



Homily Notes

July 5, 2015: XIV Sunday in Ordinary Times

Ez 2: 2-5; II Cor 12: 7-10; Mark 6: 1-6

I Am Strong When I Am Powerless

Those who assume that the followers of Jesus will be respected, honored, or followed and that power and recognition, authority and influence will be their lot will find little comfort in today's readings. Christianity is not a religion for those who seek recognition, success or power. Today's gospel passage is about how people in Jesus' home town misunderstood and rejected him, leading Jesus to apply an already familiar proverb to a new subject, "*No prophet is without honor except in his own country.*" The first reading tells us that rejection and persecution were the fate of most of the Old Testament prophets including Ezekiel. In the second reading Paul admits the fact that in spite of the revelations given to him, God has given him a share in Christ's suffering from a chronic illness so that he may glory in God's power and grace.

If Jesus were to come to our midst right now, would we recognize Him? Almost certainly, No. We would probably expect Him to look extraordinary, to speak or act or live in unusual ways, while He went about His normal life in a normal way, as a normal human being. This is what happened to Him two thousand years ago.

Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary? How can this ordinary man, whom we know since childhood be the Messiah? God apparently loves the ordinary. God hides in what is unnoticed. When God chose to come among us as a man, that man was an ordinary worker, with no trumpets or thunderbolts to herald His arrival.

When God chose Paul to preach to far-flung nations and found numerous churches, he did not take away his humiliating limitations. The Lord told him those famous words which have strengthened so many believers since: "My grace is enough for you, for in weakness, power reaches perfection." Paul who (like any of us) would have liked to be strong and free of humiliating handicaps found a new and deeper truth: "When I am powerless, it is then that I am strong."

The ordinariness of everyday life seems to be God's favourite field of action where He loves to hide and work. Our limitations seem to goad the Lord into choosing us to do great things for Him. -

-Shibin Mattathil CST

July 12, 2015: XV Sunday in Ordinary Times

Amos 7: 12-15, Eph 1:3-10, Mk 6: 1-13)

We Are the Children of God

Today's readings remind us of our Divine Adoption as God's children and of our call to witness to God's love and mercy as revealed through Jesus. We are chosen by God as His adopted children and sent as witnesses to the Gospel of His only Son Jesus. In the first reading today, the priest Amaziah tells Amos to take his prophesying back to his own country. They don't want to listen to him in Bethel. Amos replies that it was not his idea to become a prophet. He was a simple shepherd and a tender of Sycamore trees. It was the Lord who plucked him out and told him to prophesy to Israel. Amos frankly expresses his amazement at his selection as God's prophet. Yet Amos' elevation as a prophet pales before God's choice of each one of us through the mystery of Divine Adoption in Jesus. In the second reading, St. Paul explains how this adoption takes place: God adopts us as His children by giving us a share of

His own divine life. He elevates our human nature, so that we become God-like. In today's gospel, the evangelist tells the story of Jesus' preaching in Galilee, followed by the story of the commissioning of the Twelve to preach the "good news" message of repentance, forgiveness of sins and liberation.

We have a mission to live as children of God. Realization of our dignity as children of God should change our outlook on life. We are to be children filled with love, rather than selfishness and disobedience. We are to respect our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. As God's children, we should live a life of absolute trust in the goodness of our Heavenly Father, who knows what is best for us. The realization that we are the children of God should bring great comfort, peace and joy- even in our worst moments.

We have mission to grow in Divine Adoption: It is through the Church- principally through the seven sacraments- that our Divine Adoption is made possible. We are chosen by God in Christ, baptized into His church, healed by His forgiveness, and nourished at the Eucharistic table. Today, when we gather at this table of Christ's sacrificial banquet, we can rightfully address our Divine Father as His adopted sons and daughters and ask for the special anointing of the Holy Spirit to grow daily in the true spirit and practice of our divine adoption.

-Arun Vincent

July 19, 2015: XVI Sunday in Ordinary Times

Jer 23: 1-6, Eph 2: 13-18, Mk 6: 30-34

From the Presence of God to People

Today's readings explain how God, like a good shepherd, redeems his people. In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah, (VI century B.C.) consoles the Israelites, who were enslaved in Babylon, by assuring them that God will lead them back to their original pasture in Israel. The second reading explains how Jesus, the good shepherd, reconciled us with His Father by offering himself on the cross. Likewise, the gospel shows Jesus attending to his weary apostles, who have just returned from their first preaching mission, while at the same time expressing his concern for the people who like "sheep without a shepherd," have gathered to meet him in the wilderness.

Jesus gave us the example of the balance we need in our spiritual life. Jesus had the custom of going to the synagogue for communal worship every Sabbath. He participated in the temple liturgies in Jerusalem at the appointed time. He also went off by himself and spent whole nights in prayer to his heavenly Father.

The Christian life is a continuous passage from the presence of God to the presence of people and vice versa. Prayer is essentially listening to God and talking to Him. One of our main problems is that we do not truly allow God the opportunity to speak to us. We also do not know how to “be still and to listen.” Hence, we are often in danger of refusing to allow God to recharge us with spiritual energy and strength. Besides, we do not set aside enough time for Him to speak to us and for us to speak to God. How can we shoulder life’s burdens if we have no contact with the Lord of Life? How can we do God’s work unless we rely on God’s strength? And how can we receive that strength unless we pray to him individually, in the family and as a parish community in the church and receive His grace by participating in the Holy Mass and through the reception of the sacraments?

-Vanathu Antony

July 26, 2015: XVII Sunday in Ordinary Times

2Kgs 4:42-44, Eph 4: 1-6, Jn 6: 1-15

Communicating Compassion

Today’s readings invite us to become humble instruments in God’s hands by sharing our blessings with our brothers and sisters. The first reading tells us how the prophet Elisha, by invoking God’s power, fed one hundred men with twenty barley loaves. This miracle foreshadows the gospel account of Jesus’ feeding of the crowd who followed Him to hear His words. In the second reading, St. Paul advises the Christians of Ephesus to preserve unity and peace by sharing with others all their blessings: their wealth, talents, time and resources--just as they share one Lord, one faith and one baptism.

It is hard to know what we can do. But in a way the stock piling of surplus food is as great a scandal as the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. Yet it is accepted as normal. Martin Luther King had a simple answer: We can store our surplus food free of charge in the empty stomachs of the millions of God's children who go to bed hungry at night. But the chances of that happening are remote.

So what can we do about the hungry in the world. We could surely do something about it. Have a day every year in which we fast in solidarity with the hungry in the world. And what money we spare we could give to some organization that is working for the relief of hunger. "You have to fast for those who are hungry. It is a question of atonement. You can't eat too much when so many people are hungry. Remember the words of Jesus at the Last Judgement : I was hungry and you did not feed me. We cannot multiply the food like Christ could. But then we do not have to. All we have to do is share it, or the money to buy it. Christ continues to ask us the question he asked Philip: Where can we buy bread for these to eat?

Commit yourselves to share and to work with God in communicating His compassion. It is too easy to blame God, too easy to blame governments, too easy see these things as other people's problems. But they are also our problems. That is the meaning of the Eucharist we celebrate here today. In other words, as Christians we have to commit ourselves to share and to work with God in communicating his compassion to all. God is a caring Father but He wants our co-operation. That's what the early Christians did, generously sharing what they had with the needy. They were convinced that everything they needed to experience a fulfilling life was already there, in the gifts and talents of the people around them. People of our time have to be encouraged to share, even when they think they have nothing to offer. Whatever we offer through Jesus will have a life-giving effect in those who receive it. We are shown two attitudes in the Gospel story: that of Philip and that of Andrew (John 6:7-9). Philip said, in effect: "The situation is hopeless; nothing can be done." But Andrew's attitude was: "I'll see what I can do; and I will trust Jesus to do the rest." Let us have Andrew's attitude. -

-Jesuraja Fernando

Aug 2, 2015: XVII Sun in OT: Transfiguration of Our Lord

Dan: 7: 9-10, 13-14; II Pet 1: 16-19; Mk 9: 2-10

Towards the Promised Land

The common theme of today's readings is metamorphosis or transformation. The readings invite us to transform our lives by renewing it on a daily basis, radiating the grace of the transfigured Lord around us by our Spirit-filled lives. The first reading from the book of Daniel explains how the "Son of man" coming on the clouds of heaven, gets transformed by receiving dominion, glory and kingship from the Ancient One seated on the throne of heavenly glory. In the second reading, St. Peter explains to his Christian community how he was an eye witness to the transfiguration scene when Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father.

In today's reading we hear of lack of faith of those Galileans, of their utter worldliness and lack of interest in their future life. We may be inclined to judge them severely. But we must not forget that as Jews they knew almost nothing about the future life. It was only with the full revelation given by Christ that people learned of God's wonderful plan for them. Thank God, we have this full knowledge today. We know that this life is only a period of preparation, a few years during which we can make ourselves worthy to enter the real kingdom of God in heaven. We know that Christ was God's divine Son, who took our human nature in order to make us his brothers and sisters and therefore sons and daughters of God. We know that heaven is awaiting us, if only we accept Christ here and follow his teaching. Surely, we are infinitely fortunate than were the Galileans we read about today.

Let me conclude with this reflection:

Lord, we turn to you for that food,/ Which endures to eternal life,/ Which you alone can give us/ And which alone can satisfy all our hungers/ And all our longings,/ And which will sustain us/ As we journey through this life/ Which at times can become

as bare as a desert,/ Until we reach at last the promised land of
heaven.

-Arun Vincent

August 9, 2015: XIX Sunday in Ordinary Times

I Kg. 19: 4-8, Eph. 4:30-5:2, Jn. 6: 41-51

Nourished by the Bread of Life

Today's gospel describes Jesus' discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. In it he reveals himself as the true "bread of life that came down from heaven," to give life to the world. Jesus clarifies that he has not come to give them things that satisfy their material needs. He has come to show them their deeper need for spiritual realities. The bread of life Jesus speaks about is prefigured in the first reading by the miraculous food by which the angel nourished Elijah in the desert while he was fleeing from the soldiers of Queen Jezebel. After being nourished by the Lord, Elijah was strengthened for the long journey of forty days to the mountain of the Lord. The second reading presents Christ Jesus the "bread of life" as a "sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma." Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians that their discipleship must be guided by the virtues of compassion and forgiveness, avoiding "bitterness, fury, shouting and reviling which would grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

Accept the "Real Presence" of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist as an inspiring challenge. Based on sound tradition and centuries long teaching of the Magisterium, the Roman Catholic Church has consistently held fast to the belief in the Real Presence. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the other sacraments as the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all sacraments tend." In this most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore *the whole Christ, is truly, really, and substantially* contained." (CCC 1374). The Fathers of the Church explain that while ordinary food is assimilated into man, the very opposite takes place in Holy Communion. Here man is assimilated into the Bread of Life. Hence

let us learn to receive Jesus really present in the Eucharist with due reverence, true repentance, proper preparation and grateful hearts. Let us remember that Holy Communion a) increases our intimate union with Christ. b) Preserves, increases, and renews the sanctifying grace received at Baptism. c) Cleanses us from past sin and preserves us from future sins. d) Strengthens the theological virtue of charity, thus enabling us to separate us from our disordered attachments and to root ourselves in Christ. e) unites us more deeply to the mystery of the Church.

-Vibin Varghese

Aug 16, 2015: XX Sunday in Ordinary Times
Pro 9:1-6, Eph 5:15-20, Jn 6: 51-58

Sustaining the Hunger for God Alive

Today's readings stress the fact that the Holy Eucharist, which perfectly fulfils the symbol of the manna of the Old Testament, is the food that gives us life forever. In today's first reading from the Book of Proverbs, Lady Wisdom, representing God, offers wisdom and understanding in the form of a rich banquet to all those who are willing to heed her invitation. The responsorial psalm thanks God for this food. The second reading echoes this note of thanksgiving. The first and second readings encourage us to turn aside from those things that do not nourish and sustain us and turn towards the divine source: "*be filled with the Spirit.*" John, like all early Christians, believed that Jesus' body and blood are contained in the bread and wine consecrated in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In today's selection from his gospel, John describes the life-giving characteristics of those two elements.

A challenge to break your body and shed your blood for others: When we receive the consecrated host we accept a great challenge. We accept the triumphs and the tragedies, joys and the pains necessary to build up the Kingdom of God in that part of the world in which we have been called to serve. As we walk away from the altar we may perhaps hear Jesus saying: "*This is my body, given over for you*" and "*This is my blood, poured out for you*". What a power we would be for our world around us if each one of us could

say that and mean it! That is why, at the end of the Mass, we are sent out *to love and serve the Lord*, reflecting Jesus' love, mercy, forgiveness and spirit of service all around us.

Keep the hunger and thirst for God alive in your hearts: Every human being is blessed with an insatiable longing for God. We want God as our Father whose arms hold us gently in safety throughout the dangers we face. But, often we use substitutes as an escape from that need: fast living, fast food, fast cars, needless luxuries, unrestricted sexual fulfilment. We demand the right to do whatever we want to do whenever we want. But unless we keep the hunger for God strong in our hearts, we will eventually realize the emptiness of our lives without God.

-Arun Chakkalakal

Aug 23, 2015: XXI Sunday in Ordinary Times
Josh 24: 1-2, 15-17, 18; Eph 5: 21-32; Jn 6: 60-69

Accepting Christ Unconditionally

The main theme of today's readings is that Christian life is a series of daily choices for God or against God and the truths He revealed through his prophets in the Old Testament and especially through His Son Jesus as detailed in the New Testament. Concluding his long Eucharistic discourse, Jesus challenges his audience to accept him as true bread from heaven who gives his body and blood as their heavenly food. Joshua in the "first reading" and Paul in the "second reading" make similar challenges.

Will you also go away? "And what about you, do you want to go away too?" Are we going to join the ranks of the incredulous, or join instead the group of the twelve with Peter? "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life." We undertake to follow the way of Christ and make choices for Christ, fortified by the bread he gives and relying on the power of his Holy Spirit. The heavenly bread and the Holy Spirit will give us the courage of our Christian convictions to accept Church's teachings and to face ridicule, criticisms and even social isolation for our adherence to sound Christian principles in our lives. The very option or possibility of choosing for or against Jesus is repeated over and over again in the modern age. We should resolve to take a stand for Jesus and accept the consequences. We recognize in our going to communion the accepting of that challenge to be totally one with Jesus. When the

priest gives Holy Communion saying, *"The Body of Christ"*, we have to respond with a total *"Amen."* That *'Yes'* is not just an act of faith in the Real Presence but a total commitment of ourselves to Jesus in the community of which we are members. We must accept him totally, without any conditions or reservation. His thoughts and attitudes, his values, his life-view must become totally ours. Above all we are to identify with him in the offering of his flesh and the pouring out of his blood on the cross, the symbol of God's unutterable love for us.

-Johnson S

Aug 30, 2015: XVII Sunday in Ordinary Times

Dt 4:1-2, 6-8; Jam 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27; Mk 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Focussing on Relationships

The first reading is an attempt to reinterpret the spirit of the ancient legal traditions codified by Moses and given to the Israelites to keep them together as God's Chosen People. The observance of the Law was considered as a sign of commitment and obedience to God, enabling them to lead lives better than their *'pagan'* neighbours. The responsorial psalm describes a person who lives justly before God. In the second reading, James reminds us that keeping the Word of God is not just keeping the letter of the law. Rather, it is to glorify God by caring for those who are unable to care for themselves. In today's gospel lesson our attention is drawn to a debate between Jesus and the Pharisees on the subject of *"Tradition."* Jesus blames the scribes and the Pharisees for giving undue importance to the external observances in the name of tradition, ignoring the real spirit. He also criticizes Pharisaic observance and clarifies that it is our inner motivations and dispositions that reflect our purity or impurity.

Cast out the Pharisee from within and accommodate the spirit of Jesus: There is a strong attraction for some to have a religion of laws and regulations. The question on their lips is often: *"Is this a sin?"* *"Is it a mortal sin or 'only' a venial sin?"* But these are not the questions to ask. Our real concern should be: *"Is this a loving thing to do?"* It is possible to keep all the laws and rules perfectly and yet be very far from the spirit of Jesus and the Gospel. The law-keeper is

primarily concerned with “*saving his soul*”, with “*being in the state of grace*”. Even when he shows “*charity*” to others it is often simply to get “*merit*” for himself. In the final analysis, each one has to discern for himself just how, in given circumstances, he can best love and serve Christ. It calls for a great deal of honesty, integrity and a high level of real freedom, the freedom to choose what is good, what is better, what is more loving. The Gospel is not a code of laws. It provides a vision of a truly human life lived for God among other people. It is focused on relationships rather than individual actions. This very day we will have many opportunities to love and serve Jesus in various situations. Instead of worrying over our little mistakes and weaknesses, let each one of us ask, “Where and how I can be a more loving, caring and compassionate person this day?”

-Sibin Francis