

## Homily Notes

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*January. 01, 2017: BVM, Mother of God*

Num 6: 22-27; Gal 4: 4-7; Lk 2: 16-21

### **Hope for Humanity**

The Christians follow the Gregorian calendar, which came into force during the time of Pope Gregory XIII and gradually gained acceptance in several countries across the world as it created a balance between seasons and calendar. What then would be a befitting way of celebrating our New Year, if not in honour of Blessed Virgin, who is the beginning of the beginning of the Incarnation of the Lord? No human being can speak of his beginning without referring to his Mother. So too, would the Incarnation of the Lord be incomplete if we do not acknowledge the role of his Mother in his life and mission. It was in 1969 after the revision of the liturgical year and calendar that this day was celebrated as the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord, the day our Lord was named and the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.

The first reading of the day depicts Moses speaking the Words of the blessings of the Lord to Aaron and his sons. It gives hope to the present generation that the Lord is going to bless them in all that they more and accompany them in all their activities. It is with this positive stroke that we begin the New Year with the affirmation of the blessings of the Lord. The second reading contains one of the Faith proclamations that we daily make when we recite The Apostles 'Creed. St. Paul is reaffirming us that we are not the slaves but the children of God, echoing the words of Jesus himself in Jn 15:15. The Gospel reading of today shows that the first recipients of the Good News of the Messiah are the simple shepherds. Yet another example of the radical nature of our God,

who belongs more to the simple and humble than the proud. The radicality of the God, who was born in a stable, lived simple, died simple and appeared first to a sinner woman after his Resurrection. Luke clearly states that Mary treasured all these in her heart. It is an undeniable truth that Mary is the Mother of God not so much because she bore him in her womb, but because she bore Him in her heart even bearing Him in her womb. She is the Mother of God, because she was the first disciple of Jesus. The challenges that the Gospel poses is these: How do we treat women, our mothers, our sisters, our wives, our daughters and those of others? What is that we treasure in our heart? What is the significance of Incarnation of Jesus in our lives? How can we live the virtues of Mary in our lives? Let us examine ourselves on the first day of this year !

--Bhanu

### ***January 8, 2017: The Epiphany of the Lord***

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

#### **Which Way to Jesus?**

On a cold harmattan morning three palm fruit farmers were warming themselves by the fireside. Soon two of them were engaged in a heated debate comparing their religions to decide which one was the true religion. Okoro, the oldest among them, sat quietly listening to the debate. Suddenly the two turned to him and asked, "Decide for us, Okoro. Which religion is the right one?" Okoro rubbed his white beards and said thoughtfully, "Well, you know there are three ways to get from here to the oil mill. You can go right over the hill. That is shorter but it is a steep climb. You can go around the hill on the right side. That is not too far, but the road is rough and full of potholes. Or you can go around the hill on the left side. That is the longest way, but it is also the easiest." He paused and then added, "But you know, when you get there, the mill man doesn't ask you how you came. All he asks is, 'Man, how good is your fruit?'"

In the stories of Jesus' birth, two special groups of people came to visit the new-born babe: the shepherds and the magi. The church has no special feast to commemorate the visit of the shepherds but we have this special feast of Epiphany today to celebrate the visit of the magi. Why is that? It is because the visit of the magi is an eye-opener. The shepherds learnt of the birth of Jesus through a

direct revelation from angels appearing in the midnight sky. This is direct and supernatural revelation. Many of us have no problem with that. The magi, on the other hand, learnt of the birth of Jesus by observing a star. The star did not say anything to them. They had to interpret this natural sign of the star to know what it meant and where it led. If we remember that the magi or the three wise men were nature worshippers, people who divined God's will by reading the movements of the stars and other heavenly bodies, then we can see how the visit of the magi challenges some of our popular beliefs.

Like the palm fruit farmers, religious people of all persuasions tend to think that their religious tradition is the only way to God. This is what some of us hear when we hear such words of Jesus as: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). We hastily conclude that the way of God equals the way of our religious tradition. Yet the word of God cautions us against such a narrow interpretation. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). That is why we are fascinated with the story of the visit of the magi. It is a unique story that opens our eyes to the fact that God is not limited to any one religious tradition.

Notice how people of different religious traditions came to know that the Son of God was born. The shepherds who were regarded as unclean and could not take part in Temple worship without undergoing purification came to know through a direct vision of angels. The magi knew through a reading of the stars. And King Herod's scribes came to know through searching the scriptures. Visions, stars, scriptures -- different ways of arriving at the same truth. Of course this does not mean that any religious tradition is just as good as the other. Notice how Matthew indicates that when the guiding star got to Jerusalem its light failed and the magi had to consult the scriptures to direct them to Bethlehem. Over and above the natural light of the star the magi still needed the supernatural light of scripture to finally get to Jesus.

Yet the crucial question in the story remains: Who actually got to find Jesus? Herod and his scribes who had the scriptures failed to find Jesus but the magi who followed the natural light of the stars

were able to find him. Why? Because the Jewish authorities, even though they possessed the shining truth of revealed scriptures, did not follow it. They did not walk in the light of the scriptures. The magi, on the other hand, who enjoyed only a star light followed its guidance. It is not the possession of the truth that matters, it is how prepared we are to walk in the light of the truth that we possess. It is better to have the dim light of the stars and follow it than to have the bright light of the Holy Scriptures and neglect it.

As Christian we believe that our religion possesses the fullness of truth. But what does that benefit us if we do not walk in the truth? Nature worshippers or non-believers who are sincerely committed to following the dim light of natural reason may arrive at Jesus before Christians who have the exalted truths revealed by God but who do not walk the walk of faith. This is the challenging truth we celebrate today in the story of the pagan wise men who seek and find the Lord.

### ***January 15: II Ordinary Sunday***

Is 49:3, 5-6      1 Cor 1:1-3      John 1:29-34

### **The Greatness of John the Baptist**

A kite was consumed by envy of the eagle. “How come he can fly so high? Everyone admires him and no one admires me.” One day the kite sees a hunter and calls out to him to shoot the eagle. The hunter replies that he would need to add some feathers to his arrow for it to reach the eagle. The kite pulled one of his best feathers and gave it to the hunter. That was not enough to reach the eagle. So the kite pulled another and then another and yet the arrow was not quite able to reach the eagle. Before long all the kite’s best feathers were gone and he was no longer able to fly. The hunter simply turned round and shot the kite as his catch for the day. The moral of the story: envy and jealousy consume the person who harbours them before the person for whom they are harboured.

There is a difference between envy and jealousy. Envy is dissatisfaction with what belongs to us and coveting what belongs to another. We can envy people for their looks, their possessions or their relationships, wishing we could take their place. Jealousy, on the other hand, is the fear that what is ours may be lost to another. Both envy and jealousy rob people of their inner peace as

they devise ways to eliminate the person they perceive as standing in the way to their personal fulfilment.

Looking at the way things are in our world today, it would seem that envy and jealousy are normal human traits. But the example of John the Baptist shows us that true personal fulfilment and greatness lies not in how we may compare with others but in how faithful we are to our God-given roles in life.

How many people like to hear that the person who succeeded them is doing better than they did? Nobody. Here John is a rare example. John started the Kingdom of God movement. Jesus succeeded him as leader of the movement after Herod imprisoned John and had him executed. Yet whenever John speaks of Jesus he speaks of Jesus as better than him. He describes Jesus as the bridegroom and himself as only his best man (John 3:29). Notice how he introduces Jesus to his own disciples in today's gospel:

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me" (John 1:29-30).

As a result of this endorsement, two of his disciples left him and followed Jesus (verse 37). These were the first disciples of Jesus according to John's Gospel. John summarised his whole attitude to Jesus in one statement: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Why is John so content and satisfied with playing the second fiddle rather than vying with Jesus for the limelight? It is because he knows exactly the reason for him being in the world. He knows why he came into this life: "I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:30). Because he knows why he is here, John can tell when he has done his bit. He can tell when it is time to hand the baton to another. Why did you come into the world? What is God's plan for your life? If you do not have a personal answer to this question, chances are that you will spend your life chasing after everything and nothing, in a rat-race of envy and jealousy with those you perceive as better than you. Instead of living and working in harmony and cooperation

with others, people who do not know the reason for their being are often driven by rivalry and competition.

But look at the flowers in the field. Some are shrubs and some are herbs, some are red and some are white, some are yellow and some are blue; yet all of them are beautiful. The poinsettia, the daffodil, the rose, all are beautiful because they have their different purposes. As we come to the long period of Sundays in ordinary time marked by the liturgical colour green, let us have John the Baptist before us as a great example of what it means to be ordinary. Fact is, there is much greatness in being ordinary. Even though John felt he was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals, Jesus did turn round to say of him, "Among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Mat11:11).

**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

### ***January 22, 2017: III Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Is. 8: 23-9: 3; I Cor. 1: 10-13, 17; Matt 4:12-22

#### **Be Rooted in Faith**

The evangelist in today's periscope presents Jesus and his teachings as the fulfilment and continuation of Jewish culture. He quotes and brings a number of instances from the Old Testament and prophets to affirm the credibility of Christ, the Messiah.

After being filled with spirit, Jesus retired to the desert and fasted for 40 days in preparation for his ministry. The imprisonment of John the Baptist coincided with the ending of Jesus forty days of fasting. It must have been a sign from the father to Jesus for the proclamation of the kingdom. If Jesus had started his ministry before John completed his task, then it would have led to a complete mess. So every incident in the passage goes well with the prophecy of Isaiah.

Jesus left Nazareth (Mt 4:13) because he was rejected there as he proclaimed that the words of Isaiah were fulfilled in him (Luke 4:21). They tried to stone him but he escaped them and moved to Capernaum in territory of ancient tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali<sup>2323</sup>.

When we look into the history of Capernaum, it seems that God had prepared it for his son's ministry. Even though invaded many times, it was re-populated with the influx of people from around the world; world's leading roads passed through its borders; so the entire atmosphere was open to new ideas. It was a perfect space for spreading the word of God. It has been written that he became light to all the people there.

He sanctified them with God's word; to repent and prepare for the kingdom of God. The word 'light' has got particular as well as wide significance in referring to the Messiah. He became 'light' to all those in need of love, care, affection, freedom, inner peace, harmony, those affected with spiritual illness or blindness, for those people in the peripheries and all those who were tortured. His deeds were really the affirmation of his words and credibility.

Even after twenty centuries, Christ is expecting us to be the light in the lives of people around us. When our words and actions have grown enough to wipe the tears of others and to understand them; we too become light in darkness for them. Jesus was able to bring the dawn and daylight to the minds of those around him. They saw and experienced the joy and freedom as children of God. So friends, let us take effort, so that our light may shine before others that by seeing us, let them remember God. Be rooted in this faith; be credible enough. --**Jerine Joyson**

### *January 29: IV Ordinary Sunday*

Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13 1 Cor 1:26-31 Mat 5:1-12

#### **Road Map to Happiness**

"Happiness is that which all [men] seek." So says the great philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle also observes that everything people do twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, is what they believe will bring them happiness in one form or another. But the problem is that what people think will bring them happiness does not in fact always bring them true and lasting happiness. Think of the drunkard who believes that happiness is found in the beer bottle. One bottle too much and he is driving home, runs the red light, hits a car and wakes up the following morning in a hospital

with plaster and stiches all over his body. Then it begins to dawn on him that the happiness promised by alcohol may be too short-lived. Or take the man who frequents the casino to deal excitement. By the end of the month he finds that his account is in the red and that he can no longer pay his house rent. Creditors go after him until he loses his house and his car. Then it dawns on him that the happiness promised by the casino is fake. So Aristotle says that the ethical person is the person who knows and does what can truly bring them not just excitement or pleasure but true and lasting happiness.

Another word for true and lasting happiness is “blessedness” or “beatitude.” In today’s gospel, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount shows that he really wants his followers to have true and lasting happiness, the happiness that the world and everything in it cannot give. This state of blessedness is what Jesus calls being in the “kingdom of God/heaven”. The eight beatitudes we have in today’s gospel constitute a road map for anyone who seeks to attain this happiness of the kingdom.

Why does Jesus deem it necessary to establish these guideposts to the kingdom right from the very first teaching that he gives to the disciples? It is because of the importance of this teaching. Everybody seeks happiness. But often we look for it in the wrong places. Ask people around you what makes people happy and compare the answers you get with the answers Jesus gives. The world has its own idea of happiness. If a committee were set up to draw up the beatitudes, we would most probably end up with a list very different from that which Jesus gives us today.

Where Jesus says “Blessed are the poor in spirit” they would say “Blessed are the rich.”

Where Jesus says “Blessed are those who mourn” they would say “Blessed are those having fun.”

Where Jesus says “Blessed are the meek” they would say “Blessed are the smart.”

Where Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” they would say “Blessed are those who wine and dine.”



Where Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful” they would say “Blessed are the powerful.”

Where Jesus says, “Blessed are the pure in heart” they would say “Blessed are the slim in body.”

Where Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers” they would say “Blessed are the news makers.”

And where Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” they would say “Blessed are those who can afford the best lawyers.”

We see that the values prescribed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are in fact counter-cultural. We cannot accept these teachings of Jesus and at the same time accept all the values of the society in which we live. Of course, Jesus does not demand that we abandon the world. But he does demand that we put God first in our lives because only God can guarantee the true happiness and peace that our hearts long for. Nothing in the world can give this peace, and nothing in the world can take it away.

The Eight Beatitudes do not describe eight different people such that we need to ask which of the eight suits us personally. No, they are eight different snapshots taken from different angles of the same godly person. The question for us today, therefore, is this: “Do we live our lives following the values of the world as a way of attaining happiness or do we live by the teachings of Jesus. If you live by the teachings of Jesus, then rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. --**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

### ***February. 5, 2017: V Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Is. 58: 7-10; 1 Cor. 2: 1-5; Mt. 5: 13-16

#### **Be Salt and Light in the World**

Today’s Gospel (Mt.5:13-16), calls us to be Salt and Light in the world. In the ancient biblical world salt was an essential and precious commodity because of its multiple usages. It added flavour and delicacy to the food. It served as an important preservative and also made people to thirst for something more. Jesus wanted his disciples to give flavour and delicacy to the

world, which was growing insipid and corrupt, through their living examples and preaching, and make it more thirst for God's providence and love.

In the Old Testament, we read the 'Covenant of Salt' in Num. 18:19. It meant a permanent relationship. Eating salt with someone meant to be bound in loyalty. This is what the evangelist Mark refers to when he writes, "Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another (Mk. 9:50)." In our present scenario, where religious fundamentalism, communalism, terrorism, regionalism, consumerism and corrupt politics have taken an upper hand and consequently people feel brokenness, helplessness, depression, pain and anguish. Jesus, our master and saviour, calls us, His followers and disciples, to be the salt of the earth, to add delicacy to the humanity and preserve it from degradation, by dedicating our lives in establishing unity, love and solidarity among people beyond all the barriers. It's a paramount need of the hour because once we (the world) lose our saltiness (Human Qualities); we will be definitely perished or be trampled under the feet of evil forces. In this scenario, we, the Christians and all the people at large, are also called to be the light like that of the Christ himself, which emancipates believers from the physical slavery of the worldliness, and redeems them from the bondages of immoralities and sinfulness. We, the members of Christ's body (1Cor. 12: 27), and the sharers in His divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), are called today to be the light of the world, firstly by letting aside our own works of darkness, to illuminate the world by becoming the channels of love, peace, unity, solidarity and forgiveness, so that seeing our good works people may give glory to God, Our Creator.

In the Old Testament, Ex. 13:21, we see God loved His helpless and vulnerable people (Israelites), and led them in His own Light as the pillars of Fire (Light), so that they may know His love and care; and practice them through life, bringing light in others' lives. Similarly, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World (----), came to lead the Humanity from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from death to life and slavery to freedom. Same responsibility Jesus Christ, is bestowing on us all today through the gospel. Therefore today's Second reading (Isaiah 58: 7-10) tells us that there is no point in empty ritualistic fasting and observations until you love and help people, especially poor and marginalized, homeless and

naked, and needy people around. Only then your light shall break forth like dawn and when you call God, your Father, He will answer your prayers. Yes, dear Friends, The Light of Christ in us must shine to give hope to the depressed, love to the unloved, peace to the disturbed, healing to the sick, clothe to the naked, shelter to the homeless and consolation to the broken. This is the par-excellent way to be the Salt of the Earth and Light of the World, Christ wants us to be. This way must challenge us to become worthy to let His incarnated self, Jesus Christ, be born in our hearts so that enlightened by his light, we may bring the light of Christ to the earth and restore its delicacy by becoming the Salt. And in this, as the Second Reading says, "Spirit will guide you and God will empower you." It is very explicable through the lives of St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa of Kolkata, Mahatma Gandhi and many more people who adhere to God's words and lived by them. Thus, let's drive inspiration and motivation from Jesus and His Saints and become the light and salt of the word.

**--Ranjeet Joseph.**

***February. 12, 2017: VI Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Sir. 15: 15-20; 1 Cor. 2: 6-10; Mt. 5: 17-37

**The Law of Love**

Suppose we buy something in a shop; we owe the shopkeeper the cost of the article. When we have paid the cost we do not owe him anymore. The shopkeeper has no further claim on us at all. But could we ever repay what we owe to our parents. There was a time when we could do nothing for ourselves, when the slightest blow would have killed us and when we would have died if we had just been left to ourselves. Through all that time our parents cared for us.

In today's Gospel Jesus warns us that our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The only one aim and the only one desire of Pharisees was to satisfy the demands of the law. What Jesus set before us not the law of God, but love of God. When we realise how God has loved us, our only one desire must be to answer to that love, and that is the greatest task in all the world. It presents us with a task that is more binding

than the obligation to any law. It might be possible to satisfy the demands of the law if we strictly observe, but how can we ever repay Jesus' love that he lavished upon us.

There might be a danger in our understanding of God's love. We might think that we can do whatever we want, after all God loves us and everything will be all right at the end. This passage corrects this points of view and tells us that, even if God is love, and even if God forgives, that does not mean that there are no laws and obligations any more. In fact, God loves us is the very fact that keeps us from doing the wrong thing and makes us do right thing. Since, our parents and friends love us is not the license to do whatever we want toward them. Rather we have to think: I love my parents and friends and they too love me; and I must do my very best not to hurt them or disappoint them.

Love is not reason for doing what we like; it is a reason for doing nothing to grieve those who love us. Jesus said that he had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil the law. This is to say, he came really to bring out the real meaning of the law. Even behind the scribal and oral law there was one great principle which the scribes and Pharisees had imperfectly and mistakenly grasped. The one great principle is that in all things we must seek God's will and that when we know it, we must dedicate our whole life to the obeying of it.

The scribes and Pharisees were right in seeking God's will, and profoundly right in dedicating their lives to obeying it. But, they were wrong in finding that will in their man-made hordes of rules and regulations.

This is the very reason we find why Jesus again broke what the Jews called the law. He did not observe the hand washings that the law laid down; he healed sick people on the Sabbath, although the law forbade such healings; he was in fact condemned and crucified as a law breaker; and yet here Jesus seems to speak of the law with veneration and reverence. It is because he knew the real spirit of the law.

When we look at the ten commandments which are the essence and foundation of all law, we can see that the foundational principles of the ten commandments are reverence for God and respect for our fellow men and for ourselves. It is that reverence and respect

which Jesus came to fulfil. He came to show men in actual life what reverence for God and respect for men is like. Jesus came to show men in life what it means to give to God the reverence which is his due, and to give to men the respect which is their due.

This reverence and respect did not consist in obeying the multitude of petty rules and regulations. It consisted not in sacrifice but in mercy, not in legalism but in love; not in prohibitions which demanded that men should not do things but in commandments which bade them mould their lives on the positive commandments to love. --**James C. J.**

### ***February 19, 2017: VII Ordinary Sunday***

Lv 19:1-2, 17-18 1 Cor 3:16-2 Mt 5:38-48

#### **Being Perfect**

Quite a tough gospel and first reading. We like sometimes to get our own back. Happens. I'll get you for that. We know the vengeance of our own country... political and family. Eye for eye... brings no peace but a quiet lull in violence.

Peace is the way

And we know the opposite. People see the enemy walking the street and know that the only way forward is to make peace. Maybe not even forgiveness. Some can find a way forward gradually.

The forgiveness of the gospel is a slow journey. We have the small hurts and have ways of dealing with them. But the big ones are there too of injustice, getting a job over someone with a lie, being abused, family being mocked, bullying. Time heals and prayer helps... can you bring someone to God – to the cross. Pray with someone at the cross; it makes a difference.

Loving Self

A final word about loving the self – we need to allow this. The love of God is the love which helps us love the self. In the normal hurts and grievances of life we can be healing people if we love ourselves. We are people who often hate the self for our addictions, big and small faults and a past that may haunt us.

The love of God is a grace... filling that space open to love and hatred for ourselves in our hearts... the grace of loving self and other.

Be perfect... become like God... holy like God in compassion and in love. This is a wonderful vision for ourselves, our church and our world. The dream of God that all God's children live in love, peace and justice. --**Donal Neary SJ**

***February. 26, 2017: VIII Ordinary Sunday of the Year***

Is 49:14-15; 1 Cor 4:1-5; Mt 6:24-34

**Listening to the Inner Self**

Trust in the Lord! That is the strong message of the readings that we receive today. Never, ever think that God has forgotten us because that is simply impossible. For our part, we are invited to choose God and reject all that is not of God. The Gospel today is very clear that we cannot choose two masters.

We cannot serve both God and ourselves. So often we make false gods to worship: Money, Power, Material Things, and worst of all ourselves. When we make a god out of ourselves we cannot possibly have room to serve God our Heavenly Father.

Why would we think that God has forgotten us? Usually because we have encountered some deep suffering in life. For some people, it could be that they have never found the right partner and so have never married. For others, it may be that they have never felt loved by God. For another it might be the loss of a deeply loved person. There can be so many reasons to feel that God has abandoned us.

It is not easy to believe that in all that happens to us, God is present seeking to bring good from whatever happens. So many of us question why God allows evil to happen and yet we know that without freedom, we would not be truly human as we are.

Jesus admonishes his followers to put away anxiety and preoccupation with material things and instead to seek first the things of God — his kingdom and righteousness. Anxiety robs the heart of trust in the mercy and goodness of God and in his loving

care for us. God knows our needs even before we ask and he gives generously to those who trust in him.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians today we hear that we should not judge anyone. That is a strong piece of advice. It would be nice to think that we actually live that way. Perhaps at times we do. But once in a while we can be listening to our inner thinking and find that we have negative thoughts about others. There is a real challenge to living in inner peace and never judging another person.

Let us Pray: “Lord, free me from needless worries and help me to put my trust in you. Make my first concern your kingdom and your righteousness. Help me to live each day with trust and gratitude for your providential care for me”. Amen. --**Joel R. Fernandes**

### ***March 5, 2017: I Sunday of Lent***

Gen 2:7-9, 16-18, 25; 3:1-7 Rom 5:12, 17-19 Mat 4:1-11

#### **Temptations and Trials**

The African lion and the wild cat look so much alike, yet they are different. An ancient African theory explains it this way. The same lioness gives birth to numerous cubs some of which are truly lions at heart and some of which are not. How does the mother lion know which is which? Months after the birth of the cubs, just before they are weaned, the mother lion leaves the den and then, in an unsuspecting moment, she jumps into the den with a thundering roar as if she was an enemy attacking the cubs. Some of the cubs stand up and fight back the presumed enemy while others flee the den with their tails between their legs. The cubs that hold their ground to face the danger prove themselves to be real lions. Those that run away prove to be mere wild cats, false lions. As testing distinguish true lions from the false so also does it prove true Christians from false ones.

Under the old covenant God subjected His people Israel to testing in the desert. They failed that test, which made a new covenant necessary. In today's gospel reading we see Jesus the bearer of the new covenant being subjected to testing again in the desert. He stands his ground and gives the enemy a good fight, thus showing

that he is truly the Son of God. Immediately before the Temptations of Jesus, Matthew has the story of the baptism of Jesus in which a heavenly voice declared of him: "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). As he leaves the baptismal waters of Jordan to embark on his public ministry as the Anointed Son of God he had to go through the test. No child of God can go without trials, because this is the means to distinguish between a true and a false child of God. As Ben Sirach advises, "My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing" (Sirach 2:1).

Somehow we can understand, and are more comfortable with, the idea of testing or trial than with the idea of temptation. The fact, however, is that testing or trial or temptation are one and the same thing. In fact they all translate the same Greek word *peirasmos*. When we see the situation as coming from God, who would like us to pass the test, we call it a test or trial. And when we see it as coming from the evil one, who would like us to fail, we call it temptation. But both trials and temptations are experienced by us in exactly the same way: as a situation where the principle of evil (the devil) and the principle of good (the Holy Spirit) in us are vying for our allegiance and whichever one we decide for wins and becomes the master of our lives until we can reverse the decision.

Jesus is given three tests. The first one, to turn stones into bread, has to do with how we use our God-given gifts, talents and abilities. The temptation is for us to use our gifts to make a living for ourselves. But Paul tells us that spiritual gift are given to the individual "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). Jesus would later on in his ministry multiply bread to feed others. But he would not do it to feed himself. Do we see our talents and abilities, our jobs and professions, as a means to serve others or simply as a means to make a living for ourselves?

In the second test Jesus is tempted to prove that he is God's son by jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple and letting the angels catch him as was promised in the Scripture: "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 90/91:11). Though Jesus fully believes the word of God, he would not put God to the test. This contrasts



sharply with the case of a college student in Nigeria who claimed that he was born again and to prove it he jumped into the lion's cage in the zoo because the Bible promises that nothing can ever harm God's children. Maybe his soul is in heaven today but his body provided a special lunch for the hungry lions that day.

In the third temptation the devil promises Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth if only Jesus would worship him. Jesus wants the whole world to acknowledge him, of course, but would he achieve that by worshipping a false god? Can we pursue our goals by any means whatsoever? Does the end justify the means? Jesus says no. He remains steadfast and faithful to God, rejecting the short-cuts offered by the devil. In the end he attains an end more glorious than that offered by the devil: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18).

Today, let us realise that as God's children we too are under constant testing. If you do not know it, then try to answer these questions: Will you keep believing in God whether or not you get that one thing that you have always been praying for? Would you still believe that God loves you if you or your loved one contracted a shameful disease that has no cure, and God does not give you healing in spite of all your prayers? Do you sometimes put God to the test and say: "If you do this for me, then I will serve you, but if not, I will have nothing more to do with you." Jesus shows us today that to serve God is to surrender ourselves to Him unconditionally and in all situations. --**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

### ***March 12, 2019: II Sunday of Lent***

Genesis 12:1-4    2 Timothy 1:8-10

Mat 17:1-9

### **Stop Being Afraid**

There is a mysterious story in 2 Kings that can help us understand what is happening in the transfiguration. Israel is at war with Aram, and Elisha the man of God is using his prophetic powers to reveal the strategic plans of the Aramean army to the Israelites. At first the King of Aram thinks that one of his officers is playing the spy but when he learns the truth he despatches troops to go and

capture Elisha who is residing in Dothan. The Aramean troops move in under cover of darkness and surround the city. In the morning Elisha's servant is the first to discover that they are surrounded and fears for his master's safety. He runs to Elisha and says, "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" The prophet answers, "Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." But who would believe that when the surrounding mountainside is covered with advancing enemy troops? So Elisha prays, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opens the servant's eyes, and he looks and sees the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:8-23). This vision was all that Elisha's disciple needed to reassure him. At the end of the story, not only was the prophet of God safe but the invading army was totally humiliated.

This story can help us understand what is going on in the transfiguration because at this stage in his public ministry Jesus is very much like Elisha, hemmed in on every side by his foes. His disciples, and Peter in particular, feel very much like the servant of Elisha, afraid and anxious for their master's safety. Remember that just before the transfiguration Jesus asked his disciples whom the people and they themselves think he is. When Peter gives the correct answer that he is the Christ, Jesus congratulates him and then proceeds to warn them and prepare them for his unavoidable suffering, death and resurrection. But Peter is so unprepared for this that he protests visibly. He takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he says. "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus sharply corrects him, telling him that he is seeing things from a purely human point of view (Matthew 16:13-23). Like Elisha's servant, Peter needed a vision from God's point of view, to see that in spite of the death sentence hanging over the head of Jesus, God is still with him, God is still in control of events, God will see to it that in the end he triumphs over his foes as Elisha did. What Peter and his fellow disciples needed was for God to open their eyes and then give them a glimpse of God's abiding presence with their master Jesus. The transfiguration is that experience.

A certain missionary on a study trip to the Holy Land was visiting Jaffa (Joppa) where Peter was residing when he baptized Cornelius

(Acts 10). The breath-taking beauty of this small seaside town was such that it inspired him to come up with this joke:

At the transfiguration Peter offered to build three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Jesus said, “And what about you, Peter?” And Peter replies, “Don’t worry about me Lord, I got a better place in Jaffa.”

We tend to think that when Peter said, “It is good for us to be here” he was thinking about the beauty of the place. But Peter was probably thinking not of the beauty of the mountain top but its safety for his master. He was preoccupied for the safety of his master just as the servant of Elisha was. But when his eyes were opened at the transfiguration and he saw his master Jesus bathed in the glory of the divine presence his fear evaporated. And Jesus turns to him [them] and says “Get up now, stop being afraid.” This is a more exact rendering of the Greek present tense imperative of prohibition.

Every time we gather for the Eucharist we experience a moment of transfiguration where our divine Lord is transfigured before our eyes in the forms of bread and wine. May the reassurance of God’s loving presence with us at communion take away all fear and doubt from our hearts and strengthen us to get up and face with courage the challenges and trials, sufferings and, yes, death, that we must pass through before we can share in the divine glory.

--**Munachi Ezeogu, cssp** (Internet)

### ***March 19, 2017: III Sunday of Lent***

Exodus 17:3-7    Romans 5:1-2, 5-8    John 4:5-42

#### **Conversion: How It Works**

A thirst could be physical or spiritual. Often it is both, as in the case of the unnamed woman whose meeting with Jesus by Jacob's well gave us today's gospel story. Physically she is thirsty, thirsting for water, and that brings her to the well day after day. But spiritually also she is thirsty, an inner thirst which drives her from one man to another and for which she can find no satisfaction. By the time she meets Jesus she is in her sixth marriage, and yet she

is able to tell Jesus "I have no husband," indicating that she is probably already looking for the seventh.

Numbers are often significant in biblical interpretation. According to the biblical symbolism of numbers, six is a number of imperfection, of lack, of deficiency. The woman in her sixth marriage is, therefore, in a situation of lack and deficiency. Seven, on the other hand, is a number of perfection, completion, finality and sufficiency. Jesus comes to this woman as the seventh man in her life. She opens up to him and finally experiences the satisfaction of all of her soul's desiring, the full assuaging of her spiritual thirst. Isn't this the kind of experience we wish for ourselves and for all in this season of Lent? It might, therefore, be useful for us to look at the mechanism of this profound turnaround in life that we call conversion.

First, someone must be ready to break boundaries. Human society organizes itself by erecting boundaries - national, ethnic, religious, and gender. Jesus shows in today's gospel that in order to reach out to the other and create the necessary conditions for conversion, one must be prepared to challenge these man-made boundaries and break the dividing walls of prejudice. This is exactly what Jesus does to get to this woman.

According to the convention of the times, Jews were not supposed to interact with Samaritans. Walls of prejudice built on the foundations of ethnicity and religion kept them apart. Jesus broke these boundaries when he asked the woman for a drink, as her reaction shows:

"How is it that you, a Jewish man, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?" Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans" (John 4:9). That was not all. It was also against the moral norms of the day for a man to engage a woman in dialogue in a public place. And yet Jesus engages this woman in the longest dialogue we have in all the four Gospels, an act which even his own disciples saw as morally questionable. Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" (John 4:27)

If Jesus had kept within the bounds of the expected behaviour of his day, there was no way he could have gone beyond a superficial

brush with the woman, which would invariably lead to superficial results. Note also that, unlike many evangelists of our time, Jesus never tries to condemn, threaten, or intimidate the woman. All he tries to do is invite (v. 7), challenge (v. 10) and affirm her (v. 17), patiently trying to enlighten her doubts in no uncertain terms (vv. 24, 26).

Why does Jesus make such a tremendous impact on the woman? Because for the first time in her life she meets a man who really understands her. In her excitement she forgets her water jar and physical thirst (and so also does Jesus) and runs back to the village inviting the villagers to come and see "a man who told me everything I have ever done" - probably the first man to know her so well without rejecting her. Before you know it the convert has become a missionary bringing others to Jesus and to the joyful experience of conversion.

Before we close our reflection on the gospel story I would like us to pay attention to the words of those other Samaritan villagers that the woman brings to Jesus. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world." (4:42)

We see that there are two stages in the believing or conversion process: a. believing because of what someone told us about Jesus, and b. believing because we have come personally to know Jesus ourselves. Lent is the period when the Church invites all her children who still believe on the strength of someone else's witnessing to come to Jesus personally and believe, not because someone told us, but because we have known him and experienced his love personally in our own lives.

--Munachi Ezeogu, cssp (Internet)

### ***March. 26, 2017: IV Sunday of Lent***

1 Sam 16:1, 6-7, 10-13; Eph 5: 8-14; Jn 9: 1-41

### **To Be the Light**

We are called to be the light and to lighten the un-lightened in every human being's life. God works, it doesn't matter how big

and handsome we are rather how much faith we have in God and how much responsible we are for doing God's work. We see in first reading that God is responding to the human beings and in gospel we see that God does not see as the man sees. The way we think is different from God's thinking. Human beings see the outside structure of others but God sees the innermost hearts of human beings and spiritual structure of them. Spiritual heart is required to rule the people rather than physical. In Gospel too Jesus also sees the spiritual structure of man rather than body. Born blinded man is spiritually not blinded but physically blinded. Jesus has come to lighten the unlightened. Jesus reveals the will of God. He was born blinded to reveal the glory of God. Jesus knew the thoughts of Jews that if any one was born blinded either he or his parents might have sinned. They wanted to test Jesus. Jesus is the Light of the world "when the light of Jesus entered, the sin of darkness exited." Jesus is healing not only physically blinded man but also spiritually blinded.

Even though they have eyes they can't see because their spiritual eyes are closed with laws. They couldn't realize that the son of God has come to the world to heal and to call each one of us to be the bearers of light of Christ. Jesus is the light of the world. We are called to live in the light of God as Christ spread the light of His grace. Now, we are no more in darkness. We are healed through His Spirit. Paul is saying that no longer be in darkness and we are in light to do the works of Light. And in Ephesians Paul says "for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true" (Eph 5:9) and he says that sleepers as well as dead awake and rise because light of Christ is on us and we are not the sons of darkness but sons of Light. Be the light of Christ. --**Songa Mohan Rao**

*April 2, 2017: V Sunday of Lent*

Ez. 37: 12-14; Rom. 8: 8-11; Jn. 11: 1-45

### **The Journey of Faith**

Today Mother Church invites us to reflect upon the theme a faith journey with Jesus Christ from death into life. So that church chooses the biblical passage of raising of Lazarus. Jesus' friend Lazarus died then Jesus went his place and gave him life. The point

which the author wants to give to his audience is to proclaim the faith that Jesus is the resurrection and life. In a community in which the ideal of delayed Parousia, the question may be raised, why should I imitate Jesus? Why should I renounce all material prosperities for a particular person Jesus Christ? The answer which the evangelist wants to give to his community is, to have an eternal life. Whole of the Johannine tradition is speaking about the dichotomy between life and death. It is the gospel of a journey from death to life. Death means no faith in Jesus Christ, whereas life means full faith in Jesus Christ. It is said in chapter 3, verse 16; “for God loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Therefore, believing in Jesus Christ is raising from death to life. St Paul too emphasis the same in a different way. He uses the dichotomy of flesh and spirit. Flesh signifies death and whoever does not believe in Jesus Christ and spirit points to life and whoever believe in Jesus Christ. St Paul exhorts, “we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” So, my dear friends in Jesus Christ, we are called to have life and to promote life. This mission of life can be carried out only if we have the real faith in Jesus Christ. If we have this faith experience, we will be the light of the world, we will promote life in the world, we will fight against all anti- life movements in the world such as abortion, drug addiction and so on. --**Joseph Thomas**

### *April 09, 2017: Palm Sunday*

Is. 50: 4-7; Phil. 2: 6-11; Mt. 26: 14-27: 66

### **Being a Christian**

Today we commemorate the solemn entry of Jesus to Jerusalem which is the immediate cause of his death on the cross as per the gospel according to St John. The moment Jesus entered Jerusalem people shouted singing Hosanna which means ‘save us’. This was the external expression of inner cry of Jewish people. They were facing religious and political oppression and suppression from

the Roman Empire. They were at the expectation of 'Messiah' who would come to rescue them from the slavery of Roman Empire. The reputation of Jesus spread in and around Jerusalem made them think that Jesus was the messiah. According to the belief of Jewish people the purpose of the coming of Messiah was to establish the political as well as the religious freedom. So they received Jesus to Jerusalem with Hosanna. The first part of the perception of the people regarding Messiah was right that Jesus was the Messiah, the expected one. But the mission of Jesus was understood wrongly by the Jewish people. Jesus came to this world not to establish the earthly kingdom but to establish the kingdom of God which consists of gospel values such as love, peace, justice, equality etc. Before His ascension, Jesus entrusted the mission, establishment of the kingdom of God here on earth, to the church. Today once again mother church reminds us of our prime responsibility of being a Christian to establish the kingdom of God wherever we are. So let us ask ourselves are we establishing kingdom of God here on earth through our words and deeds. The establishment of kingdom of God is only possible if we lead our life based on the Gospel values.

By entering Jerusalem on a donkey Jesus fulfills the prophecy made by prophet Zachariah in chapter 9 verse 9 regarding the coming of the ruler of Israel. On those days if a king goes for war he will go on a horse but at the same time if he goes for establishing peace he will go on a donkey. Jesus the king of heaven and earth enters Jerusalem on a donkey which means Jesus came to establish peace not disharmony or violence. Donkey is the symbolism of peace and humility. Apart from the symbolism the specialty of the donkey on which Jesus entered to Jerusalem is that it carried Jesus to Jerusalem. I believe that the call to Christianity is a call to become a donkey which means to become the messengers of peace and humility and also to become the carrier of Jesus. But on the contrary we see in today's gospel that Judas betrays Jesus for thirty silver coins which is the symbol of his selfishness. Many a time we act as Judas acted. Though we, the Christians are called by Jesus to bear witness to Jesus due to our selfishness we bear counter witness to Jesus or betray Jesus. In order to bear witness to Jesus we must be humble and the messengers of peace. If we become humble and peace maker we will bear witness to Jesus thus we will



be successful in fulfilling our prime duty of being a Christian, the establishment of the kingdom of God here on earth.

**--Naijo Chittilappilly**

***Apil.16, 2017: Easter Sunday***

Acts. 10: 34, 37-43; Col. 3: 1-4; Jn. 20: 1-9

**Be Bold Enough to Proclaim the Resurrected Christ**

Dear sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ. A very happy feast day to you all, that our Lord has defeated the death and resurrected. In the first reading we see that the disciples of Jesus Christ proclaiming about the resurrection of his master, Jesus Christ who worked wonders and miracles among different strata of people, hanged on the tree and resurrected on the third day as He said to his disciples during the time of His ministry. In the second reading, St. Paul tells people to have a new life in Christ by focusing on the heavenly things rather than the worldly things that which can perish within the fraction of seconds and he firmly says, die in Christ and rise in Christ.

Coming to the Gospel, Mary Magdalene was one of the women who actively collaborated in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3), along with the Virgin Mary she bravely stayed with Him right up to His final moments (John 19:25), and she saw where His body was laid (Luke 23:55). Now, after the obligatory Sabbath rest, she goes to visit the tomb. The Gospel points out that she went early, when it was still dark it shows her love and veneration that led her to go without delay, to be with our Lord's body. From these details concerning the empty tomb one deduces that Jesus' body must have risen in a heavenly manner, that is, in a way which transcended the Laws of nature. It was not only a matter of the body being reanimated as happened, for example, in the case of Lazarus, who had to be unbound before he could walk (cf. John 11:44). The Apostles begin to grasp the true meaning of Sacred Scripture after the resurrection, particularly once they receive the Holy Spirit, Who fully enlightens their minds to understand the content of the Word of God.

Today through this, Jesus once again reminding us to live in strong faith in believing the works and miracles which He has done in His life. As we are going to continue His mission we too need to stand boldly like Peter and John telling his words and deeds to people. In our present world we see most of the people are flocking behind the worldly things which can give very minimal and temporal happiness forgetting the eternal happiness from our resurrected Jesus Christ. Today it is the time for us to examine ourselves that do we want to be like Mary Magdalene and disciples who came forward and proclaimed about the resurrected Christ? Or do we want to act like the Pharisees and the elders of the society bothering about their power and wealth and trying to kill the truth. But remember the truth always wins and the life ever reigns.

**--Joe Antony Alex**

April 23, 2017: II Sunday of Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

Act. 2:42-47; 1 Pet. 1:3-9; Jn. 20: 19-32

### **Seeing and Believing**

From today's readings many lessons could be drawn. However, I would like to dwell basically on three points: life of communion, faith based on Christ's resurrection and faith-seeking doubt.

The early Christians devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles who were convinced of Jesus' resurrection. They lived in a community sharing with all whatever they owned. Living in the community has its own advantages. It instills the sense of belonging, the sense of communion and fellow-feeling among the members. God is experienced profoundly in the community as Jesus himself affirms it when he says: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there." This life of communion was possible because they shared a common faith in the Risen Christ. Similarly, it can be possible in our context when we live in community. One's faith is strengthened in the community as we share our faith-experiences with one another. The faith that we have is imperishable, undefiled and unfading because it is totally based on Christ's resurrection which gives us a new and living hope for our own resurrection.

In the gospel passage, we find the Risen Lord imparting peace to the troubled disciples enclosed in the upper room. Although frightened they were together, depicting the community dimension, except Thomas who did not believe his friends' testimony that they had seen the LORD. The closed door did not prevent the Risen Lord to enter the room for they kept their hearts open. Open hearts enable us to receive the Lord into our lives. One thing is evident in Thomas' attitude that even though he seemed doubtful, yet his was a faith-seeking doubt. He just needed a sensual perception with which the doubter was to be so convinced that he became a worshipper – "My Lord and my God."

There are some who will not believe even when they see, such as Pharaoh; others believe only when they see, such as Thomas in today's Gospel. But, above both these types, the Risen Lord placed those who had not seen and yet believed upon hearing, such as Noah, Abraham and every believer in Christ. --**Denu Sangma**

*Apr. 30, 2017: III Sunday of Easter*

Acts. 2; 14, 22-23; 1 Pet: 1:17-21; Lk. 24: 13-35

**Let Our Eyes Be Opened When We Meet the Truth**

Dear friends in Jesus Christ it is very hard to digest when we lost some of our beloved ones and to be happy and live our normal life. The same incident happened in the gospel of today in the lives of disciples when their master handed over to the leaders for unjust cause and killed.

In the first reading we see the peter addressing the crowd that about the plan of God in the life of Jesus. That his own people will not understand the miracles and good deeds of Christ and they will catch him and crucify on the cross. And in the second reading peter says Jesus has bought us with his own precious blood so that we give glory and have hope on God. In the gospel reading he clearly states that the lack of faith of the disciples, not to recognize Jesus Christ, after all listening from him. The reason why this is so: "Their eyes were prevented from recognizing him." Christ gets to know his disciples by hearing them out. He quickly discovers the reason why they are so dejected and downcast. Their problem it

seems is that they “were hoping” for a different Christ -- a more political and temporal Christ. This is a moment to ask ourselves whether we ever hope for a different Christ, a Christ tailored to our own liking or more in accord with our human ambitions (money, wealth, fame, popularity, etc.).

They were so disturbed when they saw him hanging on the cross that they forgot his teaching, did not look for his resurrection, and failed to keep his promises in mind. Their eyes were obstructed, that they should not recognize him until the breaking of the bread. And thus, in accordance with the state of their minds, which was still ignorant of the truth, that the Christ would die and rise again, their eyes were similarly hindered. It was not that the truth himself was misleading them, but rather that they were themselves unable to perceive the truth. Coming to our daily lives so many times we fail to recognize the truth and close our eyes by telling ourselves that this not my cup of tea but the others. As we are blessed by Jesus Christ, should have the courage to stand boldly to speak the truth. And also our duty is tell the people as Christian following the footsteps of Christ, should live according to his commandments and demolish the evils of the world. We should be ready to open our eyes when some injustice is done immediately and respond, to prevail the truth. How often do we fail to recognize the Lord when he speaks to our hearts and opens his mind to us? The Risen Lord is ever ready to speak his word to us and to give us understanding of his ways. Do you listen attentively to the Word of God and allow his word to change and transform you? Let us reflect on these questions for our life's and ask god grace. Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart to recognize your presence with me and to understand the truth of your saving word. Nourish me with your life-giving word and with the bread of life.

**--Sagar Thomas Kanna**

## Book Received

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Carlos De Mellow and Kurien Kunnumpuram, **The Home of Love**, Christian World Imprints, New Delhi, 2016.

Jomin Joseph, **The Last Supper as Sacrum Convivium**, Blessed Hope Publishing, 2016.

Review of these and other books will be given in the next issue.

The Editorial Team of AJRS wishes all its readers a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Since next year is the diamond jubilee of AJRS, expect some surprises!