

Sat: 30th Jan

Mk 4:35-41

On the evening of that same day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go across to the other side of the lake." So they left the crowd; the disciples got into the boat in which Jesus was already sitting, and they took him with them. Other boats were there too. Suddenly a strong wind blew up and the waves began to spill over into the boat, so that it was about to fill with water. Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with his head on a pillow. The disciples woke him up and said, "Teacher, don't you care that we are about to die?"

Jesus stood up and commanded the wind, "Be quiet!" and he said to the waves, "Be still!" The wind died down and there was a great calm. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you frightened? Do you still have no faith?" But they were terribly afraid and began to say to one another, "Who is this man? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

This narrative of the calming of the sea tells us who Jesus is. He is the one who brings order out of the chaos of our lives; he alone can calm the personal storms in our lives, (the loss of a loved one, severe illness, financial ruin, etc). Indirectly, it repeats to any Christian the question of Jesus: "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" These questions do not mean that nothing bad can happen to Christians, rather, they bring us to the realisation that no storm should be feared. The disciples, despite witnessing the healings and miracles that Jesus performed still did not grow in their faith. Mark points out that our faith should not depend on healings and miracles but rather on the spoken word of Jesus- the One who says, "Be not afraid. I am with you and I will guide you through the valley of darkness."

Who is Jesus to me? A miracle worker or a loving friend who never leaves my side? Am I quiet enough and still enough to hear His life-giving words daily.

Sun: 31st Jan

1 Cor 13:4-13

Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal. There are inspired messages but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they cease; ...but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear....What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete- as complete as God's knowledge of me. Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

There are many kinds of love. We speak of parental love, brotherly love, fraternal love, erotic love etc.



But what is Christian love? The particular form of love that Jesus lived, and came to teach us is beautifully captured in the Greek term **agape**. It is used no less than 116 times

in the New Testament and the corresponding verb *agapan* is used 141 times. These figures alone shows us that the "love" preached and practised by Jesus and his disciples is different from the ordinary "love" understood and practised by the majority of people in the world. *Agape* refers to a giving, active love on the other's behalf – a generous, disinterested sacrificial love – something the world at large is not too keen on. St Paul, in his "sensitive awareness of the dignity and glory of genuine love in its magnificent climax" shares this strange love with us. As genuine disciples of Jesus, we too are called to this love. Love for God the Father, love for friend and foe (people we don't see eye to eye with, people whose lifestyles and behaviour we disapprove of). Genuine Christian love that puts the interests and needs of others before our own. *Nothing remains when I die; only love remains. Do I choose to think, speak and act with the selfless love of the Eternal God?*

Mon: 1st Feb

Mk 5:1-20

Jesus and his disciples arrived on the other side of Lake Galilee, in the territory of Gerasenes. As soon as Jesus got out of the boat, he was met by a man who came out of the burial caves there. This man had an evil spirit in him and lived among the tombs....Day and night he wandered among the tombs and through the hills, screaming and cutting himself with stones.

He was some distance away when he saw Jesus; so he ran, fell on his knees before him and screamed in aloud voice, "Jesus, Son of the Most High God! What do you want with me?So Jesus asked him, "What is your name!" The man answered, "My name is 'Mob'- there are so many of us!" And he kept begging Jesus not to send the evil spirits out of that region. There was a large herd nearby, feeding on a hillside. So the spirits begged Jesus, "Send us to the pigs and let us go into them." He let them go and the evil spirits went out of the man and entered the pigs. The whole herd-about two thousand pigs in all-rushed down the side of the cliff into the lake and was drowned.... As Jesus was getting

into the boat, the man who had had the demons begged him, "Let me go with you!" But Jesus would not let him. Instead, he told him, "Go back home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how kind he has been to you." So the man left and went all through the Ten Towns, telling what Jesus had done for him. And all who heard it were amazed.

In this healing scene, Jesus is showing us that the real intent of the demons is the ultimate destruction of their host. Likewise, Jesus invites us today to look deeper at our own "inner demons"-our addictions, our feelings of anger and unforgiveness, our immense need of recognition and approval- which similarly can destroy our lives by eroding the truth of our existence as the beloved children of God. We also see Jesus refusing a man's offer to follow him but giving him another mission instead. Often, we want to be somewhere other than where we are, or even to be someone else other than who we are. We must realise that our mission is in the concrete context of the here and now.

Father, you have made me who I am- a unique person with a unique calling to serve you. Help me to recognise and rejoice in this knowledge!

Tues 2nd Feb

Lk 2:22-40

Presentation of the Lord

The time came for Joseph and Mary to perform the ceremony of purification, as the Law of Moses commanded. So they took the child to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.... At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah, Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God; "Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace. With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: A light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel."When Joseph and Mary had finished doing all that was required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew and became strong; he was full of wisdom and God's blessings were upon him.

The story of Joseph and Mary's pilgrimage to Jerusalem provides the transition between the infancy narratives and

the public ministry of Jesus. It is the only "hidden life" story in the gospels. While we contemplate the words, miracles, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, we should also remember that Jesus led a simple, hidden life in a small town where he "grew...full of wisdom". Often, in our own spiritual journey, our unspectacular, daily routine of work and chores makes us feel spiritually dry. We receive no human acclamation nor admiration. It is hard. We long to be seen and acknowledged. But Jesus' own life reminds us that hiddenness- solitude, silence, simple ordinary tasks can and often is an essential quality of spiritual life- it keeps us focused on God. And like Jesus, our own hiddenness can bring us to a greater "wisdom" and intimacy with God and true love for all people.

Wed: 3rd Feb

Mk 6:1-6

Jesus left that place and went back to his hometown, followed by his disciples. On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue. Many people were there; and when they heard him, they were all amazed. "Where did he get all this?" they asked. "What wisdom is this that has been given him? How does he perform miracles? Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters living here?" And so they rejected him. Jesus said to them, "Prophets are respected everywhere except in their own hometown and by their relatives and their family." He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them. He was greatly surprised because the people did not have faith.

In today's gospel reading, we witness how Jesus became a victim of the familiar saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." His townspeople found him too familiar to be admired, respected and couldn't accept him as a prophet. The disbelief of the people makes him incapable of performing "any miracles". Jesus chooses not to force the issue. He could have well performed a few awe-inspiring miracles but he doesn't. Instead, he showed total respect for the freedom of the people-he meekly accepts the situation. *Jesus, help me to understand that your unconditional love also means that I have full freedom-the free will to choose. Help me to choose wisely and to protect the gift of faith through daily encounters with you in prayer.*

Thurs: 4th Feb

Mk 6:7-13

Then Jesus went to the villages around there, teaching the people. He called the twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two. He gave them authority over the evil spirits and ordered them, "Don't take anything

with you on the trip except a walking stick-no bread, no beggar's bag, no money in your pockets. Wear sandal, but don't carry an extra shirt. He also told them, "Wherever you are welcomed, stay in the same house until you leave that place. If you come to a town where people do not welcome you or will not listen to you, leave it and shake the dust off your feet. That will be a warning to them!" So they went out and preached that people should turn away from their sins. They drove out many demons, and rubbed olive oil on many sick people and healed them.

This reading shows that the disciples (all missionaries) whom Jesus sends into the world are to be at the same time powerless and powerful. Powerless and at the mercy of the people at the human level, but powerful on the spiritual level as they share in Jesus' authority. Political power is the capacity to coerce others to do one's will based on one's position of authority such as a kingship or presidency or even money. Spiritual power, however, resides not in the position but entirely within the individual and it has nothing to do with the capacity to coerce others. Few of us are called to exercise great political power. But we are all called to exercise spiritual power. We are all called to help people grow closer to God. *Jesus, you have given me a great responsibility – to lead others closer to you; not through words alone but through the witness of my life.*



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Fri: 29th Jan

Mk 4:26-34

Jesus went on to say, "The Kingdom of God is like this. A man scatters seed in his field. He sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens. The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit; first the tender stalk appears, then the head, and finally the head full of grain. When the grain is ripe, the man starts cutting it with his sickle, because harvest time has come.

"What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like?" asked Jesus. "What parable shall we use to explain it? It is like this. A man takes a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world, and plants it in the ground. After a while it grows up and becomes the biggest of all plants. It puts out such large branches that the birds come and make their nests in its shade." Jesus preached his message to the people using many other parables like these;...but when he was alone with his disciples, he would explain everything to them.

The Parable teaches us that the Kingdom of God will come to fruition through Jesus, the proclaimer of the kingdom. It reinforces the message that God's Word does accomplish its purpose, even if much of it falls on deaf ears. The seed/word that God scatters/preaches indiscriminately for all has an innate power and dynamism that will silently grow until the day of the harvest, the apocalyptic end of the world. As followers of Jesus, we are reminded that faith should yield more faith. The mustard seed given by God can take root in the soil of our hearts and grow into the "largest of all plants." This is possible only if we too draw life and nourishment from the rich soil of daily prayer, the Scriptures, the sacraments etc. Only then, can we be true to our Christian calling and spread ourselves beyond our personal concerns to embrace our neighbours and provide "shade" and comfort to the hungry and lonely amongst us.