



*Place of  
Refuge*

*Philip L. Yuson*

# *Place of Refuge*

*Reflections on scripture by a Laity*

*By*

*Philip L. Yuson*

***Place of Refuge***

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## *Introduction*

This book was made possible by the grace of God and is published for the glory of God.

I always liked writing my reflections - although most of them are kept hidden in my journal. However, while working in Jakarta, I felt a need to share my reflections with fellow believers. I thought that if I should share my reflections, these should be easy to read and yet present a fresh perspective of scriptural topics from the eyes of a laity. It has therefore been my prayer that my articles will provide a refuge from heavy theological and philosophical discussions of scripture. This has always been and will always be my prayer.

At first, the reflections were intended to provide some insight on events happening within the group's life. But as the situation in Indonesia became more volatile (1998), some insights were written to encourage the people affected by the events in the country.

It was also during this time that one of those receiving the reflections suggested to have some of the reflections printed in their community newsletter. Since I treat these reflections as belonging to the Lord, and therefore must be shared, I agreed. I think two of my articles were published before I left Indonesia. But through the wonder of technology, I was able to continue sending my reflections to the community.

In one of my prayer times a few months back I felt the Lord encouraging me to compile all my articles and publish them as a book. Without my knowing it my good wife, Marie, was planning to do the same thing and she wanted to give the published work as a birthday gift to me.

I appreciate what she did because she gathered her courage and talked to our parish priest, Msgr. Michael O'Connell and asked him to review my articles. Msgr. Mike was kind enough to comment on some points in my articles that had to be explained more. Since the articles had to be revised, Marie gave me my birthday gift months earlier by giving me the comments from Msgr. Mike so that I can revise my document.

So this book became a family project. It is our hope that we will be able to share with you what the Lord has given to us. We pray that through this offering to the Lord, you may have a deeper love for and commitment to him.

With the exception of the first article, all the topics are arranged in alphabetical order. The reason for placing *Mary the Mother of God* as the first article is to honour the Blessed Mother whose prayers and intercessions led me to her Son Jesus.

One final note - a request actually. We believe that God's word should be given freely. No profit is taken from the publication of this book. Our only request is that you send a donation to your parish church as a sign of your appreciation of our work.

May the Lord bless you and give you his Spirit so that you can know him as you live your life in him.

*Philip Yuson*  
*Victoria, BC*  
*Easter 2000*



## *Acknowledgments*

We thank God through the Lord Jesus for guiding us through this project. We also give thanks to Mary, the Mother of God - who, I believe interceded for us during the production stage of this book.

I would like to thank my precious wife, Marie who initiated this project and who has acted as editor, censor and cheerleader.

We also thank Msgr. Michael O' Connell our parish priest and Rector of St. Andrew's Cathedral in Victoria, who patiently went through all the articles and shared his wisdom with us.

Likewise to the Genesis Catholic Community in Jakarta, Indonesia for publishing my articles in their newsletter - may you proclaim God's Word with Power and Truth.

And lastly to those people who have one way or another touched my heart and led me to the Lord, may God bless you all.

*To our parents*

*Jaime and Dolores  
Ricardo and Lilia*

*And our children*

*Bernadette Marie  
Joseph Philippe*

*THE LAMB THAT WAS SACRIFICED IS  
WORTHY TO BE GIVEN POWER, RICHES,  
WISDOM, STRENGTH, HONOUR, GLORY  
AND BLESSING*

*REVELATIONS 5:12*

## *Mary - Mother of God*

The title of Mother of God was given to Mary during the Council of Ephesus. At that time, heretics were claiming that the divinity of Christ is separate from his humanity. But the Church fathers met in Ephesus and dealt with the heresy. The Council proclaimed that Jesus is both God and man-that his humanity and divinity are so intertwined that these cannot be separated. That is why we proclaim that Jesus was "begotten not made" and that Jesus is "true God and true man."

The fathers at the council also said that Mary is *theotokos* - meaning God-bearer.

Mary's exalted position in the Church does not come from her being *theotokos*. As scripture records, a woman once told Jesus

*BLESSED IS THE WOMB THAT BORE YOU  
AND THE BREASTS THAT NURTURED  
YOU." JESUS REPLIED, "MORE BLESSED  
ARE THOSE WHO LISTEN AND OBEY THE  
WORD OF GOD.*

Surely Mary is blessed because she was chosen to be the God-bearer. But she is more blessed because of all humanity, past, present and future- no one can love Jesus the way Mary loved him. Who can love someone more than his own mother?

We also note that when Mary said, "*Be it done to me according to your word*", it was only then that the Word became flesh. It was only then that God began to take shape in her womb. Similarly, when we hear God's promise, we do not worry about how it should happen or when it should happen. We can only say as our Mother said, "Be it done to me according to your word."

In humble trust and confidence in the Lord, we give him our entire person so that he in turn can begin to take shape in us.

I owe my repentance to our Mother. Several years ago, the Lord gave me my most important birthday gift - my repentance and conversion through Mary. Through Mary, I slowly got to know Jesus. Indeed, we grow in knowledge of Christ with the guidance of Mary. To Jesus through Mary. Thank God for the gift of Jesus through Mary.

## *Christian Discipleship*

I was involved in the Parish council for many years. Added to this are my experience at work in managing people and at the same time being managed by people. I have experienced being a follower and a leader.

As a follower, I noticed and learned a lot of things that a leader should not do. And as a leader, I wished a lot of things that should have been done by followers. In any case, I would say that my experience in the parish has given me a clearer view of Christian leadership and discipleship.

Let us talk about Christian discipleship.

There is nothing more frustrating than dealing with someone who thinks he knows everything - or thinks he is God's gift to the community. Conflicts always happen (sadly) in Christian communities if one person thinks he has all the answers to the problems and forces his will on to others. What makes it worse is if

this is done in the name of God. It is embarrassing to narrate this but I want to share this personal experience as a lesson on Christian discipleship.

I was that kind of person and still have traces of this in me. I thought I knew every answer to the problems in our community such that I got into a very ugly argument with our parish priest - and it was in front of the Parish Council. I left the meeting that night very angry and vowed that I will never ever attend any mass celebrated by our parish priest.

The next day, as I was going to work, I passed by our church and saw our priest presiding over the mass. I did not go in. Instead, I went to another church I frequently go to. I attended the mass there and during my reflections, I had a conversation with the Lord.

The Lord asked me, "*Why are you not in your parish church?*" I answered, "*Because I cannot accept the fact that the man presiding is a priest.*" I then felt the Lord tell me, "*How can you serve me if you are not humble enough to accept my priest? He was ordained and tasked to do my work. If you cannot accept him, how can you then accept me?*"

To put a happy ending to the story, I struggled with the Lord and finally went back to our church. I did not know how to approach our parish priest - maybe out of shame. I also knew he was mad at me. So when I arrived and I saw him, I said, "*Father, I want to confess my sins.*" If he would not accept me without anger then he had to accept me because he was my minister. We were able to reconcile our differences after that.

My point in telling this story is to show how important it is to have a humble attitude toward our pastors. Yes, they may be wrong or our ideas may be better but they are still our pastors and as their sheep, we have to bend and obey in trust that the Lord does his will through them.

Never mind if the idea is dumb as long as it is moral and legal, it is worth doing. I am not saying that you should just keep quiet and accept everything given you. You have to argue your point. But once the decision is made, do not be like a child who pouts and goes on a tantrum just because what he wanted was not followed. If that is your attitude, I have one advice - **"GROW UP."**

I think for lay people, discipleship is more difficult than those in religious life. For them, they have taken vows of obedience to their superiors. For us, we are free to obey or not and pride very often comes into play given that freedom. Pride has no place in a community. And neither does it have a place in a Christian's life.

# *Christian Leadership*

*BE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK THAT  
IS UNDER YOUR CARE, SERVING AS  
OVERSEERS-NOT BECAUSE YOU MUST,  
BUT BECAUSE YOU ARE WILLING, AS  
GOD WANTS YOU TO BE; NOT GREEDY  
FOR MONEY, BUT EAGER TO SERVE; NOT  
LORDING IT OVER THOSE ENTRUSTED TO  
YOU, BUT BEING EXAMPLES TO THE  
FLOCK.*

*1 PETER 5:2-3*

This was Peter's advice to the elders of the Church. As elders, we do not own the community. We have no right to do what we want with the community because the community belongs to God. As elders, we are to oversee and act as stewards - making sure that we do with the community as the Lord wants us to. Jesus gave us the best example of leadership - service.

What is meant by service? My first idea of Christian service is to go out of my way and literally serve others. However as time passes, I got the feeling that this was an imperfect idea of service.

Service to the community as a leader is looking after the community - making sure that the members of the community grow in their person. We are made up of body and soul. And growth is defined as progress in both the body and soul. A Christian leader therefore should look after the physical and spiritual growth of the members. One does this not out of obligation but because it is the right thing to do.

In Acts 6, we see the appointment of deacons. They were appointed because the Greek converts felt that they were being neglected in the distribution of food. So the apostles appointed seven deacons to ensure that the Greeks were also given enough food. What Peter said after this showed the main purpose of leaders of the community - ***to be devoted to prayer and preaching the Word.***

As a leader we are suppose to feed the members with spiritual food as well as material food. I am not saying that you should give your members money to buy their food but what I am saying is that the community should ensure that the material needs of members are also looked after.

In the past few years, we see Church leaders advocating social justice and equality. In doing so, some of them forget their main purpose as leaders - to devote themselves to prayer and preaching the Word. As a leader we have to devote ourselves to prayer. *"No slave is greater than his master"* was what Jesus said. Jesus himself spent hours praying to the Father. If he - the Son of God - had to spend hours praying, how much more for us his followers.

Prayer is a way for us to know God more. If we do not pray - we will not grow in knowledge of God. And if we do not grow in our knowledge of God, we cannot preach God's word to our community. (Or worse, we will be preaching the wrong thing to the community and mislead them.) If we do not preach God's word, the community stops growing. In his letter to the Church of Rome, Paul says *"Faith comes from hearing."* The community's growth depends on what is preached.

Christian leadership boils down to these words: ***humble service according to God's will.*** Mother Theresa of Calcutta always asked people to pray for her so that she will not destroy God's work. I guess as leaders, we too should be

humble enough to admit that we do not have all the answers to problems in the community and that we need the Lord's help in building the community.

*UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS A HOUSE,  
THE BUILDERS LABOUR IN VAIN.*

*PSALM 127:1*

Let us pray that our leaders may be given the spirit to serve us humbly as they build a community owned by the Father, led by Jesus his Son and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

## *Come into the Light*

This Lent is memorable for me because Pauline, my daughter, had her first confession. It was memorable for me because I got to participate in preparing for this. The parish had five sessions over five weeks for the child and parents to prepare them for this celebration. During this preparation, I got to see a new meaning in the sacrament of confession.

I realize that confession is not merely telling the priest our sins. It is not merely asking God for forgiveness for our sins. It is not only knowing that God has forgiven us. Instead, I see confession now as a means for me to reaffirm my baptismal vow of rejecting Satan and his deceptions and in reaffirming my belief in God as my Father. It is also my way of telling God that I need him to help me win this battle against Satan.

Before I got to know the Lord, I never took confession seriously. (*Come to think of it, before I knew the Lord, I never took him seriously!*). I always felt that it was a waste of

time because I would confess the same sins over and over again. All I thought of confession was that once I got out, I was forgiven of my sins and that was it.

But as I got to know the Lord, something changed in my view of confession. For me, it became a very powerful way of humbling myself before the Lord to ask for his forgiveness. And very often, I feel a sense of peace when the priest speaks out the absolution because I feel very loved and cleansed.

But with those five weeks of preparation, I had a different perspective of confession. It is still a powerful symbol of God's love and forgiveness. But it has become a statement of my battle against evil.

When I go to the confessional box, I come before God and tell him that I am a sinner. I tell him that despite my weaknesses, I still choose him over the deceits of Satan. I tell God that I love him and I want him over all other things. And most of all, I tell him that I need him to help me win this battle against Satan.

*FOR OUR BATTLE IS NOT AGAINST FLESH  
AND BLOOD BUT AGAINST THE RULERS,  
AUTHORITIES, POWERS OF THIS DARK  
WORLD AND AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL  
FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY  
REALMS.*

*GALATIANS 6:12.*

We have to realize that we are up against a more powerful enemy. He is smarter and far more powerful than we are. On our own, we cannot and will not be able to win over him. And in confession, we not only choose God and ask him for his help, we are exposing our sins to the light. Once our sins are exposed to the light, the deceits of Satan are exposed.

*FOR EVERYONE THAT DOES EVIL HATES  
THE LIGHT AND WILL NOT COME INTO  
THE LIGHT FOR FEAR THAT HIS DEEDS  
WILL BE EXPOSED. BUT WHOEVER LIVES  
BY THE TRUTH COMES INTO THE LIGHT,  
SO THAT IT MAY BE SEEN PLAINLY THAT  
WHAT HE HAS DONE HAS BEEN DONE  
THROUGH GOD.*

*JOHN 3:20-21*

This season of Lent, may we all come to the Lord in humility and truth. May we find confidence in his love.

*IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS  
FAITHFUL AND JUST AND WILL FORGIVE  
US OUR SINS AND PURIFY US FROM ALL  
UNRIGHTEOUSNESS*

*1 JOHN 1: 9*

## *Day and Night*

When God created the heavens and the earth, he first created light. Then there was evening and there was morning, the first day. Then God spoke and the waters separated to become the sky and the seas. Then there was evening and there was morning, the second day. Then God spoke and land appeared. He also created vegetation and plants. Then there was evening and there was morning, the third day. Then God spoke and he created lights in the sky to mark seasons, days and years. The bigger light that ruled the day was called the sun and the smaller one that ruled the night was called moon.

Notice that God was already counting days and nights even before the creation of the sun and moon. So what is deeper meaning of days and nights?

God created during the day and there was no activity at night. Days are then times of activity-God's activity. And night is an activity of creation. If we are God's people, we act when God is active. We cooperate with the Lord

during the 'day' and let the events take their course during the 'night'. We have to believe that God is in control and that events happen for a specific reason. And God uses the events to lead us to his will.

If we are in the Lord, there is no such thing as wrong discernment. Because

*THERE IS NO CONDEMNATION FOR  
THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS*

*ROMANS 8:1*

Even if we discerned wrongly and acted against God's plan, *as long as the decision was made in trust and humility*, God will lead us back.

Mother Teresa once said, "*God did not ask me to be successful. He asked me to be faithful.*" Only Jesus can perfectly discern God's will. If we make a wrong decision, the events will lead us back to the right way. God is always victorious and for us who share his life, we too will share his victory.

## *Enduring Sufferings*

**W**hy do we endure sufferings?

If we look at Scripture, Jesus consistently says "*Any one who gives up mother, father, brother, sister, children, houses, fields for my sake...*" The key phrase here is *for my sake*.

Sufferings should therefore be viewed through the eyes of faith. We suffer for Jesus. Sufferings are not tests from the Lord to see how strong our faith is. Scripture tells us that God knows our inmost being. He knows everything. If he had to test us to see how strong our faith is, then it means that God does not know something about us.

Another common reason for enduring sufferings is that there will always be something better. We are hoping for something better in the future. If this is our reason, then there is a tinge of selfishness in this. This reason means that we endure sufferings because there is something to gain out of it.

Personally, I think the main reason for enduring suffering is because we believe that this is what God thinks is best for our purification. We do not need to know the reason for suffering as long as we know that this is the Lord's will, we humbly submit to it - trusting that the Lord has his reasons for this. Why do we trust the Lord then?

I think we trust the Lord because of who he is. Not because of our love for him but because he is trustworthy.

In my early days with the Lord, there were things that clouded my faith. But now, It seems to me that the Lord wants us to accept him as he is. And I think this is where I often struggle with him. But blessed be the Lord because he is faithful. He continues to reveal himself patiently and slowly until one day, we shall see him as he is.

# Faith

*THEN JESUS WENT FROM THAT PLACE AND WITHDREW TO THE REGION OF TYRE AND SIDON. AND BEHOLD, A CANAANITE WOMAN OF THAT DISTRICT CAME AND CALLED OUT, "HAVE PITY ON ME, LORD, SON OF DAVID! MY DAUGHTER IS TORMENTED BY A DEMON."*

*BUT HE DID NOT SAY A WORD IN ANSWER TO HER. HIS DISCIPLES CAME AND ASKED HIM, "SEND HER AWAY, FOR SHE KEEPS CALLING OUT AFTER US." HE SAID IN REPLY, "I WAS SENT ONLY TO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL."*

*BUT THE WOMAN CAME AND DID HIM HOMAGE, SAYING, "LORD, HELP ME." HE SAID IN REPLY, "IT IS NOT RIGHT TO TAKE THE FOOD OF THE CHILDREN AND THROW IT TO THE DOGS." SHE SAID, "PLEASE, LORD, FOR EVEN THE DOGS EAT THE SCRAPS THAT FALL FROM THE TABLE OF THEIR MASTERS."*

*THEN JESUS SAID TO HER IN REPLY, "O  
WOMAN, GREAT IS YOUR FAITH! LET IT  
BE DONE FOR YOU AS YOU WISH." AND  
HER DAUGHTER WAS HEALED FROM  
THAT HOUR*

*MATTHEW 15:21-28*

**W**hat is faith as shown in this episode?

Look at how the woman approached Jesus. She approached him and asked Jesus to heal her daughter. When Jesus 'rejected' her, she acted in a way that showed that she believed that only Jesus can help her. By approaching Jesus, the woman took a risk. Since Jews of that time looked down on non-Jews, the woman took a risk of being rejected.

She knew she would be rejected. Yet she went and approached Jesus for help. When she was rejected, she did not appeal to anything but to the mercy of Jesus. The attitude of the woman shows a deep conviction that Jesus has the power to help her and at the same time a total surrender to whatever will happen to her.

Faith then is not believing that God will do something but that God can do something for us and if it pleases him, he will do it. It is throwing our person to the mercy of the Lord and letting him do with us as he pleases.



## *Fortune Telling*

**I**n my younger years, I practiced fortune telling. I read books on astrology and practiced it. The more I practiced them, the more accurate these become. I am telling you that these things do work and they are real. But are these practices pleasing to the Lord?

As I began to read the scripture, I learned that I was detestable to the Lord because I practiced these arts.

*LET NO ONE BE FOUND AMONG YOU WHO ... PRACTICES DIVINATION OR SORCERY, INTERPRETS OMENS, ENGAGES IN WITCHCRAFT, OR CASTS SPELLS, OR WHO IS A MEDIUM OR SPIRITIST OR WHO CONSULTS THE DEAD. ANYONE WHO DOES THESE THINGS IS DETESTABLE TO THE LORD...*

*YOU MUST BE BLAMELESS BEFORE THE LORD YOUR GOD. THE NATIONS YOU WILL DISPOSSESS LISTEN TO THOSE WHO PRACTICE SORCERY OR DIVINATION. BUT AS FOR YOU, THE LORD YOUR GOD HAS NOT PERMITTED YOU TO DO SO.*

*DEUTERONOMY 18:10-14*

God calls everyone to be holy. This is the vocation of every living human being. Holiness is achieved only by listening to and obeying the Lord. If we practice or listen to divination we are not listening to the Lord. Instead, we are listening to something else.

*REBELLION IS LIKE THE SIN OF  
DIVINATION.*

*1 SAMUEL 15:23*

It follows then that divination is the sin of rebellion.

When I point this out to Christians talking about horoscopes or zodiac signs, the answer I often get is that they are doing it for fun - it is a game. If that argument is valid then I can say that it is right to play with a something dangerous.

Consulting the horoscopes or delving in astrology and fortune telling is telling God that *"You are just one of the forces that control my life."* Undoubtedly, the planets control things on earth. The moon controls the tides of the sea. The eruptions in the sun has an effect on radio transmission on earth.

But in fortune telling, we are trusting in forces other than God. We are saying that these forces control our lives. We reject the simple fact that God is the ultimate force that controls our lives. So we turn to other 'gods' - horoscopes, cards, ouija boards, consulting spirits, etc. And if we believe in other 'gods' that is idolatry. That is why the practice is detestable to God.

A Christian who practices these 'arts' is a contradiction to his faith. How can one say that he believes in an Almighty God if movements in his life are controlled by these 'arts'?

What should you do if you have ever played these games? The only thing to do is to realize that this is detestable to God. Confess your sin and admit that you have gravely offended God.

The next thing to do is to get rid of these 'toys'. If you have cards, posters, books, coffee mugs, etc. used for fortune telling, - burn them - destroy them totally so that others will not fall into sin because of them.

Then turn to your Father in heaven and be reconciled with him. He will forgive your sins through Jesus. No sin is too big for him to forgive. And then thank him and resolve to make him Lord of your life.

# *God is Enough*

*YET THIS I CALL TO MIND AND  
THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE. BECAUSE OF  
THE LORD'S GREAT LOVE WE ARE NOT  
CONSUMED, FOR HIS COMPASSIONS  
NEVER END. THEY ARE NEW EVERY  
DAWN; ABUNDANT IS YOUR  
FAITHFULNESS. I SAY TO MYSELF, "THE  
LORD IS MY INHERITANCE;  
THEREFORE I WILL WAIT FOR HIM."  
THE LORD IS GOOD TO THOSE WHOSE  
HOPE IS IN HIM, TO THE ONE WHO  
FOLLOWS HIM; IT IS GOOD TO HOPE  
AND BE STILL FOR THE SALVATION OF  
THE LORD.*

**W**ould you believe this is from  
**Lamentations 3:21-26?**

My idea of a lament is that it is a cry out of a very intense feeling of grief. Yet for the author, in the midst of his grief, he still had hope. And his hope was not based on what he saw. What he saw and felt proved that God had left him. Everything he had was lost. His nation was conquered and the city of their God was destroyed - burned and pillaged.

In the midst of all these physical and emotional hopelessness, the author remembered God's great love and compassions. Instead of looking at what was lost, he looked at what was not lost. And he saw God's hand at work. God's love did not allow them to die and his compassions is always there. Note also he used a plural for compassions.

Every day is a new day for God's abundant faithfulness. For me, this means that God is always faithful. To say that the Lord is my inheritance is to say that the Lord alone is enough for me. He is my treasure. Even if everything is lost - God will be enough.

Therefore we rely on the goodness of the Lord to restore us. We hope in the Lord even if things seem hopeless. Because in the Lord, there is hope. We struggle in hope in a hopeless situation. When we have hope, we wait and still ourselves until the Lord comes to save us.

For us - God's children, the Lord is enough.

## *God Longs to be Gracious*

*THIS IS WHAT THE SOVEREIGN LORD, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL SAYS: "IN REPENTANCE AND REST IS YOUR SALVATION, IN QUIETNESS AND TRUST IS YOUR STRENGTH..." THE LORD LONGS TO BE GRACIOUS TO YOU; HE RISES TO SHOW YOU COMPASSION. FOR THE LORD IS A GOD OF JUSTICE. BLESSED ARE ALL WHO WAIT FOR HIM! O PEOPLE OF ZION, WHO LIVE IN JERUSALEM, YOU WILL WEEP NO MORE. HOW GRACIOUS HE WILL BE WHEN YOU CRY FOR HELP! AS SOON AS HE HEARS, HE WILL ANSWER YOU.*

*ISAIAH 30:15, 18-19*

In times of difficulty, we have the tendency to take control of the situation. This includes thinking of possible options or solutions to our situation. Yet the word of God clearly says,

*IN REPENTANCE AND REST IS YOUR SALVATION.*

*ISAIAH 30:15*

Our salvation - the solution to our problems is not in our getting busy nor trying out things on our own. It is in turning back to God and humbly resting before him to discern his will.

To get us out of our situation, we rely not on our own strength. That will only make us chase the wind. But our strength lies in quietness and trust in the Lord. We lie quiet and let the Lord work through the events. And as we lie quiet, we wait in trust for him. For our God is a God of justice and compassion and our only way out is to wait.

The last verse is an assurance that through all difficulties, God longs to be gracious to us. God always hears us and our cries for help never land on deaf ears. God answers as soon as he hears us.

May the Lord give us his grace so that we can always turn to and rely on the Lord in all situations - for the Lord is our Saviour. He wants to help us and he is the only one who can help us.

Blessed are we if we wait for the Lord.

Blessed too is our God who is always gracious to us.

# *God Provides*

*Written during the 1998 Economic Crisis in Jakarta*

*I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT  
WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. I  
KNOW WHAT IT IS TO BE IN NEED, AND I  
KNOW WHAT IT IS TO HAVE PLENTY. I  
HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF BEING  
CONTENT IN ANY AND EVERY SITUATION,  
WHETHER WELL FED OR HUNGRY,  
WHETHER LIVING IN PLENTY OR IN  
WANT. I CAN DO EVERYTHING THROUGH  
HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH.*

*PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13*

I had wanted to write something about the economic situation for a long time. But inspiration has not come until now. We have all had our experience in this crisis. Most of us are directly affected by it. And I think the passage above sums it up quite clearly on how a Christian is to respond in this day and time.

My understanding of why the Lord allowed all these to happen is to teach us a lesson. Undoubtedly, as expatriates, we have been living a very comfortable and even a spoiled life. We have been laughing our way to the bank when the Rupiah drops because that

means we will be using lesser dollars for our expenses. And I would say that we have learned "what it is to have plenty." With the financial crisis, the Lord is teaching us "what it is to be in need." Now is the time to live in humility and trust in the Lord. Yes, our salaries may be affected but I think the Lord is teaching us to trust that he will provide for all our needs.

A few years ago, I was a new immigrant in Canada. I was able to find a job and was settling down already. A few months later the company I worked for had some financial problems and had to lay off some people. I was one of them. We were quite blessed to stay with my sister. But we still had to spend money for personal needs. As our savings began to shrink, the situation became very stressful. Considering that this happened in November, was more devastating because we had to save on everything - even our Christmas celebration.

The days dragged on and we saw our savings getting smaller every week. There was no one to turn to except the Lord. And praise God, he came through at the time that our funds were about to run dry. I was able to get a job.

The reason why I tell this story is to show that God is alive. He is Immanuel - God with us. And as I look at our situation then, I realize that the Lord was teaching us something - that wherever we were, he was always there. He is the same everywhere and every time. He provided for me and he will continue to provide for me - wherever I am. A child of God, someone committed to Christ will never, ever go hungry.

*AND MY GOD WILL MEET ALL YOUR  
NEEDS ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS  
RICHES IN CHRIST JESUS.*

*PHILIPPIANS 4:19*

We may not have an excess but we will never lack. We are at a very exciting moment in our lives. True, we have our obligations - our parents, brothers, sisters, people who rely on us for financial support. But then, I see this as the Lord's way of teaching us to set our priorities right.

When a woman came to anoint the feet of Jesus before his passion, Judas commented that the money used to buy the perfume could have been given to the poor. Jesus answered, "*The poor you will always have with you. But she did*

*this to prepare me for my burial."* My reflection on this is that yes, it is right and good to serve the poor. But still, this is secondary to our service and love for the Lord.

I believe that the Lord is here and he is moving in our lives to teach us to trust him. Let us not waste this moment. Take hold of it. It is our chance to be one with the Lord's and the people's sufferings. Walk in faith and we will be able to grow in love.

God bless us all.

## *Good Deeds*

*I KNOW YOUR DEEDS, YOUR HARD WORK AND YOUR PERSEVERANCE. I KNOW THAT YOU CANNOT TOLERATE WICKED MEN, THAT YOU HAVE TESTED THOSE WHO CLAIM TO BE APOSTLES BUT ARE NOT, AND HAVE FOUND THEM FALSE. YOU HAVE PERSEVERED AND HAVE ENDURED HARDSHIPS FOR MY NAME, AND HAVE NOT GROWN WEARY. YET, I HOLD THIS AGAINST YOU: YOU HAVE FORSAKEN YOUR FIRST LOVE. REMEMBER THE HEIGHT FROM WHICH YOU HAVE FALLEN! REPENT AND DO THE THINGS YOU DID FIRST.*

*REVELATION 2:2-4*

Here was a man who outwardly was a Christian. He had a lot of points credited to him because of his good deeds, hard work and perseverance in the midst of persecutions. He knew his doctrines such that he was able to uncover false teachers. He suffered in the name of the Lord and continued to bear the brunt of sufferings without complaint. But if outwardly he looks like a Christian, why did the Lord say that these were not enough.

How many of us do good deeds thinking that by doing so, we gain points towards our salvation? How many work hard and persevere in the midst of persecution thinking that these lead us to salvation? How many of us are well versed in scriptures such that we can quote verses from scriptures and win debates with regards to faith?

If you think that doing good deeds will save you, then I flatly tell you that you are wrong. ***Only Jesus can save you.***

Before I am accused of being a heretic, let me explain myself. St. Paul clearly says in his letter

*IF YOU CONFESS IN YOUR MOUTH,  
'JESUS IS LORD,' AND BELIEVE IN YOUR  
HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM  
THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED.*

*ROMANS 10:9*

This is scripture and therefore this is irrefutable. However, a lot of people tend to oversimplify this verse.

They say that if you just confess that Jesus is Lord then you are saved. But what does confessing mean here? To confess that Jesus is Lord is to fully throw your entire person and trust to him. What is the motive for doing this?

To be saved? If that is the main reason for believing in Jesus then Jesus is being used as a thing to meet our needs. This means that if there is someone else who can save then we will go to that person too.

Read beyond that verse in Romans

*FOR IT IS WITH YOUR HEART THAT YOU BELIEVE AND ARE JUSTIFIED, AND IT IS WITH YOUR MOUTH THAT YOU CONFESS AND ARE SAVED.*

Confessing comes from belief and belief comes from our hearts. And what is found in our hearts - love of God. Therefore to say that Jesus is Lord should come from our deep love for the Lord. Jesus said, "*Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will be saved*". Similarly, not everyone who says, "Jesus is Lord" will be saved. This confession should come from a sincere heart full of love of God.

This brings us to our main point. The good deeds and hard work we do and sufferings we endure then are not means of drawing us closer to the Lord. These are in fact fruits of our relationship with the Lord. Our love of the Lord should fill our hearts such that this love overflows to others in the form of good deeds. You can join all the organizations in the world -

and do good deeds 24 hours a day but without love, these are not complete. The man to whom the letter above was addressed was outwardly a Christian but still Jesus found fault in him. I think it was St. John of the Cross who said that, *"In the end, we will be judged by how much we loved and not by how much we do."*

*"If you love me, you will obey my commandments."* was what Jesus said. If we love Jesus, doing good automatically comes. And in doing good, we will experience a lot of intrigues. These intrigues strengthen our faith and love for the Lord. And with the love for Jesus, we can endure all things because it is now not our human strength pushing us but the love of God and love for God. And where there is love, there is God.

## *Humble Yourself Before the Lord*

The following is my reflection on the first letter of Peter.

Christians are called by God according to his plan. Because of his great mercy he gave us a dynamic hope by giving us himself as our inheritance.

As we live our lives, God slowly and surely reveals himself to us. This is done through sufferings.

If we suffer according to God's will, we learn to be firm in our faith, trusting in God. As we develop this trust, God reveals himself more to us and we get to know God more.

Our goal in faith is salvation. The psalmist says, "*The Lord is my light and my salvation*". The goal of our faith therefore is God himself. To help us achieve this goal, we have to humble ourselves before him. We have to stand naked before the Lord - without the masks we have. This is what pleases the Lord and what we have to do.

The humility God wants from us is the same humility that Jesus showed in his life. Jesus humbled himself such that he totally disposed himself to the Father's will. And as we see, the Father did not abandon Jesus. On the contrary, although Jesus was rejected by the elders and the king, he is now exalted by the Father above all creation. This shows us that trusting God will only lead to God's plan for us. And his plan is far better than what we can ever hope for.

What God says is final - no one can challenge it.

So Peter exhorts us to live in obedience to God. When things seem dark and uncertain, we have to wait and trust in the Lord. If we dare to do things our way during these times, the result is certain - failure and more darkness.

The darkness that comes our way - in our walk in faith is actually God's way of teaching us to trust him and to surrender all things to him.

Trust comes from humility. When we realize our position before the Lord, we see ourselves as God sees us. This shows us that we are nothing and that God is everything. From

this realization comes the desire to trust God. It is in trusting him that we can surrender to him. And it is only when we surrender to God that he reveals himself to us.

Trust is not a leap of faith. There is no such thing as blind faith for a Christian because even if a Christian does not see the future, he sees the person he trusts - Jesus Christ.

The key verse of this letter is:

*HUMBLE YOURSELF UNDER GOD'S  
MIGHTY HAND THAT HE MAY LIFT YOU  
UP IN DUE TIME. CAST ALL YOUR  
ANXIETIES UPON HIM BECAUSE HE CARES  
FOR YOU.*

*1 PETER 5:6*

Let us therefore pray to the Lord that we may have to grace to humble ourselves before him - so that we can get to know him more.



# *Humility: Allowing Others to Serve Us*

*Anniversary of the Genesis Catholic Community*

*JESUS CAME TO SIMON PETER, WHO SAID TO HIM, "LORD, ARE YOU GOING TO WASH MY FEET?" JESUS ANSWERED, "AT THE MOMENT YOU DO NOT KNOW WHAT I AM DOING, BUT LATER YOU WILL UNDERSTAND." "NEVER!" SAID PETER "YOU SHALL NEVER WASH MY FEET." JESUS REPLIED, "IF I DO NOT WASH YOU, YOU CAN HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON WITH ME". "THEN LORD," SAID SIMON PETER, "NOT ONLY MY FEET, BUT MY HANDS AND MY HEAD AS WELL!" JESUS SAID, "NO ONE WHO HAS TAKEN A BATH NEEDS WASHING, HE IS CLEAN ALL OVER."*

*JOHN 13:6-10 (JERUSALEM BIBLE)*

From this, I see two lessons that Jesus taught the disciples. One is that we must serve as Jesus has served. The second and more difficult lesson is to allow others and GOD to serve us. Personally, I think the second lesson is harder

than the first. It is natural in us to give to others - to serve others. But it is more difficult to let others help us. It takes humility to say we need help and allow others to help.

When I was a baby Christian, service to others was drummed into my mind. And so I thought, I will go and serve and I would not allow anyone to help me. I was hogging all the tasks. I was overworked and miserable and others felt left out and miserable too! In the end, everyone was miserable!

It really took some time for me to learn that humility is also allowing others to do their part in serving me. And I am still learning to allow others to help me.

One thing I learned from this is that humility does not only apply to our brothers and sisters in the community. It applies to God more. Humility before the Lord is not blindly rushing to do something WE think is good. Humility before the Lord is waiting for him and doing what HE thinks is best.

As I said, in my early days in the Lord, I rushed into things without praying about it and not surprisingly, none of them succeeded.

Humility before the Lord means serving God the way he wants to and allowing God to serve us. Because he is the Lord - he is the Boss. Therefore we do things HIS way. And if he says he wants to do something - then we better be wise enough to let him do it for us. Because if we are like Simon Peter who says to the Lord, "**Never!**" then we will hear his answer, "*You can have nothing in common with me.*" Let us therefore pray that we may continue to grow in humility. Serving others in love. But also allowing others to serve us in love. Praise the Name of the Lord!



# *Immanuel* *God With Us*

**A**s I was reading Matthew 1, I came across the verse - *Immanuel - God with us*. This got me to try to look at what this really means. It is Christmas time and this is the season when most of us feel good. Yet if we look at the story of Jesus, Mary and Joseph - for them the first Christmas and even the succeeding ones were saddled with difficulties.

***God with us***. When the Spirit descended on Mary, God was literally with her and in her. When that happened things changed in her life. I would imagine that her relationship with Joseph changed. Joseph almost divorced her and her life was threatened because she could have been stoned to death for adultery.

***God with us*** means that Mary had to give birth to her first born in a stable with animals. ***God with us*** means that King Herod had to be troubled and the citizens of Jerusalem with him - because there was a threat to his throne. ***God with us*** means that Joseph had to pack up and

leave in the middle of the night to save the God who was with them. It meant that he had to live in a foreign country, settle there and eventually pack up and go back to his home land. All these difficulties and disruptions in their lives because God was literally with them.

But ***God with us*** also meant that an angel will tell Joseph to take Mary as his wife. It would mean that wise men will come and pay homage to Jesus. It also meant that Mary and Joseph were spared of the pain of seeing their baby killed. Therefore Immanuel also shows the salvation of God - the intervention of God.

So when we say that ***God is with us***, it does not guarantee a life of bliss - free from troubles and difficulties. As we see, ***God with us*** is a guarantee of endless uncertainties - surprises if you will. However it is through these uncertainties and surprises that we see the true meaning of Immanuel. ***God with us*** means just that - he is faithful to us. Despite our flaws and weaknesses, God is alive and in control through the troubles and difficulties we face.

***God with us*** therefore is not a promise of good feelings. It is not an end to difficulties. It is a guarantee of more difficulties AND most importantly the beginning of our victory over the difficulties.



## *Jesus is the Truth*

*WHEN HE ARRIVED AT THE HOUSE OF JAIRUS, HE DID NOT LET ANYONE GO IN WITH HIM EXCEPT PETER, JOHN AND JAMES, AND THE CHILD'S FATHER AND MOTHER. MEANWHILE, ALL THE PEOPLE WERE WAILING AND MOURNING FOR HER. "STOP WAILING," JESUS SAID. "SHE IS NOT DEAD BUT ASLEEP." THEY LAUGHED AT HIM, KNOWING THAT SHE WAS DEAD. BUT HE TOOK HER BY THE HAND AND SAID, "MY CHILD, GET UP!" HER SPIRIT RETURNED, AND AT ONCE SHE STOOD UP.*

*LUKE 9:51-55*

**J**airus was one of the elders of the synagogue. His only daughter was near death and he begged Jesus to come to his house to heal her. Jesus went with him. On the way, some servants told Jairus that the daughter has died. But Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid. Just believe and she will be saved.*" They proceeded to Jairus' house and true enough, people were mourning and weeping because the daughter had died. Was the girl dead? Sure she was!

In fact the people laughed at Jesus when he told them that the girl was asleep. From the looks of it, the girl was in fact dead - physically - dead.

But in the eyes of Jesus, the girl was asleep. That was why Jesus was able to 'wake' her up.

The point of the story here is not only the power of Jesus over death - but that his word is the truth. Jesus is the truth because his word is always true.

Even if everyone says that something is black, even if you see that something is black - even if you can prove from logic and all the laws of nature that something is black, if Jesus says it is white, then it is white!

Jesus is the truth - he does not lie and he cannot lie. In the healing of the paralyzed man, Jesus told the man, "*Your sins are forgiven.*" And to prove that what he said was true, he healed the man. On the feeding of five thousand, Jesus told his disciples, "*You give them something to eat*" and eventually multiplied the food so that disciples can give the people something to eat.

In our journey in faith - when faced with a no hope situation - what matters is not what we see or how we perceive the situation. What matters is how Jesus sees the situation and what he has to say about it. Because in the end - his word will determine the result because his word is the truth - correction - **Jesus IS the Truth.**



# *Joy*

*BE JOYFUL IN THE LORD ALWAYS, I  
WILL SAY IT AGAIN, BE JOYFUL!*

*PHILIPPIANS 4:4*

Last Christmas season, I felt the Lord urging me to do a Station of the Cross. It was quite strange because I have never done the Stations by myself mainly because I did not know the Stations. What made it even more strange was that it was Christmas season and well, Christmas season is always a joyful season and I always associate the Stations with Lent and sorrow. But after doing this, I found out why.

As I did not know what some Stations were, I had to make do with the pictures and try to recall what these were. However, at the end of the whole Stations, I knelt before the Blessed Sacrament and realized that Christmas season always was a season full of joy. When Jesus was born, everyone expected him to be the King of Israel who will deliver them from the Roman invaders. But as I reflected on the Passion, I realized that the Passion was a necessary evil

because it was through the Passion of Jesus that the human dreams of deliverance were crushed resulting in a realization of **true deliverance** - from sin.

Therefore in our lives, there has to be a Christmas. The beginnings of hope for improvement. But there also has to be a season of Lent and eventually Good Friday so that these events will bring us to a sober realization that our plans fall short from what God has planned for us. We have to suffer so that we can learn to trust God in everything in our lives. And after we have undergone our Good Friday, the Lord will lead us to our Easter - the revelation of his power and glorification of his name by giving us more than what we had hoped for.

This cycle happens always in our lives. The question is how long each stage takes in each cycle. But the sure thing about all these is that we will eventually see God's power and his name glorified and with it - our hopes and dreams purified AND glorified.

While doing the Stations too, I remembered what Paul said to the Philippians,

*BE JOYFUL IN THE LORD ALWAYS, I  
WILL SAY IT AGAIN, BE JOYFUL!*

*PHILIPPIANS 4:4*

I tried applying this to how the Lord must have felt during his Passion. If the Word tells us to rejoice always, then Jesus must have been joyful through all these sufferings. Well, how can he have been joyful through these sufferings? I cannot picture Jesus smiling through these sufferings. I then realized that my definition of joy has to change.

What was the one thing that revolved around the life of Jesus? It was his doing the will of the Father. And I believe that joy is the result of knowing that he was doing the will of the Father ***and that the Father is pleased with him.*** The same is true for us. We cannot smile when we are suffering. That would be insane. Neither will our smile ease the pain we feel. We can only smile when we know that we are doing God's will and that he is pleased with us. A smile therefore is not the cure for our problems. It is the result of our joy coming from knowing that God is pleased with us.

May this Season of Lent purify us so that we can truly see God's will and have joy in our hearts.

*DO NOT BE SADDENED THIS DAY, FOR  
REJOICING IN THE LORD MUST BE YOUR  
STRENGTH*

*NEHEMIAH 9:10*

# *Lent*

## *A Preparation for Easter*

*PRODUCE FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH  
REPENTANCE.... THE MAN WHO HAS  
TWO TUNICS SHOULD SHARE WITH HIM  
WHO HAS NONE, AND THE ONE WHO HAS  
FOOD SHOULD DO THE SAME.... DON'T  
COLLECT ANY MORE THAN YOU ARE  
REQUIRED TO.... DON'T EXTORT MONEY  
AND DON'T ACCUSE PEOPLE FALSELY --  
BE CONTENT WITH YOUR PAY.*

*LUKE 3:8-14*

As I look at the liturgical calendar, I notice that the Catholic Church, in the wisdom given by God, has two great feast days preceded by calls of repentance. Christmas is preceded by Advent. Easter is preceded by Lent. Being a greater day Easter calls for greater preparation. Lent is longer - 40 days as compared to four weeks for Advent (add a few days). Also during Lent, the preparation involves fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

All these preparations have one purpose - to call us to continuous repentance. Why is there a need for repentance? Were not our sins forgiven when we were baptized. And are we not forgiven when we confess our sins?

Personally I think that when we were baptized, God wiped our slate clean. Likewise when we confess our sins, he wipes it clean. Yet the '*wounds*' of sin are still there and these require healing - constant treatment with '*medicine*'. The medicine I talk of is prayer, fasting and almsgiving - the three acts that the church recommends. All these are to be acts that will train us to detach ourselves from material things and focus on Christ alone.

Yet, doing these things do not guarantee that we have repented. These are ways of training us and these are suppose to allow us to '*bear the fruits of repentance.*' Our repentance should "**bear fruit**" as John the Baptist says in the passage we quoted. What are these fruits?

**Generosity** - The first fruit as illustrated by John. (*The man who has two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same....*) Because of original sin, Man is inherently selfish.

Almsgiving, fasting and prayer should teach us to deny ourselves and instead consider others. Generosity is not only giving the excess we have, it is doing away with what we do not need.

**Truthfulness** - (*Don't collect any more than you are required to....*) One of the reasons why greed comes in is that we want to satisfy thirst for things we want yet do not need. This is further strengthened with media advertising. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving aims to teach us generosity to tame our desires for things we do not need. Once we become generous, there is no need to cheat to get more than what we need.

**Justice** - (*Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely*). Isaiah 58:6-7 says

*IS NOT THIS THE KIND OF FASTING I  
HAVE CHOSEN: TO LOOSE THE CHAINS  
OF INJUSTICE AND UNTIE THE CORDS OF  
THE YOKE, TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE  
AND BREAK EVERY YOKE? IS IT NOT TO  
SHARE YOUR FOOD WITH THE HUNGRY  
AND TO PROVIDE THE POOR WANDERER  
WITH SHELTER-- WHEN YOU SEE THE  
NAKED, TO CLOTHE HIM, AND NOT TO  
TURN AWAY FROM YOUR OWN FLESH  
AND BLOOD?*

Once we become generous - our tendency is to share with those who have less. God gave us what we have - not for us to hoard but to share with others. God created us to take care of his creation. And if we do not share with others - we are not being good stewards.

**Contentment** - (*be content with your pay.*) I think this is the most important of all. We cannot be generous if we are not content with what we have. If we are not content, there is this feeling that we have to get more. And the more we want, the more we hold on to what we have.

*HE WHO HAS MUCH - MUCH WILL BE  
GIVEN. HE WHO HAS LITTLE - EVEN  
WHAT LITTLE HE HAS WILL BE TAKEN  
AWAY.*

This is what Jesus said. If we are not contented - we see that what we have is very little and we will not give. Thus we deprive ourselves of being blessed by the Lord. But if we are content - we will give. In doing so, we allow the Lord to bless us and give us more.

Lent is a season of preparation. It is suppose to start close to the end of winter and it ends at the beginning of spring. During the days before spring, the weather clears up. The snow stops. And you see a lot of people cleaning their

houses. I personally take the car out and give it a good wash during these days because I could not wash it (or was too lazy to wash it) during winter. As we do for our stuff, we also do for our souls.

Let us stand naked before the Lord without fear but with confidence in his love. Let us be generous to the Lord and allow him to take our souls out. And let him wash us clean with the blood of Jesus. May we all have a meaningful Lent so that we can really understand the power of God's love.



## *Lift up Your Cross*

*WHOEVER WANTS TO COME AFTER ME  
SHOULD DENY HIMSELF, LIFT UP HIS  
CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.*

*MARK 8:34*

Jesus had just fed four thousand men and talked to his disciples about the yeast of the Pharisees. The yeast (for me) is the unbelief of the Pharisees because of their preconceived ideas. After this, Jesus then asked his disciples who they thought he was and Peter made the great profession of faith - "You are the Christ". Jesus then proceeded to tell his disciples that he had to die and on the third day be raised from the dead.

At this point, Peter rebuked Jesus saying that this shall not happen. Jesus then turned and rebuked Peter. It was at this point that Jesus said the quoted verse above.

Looking at this context, we see that denying oneself here means to surrender everything to the Lord - to free ourselves from the 'yeast of the Pharisees' - unbelief due to preconceived ideas. We want to take control - thinking that we have the power to control everything.

The next part is something new to me and I was surprised of what I saw. Very often, we hear people say, 'that is your cross - take it joyfully' - referring to problems we have. But as I prayed, this phrase, "*take up his cross*" - took on a different twist. What is a Christian's cross. Do we each have our own crosses?

Looking carefully into scripture, we see that there is only one cross of salvation - the cross of Jesus from which we were saved. The term translated as '*lift up*' actually means "*exalt*". If we exalt a cross other than Jesus' then we are not being true to our faith.

For children of God - there is no other cross to exalt except the cross of Christ.

To be able to follow Jesus therefore, we have to:

1) **Deny ourselves** - treat ourselves as nothing before the eyes of God. Get rid of our pre-conceived ideas of how to do things. Stand naked before the Lord.

2) **Exalt the cross of Christ.** In doing so, we put him as head of our lives. Lift him up - exalt and glorify his name. Recognize that he is YOUR Saviour and that he alone can save you.

It is only then that we can truly follow him.

As we live our lives, let us continue to deny ourselves - get rid of our preconceived ideas. Exalt the name of the Lord. Put him above all our difficulties. Acknowledge that he alone can save us. Only then can we follow Jesus - the way he wants us to.



## *Living in God*

The year 1998 was quite difficult for my wife and I.

First was that my father passed away last August 15th. And on October 17th, my sister-in-law (my wife's sister) passed away.

When I realized that in a span of three months (give or take a few days) there were two deaths in my family, I got to think of why all these happened. It also made me face my mortality and question why God made me. To begin my search, I thought, where else but go to the beginning - the book of Genesis.

In my reading of the story of creation, I noticed several things.

First, God created man and breathed into his nostrils and man became a living being. In the middle of the garden was two trees, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God forbade man to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Notice that God did not forbid man to eat the tree of life. I think what this means is that God wanted man to live. And

by breathing his breath onto man, God wanted man to live a life in God. Knowledge of good and evil is not important because if one is living in God, one will certainly not do anything evil.

The life in the garden was actually a life in God. One where the man shared God's dominion over creation. This life however had its requirements. Man had to obey God's command. Once he violates it, he is dead. But man did not want to live in God. Man wanted to be like God. And because of this desire to be like God, he consciously went against God's command.

And because of this, man became ashamed of his weakness and incompleteness because he now relied on his own wisdom rather than on God's.

Notice also that when they disobeyed God, they realized that they were naked. They became ashamed and did not want to face God naked. This is what happens to us when we go against God's commands. This feeling of shame remains in us today. God does not want us to stand before him in shame. He wants us to stand before him naked - just as we are. Because what

pleases the Lord is not our accomplishments. The Lord is pleased with a humble and contrite heart. A heart that admits its nothingness before him.

So now we have God's plan for man - to live in him. But because of man's desire to be like God, man sinned and was condemned to death. But God's plan still remains and in his stubborn love, God did not give up.

This brings us to the second observation - Resurrection. In John's account of the resurrection, Jesus breathed on the disciples. This act is parallel to God breathing his life into man. Jesus breathing on the disciples means that now, we can again live in God. For those who experience the resurrection of Jesus in their lives, they can live in God.

To experience the resurrection of Jesus means to turn a new life - to die from our desire to be like God and to live a life of obedience to God. Jesus showed us that a life in God is again made possible with his death and resurrection.

Going back to my reason for this reflection - this is therefore God's will for us: to live with him in nakedness and total reliance. Total reliance will not stifle our growth. Total reliance and surrender in fact is the the only way to freedom and life in God.

Indeed God is good. Praise the Lord.

## *Obedience to the Lord*

The Baptism of the Lord holds a special meaning to me. Not only does it officially mark the end of the Christmas season but my son was born on this feast day.

We have been told that this event marks the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. However, as I read the scripture on this, I find that this event is actually a summary of the life of Jesus.

In the book of Genesis, the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. And it was in these waters that creation took form. Jesus' going into the river Jordan symbolizes God's hovering over the waters of creation. His baptism - immersing in the waters, symbolizes his immersion into his creation. It also symbolizes the day when he will die and his rising from the waters symbolizes his resurrection. And after Jesus rose from the water, the Spirit descended on him and the Father spoke, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased."*

The descent of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism foreshadows the descent of the Spirit on the Church at Pentecost after his death. And when the Father spoke, he was referring to the obedience that Jesus showed in his Incarnation and will show in his life and death.

The Father was pleased with Jesus because Jesus was totally disposed to the Father. Jesus obeyed the Father and allowed the Father to do his will through Jesus.

When Jesus walked the earth, he was fully divine yet fully human. To say that Jesus performed the miracles and wonders because he was God is a misstatement. Indeed, we believe that Jesus is God. But we sometimes forget that he was also a man like us except that he did not sin. If Jesus did those things because of his divinity, then he was not fully human. In a sense he had an advantage over us.

My reflection on this is that Jesus was able to do the wonders he performed because he was totally and fully obedient and dependent on the Father. His obedience to the Father allowed the Father to work through Jesus. And that is what pleased the Father.

May we open our hearts to the Father so that we may be obedient to his will. This is the only way that Jesus has shown us. This is the only way to please the Father.



## *How Should We Pray*

**H**ow do we pray? Jesus taught us how to pray. He gave us a pattern of prayer in the Lord's prayer.

*"OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN HOLY BE  
YOUR NAME YOUR KINGDOM COME YOUR  
WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN  
GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD  
FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE  
OUR DEBTORS AND LEAD US NOT INTO  
TEMPTATION BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL  
FOR YOURS IS THE KINGDOM AND THE  
POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER,  
AMEN"*

As I was reflecting on this prayer, a thought came to my mind. I thought about how my children welcome me when I got home from work. As soon as they hear the door open, they drop whatever they do and excitedly rush to the door shouting "Papa". They will then embrace me and kiss me.

This got me to think. My children never ask me to feed them everyday, yet I do. My children never ask me to forgive their many childish pranks - yet I do. And what parent

would lead their children to temptation or not protect their children from evil? In that one word, "Papa", my children expressed these things to me.

If I do these instinctively for my children, would the Lord not do these to his children? Then why do we have to tell him to do these things for us? I then realized that if I added the word "You" before every petition, I get the different meaning of the prayer.

As in my children's exclamation of the word "Papa", this prayer is our exclamation of "Papa" to our Father. In it we express our confidence that he will do what we asked for. He gives us our daily bread. He forgives us our debts as we forgive our debtors. He does not lead us to temptation and he delivers us from evil.

This goes to another question - then why does God not grant some of our prayers? Look at the prayer of Jesus. These are petitions that are according to the will of the Father and thus these will be done. Jesus said, *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you."* When I first read this promise, I was asking the Lord for something and I knew that the Lord would not

give what I asked for. I then told the Lord, "*But you said, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you. Why are you not giving me what I wished for?*" I felt the Lord tell me that I have not met the condition for this. I was so focused on the second part that I forgot the most important condition - *If I remained in him and his words remain in me.*

What then does it mean to remain in God and for his word to remain in me? I think this means that we have to be in tune with God's will. So if we ask something that is according to his will, he will surely give it. Take our children as an example. If it is time for them to study and they say, "Can I study now?" Do you say no? Of course not! You are even pleased that your child has the initiative to ask for something you wanted him to do.

So then, how should we pray? Jesus said, "*Do not babble like pagans. Who think that they can get what they ask for by the length of their prayers.*" Are we like pagans in our prayers? Do we babble on and on asking the Lord to give us this or to do that? St. Paul said, "*We do not know how to pray that is why the Spirit helps us to pray.*" We take this as our clue to true prayer.

When we pray, we ask the Lord to show us what he wants us to pray for. Then when the Lord reveals it to us, we pray for it. Such prayer shows total surrender to the Lord and if such is our prayer, we are sure that all that we ask for will be given to us.

## *Precious in God's Sight*

I was praying Luke 7 and I do not know why but I was very touched with the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet.

I wondered what made this woman to, all of a sudden, go into a Pharisee's house at the risk of humiliation (because she was a woman of questionable character) and approach Jesus. Then I thought maybe, there were some things that happened behind the scenes. Things not recorded in the gospel.

Just think of it this way - she was a woman of questionable character - a prostitute. Because of this, she has lost her dignity as a human being. To add insult to injury, she probably was not welcome in society. She probably lived her life alone, being ridiculed by the people and probably being scorned by some of the Pharisees - one of whom would probably be Simon the host of Jesus that night.

The events that led to this outburst of emotion from the woman - we can only guess. But I imagine that Jesus probably showed her the respect she never knew nor expected. And

this precisely is the main point of the gospel - that we are God's children and because of this we are worthy of dignity and respect. Jesus restored to her the dignity she lost. He made her feel that she was important and worth the respect of Jesus and the love of God.

What this story shows is that no matter who we are - even if we are the rejects of society, even if everyone rejects us - the Lord is always faithful. We are his children and we are precious in his sight. I remember a verse in one of the psalms

*THOUGH MY FATHER AND MOTHER  
ABANDON ME, YOU WILL NOT ABANDON  
ME. FOR YOU O LORD ARE FAITHFUL.*

*PSALM 27:10*

Everyone is precious in God's sight.

That is the reality. And if God tells us that we are precious, no one can change that fact. We are the Lord's. We are precious. We are loved.

# *Preparation for Christmas 2000*

*THE HOUR HAS COME FOR THE SON OF  
MAN TO BE GLORIFIED... I AM  
TROUBLED NOW. YET WHAT SHOULD I  
SAY? 'FATHER, SAVE ME FROM THIS  
HOUR? BUT IT WAS FOR THIS PURPOSE  
THAT I CAME TO THIS HOUR. FATHER,  
GLORIFY YOUR NAME*

*JOHN 12:23, 27-28*

**A**fter office, I dropped by the St. Andrew's Cathedral which is a block from my office. At the start of the week, I wanted to do a station of the cross but was not able to do so until that afternoon. I feel very blessed to have done it.

Although I am not familiar with the Station of the Cross, I tried my best to follow each station based on the pictures. I tried reflecting on each station and even on the first station, I felt and realized how Jesus truly

emptied himself to obey the will of the Father. As I went through the other stations, I saw how Jesus struggled despite intense physical and emotional pain - just to do the Father's will.

When I came to the station where Jesus was stripped of his clothes to be crucified, I realized that this is what the Father wants of us. As we approach our 'Calvary', we too should remove ourselves of material things that hinder us from knowing God so that he can be glorified.

During our 'crucifixion', we too should stretch out our hands in prayer - not so much as to ask for strength BUT, as Jesus did, proclaim the victory of God. For it is during these moments of trouble and darkness that God's power works in us. His power and grace burns everything that is not him so that when everything has been burned, what remains will be our pure love for him.

During this Advent season, may we truly remove from ourselves everything that is not the Lord so that we can celebrate his birth and this Great Year of Jubilee with joy and power.

## *The Red Sea Experience*

Exodus 14 tells us a very powerful story of God's intervention in the history of his people. We have the house of Israel who just left Egypt and are now encamped along the sea. Then comes Pharaoh with his chariots, horsemen and troops. The house of Israel had no where to run. They were caught in the middle of the sea and Pharaoh. The house of Israel was now terrified because they faced sure death. Their choice was to die by the hands of Pharaoh or die by drowning in the Sea.

In the confusion Moses spoke,

*DO NOT BE AFRAID. STAND FIRM AND  
YOU WILL SEE THE DELIVERANCE THE  
LORD WILL BRING YOU TODAY. THE  
EGYPTIANS YOU SEE TODAY YOU WILL  
NEVER SEE AGAIN. THE LORD WILL  
FIGHT FOR YOU; YOU NEED ONLY TO BE  
STILL.*

*EXODUS 14:13-14*

Then Moses raised his staff and stretched his hand over the sea. And a strong wind came and the house of Israel saw the angel of the Lord moved from the front to the rear - separating them from Pharaoh. The wind then blew all night and then the Lord drove back the sea and turned it to dry land. The Israelites passed through the dry land to safety.

This experience revealed to the Israelites the power of God over nature. They saw another dimension of the Lord and this stuck in their minds.

In our Christian life, we too will have our own Red Sea experience. There will be times when for no fault of ours we get caught in a no hope situation. In these times, what do we do? Do we find a way out?

I have very often been caught in such a situation. The first thing that comes to my mind is - what made this happen? Maybe I discerned wrongly and now this is the result. But time and again, I have learned that *we never make a mistake as long as an act was done after deep and careful discernment*. So there is no such thing as wrong discernment. God will always lead us to his will.

*ALL THINGS WORK FOR THE GOOD OF  
THOSE WHO LOVE **G**OD AND FOR THOSE  
WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS  
PURPOSE.*

*ROMANS 8:28*

Once we realize this we look at our situation differently. It is not anymore what I want but where the Lord wants me to be or what the Lord wants me to do. And if our prayer at these times is for the Lord to reveal what he wants us to do, he will surely show it to us. If after careful prayer and discernment, we find the Lord leading us to a path that seems impossible, then all we have to do is stand firm and wait. For if it is God's will he will surely intervene and nothing can prevent it from happening.

And then will we see the power of God working a miracle in our lives.



## *Resurrection of Jesus*

In Luke's version of the resurrection, Jesus shows his hands and feet to his disciples. The wounds on his hands and feet show that Jesus died, and has risen again.

However, I believe that there is a deeper meaning to all these actions. In the Old Testament, we often encounter the phrase "*hand of God*". This phrase means power of God. Thus when Jesus tells his disciples to look at his hands, he is telling them to see the power of God at work in his death and resurrection.

What about the feet? In Genesis, God told the serpent, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman. His feet shall crush your head and you will strike his heel.*" At the resurrection, we see this prophecy fulfilled-Jesus has crushed the head of the serpent-and the wounds on his feet proved that the serpent has struck his heel. This proves the faithfulness of God in fulfilling his word as well as his victory over evil.

The resurrection therefore shows God's power, faithfulness and sure victory over evil. We are a resurrection people and with this, we too have power over evil. We have won over evil and evil cannot touch us because our Lord and Master has won the victory for us.

No matter how dark things look-no matter how bad things go, we are sure of this, the Lord's power is always with us. His death and resurrection proves his faithfulness. And in the end, we too will rise over our difficulties and win over evil by the power and faithfulness of our Lord.

# *Sainthood*

## *A Call to Please God*

For Catholics, we honour people who lived their lives in love of the Lord. We call these people Saints because by their lives, they undoubtedly mirror their love for God. However, this practice has led us to lose sight of the doctrine that all believers are saints.

*IN HIM WE WERE ALSO CHOSEN -  
HAVING BEEN PREDESTINED ACCORDING  
TO THE PLAN OF HIM WHO WORKS OUT  
EVERYTHING IN CONFORMITY WITH THE  
PURPOSE OF HIS WILL - IN ORDER THAT  
WE, WHO WERE THE FIRST TO HOPE IN  
CHRIST MIGHT BE FOR THE PRAISE OF  
HIS GLORY.*

*EPHESIANS 1:11-12.*

Those who hope in Christ have been set apart by God for the specific purpose of giving glory to him. This includes ALL who hope in Christ - those who had lived, those who are living and those who will come. **THIS INCLUDES YOU!**

Paul says this,

*LIVE AS CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT - FOR  
THE FRUIT OF THE LIGHT CONSISTS IN  
ALL GOODNESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND  
TRUTH AND FIND OUT WHAT PLEASES  
THE LORD.*

*EPHESIANS 5:8-9*

In my opinion, I think the Saints were not given the honour because they lived a good life. They became Saints because they lived a life according to God's will. Their good, righteous and truthful lives happened not because they wanted to do good. Their lives bore fruit because they lived for God and did what pleased God.

What DOES please God? Remember the rich young man who came to Jesus and asked how he can get eternal life. Jesus said,

*WHY DO YOU ASK ME ABOUT WHAT IS  
GOOD? THERE IS ONLY ONE WHO IS  
GOOD. IF YOU WANT TO ENTER LIFE,  
OBEY THE COMMANDMENTS.*

*MATTHEW 19:17*

I have been trying to find out what this means and I think what Jesus meant here is that only God can tell you what is good and as a general guide, obey the commands. However, obeying the commandments is not enough because Jesus added,

*IF YOU WANT TO BE PERFECT, GO, SELL  
YOUR POSSESSIONS AND GIVE TO THE  
POOR, AND YOU WILL HAVE TREASURE  
IN HEAVEN. THEN COME, FOLLOW ME.*

*MATTHEW 19:21*

To live a life that pleases God is to turn our attention from the gifts and turn our attention to the Giver himself. Obeying the commandments is just part of being a Christian. To be a TRUE Christian we must strive to discern God's will AND to do his will. The key here is to discern his will. A Christian who does not pray and discern God's will is not a true Christian. How can you know God's will is you do not sit down in silence and listen to him?

Of course discernment is just part of the story. The true Christian ACTS on his discernment - even if it seems impossible - because everything is possible with the Lord.

We have to realize that once God makes up his mind to do something, it shall be done. St. Benedict, the Father of the West has a simple philosophy - *Ora et Labore* - prayer and work.

Work without prayer and discernment is reckless. Prayer and discernment without action is dead. Prayer and discernment that leads to action pleases God.

May we be able to live a life of prayer and work that will bear fruit so that God will be glorified in our lives.

## *Seeing Through God's Eyes*

*WHEN YOU HAVE LIFTED UP THE SON  
OF MAN, THEN YOU WILL KNOW THAT I  
AM  
AND THAT I DO NOTHING OF MYSELF;  
WHAT THE FATHER HAS TAUGHT ME IS  
WHAT I PREACH;  
HE WHO SENT ME IS WITH ME AND HAS  
NOT LEFT ME TO MYSELF,  
FOR I ALWAYS DO WHAT PLEASES HIM.*

*JOHN 8:25-26*

Jesus said this after he was confronted with an adulterous woman. The Jews wanted to stone her but Jesus spoke and her life was spared. The Jews were not happy with this because the incident made them look bad to the people. So they came to Jesus and challenged him. And this was one of the strongest testimony of Jesus about himself.

Jesus tells his accusers that the only way to know him completely is to lift him up. We normally associate this with lifting him up on the cross. However, the original word used in John's gospel means to exalt. With this in mind,

we see that we can only understand who Jesus is if we exalt him. To exalt Jesus means to make him our Lord. Some claim that you are saved if you just say that Jesus is Lord.

But for me, I think there is more to this. Calling Jesus as Lord means that we surrender our lives to him and that it is now he who controls our lives. It goes deeper than just doing good works - and certainly goes deeper than just telling others that Jesus is Lord.

Exalting Jesus means giving up our desire to live according to what we think is right. It is to live the life that the Father wants us to live as revealed to us through Jesus. Making him Lord is not easy because we all have a tendency to do things according to what WE perceive. Making him Lord means that we do things according to what HE tells us. It is a struggle and requires a lot of prayer and discernment. But it is possible because of the Spirit that Jesus has given us.

To further appreciate this, we must remember that in his earthly life, Jesus was in every way a human being. This despite of his divinity. (*How this is possible, I do not know*). Being fully human, he too experienced all the difficulties we are experiencing now. And yet, despite all these "baggage" that he had to carry,

Jesus does nothing of himself. He preaches what he learned from the Father. And his life is centered towards pleasing the Father. And this, I believe is also the goal of our lives - to please the Father.

For one, we have to see things through the eyes of God. Situations can come to us and when we see them through our eyes, we tend to act based on our intellect or emotions. But if we see them through the eyes of God, then we will have the right perspective and be able to respond according to God's will. Reality is seen through the eyes of God. What we see is virtual reality.

Comes the question, how then can we see through God's eyes? The answer here is discernment. Without discernment, we cannot know the will of God. In his book on prayer, "*Weeds Among the Wheat*", Fr. Thomas Greene S.J. said that discernment is the dividing line between prayer and action. Prayer leads to discernment and discernment leads to action based on the discernment.

During prayer, we come to God in humility and surrender ourselves and our situation to him. We let him take charge and commit ourselves to doing what he wants. Without humility there is no surrender. Without

surrender, discernment is not possible. And without discernment AND action based on discernment Jesus cannot be Lord of our lives. And if Jesus is not Lord of our lives, then holiness is not possible.

When a rich young man came to Jesus, he asked Jesus what he has to do to possess eternal life. Jesus said,

*IF YOU WISH TO ENTER INTO LIFE, KEEP  
THE COMMANDMENTS. ... IF YOU WISH  
TO BE PERFECT, GO AND SELL WHAT  
YOU OWN AND GIVE THE MONEY TO THE  
POOR AND ... COME, FOLLOW ME*

*MATTHEW 19:17-21*

Note that to just enter life, all we have to do is keep the commandments. But to be perfect, to live the life to the fullest - to please God, we have to detach ourselves from everything we have and follow Jesus.

May God give us the grace to see things through his eyes so that we may have the courage to do his will - through Jesus our Lord.

## *Send Forth Your Spirit*

Proclaiming the word of God is a difficult task. And it carries with it a big responsibility as an error may cause a scandal to the listener and push them away from the Lord. Added to this are the more '*liberal*' thinking of intellectuals who come up with ideas that neither propagate the gospel and in fact dilute the power of the gospel.

What I am referring to is the move in some churches towards changing some of the teachings and doctrines to make them palatable to the so called *special interest groups*. This move towards political correctness by quoting scripture or explaining passages in scripture to justify specific lifestyles and actions is an outright insult to the Lord and also to themselves.

Aside from these 'changes' in the churches, Christianity is being hit hard in the streets. We see Christians - specially Catholics being the target of jokes in media. Indeed, the church is being attacked both from within and from the outside. And the forces that do this seems to be winning.

But we take comfort that God is in control and that all these have been foretold in scripture.

*FOR ALTHOUGH THEY KNEW GOD, THEY NEVER GLORIFIED HIM AS GOD NOR GAVE THANKS TO HIM, BUT THEIR THINKING BECAME FUTILE AND THEIR FOOLISH HEARTS WERE DARKENED. ALTHOUGH THEY CLAIMED TO BE WISE, THEY BECAME FOOLS AND EXCHANGED THE GLORY OF THE IMMORTAL GOD FOR IMAGES MADE TO LOOK LIKE MORTAL MAN AND BIRDS AND ANIMALS AND REPTILES.*

*THEREFORE GOD GAVE THEM OVER IN THE SINFUL DESIRES OF THEIR HEARTS TO SEXUAL IMPURITY FOR THE DEGRADING OF THEIR BODIES WITH ONE ANOTHER. THEY EXCHANGED THE TRUTH OF GOD FOR A LIE, AND WORSHIPPED AND SERVED CREATED THINGS RATHER THAN THE CREATOR- WHO IS FOREVER PRAISED. AMEN.*

*BECAUSE OF THIS, GOD GAVE THEM  
OVER TO SHAMEFUL LUSTS. EVEN THEIR  
WOMEN EXCHANGED NATURAL  
RELATIONS FOR UNNATURAL ONES. IN  
THE SAME WAY THE MEN ALSO  
ABANDONED NATURAL RELATIONS WITH  
WOMEN AND WERE INFLAMED WITH LUST  
FOR ONE ANOTHER. MEN COMMITTED  
INDECENT ACTS WITH OTHER MEN, AND  
RECEIVED IN THEMSELVES THE DUE  
PENALTY FOR THEIR PERVERSION.*

*ROMANS 1:21-27*

We know that God is still in control - and that eventually his Holy Name will be glorified. The only way that the Church can win is to remember who can save it.

When we look at scripture, we see that Jesus made a promise to Peter:

*YOU ARE PETER, AND ON THIS ROCK I  
WILL BUILD MY CHURCH AND THE GATES  
OF HADES WILL NOT OVERCOME IT.*

Matthew 16:18

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see how the Spirit of God worked in the growth of the early church. The persecution of the Christians after the death of Stephen dispersed the Christians in Jerusalem. But this was also an opportunity to have Christians spread the gospel to the neighbouring countries.

As the Church celebrates the last year of before the Jubilee year, and as we celebrate Pentecost this May, let us pray that the Father may send his Spirit so that his gospel may be preached with power and that people may turn their hearts back to God.

*LORD, SEND FORTH YOUR SPIRIT - AND  
YOU SHALL RENEW THE FACE OF THE  
EARTH*

*PSALM 104-30*

## *Sensuality and Sensibility*

*LIVING SENSUAL LIVES, RULED ENTIRELY  
BY OUR OWN PHYSICAL DESIRES AND  
OUR OWN MIND; SO THAT BY NATURE WE  
WERE AS MUCH UNDER GOD'S ANGER AS  
THE REST OF THE WORLD.*

*EPHESIANS 2:3 (JERUSALEM BIBLE)*

As Christians, we are suppose to be different from non-believers. Our minds and hearts should be focused only on one thing: loving God and doing his will. This attitude of loving God goes beyond doing what WE think is right. It goes beyond what WE believe is right. It is seeing things through the eyes of God so that we can know him more and thus love him more.

In the verse above, we see that sensuality is defined as being ruled entirely by our physical desires and our own mind. Included in physical desires are lust, greed and the other sins. The media has done a good job in giving this definition to us.

However, one thing that caught me is that sensuality is also being ruled by our own mind. I will try to explain this.

One example that I like most is the one given by Fr. Thomas Greene S.J. in his book - Vacation with the Lord. He posed this question. If you happened to get 10,000 pesos without any effort - what would you do? He then proceeded to explain the three different responses to this situation.

The first kind are the procrastinators. They keep saying that they will give some money tomorrow. Tomorrow becomes today and they postpone their plan until they forget about it.

The second kind are the tithers. This is very typical of some Christians who would give a percentage of the money to charity and do with the rest as they want to.

The third kind are those who lay the money before the Lord and ask the Lord on what HE wants to do with the money. If the Lord tells them to keep the whole amount, they keep it with gratitude. If the Lord tells them to give a certain percent to this and a certain percent to that, they do it without complaint. If the Lord tells them to give the whole amount, they do so - probably after much argument with the Lord.

The question is - which of these do you think pleased the Lord?

We know that people who procrastinate never get things done. These are the seeds who fall on little soil. They get carried with emotion. Feelings dictate their actions and they do things because they want to and because it feels good. The bad thing about this is that because their faith lies on emotions, they believe that they are right and will fight to be right.

The second kind are those who give money to wherever THEY think is the best place to put the money. What they did is like telling the Lord, "OK, here is your cut now leave me alone". Although they did good by giving to charity, it is still their will and mind that ruled their action.

The third kind are those who do what they humbly discern to be the Lord's will. They leave everything up to the Lord and let HIM decide on the situation. Sure enough, they might complain. They might struggle but in the end, they always do what the Lord wants.

Our Blessed Mother is a model of a sensible Christian. Her life was lived in total obedience to the Lord. When confronted with the possibility of being the Mother of God, she accepted it as the Lord's will. When the wise men presented the gifts to Jesus, she let them do

it and treasured all these in her heart. When confronted with the death of her Son, she humbly stood by his cross - accepting this as God's will.

Mary's life shows us that faith is a matter of decision. It is not based on emotions and logic. It is not based on knowing why things happen. It is based on trust in the Lord and loving the Lord. I believe this is sensibility - to do something, not because we know why but because we know who is leading us.

May the Blessed Mother continue to be an example of sensibility for us so that we may treasure things that we do not understand and trust in the God our Saviour.

## *Sowing on Rich Soil*

*WHAT THE SOWER IS SOWING IS THE  
WORD.*

*THOSE ON THE EDGE OF THE PATH  
WHERE THE WORD IS SOWN ARE PEOPLE  
WHO HAVE NO SOONER HEARD IT THAN  
SATAN COMES AND CARRIES AWAY THE  
WORD THAT WAS SOWN IN THEM.*

*SIMILARLY, THOSE WHO RECEIVE THE  
SEED ON PATCHES OF ROCK ARE PEOPLE  
WHO, WHEN FIRST THEY HEAR THE  
WORD, WELCOME IT AT ONCE WITH JOY.  
BUT THEY HAVE NO ROOT IN THEM,  
THEY DO NOT LAST; SHOULD SOME  
TRIAL COME, OR SOME PERSECUTION ON  
ACCOUNT OF THE WORD, THEY FALL  
AWAY AT ONCE.*

*THEN THERE ARE OTHERS WHO RECEIVE  
THE SEED IN THORNS. THESE HAVE  
HEARD THE WORD, BUT THE WORRIES  
OF THE WORLD, THE LURE OF RICHES  
AND ALL THE OTHER PASSIONS COME IN  
TO CHOKE THE WORD AND SO IT  
PRODUCES NOTHING.*

*AND THERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE  
RECEIVED THE SEED IN RICH SOIL; THEY  
HEAR THE WORD AND ACCEPT IT AND  
YIELD A HARVEST, THIRTY AND SIXTY  
AND A HUNDRED FOLD.*

*MARK 4:14-20 (JERUSALEM BIBLE)*

We have often heard this explanation of the parable of the sower. As I was praying over this, I noticed that in all the instances, the word was heard. The difference was only in the way the word was received.

First, the word did not have time to grow. It was snatched away immediately by the devil. This happens when we get distracted while hearing the word. I for one am guilty of this quite often. I would attend mass but will not be able to concentrate either because of an over active imagination or maybe just lack of concentration. When this happens, the word that is sown did not have a chance to grow.

The second way is when the word is received on an emotional level. Faith as Jesus wants it is not to be based on emotion. Faith based on emotion is selfish. The reason I say this is because actions based on emotional faith will be based on whether something feels good or not. It is not based on a firm commitment to love

God above all things. That is why we often see people weep during their conversion and fall away after a few months. Very often too, an emotional faith leads to treating God like a switch that is turned on during depression and turned off when things are all right. And very often troubles are seen as God's punishment rather than as God's way of purification.

Notice on the third example, Jesus talks of worries of the world, lure of riches and other passions CHOKING the word. There is a desire to grow yet the grace of God is hindered by our attachment to things. Personally, I think the root cause of this is lack of faith in God or refusal to believe in the promises of God. I know this is difficult because through the years, the Lord has slowly and very often forced me into a situation where there is no escape to teach me to surrender the situation to him. And I have learned that the more I refuse to let go, the more frustrated I become. But once I surrender the situation to the Lord, the Lord always intervenes. Quite often, the Lord does not show me an escape but he clears the way through the situation.

So what can we do, now that we know what prevents the word from growing in us?

To prevent the seeds from being snatched by the enemy, we have to 'sweep the road' and gather the seed and plant them onto good soil. For me, this means that we have to spend more time with the word. Spiritual growth is not possible without knowledge of scripture.

To allow the seed to take root, we have to 'dig and clear the rocks' so that the soil will be softer and thus allow the seed to take root. This means that we must be broken by the Lord. Let our faith go deeper than our emotions. When troubles come, we persevere and believe that God is faithful and will pull us through.

To prevent the thorns from choking the crop, we have to go in and remove the thorns. For me, this requires us not only letting go of our anxieties but to make a conscious effort to be focused on the Lord and in doing his will.

It is only in doing these that we can eventually grow in our life with the Lord.

As we start this year, may the Lord give us the grace to be more committed to the serious and truthful study of his word. May we allow him to dig and clear the rocks in our hearts so that we can worship him in Spirit and Truth.

And finally, may we allow him to take away the thorns that choke our growth. And when he has done this, may he use us to proclaim his word to the world.



# *Tithes*

## *What They Mean*

*BE SURE TO SET ASIDE A TENTH OF ALL THAT YOUR FIELDS PRODUCE EVERY YEAR. EAT THE TITHE OF YOUR GRAIN, NEW WINE OR OIL, AND THE FIRSTBORN OF YOUR HERDS AND FLOCKS IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD YOUR GOD AT THE PLACE HE WILL CHOOSE AS A DWELLING FOR HIS NAME, SO THAT YOU MAY LEARN TO REVERE THE LORD YOUR GOD ALWAYS.*

*DEUTERONOMY 14:22-23*

**T**ithing has been mentioned even in Genesis when Abraham gave the priest Melchizedek one tenth of all his possession. When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees, he did not tell them to stop giving tithes. He told them to practice justice and love of God without neglecting tithes.

Why give tithes? As the passage in Deuteronomy says, "*so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.*" Tithing is a way of us telling the Lord that we are offering back to him what he has given us. It is a sacrifice to him.

Sacrifice here means an offering to the Lord. By tithing, we tell the Lord that he is the source of everything we have and by giving part of it back to him, we are also telling him that we trust that he will provide for all our needs. We are also telling him that he has given us at least 10 percent more than what we need.

Where do we give our tithes? The Old Testament tells us that tithes are to be slain in the temple and eaten in the temple (in the presence of the Lord at the place he will choose). What this means is that giving tithes is a celebration. We celebrate God's abundant gift to us. Some pastors recommend that entire tithes should go to support the church.

If you look at churches in North America, you will see that they are in desperate need of financial support. Some congregations had to merge and share one church to save money. If such is the case, maybe the entire tithe should support the church.

But if the church is blessed with an abundance of money, I think tithes can be used for other purposes. One thing that comes to mind is what the Lord has repeatedly said in the Old testament-look after orphans, widows and aliens in the land.

However, before we try to find the fortunate orphan, widow or alien, I think we should look within our own family. I am not thinking of our immediate family (children and spouses). If we give tithes to others and our parents are starving, there is something wrong. For the Lord who commands us to tithe also commands us to honor our parents. Only when our parents are looked after, should we look for other people to assist.

Being expatriates, our tithes can be used to help the poor in our host countries. We can also offer our tithes to our countrymen who are in need of financial help. But whatever and wherever we discern to use it, the tithe is the Lord's and it should be used according to his will. It should not be used personally - not even for our children or spouses. Because tithes are to be used for others.

Financial tithes are just part of the story. We also have to tithe our time and talent. Giving time for the Lord each day is a form of tithing our time. Giving time to serve others is also a form of tithing. Tithing is a serious matter and is needed for our growth.

*YOU ARE ROBBING ME IN TITHES AND OFFERINGS. YOU ARE UNDER A CURSE- THE WHOLE NATION OF YOU. BRING THE WHOLE TITHE INTO THE STOREHOUSE, THAT THERE MAYBE FOOD IN MY HOUSE. TEST ME IN THIS," SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY, "AND SEE IF I WILL NOT THROW OPEN THE FLOODGATES OF HEAVEN AND POUR OUT SO MUCH BLESSING THAT YOU WILL NOT HAVE ROOM ENOUGH FOR IT*

*MALACHI 3:8-10*

## *We Believe in God*

August is a very special month for me. Not only does it have two important solemnities of our Lady, but two major events in my life happened on these two feast days of Mary.

The first happened eight years ago. The Lord gave me a princess on the feast of the Queenship of Mary. The second happened a year ago when the Lord took my father with him on the feast of Mary's Assumption. Two great feasts of Mary and two important events in my life.

Coincidence? Think what you will but for me, this is NOT a coincidence. A coincidence is an event that happened by chance. Very often, we hear the phrase 'good luck' or 'bad luck'. And quite surprisingly, we hear this from Christians. These terms have been so used in our language that we use them without really thinking of what it means.

Luck, whether good or bad is something that happens without any reason. To attribute something to luck or to wish someone good luck is to believe in superstition. And to believe in superstition is to believe that something else controls events. But like I said, as Christians we do not believe that things just happen.

What then do we believe in?

***We believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth.*** That is part of what we believe. Our actions therefore should be based on what we believe.

**God is a Father.**

*ALL GOOD GIVING AND EVERY PERFECT  
GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING FROM  
THE FATHER OF LIGHTS WITH WHOM  
THERE IS NO ALTERATION OR SHADOW  
CAUSED BY CHANGE*

*JAMES 1:17*

As a Father, he gives us not only the best but the perfect gifts because he is perfect - unchanging and pure. Not only does he know our needs, he is **Yahweh Jireh** -the God who provides (*Genesis 22:8*) and gives us everything that we need.

As a Father also, God is to be loved AND feared. The current stress on a loving God has made people think that they can do anything they want. Their argument is that because God is love, he accepts them as they are so they can be what they want to be. And God understands and they will go to heaven.

Such a thought and teaching is trash. As a Father, God loves us - in fact, he IS love. But as a father, God also has to discipline us.

*WHOM THE LORD LOVES, HE  
DISCIPLINES; HE SCOURGES EVERY SON  
HE ACKNOWLEDGES.*

*HEBREWS 12:6*

One of things that saddens me is hearing pastors and even Catholic bishops calling God in the feminine gender and as a Mother. *This is very wrong and dangerous. It dilutes the gospel and much worse it is not the truth.* The intention may be good - to attract more people to the church. But this goes against everything that Jesus revealed to us through the gospel.

For me, if my Lord says that God is a Father, then he is a Father. Saying otherwise is saying that Jesus is wrong and is lying. I hope that people who say this have a good reason for doing this when they come in judgment before God.

**God is Almighty.**

*THE MIGHTY ONE HAS DONE GREAT  
THINGS FOR ME, HOLY IS HIS NAME*

*LUKE 1:49*

Since God is our Father and he is mighty, he does great things not only for Mary, but for us if we are obedient to him. If God is Almighty, then no one is more powerful than he is. If he is more powerful than anything else in all creation then what is there to be afraid of?

**God is Creator of heaven and earth.**

*ENTER, LET US BOW DOWN IN WORSHIP;  
LET US KNEEL BEFORE THE LORD WHO  
MADE US*

*PSALM 95:6*

If God created us, then this should be our attitude towards him - humility. We cannot come to the Lord to demand that he give us something. We cannot tell God to give us something because we have done something for

him. We cannot do anything to add or diminish his glory. He is God - the Creator of all things and therefore he has the final say on how things are to be done and when things are to happen. Therefore living a life in the Lord means living a life of humility.

Humility is realizing our position with respect to the Lord. It is realizing that God is our Father who wants only the best for us and he is Almighty who has control over all things. We cannot do anything on our own. In children's shows today, we hear them teaching the children that "we can do anything that we want to do" or that "If you put your mind to it, anything is possible."

Well this is good for the child's self-esteem but this is wrong. What should be taught to children is that

*I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH  
CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME.*

*PHILIPPIANS 4:13*

It is only when we realize this that we recognize the truth. Things happen only if they are within the will of the Lord.

Let us therefore pray that when we recite this part of the Creed, we will truly be able to live it out in humility and total submission to the Lord.

# *Welcome the Kingdom of God*

*AMEN, I SAY TO YOU, WHOEVER DOES  
NOT ACCEPT THE KINGDOM OF GOD  
LIKE A CHILD WILL NOT ENTER IT*

*MATTHEW 10:15*

The common interpretation of this verse is that we should accept the kingdom of God as a child would. However, as I was praying over this, I realize that there is a different interpretation to this. If we read a few verses up from this, we see Jesus telling the disciples that,

*WHOEVER RECEIVES ONE CHILD SUCH  
AS THIS IN MY NAME, RECEIVES ME AND  
WHOEVER RECEIVES ME, RECEIVES NOT  
ME BUT THE ONE WHO SENT ME.*

*MARK 9:37*

This got me to think that another way of interpreting the first verse is that we have to accept the kingdom of God as we would accept a child. If we look at the verse this way, then a different perspective comes up. I can speak from experience that welcoming a child can indeed be very difficult.

I was a bachelor until I was 31 years old. When I finally got married, my life did not change much. Of course, now, I had a wife to think of. My life was now shared with Marie.

When we knew that we were going to have a baby, things began to change. The focus was now towards the baby. Everything revolved around the baby (our schedules, our activities, what we can do and what we can't do, etc.) Things were changing up to the day she was born. We had to set up the house for the baby. We had to buy things for the baby.

From the time she was born, our focus was on her. Everything centered on her. Our work schedules, our home schedules, our expenses, sleeping and waking times and even the food we were to eat. I guess those who have had babies know very well what happens.

However, despite all these '*troubles*', there was a joyful expectation.

I believe that my experience with my daughter (and more so with my son), shows that indeed, welcoming God's kingdom should be a joyful experience. Being ruled by God is a joy. **BUT** you should also expect that your life will change.

Once you welcome God into your life, your focus will be on him. Just as a child disrupts everything in our lives, he too disrupts our lives - for the better of course!

Everything will and should revolve around the Lord.

May the Lord then give us the grace to re-focus our lives on him and detach ourselves from all things so that our lives can revolve around him.



## *What is the Good News?*

**E**vangelization - the process of proclaiming the good news. This is a very often used word in our Christian life. And by Christ's command,

*GO INTO ALL THE WORLD, AND PREACH  
THE GOOD NEWS TO ALL CREATION.*

*MARK 16:15*

We, as his disciples should preach the good news. But comes the question, what is the good news?

The good news is summed up in three words: God Loves You. What is the proof of this? To answer this, we go back to the story of creation.

When God created heaven and earth, he also created man. God also "*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*" (*Genesis 2:7*). God gave his breath to only one creature - MAN. And that was what made man very special because he had the Sprit of God. Because God loved the man so much, he put the man in a place where he would be able to

live under the authority of the Spirit of God. While living in the Spirit, man enjoyed his work. Everything was provided to him by God. Man did not need anything, not even clothing - so that they did not even noticed that they were naked.

But as we all know, man sinned against God and we see later in scripture, man had to be driven out of the place God had prepared for him because he made a decision to reject God's authority. We are now doomed to die. We are cursed to struggle in life. There will now be unfulfilled needs - in short, we now live a life outside of the Spirit of God.

With Adam's rebellion, we lost everything - except God's love. However, despite Man's rejection of God's authority, God still promised that he will one day unite himself with man when Evil is defeated.

So when Jesus surrendered his will to the Father and became man, this was the fulfillment of God's promise. Jesus died and the gates of heaven were open to man again. In St. John's account of the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and *breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22)*. What

did Jesus do again? He **breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"**. Is this not what God did during creation? *He breathed into (man's) nostrils the breath of life.*

Could this be that the resurrection of Jesus means the restoration of man before the eyes of God? The answer is YES! With the resurrection of Jesus, We are now reconciled with God and are now brought back to our original state during creation. And that is the good news.

That is why the death and resurrection of Jesus is the central point of our faith. In the Acts of the Apostles, we have three examples of the apostles' preaching (*two by Peter - Acts 2:14-47 and Acts 3:11-26 and one by Paul - Acts 17:22-31*). All these examples always have the same theme: God had promised a deliverer and this was fulfilled in Jesus. He was killed and God raised him from the dead. Because of his resurrection, the Spirit is now poured out to those who repent. And like official documents that are stamped with a seal, those who repent are sealed with the Spirit as a proof that they are reconciled and are reinstated to their original position with the Father.

I always liked one of the eucharistic prayer that goes, "*Father, in love you created us, in justice you condemned us and in mercy you redeemed us.*" I think this sums up the good news. God loves us, he created us - we rejected him - but he redeemed us. God always extends his hand to us and if we are willing to take his hand, we are restored to our original state before his eyes. And this is the good news.

May we be able to

*PREACH THE WORD; BE PREPARED IN  
SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON; CORRECT,  
REBUKE AND ENCOURAGE - WITH GREAT  
PATIENCE AND CAREFUL INSTRUCTION.*

*2 TIMOTHY 4:2*

In Jesus our Lord.

## *Will You Follow Me?*

God is love. He loves us and he cares for us.

A few years ago, I had a dream. I was walking on a mountain and was about to enter a cave. A guide came and looked into the cave and said to me, "Are you going in?" Not knowing what to do I hesitated. The guide then gave me his hand and said, "Will you follow me?" Then I woke up.

Although I always felt that we should not take dreams seriously, I reflected on it and somehow related this to my relationship with the Lord. If I should enter the dark cave, I needed a guide to lead me. Once inside, I may not know where to pass but the important thing is that I keep my eyes on my guide. And the more I trust the guide, the more I am sure to reach the end of the cave. It does not really matter what is ahead of me what matters is who is ahead of me.

I think this is also true with our relationship with the Lord. Very often in our relationship with him, the Lord leads us to a point where we have to make a decision. And at

that point, things will seem uncertain and dark. There will be fears of the future. It is at this point that the Lord gives us his hand and says, "Will you follow me?"

Our response to this question depends on our love for the Lord. If we love the Lord, we would always want to be where he is for us. And even if the way that he leads is dark or uncertain and very often painful, we push on because we know that this is the Lord's will and that we will come out better than before.

In my years of walking in the Lord, the Lord has humbled me a lot. In my eight years of marriage, my family moved to eight cities for an average of one city for each year of marriage. And every time we move people will ask us, are you here for the long term? And in the past, I always say, "Yes". And something always happens that makes us move to another city.

My point here is that every time we move, I always think that, "This is it. I want to settle here." My limited perspective of my condition makes me think that I am in the place the Lord has marked for me. Now, I am older and hopefully a little wiser, I realize that the only constant in all the moves we had was the Lord.

We had been in places where we had plenty.  
There were places where we had just enough.  
There was also a time when I was laid-off and  
we had to dip into our savings to be able to eat.

But through all these, I saw that the Lord  
was always there. Through all uncertainties, the  
Lord was always there. The lows were in fact  
ways of the Lord to kick me out of complacency  
so that I will move and do his will. How true it is  
what Paul said,

*ALL THINGS WORK FOR THE GOOD OF  
THOSE WHO LOVE GOD AND FOR THOSE  
CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE*

We all live in uncertain moments  
although in different situations. Some of you are  
not sure whether they will have a job next  
month. My new career forces me to trust the  
Lord to provide for the next contract. And I tell  
you, I feel the same way as you do. But what  
makes me confident is that the Lord is true to his  
word. He said he will provide and **HE WILL  
PROVIDE**. God's word is true and if he says so,  
it shall happen.

When things ahead are dark we do not  
worry about what is ahead of us. All we need to  
know is who is leading us. If it is the Lord, then  
we are safe.



## *Yahweh is God*

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is the confrontation of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. It has been years since Israel has been divided into two nations: Israel and Judah. Since the temple was built in Jerusalem which is in Judah, the worship of Yahweh was followed. Since the temple of Yahweh was not in Israel, the nation had to build one where they too can worship Yahweh. However, the problem of their temple is that it did not keep to the primary belief that there is only one God. The neighbours brought in their gods and the people of Israel put Yahweh beside these gods.

This came to a point where Baal was becoming more significant in the lives of the nation such that the prophets of Yahweh were executed and this did not even cause a stir in the people. The worship of Yahweh was about to collapse because there were no more prophets of Yahweh in Israel. They were either dead or hiding.

Elijah then came and challenged this. He faced all the prophets of Baal and posed this challenge to the people of Israel, "*If Yahweh is God, follow him. If Baal is God, follow him.*"

When he confronted the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, Elijah knew the purpose of the confrontation,

*SO THAT THIS PEOPLE WILL KNOW THAT  
YOU, O LORD, ARE GOD, AND THAT  
YOU ARE TURNING THEIR HEARTS BACK  
AGAIN.*

*1 KINGS 18:17*

For me, this was Elijah's role during his time.

And this too was the role of John the Baptist during his time. He was pointing people to God and calling them back to him.

In our time, the call of Elijah and John the Baptist still is relevant. They call us to approach the Lord so that we can know that the Lord is God. So that we can know how much he loves us and on knowing this, turn our hearts back to God.

I must admit that very often, in the mad rush to survive, I often forget that God is the only one that can make things happen. I often think and fool myself to believe that I can do things with my skills and qualifications. Very often, I make myself my own false idol. But the Lord is good. He constantly reminds me that everything depends on his pleasure. He constantly shows me that he is God and he constantly calls me to turn back to him.

This Christmas, may we realize that our salvation is a gift from God. We did not earn it. We did not work for it. It came in a complete fully wrapped package through a baby boy born in a manger. This baby is the fulfillment of God's salvation. He is the proof that Yahweh is God. He is the one who will restore us back to our original state before God. And he is the God who always calls us to turn back to him.

Let this word of the people of Israel ring in us throughout this season, "*Yahweh is God, Yahweh is God.*" (1 Kg 18:39).

May we all follow his Way, and be led by his Truth so that we may have eternal Life in the Christ Child this season and in the coming year. God bless you all.



# *The Year of Jubilee*

*THIS FIFTIETH YEAR YOU SHALL MAKE  
SACRED BY PROCLAIMING LIBERTY IN  
THE LAND FOR ALL ITS INHABITANTS. IT  
SHALL BE A JUBILEE FOR YOU.*

*LEVITICUS 25:11*

The year 2000 is special not only because of the Y2K bug, but most specially because it marks the beginning of the new century and millennium. So should we be celebrating or should we be worried?

A few days ago, I was very concerned with what was happening in society. I see that in the US and Canada, there is a move to subtly persecute Christians. Teaching against contraception, abortion and alternate lifestyles is branded as a violation of human rights of those affected. Yet, the attacks on the Church and Christians is not a violation of the rights of Christians. The national magazine in Canada (*McLean's*) aims to discredit Christianity by calling it a myth.

We see a decrease in attendance in churches across the richer countries. This has led to a number of churches closing. For other communities, leaders adapt their teachings to make them more palatable to so called special interest groups. I believe that this eventually causes more people to move out of their community than join it.

Add to these are the natural and man-made disasters. Do we have something to look forward to?

As I mentioned, this really concerned me a lot. But praise God, I read the Pope's book "*Crossing the Threshold of Hope*" and one thing stuck in my mind. "*Fear Not!*"

Indeed, as I look at it, there is nothing to fear - despite all these things that are happening. "*Fear Not!*" This was the command of Jesus. It is not an advice but it is a command to us who believe. True, society is moving away from Christ - but there is a thirst for something spiritual. Added to this are developments in technology.

When used for good, the internet is a powerful tool to fulfill the command of Christ to preach the good news to the world. Already we see a lot of websites that contain treasures like

documents from the Church councils, letters of the Church Fathers. Indeed, information for research is available literally at the tip of our hands.

More people are turning their lives to Christ - not only in Christian countries but in traditionally non-Christian countries and ex-Communist countries. (I was surprised to find out that the country that sent out the most missionaries is South Korea which is not predominantly Christian!) Converts from these countries have a deeper understanding of their faith mainly because of the persecutions and sufferings they experienced in previous years.

Quite surprisingly also, it is people from these countries that migrate to the richer countries and make the Church grow. Proof of this is that despite the closure of churches in Canada, the Archdiocese of Vancouver is setting up four new parishes at the cost of 3-5 million CAD each! According to the Archbishop, this is due to the influx of migrants from Asia and East Europe. But I personally believe that this is also because of his uncompromising stand in proclaiming the gospel despite the persecutions he faced.

Another thing that looks very hopeful is the initiative of the Pope to be reconciled with the other churches. Already, there has been moves to reconcile with the Eastern Churches. A few months ago, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church issued a joint statement on salvation by grace. The Vatican has already set up an embassy in Israel.

For me then, the new year marks the start of years of jubilee. These years will be years of freeing people from their slavery of sin. It will be years of renewed and more powerful relationship with our Lord. It will mark the beginning of a new springtime where the good news is proclaimed from "***Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.***"

May the Lord bless us all and may he continue to deepen our love for him for the glory of his name.