

Sat 8th Jan

Jesus went with his disciples into the Judaeon countryside and stayed with them there and baptised. At the same time John was baptising at Aenon near Salim, where there was plenty of water, and people were going there to be baptised. This was before John had been put in prison. Now some of John's disciples had opened a discussion with a Jew about purification, so they went to John and said, 'Rabbi, the man who was with you on the far side of the Jordan, the man to whom you bore witness, is baptising now; and everyone is going to him.' John replied: 'A man can lay claim only to what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can bear me out: I said: I myself am not the Christ; I am the one who has been sent in front of him. 'The bride is only for the bridegroom; and yet the bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens, is glad when he hears the bridegroom's voice. This same joy I feel, and now it is complete. He must grow greater, I must grow smaller.'



with their problem. However, John the Baptist was not sucked into this problem of hostility and rivalry. This was because he was convinced of his identity and mission in life. He said, 'I myself am not the Christ; I am the one who has been sent in front of him.' Thus, he did not need attention or love or approval from his disciples or from any one else. His simple joy was complete by seeing Jesus growing more important than him.

Let us look at ourselves... Do we feel the need to compete? Do we feel threaten with the presence of another? Can we rejoice at the success of the other?

It is not easy to grow smaller... because we naturally want to grow greater in reputation, in responsibility, in popularity, etc. Yet, Jesus is challenging us to be like John the Baptist who was humble because he was rooted deeply in his Truth...of who he was for God and of his purpose, mission in life.

Let us also not encourage rivalry to happen in our homes, offices, friendships by helping our children, siblings, parents, friends, etc to root themselves fully in God's love... in their Truth of who they are and their unique mission on earth.

Lord, help me to see my own uniqueness so that I can live each day freely without the need to compete or crave for attention and love.

John 3, 22-30

Rivalry- be it sibling rivalry or rivalry between friends or colleagues- is an age-old problem. Human beings crave for attention, time, love, approval from parents, friends, bosses, etc. When attention, time, love and approval are limited or threatened, competition arouse easily between siblings, between husband and wife, between best friends... etc. In today's gospel, John the Baptist's disciples were threatened with the appearance of Jesus and his disciples. They saw the other party as rivals, and so they went to John the Baptist

You are all I need. Guide me in my words and actions so that I can help others to live in their own unique Truth.

Sun 9th Jan Baptism of the Lord Mt 3, 13-17

Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. John tried to dissuade him. 'It is I who need baptism from you,' he said 'and yet you come to me!' But Jesus replied, 'Leave it like this for the time being; it is fitting that we should, in this way, do all that righteousness demands.' At this, John gave in to him. As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him. And a voice spoke from heaven, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him.'

After the baptism, Jesus heard a voice that affirmed him in his identity- 'This Is my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on him' With these words, Jesus rooted his whole life in his Truth. He lived his life as the Son of God, as the Beloved. Nothing and nobody could remove him from this identity. Because he was rooted in his Truth, Jesus knew that his mission was to help others to also discover the same voice calling each 'My child.' He looked around and saw self-righteous Pharisees and Teachers of the Law living in lies of making rules and regulations as their gods, lies of turning their noses down at others who are considered 'not good'. All these lies made them to miss living in close relationship with God as their Father. He too saw many outcasts who lived with many labels that society placed upon them. These labels- such as 'You are a sinner. You are no good. You are useless. You are punished by God' are all lies that oppressed them and lived away from society. Thus, he saw many people living as slaves of lies, instead of living with freedom in their Truth.

Jesus went around loving and doing good in order to break down the many walls of lies and to reveal the true face of God the Father, as well as to show the freedom of living as a child of God.



Today, we are also called to live as children of God, and not to live in many lies that either make us to be proud and self-righteous or to live in shame and fear. We are children of God...not slaves. Living as the Beloveds of God, we will not separate others from us; rather we will spontaneously see others also as Beloveds of God. Today, let us listen again to the words of God as he tells each one of us, 'This is my son, my daughter, the Beloved. I am pleased with you. My favour rests on you.'

Mon 10th Jan Mk 1, 14-20

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.' As he was walking along the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net in the lake- for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you into fishers of men.' And at once they left their nets and followed him. Going on a little further, he

saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending their nets. He called them at once and, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.

Simon and Andrew as well as James and John were doing what every fisherman had to do... mending the nets, casting a net in the lake, etc. Yet in their very ordinary monotonous life, Jesus came and called them, 'Follow me'.



Today, as we start a new work week, we are again rushing to meet deadlines, going through normal routines, sending children to school, dragging ourselves to work, etc. Yet, Jesus calls us, in the same way he called those fishermen centuries ago, to follow him... to follow his values, the way he loves, the way

he opts to live in the Truth, etc. Jesus is inviting us to take the step out of our ordinariness into an extraordinary life- to live his life here and now.

Jesus calls in the ordinary moments when we are in the office, at home, in the supermarket...when we are surrounded by noisy children or when we are stuck in a bad traffic jam. He calls us to reach out to an outcast in the office or to be patient with a spouse or a child or to forgive the mistakes of someone or to smile and greet an elderly cleaner at the office...etc. Jesus calls us because we are not meant to follow the voices of the world, which make us to be unforgiving, impatient, competitive, selfish, proud, self-righteous, etc. Today, in our ordinary life, Jesus comes and calls us to live with him so that our life can be extraordinarily filled with his love, joy and peace.

Jesus, help me to listen to you as I go through the normal routines of today. Give me an attentive ear to hear you as you call me once more to follow you.

Tue 11th Jan Mark 1, 21-28

Jesus and his disciples went as far as Capernaum, and as soon as the Sabbath came he went to the synagogue and began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. In their synagogue just then there was a man possessed by an unclean spirit, and it shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus said sharply, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were so astonished that they started asking each other what it all meant. 'Here is a teaching that is new' they said 'and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to the unclean spirits and they obey him.' And his reputation spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

Jesus could make the unclean clean; the sinful holy; the outcast a member of the community by the power of his Word. His words had authority that was unlike the scribes...What kind of authority? Jesus had the power that came from a heart that truly loves. He saw the

man with the evil spirit...a definite outcast in the society. Yet, he healed the man in order to include him back into the community.

It is so easy for many of us to exclude someone from our community or our social group or class. Just a simple exercise that we can do is to stand on a busy street and to see how many people walking past us that we automatically start to label and exclude as different from us. 'She is not someone I would want to hang out with', 'That person is so loud', 'He is a gay', 'That foreigner is so unrefined ... etc- such thoughts would surely cross our minds.

The people who witnessed the healing of the man with the evil spirit were astonished and said to one another 'Here is a teaching that is new and with authority behind it...' The teaching is new because Jesus taught from the heart... a heart that welcomes, includes. What about us? Do we welcome and include people, especially those whom society rejects, as part of our community, our family, our social circle, our life?

Jesus, I know that I tend to judge and separate people whom I think are different from me. Yet, you never push away anyone but welcome all into your heart. Teach me again how to have this same heart of yours, so that my words and actions will too have your same authority of love.

Wed 12th Jan

Mark 1, 29-39

On leaving the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now Simon's mother-in-law had gone to bed with fever, and they told him about her straightaway. He went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. And the fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding round the door, and he cured many who were suffering from diseases of one kind or another; he also cast out many devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was. In the morning, long before dawn, he got up and left the house, and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him they said, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns, so that I can preach there too, because that is why I came.' And he went all through Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out devils.

When Jesus heard that Peter's mother-in-law was sick with fever, he immediately went to her. A fever in the time of Jesus was often life-threatening and the sick person wrecked with fever would need complicated remedies which may not guarantee any success. Jesus simply went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. A simple touch of Jesus was enough to heal her. What does this healing of Peter's mother-in-law mean to us today? Fever is no longer life-threatening but there are many people out there who are suffering from other life-threatening illness. Do we, like Jesus, immediately go to them and help them up with our words of encouragement, of hope... raise them up with our simple touch of love and care?

There are also many people suffering from 'illnesses' that prevent them from functioning well in society, in life... 'illnesses' such as depression, low self-esteem, anger, guilt, shame... Do we go to them immediately and help them up? Are we too busy with our own world to look and see the suffering of the other?



Jesus was surrounded the whole day with sick people and he patiently spent time with each person... relieving each from their pain, worries, etc. He did not reject anyone...each person, no matter how 'small', was a person worthy of his time and attention. Today, we are also surrounded by many people throughout the day- our children, siblings, colleagues, elderly parents...

each person is worthy of our time, attention and love. Do we reach out and keep helping them up?

Jesus, each person, no matter how 'small', is a person worthy of my love. This is my mission today... I want to reach out and bring your love to someone who is in need of care and attention.

Thu 13th Jan

Hebrews 3, 7-14

The Holy Spirit says: If only you would listen to him today: do not harden your hearts, as happened in the Rebellion, on the Day of Temptation in the wilderness, when your ancestors challenged me and tested me, though they had seen what I could do for forty years. That was why I was angry with that generation and said: How unreliable these people who refuse to grasp my ways! And so in anger, I swore that not one would reach the place of rest I had for them. Take care, brothers, that there is not in any one of your community a wicked mind, so unbelieving as to turn away from the living God. Everyday, as long as this 'today' lasts, keep encouraging one another so that none of you is hardened by the lure of sin, because we shall remain co-heirs with Christ only if we keep a grasp on our first confidence right to the end.

'What am I going to do for the rest of my life?' 'Which school should I send my children to?' 'Should I quit my job or should I stay on?' 'What is the best solution to settle this family problem?' etc.... We are constantly bombarded with the need to make choices. Sometimes, when we make up our mind, we wonder if we are actually making the right decision.

The good news is that God wants to speak to us because he has the best plans for our lives (Jer 29, 11). That is why he calls out to us, 'If only you would listen to me today...do not harden your heart...'

"Today" is the time we need to cherish. Nothing in the passage is said about "Tomorrow" or "Yesterday". We need to have an attentive ear to listen to the voice of God TODAY. God speaks to us in the Word, in the Eucharist, in the silence of our hearts, in situations, in nature, in the advices of people, etc. God speaks! He is not a God who is indifferent to our lives. When we listen to his voice, God pleads for an obedient and humble heart that does willingly what we understand from him. We need time to learn how to listen and discern God's voice each day; as well as we need an obedient and humble heart. We cannot make demands on God, 'Ok... I am waiting. Let me hear you Now!' With obedient and humble hearts, we ask, seek and knock and God will open the door in his time and way. As family and community of believers, let us keep encouraging one another and help each other to be faithful to listen and keep listening to God's voice and obey him with a humble heart full of trust.

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Prayer for Living

Fri 7th Jan Friday

Luke 5, 12-16

Jesus was in one of the towns when a man appeared, covered with leprosy. Seeing Jesus he fell on his face and implored him. 'Sir,' he said 'If you want to, you can cure me.' Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him and said, 'Of course I want to! Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once. He ordered him to tell no one, 'But go and show yourself to the priest and make the offering for your healing as Moses prescribed it, as evidence for them.' His reputation continued to grow, and large crowd would gather to hear him and to have their sickness cured, but he would always go off to some place where he could be alone and pray.

The man with leprosy, most likely, heard about Jesus and how he had no fear or disgust for lepers or other outcasts of the society. He knew deep within that only this great prophet could heal him. Taking a leap of faith, he went up to Jesus, not knowing what would happen but he somehow believed that Jesus would be able to help him. Thus, he uttered those words of faith 'Sir, if you want to, you can cure me.' Today, we might not suffer from leprosy or any incurable diseases. But many of us may be carrying heavy burdens of worries and anxieties, full of aches and pains, full of grief and sadness. Do we take the leap of faith and tell Jesus, 'If you want to...' with humility and trust? Or do we say 'Jesus, if you want to...' but then remain in our depression, our frustrations and start looking for solutions or relief in the world of fantasy, alcohol, TV dramas, shopping, etc?

In his time and in his way, Jesus comes. Perhaps he will not remove all our sufferings, problems and burdens but he comes to give us strength, peace, courage, hope...All what we need to keep us living each day with him.

Jesus' reputation grew but he was not affected by the opinions of others. Huge crowd came to him... admiring him, depending on him, needing him. Jesus spent time with the people but he always took time to go to some place quiet where he could spend time in prayer. This was the key moment of his day- QUIET

MOMENTS OF BEING WITH GOD.

In our lives, we too face many demands from family members, friends, bosses and colleagues. Many people need us to help them solve their problems, to spend time with them, to do things for them. Among our busy schedules, do we find time and space to be alone with Jesus? Are we in need of his Word, his Love? Is he the centre of our life?

Jesus, if you want to... you can heal me, give me your peace, hope, joy. If you want to... and so I trust in you. Please help me to treasure these moments of prayer!

