

Sat: 13<sup>th</sup> Feb

Mk 8, 1-10

A great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat. So Jesus called his disciples to him and said to them, 'I feel sorry for all these people; they have been with me for three days now and have nothing to eat. If I send them off home hungry they will collapse on the way; some have come from a great distance.' His disciples replied, 'Where could anyone get bread to feed these people in a deserted place like this?' He asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' 'Seven' they said. The he instructed the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and handed them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them among the crowd. They had a few small fish as well, and over these he said a blessing and ordered them to be distributed also. They ate as much as they wanted, and they collected seven basketfuls of scraps left over. Now there had been about four thousand people. He sent them away and immediately, getting into the boat with his disciples, went to the region of Dalmanutha.

Jesus felt sorry for the people because he saw that they were hungry. Today, there continues to be hungry people



even though the world boasts of its modern science and technology. In February 2009, a survey done by Christian group, Bread for the World, showed that 1.02 billion people across the world are hungry and that almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes everyday- one child every five seconds. Do

we feel sorry for the situation of the world? What can we do? Donating money... creating awareness...supporting organisations...etc. All these are things that we can do one way or another. However, one important thing that we can consciously do is not to waste the food, resources, money that we have. In today's passage, the disciples collected the scraps leftover...why did the evangelist bother to mention this? Every scrap of food is a blessing from God that should never be wasted. Let us not waste the gifts that we enjoy in our lives, but value all the blessings that God has given to us and also share what we have with others, especially those who have little or none. 'If anyone has two tunics, he must share with the man who has none.' (Lk 3, 10)

Sun: 14<sup>th</sup> Feb

Lk 6, 17, 20-26

...Then fixing his eyes on his disciples he said:

Happy are you who are poor; yours is the kingdom of God. Happy you who are hungry now; you shall be satisfied. Happy you who weep now; you shall laugh. Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets. But alas for you who are rich; you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep. Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.'

Jesus divides humanity into two parties. On one hand, there are those who are the poor, the hungry, those who weep and those who suffer religious persecutions. On the other hand, there are those who are rich, those who are well-fed, those who laugh and those who receive praise. The contrast is stark. Which party do we belong to?

When Jesus speaks of the two parties of the poor and the rich, he is not pointing out to people who hold good economical standings and social backgrounds. Jesus speaks, instead, of FAITHFULNESS AND UNFAITHFULNESS to God. The poor are those who choose to enter into spiritual relationship with God and thus they choose to give up all excessive materialism and hedonistic tendencies. For those who are poor, they hold onto God as their security and treasure HERE AND NOW.

Jesus welcomes us to enter into an intimate relationship with him, with the Father... to be part of God's household of faith. *Jesus, you are the first to be faithful to me. Give me enough faith to enter everyday into an intimate relationship with you. I want to rejoice in being poor for you, and to have you as my eternal treasure.*

Lunar New Year

Mon: 15<sup>th</sup> Feb

James 1, 1-11

...My brothers, you will always have your trails but, when they come, try to treat them as a happy privilege; you understand that your faith is only put to test to make you patient, but patience too is to have its practical results so that you will become fully-developed, complete, and with nothing missing. If there is any one of you who needs wisdom, he must ask God, who gives to all freely and ungrudgingly; it will be given to him. But he must ask with faith, and no trace of doubt, because a person who has doubts is like the waves thrown up in the sea when the wind drives. That sort of person, in two minds, wavering between going different ways, must not expect that the Lord will give him anything. It is right for the poor brother to be proud

of his high rank, and the rich one to be thankful that he has been humbled, because riches last no longer than flowers in the grass; the scorching sun comes up, and the grass withers, the flowers falls; what looked so beautiful now disappears. It is the same with the rich man: his business goes on; he himself perishes.

A Chinese proverb goes like this: The diamond cannot be polished without friction, nor the man perfected without trails.

Today, St James wants to remind us the same thing- we will always have trails in life, for example, separations from the ones we love, illnesses, financial burdens, depressions, etc. Yet, he boldly calls us to see all these as HAPPY PRIVILEGE. This is because trails will only make us to be patient with ourselves, with others. Trails will also lead us to be fully-developed, complete and with nothing missing. We need to realise that the only thing that will last forever is, not our difficulties or our limitations or our riches or social positions, but our unwavering faith in God.

Let us savour the words of St James today. Allow him to speak to our lives...to challenge...to comfort us. Let us be open to the Word of God!

Tue: 16<sup>th</sup> Feb

James 1, 12-18

Happy the man who stands firm when trails come. He has proved himself, and will win the prize of life, the crown that the Lord has promised to those who love him. Never, when you have been tempted, say, 'God sent the temptation'; God cannot be tempted to do anything wrong, and he does not tempt anybody. Everyone who is tempted is attracted and seduced by his own desire. Then the desire conceives and gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it too has a child, and the child is death. Make no mistake about this, my dear brothers; it is all that is good, everything that is perfect, which is given us from above; it comes down from the Father of all light; with him there is no such thing as alteration, no shadow of a change. By his own choice he made us his children by the message of truth so that we should be a sort of first-fruits of all that he had created.

God is a God of Life. God is the Father of all light. He creates us for eternal life, not eternal death. He is not the source of sin, but all what is good and holy. We are his children and we are called to live in the light, not darkness. Each day, God guides us with his Word so that we can walk the path of truth, of love, of life. He gives us strength as he nourishes us with his Word so that we can stand firm in face of temptations. God who is our Father of all light will never

abandon us to face temptations and difficulties alone. He will always be with us so that we can become Children of Light. Today, be open to God as he tells us again, 'Do not be afraid...I am with you. I will take care of you. Come to me. I have called you to be my child... to live in my truth, my love.'

### LENT

Ash Wednesday

Wed: 17<sup>th</sup> Feb

Mt 6, 1-6; 16-18

**Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward...'**

Today, we begin the season of Lent. Lent is a journey in which we walk towards a closer union with God. It is not simply a time to fast, to give alms, to pray more....but all these should lead one to union with God.

That is why Jesus warns us today not to parade, to show off, to display ourselves when we fast or give alms or pray. This is because our motive is not to impress others. This Lent, Jesus invites us to look at our hearts and to see our intention for doing what we do... Basically, all what we do and say should lead us to God. Our good deeds, our fervent prayers, our fast from chocolates to Korean dramas...should all be done in secret.... Focussing solely on God. It is only when we focus on God, we will then bear spiritual fruits of peace, love, self-control, patience, etc. God wants us to bear spiritual fruits and not religious nuts.

Lent is a time of interior journey towards God, who loves us and calls us for deeper spiritual union with him.

*Lord, how can I prepare myself to be more in love with you?*

Thu: 18<sup>th</sup> Feb

Lk 9, 22-25

**Jesus said to his disciples: 'The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, to be rejected by the elders and**

**chief priests and scribes and to be put to death, and to be raised up on the third day.' Then to all he said, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross everyday and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, that man will save it. What gain, then, is it for a man to have won the whole world and to have lost or ruined his very self?'**

D.H Lawrence once wrote:

*Are you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled, made nothing? Are you willing to be made nothing, dipped into oblivion? If not, you will never really change. The phoenix renews her youth only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down to hot and flocculent ash. Then the small stirring of a new small bub in the nest with strands of down like floating ash shows that she is renewing her youth like an eagle, Immortal bird.*

Jesus, because of love, was destined to suffer, be rejected and faced death. As his followers, we are too call to embrace this path to the cross...of losing ourselves so as to gain eternal life. This path of dying to self is not at all pleasant and pleasurable. It requires us to go against our desires, to change, to give up certain worldly ambitions, pride, selfishness, etc...It calls us to welcome to become nothing, in the eyes of the world, but great in the eyes of God.

Are we willing then be made nothing, dipped into oblivion? Like the phoenix, do have the courage to burn down our ego completely so that the life of God springs forth and renews us from within?

*Jesus, I want to take up the cross and follow you. I know that this requires me to die to myself... to lose my life so that I can gain your fullness of life. Jesus, help me to be willing to be made to be nothing for your sake.*



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## Prayer for Living

Fri: 12<sup>th</sup> Feb

Mk 7, 31-37

**Returning from the district of Tyre, Jesus went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, right through the Decapolis region. And they brought him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they asked him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, put his fingers into the man's ears and touched his tongue with spittle. Then looking up to heaven he sighed; and he said to him, 'Ephphatha,' that is 'Be opened.' And his ears were opened, and the ligament of his tongue was loosened and he spoke clearly. And Jesus ordered them to tell no one about it, but the more he insisted, the more widely they published it. Their admiration was unbounded. 'He has done all things well,' they said 'he makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak.'**

Aesop has a fable of three bulls that fed in a field together in the greatest peace and safety. A lion had long watched them in the hope of making prey of them, but found little chance so long as they kept together. He therefore secretly to spread evil and slanderous reports of one against the other till he fermented jealousy and distrust among them. Soon they began to avoid each other and each took to feeding alone. This gave the lion the opportunity it had been wanting. He fell on them singly and made an easy prey of them all.

Today, Jesus tells us to be opened to his Word that gives life, brings unity and peace. Yet, many times, we tend to be opened to slanderous reports and rumours that defamed others. Perhaps, we ourselves are like the lion of Aesop's tale who went around speaking words that shattered the unity of the three bulls.

Jesus wants to open our ears to listen to his Word that gives life and to loosen our tongue so that we can speak of words of blessings and peace. 'Ephphatha!'- this is what Jesus invites us to. Do we allow Jesus to touch the impediments that block us to be open?

*Jesus, I want to be open to your Word so that I can speak clearly your message that brings peace and love.*