

Sat: 6th Feb

Mk 6:30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that there was no time for them even to eat. So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many recognised them; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

This is the face of our God – one who never turns away our needs because he loves us. Jesus does not get frustrated that his plan for resting for a while was disrupted by the crowds that followed them. Instead of viewing them as obstacles in his way, he saw them as people in great need of direction and consolation.

In our daily lives, we are often faced with people who stand between us and our plans and schedules – our parents, colleagues, children, spouses, siblings, etc. How do we respond to them? Can we see their needs and set aside our plans to attend to them?

It is easy to get caught up in achieving so many important things in our lives. Yet today, let us reflect again the mission Jesus has entrusted to us – to love others the same way he loves us.

My Lord, help me put things in perspective, to realise what is truly important in my life and what I can put off for a bit. I want love like you do!

Sun: 7th Feb

Lk 5: 1-11

Now it happened that he was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats at the water's edge. The fishermen had got out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats – it was Simon's – and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.' Simon replied, 'Master, we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled both boats to sinking point.

When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were completely awestruck at the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is people you will be catching.' Then, bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him.

As Jesus taught the crowds from Peter's boat, Peter listened, and was filled with wonder at the new depth Jesus gave to the same scriptures he had heard over and over. Here was a teacher who really dialogued with God, who knew deeply the heart of the Father. Jesus' message resounded in Peter's heart and he wanted to know Jesus more.

Hence when Jesus told him to cast his nets out after a long night, Peter obeyed. He did not scoff that he was the professional in this area, but followed Jesus' instructions. Peter recognised that Jesus' authority did not come from expert knowledge, but from his relationship with God.

Jesus comes to us, to sit along in our workplace, our homes, in our relationships, our difficulties, our doubts and struggles. He tells us to trust him, to let him guide us when we are out of ideas, out of strength, out of joy. Like Peter, let us recognise the authority of Jesus, and allow him to guide us as we strive to live his Christian way today.

Lord, you know I am weak and sinful. But you still choose to come and share in my life. Thank you for not giving up on me.

Mon: 8th Feb

Mk 6:53-56

Having made the crossing, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored there. When they disembarked people at once recognised him, and started hurrying all through the countryside and brought the sick on stretchers to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, to village or town or farm, they laid down the sick in the open spaces, begging him to let them touch even the fringe of his cloak. And all those who touched him were saved.

This is the effect that Jesus had on people – people talked about him and ran to him wherever he was. The people were eager to meet this famous teacher, the one who speaks to the inner yearnings of everyone – to be loved, to be free, to be understood and accepted... They wanted to meet Jesus personally, to hear his teachings and to bring their loved ones who were ill to be made well by him. Wow!

In our lives today, Jesus also walks by us. He is available to hear us out, to teach us, to heal us, to comfort us any time

we want. Yet somehow, it's so hard to make time and space to truly encounter Jesus. Reflecting on the response of the people to Jesus, let us realise anew that in Jesus, we find our dearest friend, our wisest teacher and the God who loves us. With him, we are complete.

With this realisation, let us firmly put aside all our other preoccupations and dialogue with our Lord in this time of prayer.

Dear Jesus, you come to tell me life is so much more than running the rat race. Help me to understand your way more. I ask also your help today for the people I love who also need to see the truth.

Tues 9th Feb

Mk 7: 1-13

The Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round him, and they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with unclean hands, that is, without washing them. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, keep the tradition of the elders and never eat without washing their arms as far as the elbow; and on returning from the market place they never eat without first sprinkling themselves... So the Pharisees and scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not respect the tradition of the elders but eat their food with unclean hands?' He answered, 'How rightly Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites in the passage of scripture: This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me. Their reverence of me is worthless; the lessons they teach are nothing but human commandments. You put aside the commandment of God to observe human traditions.'

Hypocrites! What a strong word Jesus uses on the Pharisees... He does so in order to awaken them to the emptiness of their ways. In putting so much emphasis on the external, on appearances, they become much more interested in winning the approval of men than of God.

So easily, our following of Jesus can become a following of "human commandments". We get so caught up trying to do what our parents, our friends, our bosses, our priests, etc, tell us is right and good that we forget to make time to listen to God. What is our way of being friends of Jesus? Is it in complying with church rules, or are we interested in getting to know the person of Jesus?

Like the Pharisees and scribes, we need to wake up, to see that our God wants to be in relationship with us. He wants our hearts to be close to his! Let us not be so busy with doing things today, but to sit quietly and listen to Jesus as he speaks with us.

Wed: 10th Feb

Mk 7: 14-23

He called the people to him again and said, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean...' When he had gone into the house, away from the crowd, his disciples questioned him about the parable. He said to them, 'Even you – don't you understand? Can't you see that nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean, because it goes not into the heart but into the stomach and passes into the sewer? And he went on, 'It is what comes out of someone that makes that person unclean. For it is from within, from the heart, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within and make a person unclean.'

Often, we get carried away trying to keep up appearances – our image, our involvement in church, our generosity to the disadvantaged, our devotion to our families... This could possibly win us the approval of men, but Jesus is very clear in his sermon.

He does not care about superficial observances of rules, but he cares about what we harbour in our hearts. Today, let us allow Jesus to show us the little buds of "evil intentions" that are sprouting in our hearts today – thoughts of greed, of vanity, of desolation, of pride... If we allow them to take root in our hearts, these thoughts will enslave us and take control of our lives. Or we can call on Jesus for the strength, the light and the determination to throw them out of our hearts and live in freedom – to love, to know the joy and peace of God.

Jesus give me light to see the "evil intentions" I have allowed to grow in my heart, and give me the courage and strength to reject them completely.

Thurs: 11th Feb

Mk 7: 24-30

World Day of Prayer for the Sick

He left that place and set out for the territory of Tyre. There he went into a house and did not want anyone to know he was there; but he could not pass unrecognised. At once a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him and came and fell at his feet. Now this woman was a gentile, by birth a Syro-Phoenician, and she begged him to drive the devil out of her daughter. And he said to her, 'The children should be fed first, because it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to little dogs.' But she spoke up, 'Ah yes, sir,' she replied, 'but little dogs under the table eat the scraps from the children.'

And he said to her, 'For saying this you may go home happy; the devil has gone out of your daughter.' So she went off home and found the child lying on the bed and the devil gone.

This mother's love for her child led her to beg Jesus, a Jewish teacher who could have rejected her plea for help. She presented her need to Jesus with humility and faith, and he granted her request.

When we go to present our needs to Jesus, we can also imitate the attitude of the woman. We approach Jesus with the faith that he has the power to fulfil our needs, yet also with the humility to accept that Jesus' response may not be what we want. We can adopt this attitude because we know that Jesus loves us and gives us what is best for us, even if that is not what we have asked for.

So when things do not seem to be going our way, we can persist, like the woman in the passage, and keep on praying, asking Jesus for his help. And in God's time, he will help us – to understand, to overcome, to trust, to love, to be happy.

Lord, I pray for the people in my life who are in need of your healing. I accept your help, in whatever form you give to us.



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Fri: 5th Feb

Mk 6:14-29

King Herod had heard about him, since by now his name was well known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Others said, 'He is Elijah,' others again, 'He is a prophet, like the prophets we used to have.' But when Herod heard this he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead.' Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.' As for Herodias, she was furious with him and wanted to kill him, but she was not able to do so, because Herod was in awe of John, knowing him to be a good and upright man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him...

Contrast the kingly powers of Herod and Jesus. Herod lived in luxury and commanded the allegiance of many men. Indeed, he lived a blessed and enviable life, by the world's standards. But Herod was a slave of his desires and entrapped by his relationship with his brother's wife. He recognised the truth and righteousness in John's words and yearned to be freed from his slavery. Yet he allowed John to be put to death, at the demand of his lover. Because of this, he lived in fear and guilt, even though he was a king.

Jesus, on the other hand, did not have all the physical signs that we associate with a king – wealth, troops, palaces, etc. But his words carried authority, and his obedience to God gives him the power to save all men. In the simplicity of his life, Jesus finds freedom. Through his intimate relationship with the Father, Jesus receives the joy, strength, wisdom and peace he needs to carry out his mission.

Which king do we choose to worship and follow?

Jesus, I want to live in freedom today. Teach me how, Lord.