? Do so. Let no enmity or bitterness cloud our relationships. Christ died for all, to love all and save all.

Let us Meditate

1. Do I accuse people? Do I gossip? Do I disclose the secrets of others?
2. Have I become the cause of division among friends and in the church?
3. Have I been nurturing bitterness against anyone? Have I forgiven all?
4. Have I reconciled with my enemies?

Application

I will not hold a grudge against anyone no matter what my differences with them are. I will remember that God has forgiven me and I need to forgive others. I will reconcile with all and strive to bond better with them.

Prayer

Dear loving God, this has been one of the blessed seasons of Lent I've ever been through. I feel spiritually renewed in my knowledge of You. I feel You are closer to me than ever before and Your love is covering me. I thank You for reminding me to be a peacemaker. Grant me Your mercy that I may love all, respect all and be a friend to all. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Hold others in esteem

Genesis 13:8-12
Philippians 2:3-4
Romans 12:10

Through all His teachings, Jesus the Messiah gave us the supreme example of 'holding others in esteem'. By His deeds He showed us the meaning of worth, dignity and esteem.

People are distinctly different. Generally, human beings can be divided into two categories – the selfish and the unselfish. The selfish always think of themselves...their family, their social status and their egos. "What do I stand to gain?" This is their perpetual question. They seldom spare a thought for others.

The unselfish are characterized by their care and compassion for others. They place the concerns of their neighbours above that of theirs. "What can I give?" This is their eternal thought. The question now is: Where do I stand?

The Holy Bible talks about Abraham who was called by God to go on a journey. And as God directed he set out. Lot, his nephew, also joined Abraham. Lot must have shared a good rapport with Abraham. Lot very well knew that Abraham was a man who cared for others. He also had the confidence that in no way would Abraham reject him.

As the journey progressed, their men had a tough time

getting along, though Abraham and Lot were friends. They fought, quarreled and became a divided lot. Abraham realized that this sort of a disharmony would only hurt his relationship with his nephew. So Abraham said to Lot: "Choose for yourself the best part of the land. I will take what you have cast aside" (Genesis 13:8-9). And this brought peace in the fold. Today, as we look around, we find people who fight over small issues and personal trivialities; and at times even end up killing each other. Abraham's action tells us that he was more concerned about the future of his nephew than his own welfare and safety.

Let us ponder over this. What is our attitude towards the needy? Why do we hurt those around us? Why are we unkind to our family?

We make a lot of decisions every day. When it comes to matters involving others, we ought to be able to make the right decisions. Let us place the interests of others over that of ours. Through all His teachings, Jesus the Messiah gave us the supreme example of 'holding others in esteem.' By His deeds He showed us the meaning of worth, dignity and esteem. The rejected and the downtrodden were those He valued the most. "Do to others what you would want them to do for you," the Messiah always said.

During this Lenten season, let us learn to suffer a little for the sake of others. Let us meditate on Jesus the Saviour, who walked, talked and toiled for the 'rejects' of society. Such thoughts and acts may form no part of our mental make-up or interests. But let us make this resolution for Jesus who always thought of others and Himself, never!

Let us Meditate

1. Am I selfish? Or do I hold others in esteem?
2. Do I consider my neighbours' needs as my own?
3. Do I have the spontaneous nature of holding the dignity and respect of others just as mine?

4. What decisions am I taking today to grow in this virtue?

Application

I will always look for opportunities to help others who are in need, and be resolute and determined in holding the self-esteem of my fellow-beings.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I admit that it is hard to put myself in second place because by nature I always look for the first place. Please help me to overcome bitter experiences of the past and truly forgive others. Dear Lord, I need Your grace to help me in holding my brothers and sisters in great esteem. In the loving name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Allow no bitter roots

Leviticus 19:17-19

Genesis 31:1-13

Psalms 22

Ephesians 4:25-32

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:31).

It would be next to impossible to find somebody who has never been emotionally hurt. We are emotional beings prone to get hurt if things don't work the way we want. But this hurt, if not addressed, can spin out of control to become a malady. It can destroy us. Such hurt, if not well handled, will grow to become a canker of bitterness which finally eats us up. Bitterness has a tenacious way of taking root in our soul. It will resist all effort to have it weeded out. Bitterness can be derived from a sense of being unjustly treated and its list of woes can be very long and descriptive. When we allow bitterness to grow and take root in us, we reject the grace of God that can deliver and liberate us from such emotional strain and heaviness.

Bitterness is defined as poison in the Holy Scriptures and a means by which many are defiled (Hebrews 12:15). It is the cause of numerous spiritual and physical ills that plague us today. Bitterness can be tricky to distinguish because initially, it shows no visible symptoms like anger or even cancer, where symptoms show up only at a critical stage. People claim they aren't angry or hurt or bitter. But that's far from the truth. Bitterness is an underlying problem that's not always apparent, but dwells in a person's system.

Bitterness hurts the person who carries it. It stays like a fresh wound, always festering. The person who is bitter is often resentful, cynical, harsh, cold, unrelenting and unpleasant to be with. Any expression of these traits is a sin against God, and those who persist in them will not inherit God's kingdom (Galatians 5:19-21). If we are honest before God and admit it, healing from God will start flowing into our lives. We should cast away all forms of bitterness, because it enslaves us and stifles our lives. What can we do then? We can look to God. He is prepared to clean and heal us of all bitterness and replace it with His peace and Joy.

The sooner we deal with it the better. The longer we harbour pain and unforgiveness, the farther we move away from spiritual health. Bitterness will hamper our joy, peace, life and relationships. Jesus warned us that if we harbour bitterness within us, God will not forgive our sins (St. Matthew 6:15). Therefore, if we claim to be God's children, we need to be quick to forgive and forget and be healed by their power.

We see this excellence in Christ even while he was going through excruciating pain and despair. People abused and mocked Him. But at the cross, He prayed that those who had nailed and persecuted Him be forgiven. For Jesus knew it was the fastest and only way for the grace and mercy of the Father to fall upon His creation. Every Christian should know this. So it's up to us not to allow the roots of bitterness grow and choke our heart.

Only by trusting in God's sovereign wisdom can we get rid of anger and bitterness. If we refuse to trust God's justice, we become slaves to bitterness and anger. Let us therefore guard our hearts and trust God to exercise His judgment against those who oppose and hurt us. Seeing Jesus through this journey of Lent, we learn how the Lord and our Master willingly kept His life looking only at His Father and not those who had

reviled Him. We must learn this as we celebrate the season.

"A Rattlesnake, if cornered will become so angry it will bite itself. That is exactly what the harboring of hate and resentment against others is-a biting of oneself. We think we are harming others in holding these spites and hates, but the deeper harm is to ourselves" E. Stanley Jones, an apologetic and missionary to India.

Let us Meditate

1. Is there anyone who hurt me, I have not forgiven so far?
2. Am I jealous of someone? Am I not happy with some one's success?
3. Is my heart able to love all and is it at peace with all?
4. What can I do to have roots of bitterness removed from my life?

Application

I will seek forgiveness of those whom I have hurt and forgive those who may have hurt me. I will always see others as children of the Almighty and love them with diligence.

Prayer

*Our heavenly Father,
please save me from bitterness of any sort
and its influence. Help me to weed out the roots
of bitterness that live within me. Help me to forgive all the
evil done to me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

To forgive is divine

St. Matthew 6:14-15

Colossians 3:13

Romans 12:20

St. Luke 6:37

Jesus accepted a painful death on the cross to give us forgiveness and empower us with His divine ability to forgive others.

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, rightly said: “The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.” Renowned theologian Lewis B. Smedes said: “To forgive is to set a prisoner free, and discover that prisoner was you.”

“I love you and forgive you. How could I not? For Jesus taught us to ‘love our enemies’— not kill them or seek revenge.” This was the reaction of Anita Smith to the one who shot dead her husband for no apparent reason. Anita and her husband were working as educational missionaries with an aboriginal tribe in Africa.

We give what we have, and not what we don’t. Only Anita can describe the pain and agony she went through. But despite her loss on a fateful morning, she was able to forgive the killer; because of the forgiveness she had already received from the Lord.

The season of Lent reminds us once again that Jesus forgave those who had falsely implicated Him. The religious leaders of the day arm-twisted the legal

authorities into bringing up trumped up charges against Christ. And they gave Him death, a punishment that was normally given only to hardcore criminals.

While on the cross, Jesus told His Heavenly Father: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do" (St. Luke 23:34). Jesus accepted a painful death on the cross to give us forgiveness and empower us with His divine ability to forgive others. He forgave all those who had wronged, abused and harassed Him.

Jesus the Messiah demonstrated the most powerful lesson a Christian could ever learn: Forgiveness.

Jesus' act of forgiveness is an instruction for us to forgive those who wronged us, took advantage of us, cheated or deceived us. This Lenten season is ours to draw closer to Jesus, learn from Him and be like Him. Let us be still and feed on the teachings of the Messiah and empower ourselves with the power to forgive and be forgiven.

Someone said: "One of the secrets of a long and fruitful life is to forgive everybody, everything, every night, before going to bed." As a Lenten observance, let us resolve to emulate Christ by following in His footsteps. Let's remember His words: "Forgive so that you also will be forgiven." Let us celebrate the concept of forgiveness by listing out the names of all who have wronged us and start praying for them. Once we start praying for them, we develop a heart full of love. A praying heart is a loving heart and a forgiving one. Let us forgive and forget just as our Lord did, for to forgive is Divine.

Let us Meditate

1. Have you gone through times of being falsely accused, cheated or unjustly treated?
2. What were your reactions and responses? Have you been able to forgive or was it difficult?

3. What will you do when you go through similar situations again? Make a list of practical steps and decisions.

Application

I will restore my relationships by asking forgiveness of those I have hurt; and renew my friendship with those I think are my enemies.

Prayer

Loving Lord, I am grateful to You because You forgive all who come to You with a penitent heart. Forgive all my sins and grant me the grace to forgive and sincerely love those who wrong me. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Always speak the truth

*Psalms 15
Zechariah 8:16
Ephesians 4:15-28*

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25).

"Speaking the truth" is a challenge! A lie is an effortless act. It's a natural response. When we keep on lying, our conscience fails to be sensitive to that particular wrong. Finally, the fine line between the right and the wrong gets blurred. A survey shows that an average of 91% of people are habitually inclined to speaking lies. The truth is twisted in many ways– half truths, white lies, silent lies and so on. The fellowship of God with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was ruined when Satan deceived Eve by lying to her. The Holy Bible is brutally honest in exposing the failures of some of the great men and women of faith when it comes to deception and lying. Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Aaron, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, and David all fell prey to this malady; and even Peter, the disciple.

The Holy Bible says that craftiness, deceitfulness and concealing or misinterpreting the truth are traits which come from the 'Father of lies.' But God represents TRUTH. He abhors lies. He stands for truth, righteousness, honesty and justice. The word 'therefore' in the verse takes us back to the preceding passage.

St. Paul refers to the old way of life when we bowed down to deceitful desires, darkened in our understanding of God. Now that we are created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness, we must shun falsehood and be true to our neighbours, for we are all members of one body. Truth is an accurate representation of facts and is in conformity with God's nature and standards as revealed in His Word. Ephesians 4:15 says we must speak the truth in love. We must be kind and gracious when we speak the truth; being least offensive and most sensitive in our feelings to others. Speaking the truth fosters a deeper and joyful relationship with all those around us.

This was what Jesus the Messiah exemplified when He was forced by every influence around; but He never spoke against His Father's will. He never spoke a word in retaliation, never stood up for His personal rights. It is said that "He did not open His mouth" (Isaiah 53:3,7). We are called to emulate this example and this must characterize our nature. As we remember the Passion of Jesus during this season of Lent, let each of us kneel down before the Messiah in all humility, and mend our deceitful nature. Let us shun lies, deceit and dishonesty and try to become more like our Saviour.

Let us Meditate

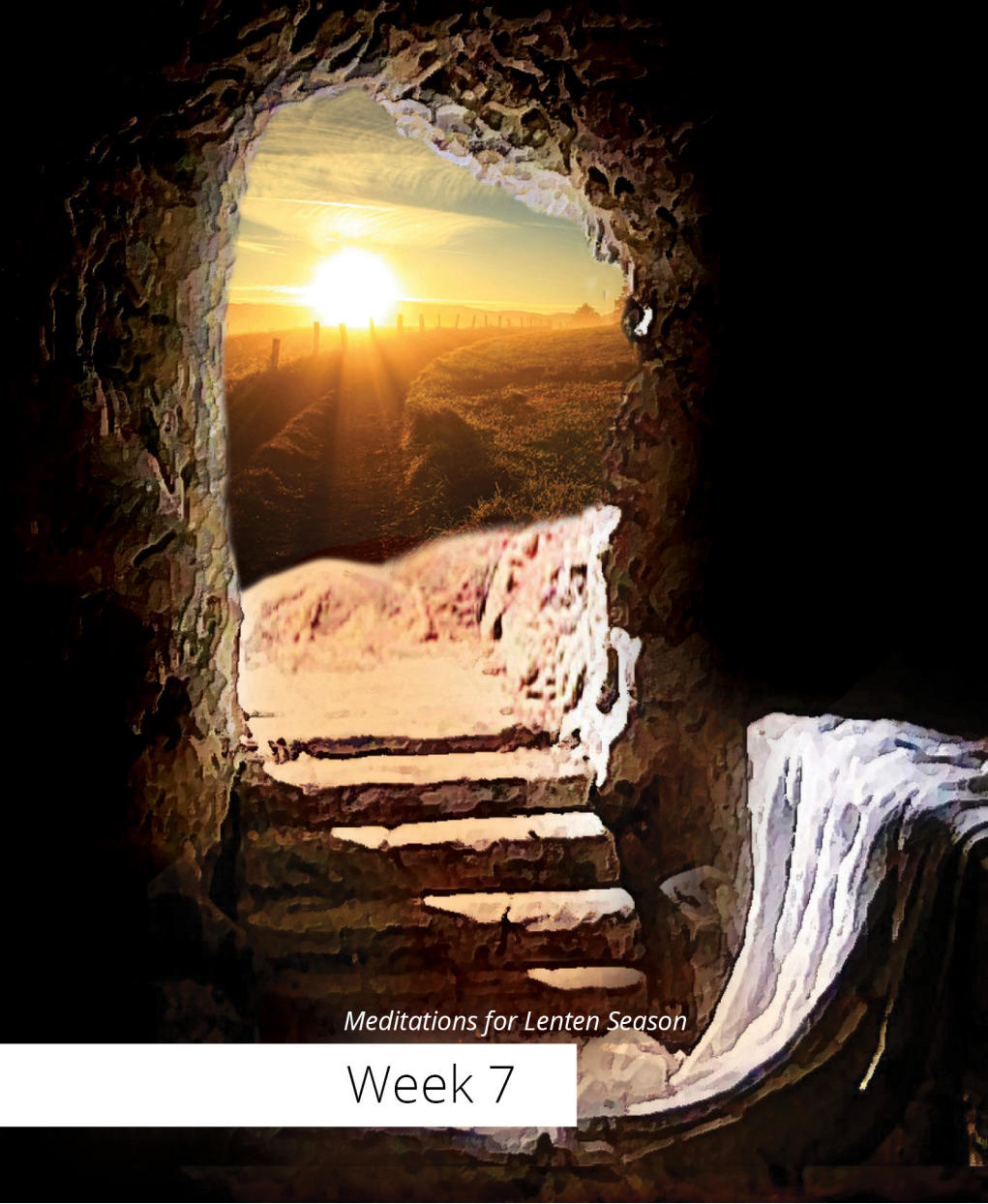
1. Do my words reflect 'the father of lies' or 'the God of Truth'?
2. Do I lie and call it casual?
3. Do I always make cautious efforts to pass on the right information?
4. What resolutions should I make to develop the trait of speaking the truth?

Application

Memorize and believe this verse: "The truth shall set you free" (St. John 8:32) - Free from stress. Free from tension. Free from pressure. Free from worry. You will experience freedom from sin and its blessings by speaking the truth.

Prayer

*Dear God,
I believe I am created and robed in holiness
and righteousness just as You are.
Help me to honour You with truthful lips.
In Jesus' precious name, I pray, Amen.*



Meditations for Lenten Season

Week 7

Think About
100 Years from now...
where will I be?

Palm Sunday: tribute to the king

Psalms 29:1-2

St. Matthew 21:1-17

Revelation 7:12

History is replete with stories of kings and rulers who lorded it over their subjects with ruthlessness, leaving them bruised and broken. But the kingship we see in Jesus is different from the rest of all put together. His unique style of ruling was out of this world. "Christ is not merely a great man who is dead and gone; He is the incarnation of God, the Saviour of the world. We must live in Him -- then we shall have a message for the world and we shall see Him again in glory" said Sadhu Sunder Singh. It's Love, not Force, with which Jesus ruled, still rules and will, for evermore.

Palm Sunday once again reminds us that Jesus is the King to whom we owe unconditional service. Unlike others, this King is of a different kind. His reign is marked by infinite grace and abundant blessing. This King is the head of our lives, our family, our church and everywhere.

Let us sing loud to our king: It is sung by the faithful the world over.

Christ is the Lord of the smallest atom,

Christ is the Lord of outer space,

Christ is the Lord of the constellations,

Christ is the Lord of every place.

King Jesus who gave up His heavenly privileges, glory and honour, came to die on the cross and He deserves all of mankind's love and worship. So, let us express our love and worship by acknowledging the kingship of Christ, with all the resources we have. During His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, people spread their cloaks upon the donkey and also on the road so that Jesus would ride the donkey on them. Clothes denote people's dignity and respect. Here we see a spontaneous display of love and loyalty, honour and pride of people paying homage to the king.

Secondly, we should accept the kingship of Christ even if it means losing our treasures. In this particular passage, Jesus is portrayed as the Reformer. He entered the temple to change the age-old existing practice of doing business there. He destroyed all trade and business the temple and its premises were privy to. A temple is a sacred place, designated by the Lord to have communion and fellowship with His people. God will in no way tolerate the desecration of His holy place.

Thirdly, we should acclaim the kingship of Christ, even if our expectations are not fulfilled. In verses 9 and 15 of St. Matthew, Chapter 21, we read about people cheering "Hosanna to the Son of David."

Zechariah 9:9 says: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

People cheerfully acclaim the coming of the Son of David, the promised and the prophesied Messiah, who would come to deliver the Jewish people from the oppressive clutches of Rome. But soon, people's long-awaited expectations came to naught when they learnt that He was not the kind of messiah they were expecting. He did not ride a steed, but was on a lowly donkey - a king who came in all humility. Jesus riding a young donkey symbolises peace and tranquility - the shalom that God brings to His people.

Let us Meditate

1. Are you using all God-given resources to glorify Him?
2. Will you still thank and praise God if your ambitions and expectations come to naught?
3. Do you feel hurt and humiliated when someone outrightly points out your mistakes?

Application

I will use my money, intellect and entire God-given resources to help others so I can glorify my God. I will not resort to resentment, even when my prayers are not answered the way I want. But I will continue to praise Him, because He knows what's best for me. I will not retaliate, but gracefully accept my mistakes and wrongdoings and ask for forgiveness and seek to be corrected.

Prayer

*Dear Jesus, once again I acknowledge
You as my King. Everything that I have is Yours.
Nothing I possess is my own. Help me to utilize all
my resources to glorify You and You alone. Grant me the
heart to be grateful even at a time of loss. Help me to
humble myself to accept Your admonition
which will bring in positive changes in me.
In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.*

Giving alms

Psalms 112:5-9

Ezekiel 18:16

St. Matthew 6:1-4

“Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God” (Proverbs 14:31). “Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice” (Psalms 112:5).

Sin has left its horrible impact on the world. We thus have the poor and the deprived, the widows, the slum dwellers, the orphans and the street children, in desperate need of our love, care and kindness. But sin has left its stamp of selfishness on human life. We care for ourselves and hardly bother about others. In this context, giving alms plays an important role. Alms is money or goods given to those in need as an act of empathy. When you give alms, you are extending God’s mercy to them.

Let’s put ourselves in the shoes of the less fortunate. Would we want to be abandoned or forgotten by those whom we love? Jesus’ words apply as much to this situation as to any other: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (St. Matthew 7:12).

God never abandons the lost and the lonely. Nor should we. In fact, the Bible says He has a special concern for those who can’t take care of themselves, the very young, the old, the poor, the disabled, the orphans and the widows. One of the ways by which He shows His concern for them is through our acts of

love. The Bible says: "The religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: The care given to orphans and widows in their distress." The godly are those who feed the hungry and clothe the naked. Whoever is kind to the needy honours God. Jesus and His disciples gave alms to the poor (St. John 12:6), and believers are exhorted to "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10). The godly Tabitha was praised as one who always "helped the poor."

Jesus once asked a rich young ruler to sell all he had, give alms to the poor, and follow Him. Jesus' challenge was meant to reveal where the young man's devotion lay: did he love money more than the Lord? It's not just following the Lord which is the crux of the matter; it reveals the very place the poor have in God's heart and plan. The man turned and walked away from Jesus, unwilling to part with his fortune. By doing so, he showed he was not ready to become a disciple.

The season of Lent reminds us that giving money and care to those in need is an important expression of Christian faith. And the call is to give out of a true love for God, without drawing attention to oneself. Jesus taught that giving alms is an act of charity meant for God's eyes alone and not for putting up an act before others. Those giving out of their love for God are not seeking to make an announcement or draw attention to it. When we invest what God has given us to impact the lives of others, we can trust that the results will make a difference both now and for eternity.

Ask these simple questions to yourself. Am I still looking down on those who are in need of my help? Or, have I ever tried to know their difficulties and reach out to them with an empathetic gesture? Giving alms is just not about give out money. It includes giving one's all, including time, attention, talent, food, medication, shelter, a touch and a smile to the less privileged. This is what pleases our God! This characterizes the story of the One we remember this season.

Let us Meditate

1. When was the last time I helped a poor person, an orphan or a widow?
2. What are my responsibilities to those who are down trodden and neglected?
3. What steps and decisions do I take to put into practice God's love for the suffering and the needy?

Application

I will set apart a certain portion of my income for helping those in dire need. I will not neglect and cast away someone who is in need of a smile, a gentle touch or a bit of help. I will see the deprived and the downcast as my brothers and sisters created in God's image.

Prayer

Dear Lord we know that we have been selfish and have ignored the suffering and the needy. Forgive us and have mercy on us. Grant us Your ability to love them and care for them as You would. Help me to love orphans, the abandoned and the destitute and those who are in genuine need. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Set your minds on things above

Colossians 3:1-4

Revelation 21:1-4

Psalms 84

"May the things of this world so lose their power over us that we do not in the slightest wish to be 'worldly'; nay, we even delight in not remaining 'in the world.'"
- Watchman Nee, a missionary author from China.

"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:2). The Mind has never ceased to create awe and wonder. It's been a most intriguing subject of study with people discovering its limitless powers. Medical science puts a patient's recovery on his or her mental makeup. In sports, the best athletes are those who are focused and show determination. In law, a person's mental disposition is said to be a key factor in the seriousness of his offense.

Hence it should not surprise us that St. Paul took a turn away from theological perspective to practical living when he said: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Colossians 3:1-2).

The Bible says we live in a world that's ephemeral. Agony and ecstasy, wealth and poverty, joy and sorrow, sense and nonsense, human life and everything on this earth is dated. A day will soon come when all these will

just vanish. A new Kingdom, the Kingdom of God will come in its place where we will know only love, peace and joy.

St. Paul writes: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). The earth is just our workstation now. Hence we should set our minds on things above, not on the things that are of the earth. We are not to settle down on earth. Our thoughts are to be of heaven as our future home.

Here's a great story to further explain this: There was once a prince who was snatched away from his palace while a baby. He was brought up by a woodcutter who taught him his trade. One day a courtier discovered the young man and told him who he really was. The prince then realized he was not the woodsman he was raised as. He was indeed a prince. So he had to live like one.

So is it with us. Know that "He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Colossians 1:13). We become royalty. And just like the prince, who had to take up residence in the palace and learn to think like a prince to be entitled to his inheritance, we must adopt a lifestyle and mindset worthy of our new identity.

It would look ridiculous if astronauts were to grab the best rock on the moon to build a house there, knowing that they would be on the celestial object for only a few moments.

Aren't we also big fools? Of what use are our long-term plans on earth? Having been raised on this planet and made of clay, we are strangely possessive about dirt.

The world is not an easy place to live in, with a constant struggle with our lust for life's shallow pleasures. To escape the clutches of sin we truly need God's help. Let us recommit our lives to Jesus. Let us ask Him to recast our minds and thoughts. As we observe Lent remembering the Passion of the Lord, learn to have His

mind. Let us get rid of all that distract us from our Lord. Let's overcome the desires of the flesh and be led by the Holy Spirit.

Let us Meditate

1. What am I striving to achieve? Is it eternal or ephemeral?
2. Have I ever thought of a life after death? Am I excited at the Lord's Second Coming?

Application

I will not look to amass wealth. I will not work or live just for money. I will always cherish the thought of being a traveller on earth and wait for my Lord who is coming soon.

Prayer

*Almighty God,
how often are my thoughts and desires
of the world taking me away from the world above! I need
Your help and guidance to keep me focused on eternity.
Help me to keep my mind on heavenly things.
In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Living for eternity now

Psalms 39:1-7

St. John 3:1-16

Revelation 3:5-9

*We have only a little time on earth,
yet what we do here affects eternity.*

“Where will you be a 100 years from now?” is a question often asked by Metropolitan Dr. K. P. Yohannan. An honest, thoughtful person will understand the depth and seriousness of this simple question and the reality of life. It points to the shallowness and temporariness of existence, but wisdom to live the present for one that is to come.

God is eternal! Before the mountains were born, before You gave birth to the Earth and the world, from eternity to eternity, You are God. Your throne has been established from the beginning; You are from eternity!” (Psalms 90:2, 93:2).

Because God is eternal, He is not bound by time, nor is He contained by it. “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:3). God was before time, is now, and will be after time has gone. Rather than being bound by the chronology we know, God completely surrounds and contains time.

God created time for humanity. He created us and placed us in time so that we would have the opportunity to enter into a relationship with Him, know Him and learn to walk with Him and be saved.

(1 Peter 2:3-9). God's sense of timelessness is just the opposite of the usual human viewpoint. Without the limit of time we tend to think - what or where is the hurry? God, however, created time and knows how each of us has to respond to Him to seek His eternal remedies for our needs. The Eternal God understands therefore, the need for urgency during our comparatively short time on earth.

Although we live in time now, God created us for eternity. The Holy Scripture says: "God has put eternity in their hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). We therefore, must learn to live for eternity, and not for time. We are to live our lives in time with eternity as the background. Because God is eternal, we cannot serve Him thinking in terms of time alone. And, our time here on earth is short. St. Paul writes: "Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk; not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of your time" (Ephesians 5:15-16). And St. Peter says: "Now the end of all things is near; therefore, be serious and disciplined for prayer. Above all, maintain an intense love for each other, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:7,8).

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (St. Luke 10:25). A real question by this rich and wealthy person who had everything in life, but missed something and longed to quench the thirst of his inner soul. He realized that only God is Eternal, the author of Eternal life.

The Holy Scripture expresses a sense of urgency that should outline our outlook in life. We have only a little time on earth, yet what we do here affects eternity. We need to live with eternal perspective in everything we do. We need to walk in wisdom and pray to the One who is Eternal.

What do you consider to be essentials in life? A house? Clothes? Education? Health? or material benefits? The list is unending. But will these satisfy and answer the questions of eternity and that of the inner soul?

An eternal perspective affects our priorities and our actions. It means that when Jesus makes a statement about who He is, such as, “I am the resurrection and the life” (St. John 11:25), we must decide to believe and keep believing that truth allowing the Word to see that truth expressed in our lives. Jesus forgave even when the offender was absolutely wrong. He lived for eternity by simply living our forgiveness. If we find ourselves in tough situations and act like Jesus instead of the way others do, we are a witness to the ways of God. Our behaviour then reflects eternal values by which God the Eternal One is characterized.

The Eternal God of course, is aware of all our needs and is faithful in providing all (see St. Matthew 6:25-34). Jesus’ teaching of the Kingdom of God includes all these and much more. But He tells us not to be buried under things of this world—the here and the now; but to have eternal perspectives on all these by seeing and trusting God who is eternal and choosing to live by His values. This is like “selling everything that we have, to purchase a precious pearl,” as told by Jesus Himself.

An eternal perspective of “now” points to what is lasting and to what is above earthly distractions. Diligence in our spiritual walk, discipline in prayer, and loving attentiveness to others are investments in our relationship with God and others—things that will last through eternity. May we draw closer to this life as we go through this season of mediating upon Jesus who truly showed us the Way, as He lived His earthly life in time and space as a human.

“Christians sometimes make themselves into elephants afraid of mice. You have the Creator of the universe on your side; not to mention, you’ve been given eternal life. ‘Whom or what shall you fear?’ To be afraid of anything other than God himself is like an insult to God” Criss Jami a poet and essayist.

Let us Meditate

1. Where will I be a 100 years from now?
2. What is it I am looking at and aiming to reach?
3. Will I think of life and eternity as Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God?
4. Let us make a few decisions to practice how to live for now and eternity.

Application

I will draw closer to God by living my life here on this earth demonstrating eternity in my actions.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus, may we have the stamp
of eternity in our eyes so that may we think,
decide and act as people who have Your life in us.
We accept our failure in not understanding You.
We surrender our lives to You.
In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.*

Walking in the path of humility

St. John 13:14
Philippians 2:2-5
Ephesians 4:2
Colossians 3:4
St. Matthew 20:28
St. Mark 10:45

*"True humility is not thinking less of yourself;
it is thinking less of yourself." - C. S. Lewis.*

"So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you," said Jesus.

When Pope Francis washed and kissed the feet of twelve prisoners in Rebibbia Prison in Rome, on the eve of Holy Thursday, history was made. His demonstrative love and servant-hood was so heart-touching that all the twelve inmates started weeping as the Pope knelt down to kiss their feet. Never did they imagine such an unforgettable and loving experience would come their way. Nor did they expect such unconditional love from a great spiritual leader.

We are a very arrogant and egotistical generation. All around we see people promoting themselves, praising themselves and glorifying themselves. It's the order of the day. A person who is humble is considered as weak. But, little does the world know that in humility lies true character. "God opposes the proud, but shows favour to the humble" (James 4:6).

Today is the day of the “Maundy.” Maundy comes from the Latin word ‘*man datum*,’ which means commandment - His Supreme commandment. Maundy Thursday, as we celebrate today, underlines the teachings of Jesus before the Last Supper He had with His disciples (St. John 13). On that memorable night, He first washed the feet of His disciples, then wiped them with a towel and asked the disciples to do as He did and also commanded them to love one another.

Let’s pause for a moment and visualize the Creator of the World, the Almighty, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, washing the dirt off the feet of fragile human beings just to teach them what service and love meant. As we meditate on this act we slowly begin to realize the great lesson the Master wanted us to learn.

Be a servant to all, love everyone. That would be the apt way to commemorate this blessed occasion, just as our Lord commanded. Love and service are but two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. That is why the Gospel of St. John chapter 13 records two classic examples of Christianity. The chapter begins with service and ends with love.

As we are closing in on the season of Lent, let this become the beginning of a new life - a life that believes in serving and loving. Let us pledge to serve the needy and the powerless. Let’s be servants of God, born to serve.

Let us Meditate

1. Am I comfortable in relating to people around me like my neighbours, colleagues, members of the church or classmates?
2. Have I forgiven those who betrayed, hurt or ill-treated me or do I still hold a grudge against them?

3. What will I do when God gives me another opportunity to become a true Christian?

Application

Today, I will seek forgiveness through whatever medium I can - phone, email or letters and restore a broken relationship. From today, I shall be a true servant. I shall serve my neighbor, colleague, wife, children, members of the church and all who are close to me.

Prayer

*Loving God, fill my heart with
Your love, make me feel what You feel
and see what You see so I may become like
Jesus in all spheres of my life.
In Jesus' loving name, I pray. Amen.*

It is finished

St. John 19:28-30

Isaiah 53:1-12

Psalms 22

Hebrews 10:16-25

"It's finished", "It's over" are everyday words. We hear them all too often. From the time we were children, we have heard and used the words over and over again.

- While in school, when we complete our work, we yell out: "Finished, Ma'am."
- At home, we hear it from our children, when we ask them to clean their room. Five minutes later we hear them scream: "Finished...work is over. We are done for the day."
- In offices, we hear these familiar words: "Sir, the assignment has been done. It's finished."

What could people have said on that black Friday? Could they have said: "It's finished. It's all over."

For the soldiers, who pinned Him on to the wooden cross, their task was over. They had FINISHED Him.

For the crowd, the Jews, the horrible spectacle was over. Everything was finished!

For the High Priests and others, their tricky business had succeeded. To the disciples who had given up everything to follow Jesus, His death was the death of their faith, death of their hopes. They were done with. Everything was over!

However, no one could say it the way Jesus said it or meant it!

Of the last words of Christ, none is more poignant or heart wrenching than "It is Finished!"

There's something about finishing a large and seemingly overwhelming task that makes us lean back in some gratitude and relief and sigh: "There — it's done."

It's easy to have that same kind of thought as we read the words of Christ on the cross in St. John 19:30 — "It is finished." You and I might be tempted to hear resignation and relief in those words, but they are far from that. The word "finished" in its original sense translates to 'tetelestai', a cry of triumph, satisfaction and victory...Finished! Accomplished! Done!

A debt that has been paid in full.

Finished - when the last moment of the last hour of the last day of Jesus had come, He had completed God's mission and message to humankind. The greatest examples of determination, perseverance and obedience, were laid bare before us.

Jesus was in complete control, despite the agonising pain He was going through. It was real pain, real thirst, real death. He never said, "I am finished", but "it is finished"! On the Cross, God's will was being done perfectly on earth as it was in heaven! The Cross was not a place of failure but one of amazing fulfilment.

This phrase "it is finished" is also an accounting term that means "paid in full." It is like a stamp a bank places on the withdrawal slip of a loan receipt after it has been paid off. The obligation and debt were completely fulfilled.

What it means now?

We cannot add to something that was finished on the cross. We live in the grace, mercy, forgiveness and

freedom given to us in Christ everyday of our lives. The death of Jesus was once for all, a historical event, but the love of God which expressed itself supremely in this event is the love in which we now live, move, give and forgive!

“For I am persuaded, that neither Death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, Nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth nor any Other creature, shall be able to Separate us from the Love of God, Which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

The cross is a sign, pointing its way to the reality of God becoming one with us in Jesus. To live as Christ’s followers is like letting Christ live in us through today, tomorrow and every day.

Because of what Jesus finished on the cross, we have hope in this life and for the next. We know that nothing can separate us from God’s love. There will come a day when what God has begun in us will also be finished, by His grace. Until that day, we will live in the confidence of Jesus’ cry of victory: “It is finished!”

On Sundays, when we take part in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we are reminded of our Lord Jesus “who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross.” Also, it reminds us that we are called to be like Him and we too have a work to do for God, a task to accomplish, given to us by the Father, that only we can finish.

Let Us Meditate

1. Do you live in the thought that Jesus would finish the work of salvation?
2. Do you have the faith that God will finish that which He has begun in you?

Application

Read St. John 19:1-37 slowly and prayerfully, engaging your imagination as each scene unfolds. What do you see, hear, feel, smell, in each scene? What does all this mean to you? Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the story of Christ's death for you.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus, it was our sins that sent
You to the cross. On that piece of wood
You finished the work of our redemption.
There we looked upon You, whom we pierced.
There and then was born our redemption.
It was a task You finished.
Thank You for Your abiding love.
In Christ's name, Amen.*

Holy Saturday – it is not over yet

| *St. Matthew 27:55-66*

| *St. John 19:38-42*

| *Psalms 16*

*In the Silence of Saturday there is
Hope in the Darkness.*

Have you ever thought of what the first Holy Saturday was like? What could have been the thoughts of His disciples - the questions that troubled their hearts?

Without a trace of doubt the events of that solemn Saturday those many, many years ago were all shrouded in mystery, filled with anguish. To Jesus' followers, it was akin to being stuck in the middle - neither here nor there. The unbearable pain of the crucifixion was fresh in their minds. The future looked gloomy. Not a word was spoken, nothing was discussed. But the air was filled with the spirit of awe, reverence and a sense of the intangible. Many were still in shock, grief and disbelief. They rested, the tears on their faces dry, the darkness and the void conquering their hearts. St. Peter cringed in shame and considered himself dead in spirit. The silence of hopelessness was over all who followed Him. This could have been the one thing they said: "It's all over now."

No one ever expected a resurrection, though many of them remembered Jesus telling them so. In fact, the disciples were puzzled, shocked and stunned to see

an empty tomb. St. John writes that they even then could not visualize that Jesus would rise from the dead (St. John 20:9).

For as yet they knew not
The scripture, that He must
Rise again from the dead.

The women who followed Him just thought if Saturday was over, they could set up a vigil and pay homage to His body. The disciples were left dumb when they beheld an empty tomb, for the memories of that excruciatingly painful crucifixion refused to fade away. Israel was silent that day, as Jesus of Nazareth was no more a familiar sight, teaching and building up faith. This was the one and only sentiment which echoed all over: It's all over now."

Many a time, we get stuck in situations like this; and we tell ourselves: It's all over now. But on this Saturday let us remind ourselves that the Lord is at work today. He is sharing the Gospel even with the dead today. He has gifted a place in paradise to a wretched thief today. There's an Easter tomorrow - a resurrection - a new life in Christ!

The story of creation is a classic example of God working in a dark void. The very same reality was present in the grave...darkness. Beyond the darkness lay despair, depression and a bottomless void of grief and emptiness.

We go through all sorts of fears in some point of our lives. But let not our heart be troubled...neither let it be afraid. We must be patient. We must wait for the wind of the Spirit, the "wind from God [that sweeps] over the face of the waters" in Genesis 1, to fan the dim embers of our faith. "Then God said: 'Let there be light,' and there was light...God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Genesis 1:3,5).

Let this day be a day of hope, while we wait for Him, trusting Him, relying on Him. Know that there is Easter tomorrow, that there will be light. Let it be known that for God nothing is ever over. It is the Holy Saturday and it is not over yet!

Let us Meditate

1. Do I really consider God as one who is always in control?
2. Which are the areas where I lack trust and feel it is over and nothing good will ever happen?
3. When did I last overcome fear and discouragement?

Application

I will not be preoccupied by the difficulties of life. Nor will I be taken in by discouragement around me. Instead, I will focus on God. I will remember all His promises as told in the Bible and I will keep remembering them in times of trouble. I will remember that we have Easter after Good Friday and Holy Saturday.

Prayer

*Dear God, help me to trust in
You in difficult times.
Help me that I will no more be in doubt.
I will not live in gloom.
I will rejoice in You. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

Jesus is risen and alive

| St. Luke 24:1-7

| St. John 20:1-8

| Colossians 3:1-4

"Never let anything so fill you with sorrow as to make you forget the joy of Christ risen." - Mother Teresa.

Yes, the Tomb is open, death is beaten and JESUS is RISEN and ALIVE! This is the message of Easter-the message of hope and joy!

The first day of the week was still young...still dark. Dawn was a few momentous moments away. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James and Salome went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They were walking and talking. Who would roll away so heavy a stone from the tomb, they wondered. They went, they saw and their world stood still. Disbelief gave way to awe and amazement. The seal was opened, the stone removed and the tomb empty! Now where was the Messiah? A confused Mary started weeping and poured out her grief to the two angels who were sitting there. Her weeping and mourning didn't last long as she suddenly heard the voice of her Lord calling out 'Mary.' She turned and recognized her Master. "Rabboni!" she cried. The Lord could not have given anybody a greater reward for such unflinching loyalty. For, she became the first human to see a resurrected Jesus. Her despair turned to tears of joy. She went about announcing to the disciples that Jesus had risen and was alive.

Who wouldn't want to sing Christian songwriter John W. Peterson's beautiful hymn at this juncture?

*Heaven came down and glory filled my soul,
When at the cross the Saviour made me whole;
My sins were washed away
And my night was turned to day
Heaven came down and glory filled my soul!*

We all go through disappointments, pain and despair in our journey called life, but these moments need not stop us from experiencing the new life we have in Christ. The fact that the tomb was empty shows us how God defeated the power of darkness and death. God cannot be limited to time and space. He rose from the grave and proved to the whole world that He was alive and would always be. This is our hope and the foundation of our faith in Him (1 Corinthians 15:12-18).

The fact that we follow the living Lord Jesus Christ should be reason enough for our hearts to be filled with hope and we must look forward to experiencing the power of His resurrection in our daily life. St. Paul's greatest desire was that "...I may know the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). We should earnestly strive to realize the power of the Lord and how it works in our lives. This is what Resurrection is all about. This power, this glory, will transform our lives forever and draw us closer to Him. St. Paul felt he had lost everything. Little did he realize that his loss would transform into such power which only Christ's resurrection could give him.

Resurrection is a life-giving power. It can help us overcome sin and its stranglehold over our lives. Thus, we live in victory each day, for Christ.

Through Christ's resurrection, we are blessed with new life. St. Paul in his letter to Colossians instructs us to set our minds not on matters of the earth, but on the things above. If we cling on to things of the world, the Bible says, "we are to be pitied of all men" (1 Corinthians 15:19). As we are raised with Christ, we

shall not set our eyes on what's temporary and fleeting. Our hope should lie far beyond all that our minds can comprehend. For us to be revealed with Christ in glory, we need to be careful how we live our lives while on earth.

The Easter message also inspires our hearts and takes us on a mission, that is, to proclaim to the entire world that JESUS IS RISEN just as Mary Magdalene did. It's a great responsibility as Christians to share the joy and hope of Christ's resurrection with others who have not heard of the gospel. Thus, we prepare the way for many to experience the glorious power the resurrection gives us.

Let us Meditate

1. What are my benefits because of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave?
2. Do I still need to be afraid of death?
3. What are those things I should do to proclaim the power of the Risen Lord?

Application

I will turn to the resurrection as the answer to all my queries, doubts and questions. I will always remember that Jesus conquered the greatest enemy... the death. He is all that I need.

Prayer

Oh God, how grateful I am to You for being such a wonderful Teacher. I praise You for Your mighty works. Grant me the grace to put my trust in Your power. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

