

# **THE WORD OF GOD: A LAMP TO OUR FEET**

———— **Vol. 2** ————

Rev. Fr. Dr. Peter Addai-Mensah  
and  
Rev. Fr. John K. Opoku

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# Acknowledgement

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*What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift – 1Cor. 4:7b.*

It is a fact that cannot be again said that God is the creator and sustainer of all life. God is the giver of all gifts. We will like to thank God for the gift of life He has given to us, for the expertise, the intelligence and the knowledge to come out with this book.

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To all those who contributed to the publication of this book, may the good and gracious Lord bless you. Amen.





# Preface

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Words are very important. They say a lot about a person when they are uttered. Words can build up a person or a nation. On the other hand, it can destroy or annihilate a person's dignity or a whole community. St. James says it all when he notes, *The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity. It stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature and is itself set on fire by hell.* – James 3:5b – 6. Right at the beginning of creation, we see the effectiveness of the word of God. The bible tells us that, *"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, Let there be light and there was light – Gen. 1:1-3.* The importance of the word of God cannot be over emphasised. It is very powerful and gives life. Jesus also adds his voice to the importance of the word of God when he says, *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished – Matt.5:17-18.*

It is against this back drop that the authors have taken upon themselves to share these reflections on the word of God. *The Word of God: A lamp to our feet* is collections of reflections on Sunday readings and solemnities and feasts from cycle or year A. This book is volume II, to

*The Word of God: A Guide to our spiritual Journey towards Eternal Life I Heaven*

It is the prayer of the authors that this book will be useful for priests/pastors, seminarians, Sunday school teachers, all who are

engaged in Evangelisation and individual Christians especially in this year of Faith.

**Rev. Fr. Dr. Peter Addai-Mensah**  
Catholic Chaplain/Senior Lecturer  
KNUST – KSI.

# First Sunday of Advent

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THEME: **KEEP AWAKE THEREFORE, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW ON WHAT DAY YOUR LORD IS COMING.**

Readings: Isa. 2:1-5; Rom. 13:11-14; Matt. 24:37-44

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, today we know is the first Sunday of Advent, the beginning of a new liturgical year. Advent comes from the Latin word, *Advenio*. *Advenire* means to come or to arrive. The season of Advent refers to the coming or the arrival of Jesus Christ. When the Catholic Church talks about the coming of Christ during the Advent season, it means two (2) things

1. It refers to the first coming of Christ at Christmas when he was incarnated or became human and dwelt among us.
2. It refers to the second coming of Christ when he will appear in his glory and majesty.

The Advent season is made up of four (4) weeks and divided into two (2) parts to emphasize the two (2) comings of Jesus Christ. The first part which begins from the first Sunday of Advent and ends on 16<sup>th</sup> December dwells on the second coming of Christ. The second part starts from the 17<sup>th</sup> December to the 24<sup>th</sup> December and focuses on the first coming of Christ when he took on our human nature.

## Message

The readings of today turn our attention on the second coming of Christ. When this will happen remains a mystery to you and

to me. No human being can bring this about and nobody knows when it will happen. What Jesus tells us in the gospel reading is that his second coming will be sudden. It will take many people by surprise. He goes on and uses the biblical event of the flood during the time of Noah to teach us a lesson. During the time of Noah, people were called upon to repent and turn a new leaf so as to be saved. Many people did not pay heed to the call to repentance and renewal. They were incorrigible, recalcitrant and obstinate. Consequently, they were swept away by the flood unlike those who heeded the call and entered into Noah's Ark which is a symbol or haven of salvation.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ in order that we may not be taken by events at the coming of Christ, St. Paul in the second reading admonishes us seriously when he says, *You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and drunkenness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, make up no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires – (Rom. 13:11-13).*

In the gospel, Jesus talks about His coming. It will be unexpected, it will be sudden: He uses the image of a thief at night to buttress his point. He says, *if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour – (Matt. 24:40-42)*

Secondly, Jesus' second coming will be catastrophic and dramatic: *Two people will be in the field; one will be taken and one*

*will be left. Two women will be grinding meal together, one will be taken and one will be left – (Matt. 24:40-42).*

Dear friends in Christ, how are you preparing for the coming of Christ? Is your preparation only a material preparation or it includes also a spiritual preparation? How are you going to put the admonitions of St. Paul into practice?

## **Conclusion**

As we begin these four (4) weeks of preparation, may God give us the grace to prepare first spiritually and secondly, materially for the coming of the Lord.

# Second Sunday of Advent

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THEME: **PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD.**

**Readings: Isa. 11:1-10; Rom. 15:4-9; Matt. 3:1-12**

## Introduction

My dear people of God, as human beings we all love to hear good news, news that will bring us joy and happiness. We love to hear good news because that is what God created us for.

## Message

In the first reading we hear about words of consolation, words of peace spoken by the prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel. To understand this passage, it is important to put the passage into its proper context. Israel as a nation has been destroyed. Their prominent citizens have been sent into exile. They have been suffering. They have lost all hope. It is in the midst of this, that the prophet Isaiah is called and sent to speak to them. Isaiah uses the image of a tree stump which seems to be dead but on its side a shoot is springing up. What Isaiah is saying is that even though Israel as a nation seems to be dead and have lost all hope, God is able to raise somebody up to revive the fortunes of Israel as a nation and restore them to their former dignity. This is what he meant when he says, *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow from out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord – (Isa. 11:1-3).* In the opinion of the prophet Isaiah, the period of this messenger from the Lord shall be peaceful and serene. He uses all kinds of metaphors to depict this point – *The wolf shall live with the lamb,*

*the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatting together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox – (Isa. 11:6-7). He goes on to say, The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put the hand on the cobra's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea – (Isa.11:8-9).*

Dear friends in Christ, for us Christians this saviour prophesied by Isaiah has its final fulfilment in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this light that when he was due to arrive, God raised up John the Baptist who came to call the people of Israel to repentance and renewal of their lives. John the Baptist warned them of the consequences if they remained obstinate and recalcitrant – *You brood of vipers! Who warn you to flee from the wrath to come. Bear fruit worthy of repentance – (Lk. 3:7-8).* He goes on to say, *Do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our ancestor; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now, the axe is lying at the root of the tree, every tree therefore does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire – (Lk. 3:9-12).*

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, the words of John the Baptist are applicable to you and me now since by virtue of our baptism, we have become the New People of Israel the chosen people of God. As somebody awaiting the coming of the Lord, how are you preparing yourself? Are you renewing your life in the Lord? Or you have become complacent like the people of Israel? Remember what the Psalmist tells us, *O' that today you would listen to his voice, harden not your hearts – (Ps. 95:7b-8).*

## **Conclusion**

May the Lord help us to prepare our hearts and our lives well for the coming of the Lord.



# Third Sunday of Advent

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THEME: REJOICE IN THE LORD, FOR YOUR  
SALVATION IS CLOSE AT HAND

Readings: Isaiah 35:1-6a; James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, today we know is the third Sunday of Advent. Traditionally, it is referred to as “*Gandate*” Sunday. “*Gandate*” in Latin means rejoice or be joyful. It is referred to as “*Gandate*” Sunday because the introit to the mass and the readings of today exhort all of us to rejoice because our salvation is close at hand.

## Message

In the previous chapter, God called the prophet Isaiah and sent him to speak words of comfort, words of consolation to the people of Israel. It was a time when Israel as a nation had been destroyed and the prominent citizens among them sent into exile. When all hope seemed to have been lost, Isaiah prophesied that *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of Knowledge and the fear of the Lord, His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord – (Isaiah 11:1-3a).*

According to the prophet Isaiah, the period of this messenger of God will be serene and peaceful. He used all kinds of images to buttress this point.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah continues with his message of hope and restoration. He notes, *The wilderness and*

*the dry land shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus, it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing – (Isaiah 35:1).* For this reason, he exhorts the people of Israel, *strengthen the weary hands, and steady all trembling knees and say to those who are of a fearful heart, be strong, do not fear; here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you (Isaiah 35:3-4).* In the opinion of the prophet Isaiah, the time of this messenger or saviour from God will witness great manifestations, *The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert – (Isaiah 35:5-6a).* Surely, Isaiah's prophecy came to pass when Israel returned from their exile in Babylon and rebuilt their nation. However, this prophecy foreshadowed or prefigured the coming of Christ, the saviour of the world.

As we heard in the gospel, the coming of Christ was very eventful: *the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them (Matthew 11:2-6).* These events that spread throughout Judea made John the Baptist, who was at that time in prison ask about the messiah, the anointed one of God. What Jesus said about John the Baptist should make you and me sit up, change our lives for the better and enter the kingdom of heaven. Among other things, he said, *Truly I tell you, among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he (Matthew 11:4).*

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, what is today's message of hope and restoration saying to you? How are you preparing yourself to receive the Lord? The kingdom of heaven is being preached and the strong are taking it by force, what are you doing or what are you giving up in order to enter into the

kingdom of heaven and be greater than John the Baptist? You can be greater than John the Baptist when and only when you enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, do something positive about your life, change for the better.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for more grace so that we will always be mindful of our status as adopted sons and daughters of God and live good and decent lives so as to be worthy of the kingdom of God.

# Fourth Sunday of Advent

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THEME: **THE COMING OF THE LORD IS AT  
HAND; ARE YOU READY FOR HIM?**

**Readings: Isa. 7:10-14; Rom. 1:1-7; Matt. 1:18-24**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, for some four (4) weeks now, we have been preparing ourselves for the coming of the Lord. Today, being the fourth week, our preparation reaches its climax because we are about to celebrate Christmas – the day that God became man and took on our human flesh with the intention of saving you and me.

## Message

The Incarnation of the God – man must always give us hope and consolation. It teaches us that God is with us and will never abandon us. This is the message that runs through the readings of today.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah continues with his message of hope and consolation. He wants to encourage the people of Israel not to lose heart but to have faith and trust in the Lord. The context of this passage is that the nations around Israel had conspired to wage war against Israel. This has been reported to Ahaz, the king of Israel. King Ahaz is desperate. He does not know what to do.

He knows definitely that Israel as a small nation cannot stand the might of the forces coming to attack her. It was in this desperation that the prophet of Israel approached the king to ask him, not to panic but to have faith and trust in the Lord. Isaiah

tells the king that he could demand a sign from the Lord to be assured that the Lord will not abandon Israel and that Israel will not be destroyed. When the king refused Isaiah himself gave him a sign. The sign was that the youngest wife of the king who was virgin at that time was to conceive and bear a child. This will indicate to all that God was with the people of Israel.

The prophecy of the virgin begetting a child to indicate that God was with the people of Israel is a fore-shadow of the gospel reading today. As we get closer to the Christmas season, we read about the birth of Christ. Today's gospel reading shows how the mystery of the Incarnation happened. It is the beginning of our salvation which will reach its climax during the Easter event. Just as human beings in the person of Adam and Eve, played a part in the downfall of humanity in the same way, human beings, in the person of Joseph and Mary, play a role in the salvation/redemption of humanity. We hear that Joseph was told what to do by God through an angel. As God-fearing man, Joseph hastened and obeyed the instructions of God. Joseph's act of obedience is the beginning of our salvation just as Adam's act of disobedience was the beginning of the downfall of humanity. Joseph, therefore "*undid*" what Adam did. His "*Yes*" to the Lord cancelled Adam's "*No*" to God.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, as we approach Christmas, there is the urgent need to turn inward and examine our lives. Do we listen attentively to inner voice of God which is in us? Do we pay attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Do we discern the moves that God is making in our lives? Or we allow ourselves to be occupied with the buying of new clothes, shoes, what to give as X'mas gift to our loved ones? Christmas is more than that.

It is more a spiritual event. It is about recognizing and deepening our relationship with the Lord.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray that God will give us more grace so that like St. Joseph we will always listen to instructions from God and do them.

# Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

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THEME: **AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH  
AND MADE HIS DWELLING AMONG US**

Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrew 1:1-6; John 1:1-18

## Introduction

Today, we all know is Christmas day – the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. All things being equal people are very happy and excited. We express this through visiting families and friends; sharing and exchanging gifts and having family meals. We have every reason to celebrate this wonderful day and season because it restores us to our status as children of God. To understand the birth of Christ, it is always important to keep in perspective where we are coming from as human beings.

## Message

The bible tells us that even though we were created in the image and likeness of God, we fell from God's favour through the disobedience of our first parents – (cf. Gen. 1:26-3:1-24). We went as it were into darkness. Since it is the nature of God to love, God did not abandon us. Rather, God promised us a redeemer and a saviour. This salvation history can be compared to the story of Israel's history. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah proclaims a message of hope to the people of Israel at a time when they are down – *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, "Your God is king"* – (Is. 52:7). He goes on to say, *Hark! Your sentinels raise a cry, together they shout for joy, for they see directly, before their eyes the Lord restoring Zion* – (Is. 52:8). We can see that after a period

of suffering and hardship which came on the people of Israel because they wandered far away from God, God intervened and came to their rescue.

This story of the history of Israel typifies the whole of humanity. The message of rescue and restoration can be seen in the gospel reading. The Word of God became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Once he made his dwelling among us those who believe in him, *he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God* – (Jn. 1:12-13). This became a reality to fulfil the prophecies made through many generations. This is what the author of Hebrew means in the second reading when he says, *in times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he has spoken to us through the Son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, who is the refulgence of his glory, the very imprint of his being, and who sustains all things by his mighty word. When he had accomplished purification from sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the majesty on high, as far as superior to the angels, as a name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs* – (Heb. 1:1-4).

We have every reason to celebrate this wonderful day because there is a great exchange between God and us. God becomes a man so share in our poverty so that we will have a share in his riches. God shares in our humanity so that we will have a share in God's divine nature. St. Augustine beautifully captures this when he says *You would have suffered death, had he not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for this mercy. You would never have returned to life, had he not shared your death. You would have been lost if he had not hastened to*



*your aid. You would have perished, had he not come – (Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. 1 p. 379).*

## Conclusion

As we celebrate Christmas, let us not lose the essence of the feast. Christmas is about love. It is about sharing. It is about reaching out to others especially those who are poor and in need. Just as Jesus reached out to us to save us, we are encouraged at this season most especially to reach out to our less unfortunate sisters and brothers who find life too burdensome.

Secondly, Christmas is not about over-indulgence and a life of debauchery. Rather, it is about a new life. It is about renewal. As Pope St. Leo once speaking on Christian dignity said, *Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God's kingdom. Through the sacrament of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ – (Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. 1, p. 405).*

We pray that this season will truly be a time of blessing and grace to all of us, our families and friends.

# Solemnity of Mary – Mother of God

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**THEME: IN THE PAST GOD SPOKE TO OUR  
ANCESTORS THROUGH THE PROPHETS;  
IN THESE LAST DAYS, HE HAS SPOKEN  
TO US THROUGH THE SON.**

**Readings: Numbers 6: 22-27; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21**

## Introduction

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, exactly a week ago today, we celebrated Christmas, the great mystery of God coming to live among us as a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. In the opinion of Augustine, *God comes to share our human nature so that we, human beings in turn will have a share in God's divine nature* – (Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. 1 – p. 541). He says, *God became man so that man might become God* – (Ibid.). Christmas therefore is the beginning of our redemption, the beginning of our salvation.

## Message

Even though this mystery of redemption and salvation is God initiated and centered, human beings play an important role in this mystery of salvation. This is beautifully captured by Paul in the second reading when he says, *when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoptions as sons. As proof that you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into out hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father"* – (Gal. 4:4-6). He goes on to say *so you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir, through God* – (Gal. 4:7).

Dear Friends in Christ, this is how we should see ourselves as Christians. That is to say we are not only adopted sons and daughters of God but also heirs of the kingdom of God. This is an honor that has been bestowed on us by God. An honor, we know goes with a responsibility. Consequently, as adopted sons and daughters of God and heirs to the kingdom of heaven, we need to live good and decent lives. Is the type of life you are living befits an adopted son or daughter of God? Do you think and feel for sure that your lifestyle will help you enter the kingdom of God as an heir? Or you think that there is the need to change for the better?

Today is New Year's Day. The changing of times and seasons is a reminder that life is transient. There is therefore the need to reflect on our lives and live for a better one. To help us to do this, we have been given Mary, Mother of God as a model for our reflection. I will not go into the controversy that surrounded the doctrine of *Theotokos* – Mother of God – bestowed on Mary. The teaching of the church is that if Jesus is both God and man and Mary is the mother of Jesus, then it follows that Mary is the Mother of God.

New Years day is also World Day of Peace. It is a day when many people make resolutions. Unfortunately, people make resolutions but quickly forget about them and do not put them into practice. Do you remember the resolution (s) you made last year? Were you able to keep it (them)? To make a resolution and not keep it can be demoralizing. However, it does not mean that we should disregard the idea. It is always important that from time to time we look into ourselves and see how best to improve our situation. We need to grow; we need to develop and we need to move forward. This we can do only through reflection and meditation on our lives. Perhaps, the best resolution we can make on a day like this is to leave behind all the baggage we carried on ourselves last year and look ahead to do better.

Let any resolution you make be specific and not general. For example, do not say this year I will try and lose weight. It will be better to resolve to lose about 5 pounds every week.

## **Conclusion**

As we begin a New Year, with Mary, the Mother of God as our model, think positive; do away with all negative criticisms and judgments and learn to do good.

Secondly, as we celebrate World Day of Peace, we pray that peace may reign in our hearts at all times and always strive for peace in our families and among our friends.

# The Epiphany of the Lord

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THEME: **THE STAR LED THE MAGI TO BABY JESUS,  
WHAT IS LEADING YOU TO THE BABY JESUS.**

**Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Eph. 3:2-3, 5-6; Matt. 2:1-12**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, as we know the incarnation of Christ brought joy and happiness to the adopted sons and daughters of God. St. John captures it beautifully when he says: *“From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace”*. (Jn. 1:16).

## Message

Today is the Epiphany of the Lord. Epiphany meaning *“showing”* or *“revealing”*. It connotes the idea of something that was hidden but now uncovered, or opened or revealed. The solemnity that we are celebrating means that Jesus, the anointed one of the Lord, the Messiah, has been revealed. This is attested to by the author to the letter to Hebrews, when he said, *long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world* – (Heb. 1:1-2).

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks about the restoration of Israel. Israel which has been destroyed with its prominent citizens sent into Babylon have now experienced relieve after many years of suffering – *lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they came to you; yours shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses’ arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall*

*thrill and rejoice because the abundant of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of nations shall come to you – (Isa. 60:4-5).* This prophecy of Isaiah was initially fulfilled when Israel was rescued by the king of Cyprus when he defeated the Babylonians and set Israel free. The Jews, consequently, returned home and rebuilt their nation.

For us Christians, the prophecy of Isaiah has its final fulfilment in the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus comes to redeem and restore us to our former dignity. He comes to bring joy and happiness to the world. This good news is not meant for any particular group of people. This is depicted by the visit of the Magi or the three wise men. These men were not Jews. They were from Far East. This is to indicate that the coming of Jesus Christ is for Jews and non-Jews alike.

As we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, it is very important that we learn from that event.

1. The need to pay attention to the signs of times to discern what God is telling us. The three (3) wise men were observant. They saw the star and realised that it was not an ordinary star. It was a star with a difference. When they followed it, it led them to the new-born child. Who or what is leading you daily to your God? Is it your reading of the bible or your wife or your husband or your children or a friend? Do you have quiet times in your daily schedule to enable you to discern the moves that God is making in your life?
2. We are told that when the Magi visited, they offered the baby Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts were symbolic. Traditionally the church has explained the gold to mean that the new born baby born is a king since gold in the olden was found mostly with kings. The

frankincense means that the new born baby is God since incense was/is offered to God or gods. The myrrh was to indicate the human nature of the baby. It meant that as a human being, he will suffer and die.

Dear friends in Christ, following the footsteps of the three (3) wise men, what are you going to give to the baby Jesus? Do you have gold, frankincense and myrrh? Give him your heart which represents your whole life and he will be more pleased than anything.

## **Conclusion**

As we celebrate the Epiphany of the Lord, let us pray that God will give us the grace to be more observant and experience the moves that God is making in our life through the various sings of the time.

Secondly, we pray that we may give our lives to God and be more committed and devoted to the Lord this year.

# Baptism of the Lord

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THEME: **THIS IS MY BELOVED SON,  
IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.**

**Readings: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, we are aware of the fact that there are different people in the world. Each group of people have a way of welcoming new born babies into the groups or family. Among the Akans of Ghana, new born babies are first called by the name of the day with which they entered into the world. They are not considered to be members of the family until such a day that ritual of “*Abadinto*” is performed. Other groups of people have similar cultures.

It is the same when it comes to religion. Certain rituals are performed before one becomes a member of the family of God. In the olden days, it was through circumcision – (cf. Gen. 17:9 ff). However, in the new dispensation, it is through water and Holy Spirit. As Jesus points out, *no one can enter the kingdom of heaven without being born of water and Spirit* – (Jn. 3:5). St. Paul says it all when he notes, *for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor un-circumcision counts for anything, the only thing that counts is faith working through love* – (Gal. 5:6).

## Message

Today is Baptism of the Lord. Jesus we know had no need of baptism. He was without sin. This is why in the gospel, John the Baptist protested when Jesus came to him to be baptised – I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me? – (Matt. 3:14).



The baptism of Jesus was to proclaim him as the anointed one or the Messiah of God. The heavens opening and descending like a dove on him and the Father's voice saying *This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased* – (cf. Matt.3:16) was for the benefit of the people around. It was to indicate to the people that Jesus was not an ordinary person. He was from heaven and was anointed to do heaven's work. People were therefore to accord him the necessary respect and listen to him. This is in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah in the first reading; – *Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a braided reed he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice* – (Isa. 42:1-3).

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, the baptism of the Lord, reminds us of our own baptism when we were baptised the same words were addressed to us. – *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* – The question we need to ask is: Are we living our baptismal promises? Can we say in all sincerity that the type of life we are living, God our Father is pleased with us?

How can the Father be pleased with you when you are cheating and defrauding people? How can he be pleased with you when you have not been faithful and living in sin?

## Conclusion

As we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, let us pray for the grace to renew our baptismal promises and always live in such a way that God the Father will always be pleased with us.

# Second Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **HERE I AM LORD! I COME TO DO YOUR WILL.**

**Readings: Isaiah 49:3-5; 1 Cor. 1:1-3; John 1:29-34**

## Introduction

My dear family of God, from time immemorial, God has been described as omnipotent – all powerful – almighty which means God can do anything and everything without the assistance or the help of anyone. Yet, if you go through scriptures and the history of the world, God almost invariably makes use of other human beings in order to reach God's people.

## Message

In all the three (3) readings of today, we learn about the call of certain people, chosen purposely to bring God's message of redemption and salvation to God's people.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks about what has transpired between him and God. He says, and the Lord said to me, *you are my servant, Israel in whom I shall be glorified; but I said, "I have laboured in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God – (Isa. 49:3-4).* Isaiah goes on to say, *And now the Lord says who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength – (Isa. 49:5)* In this passage, we see the call of the prophet Isaiah and the purpose of the call – *to bring Israel back to God in order to be saved.*

In the same way, in the second reading, St. Paul talks about his call by God and the purpose of the call. He says, *I, Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and our brother Sosthenes. To the church in Corinth to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be Saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours* – (1 Cor. 1-2).

Corinth was an enormously large city. It was by the sea. As we know, large cities have their own social problems. Paul founded the church in Corinth which was very dear to him and so he spent a lot of time with the members there. Even when he was under house arrest in Rome, he was writing letters to the community members.

In the gospel, we continue to read about the story between John the Baptist and Jesus. John the Baptist had come to prepare the way for Jesus. Last week, we heard that when Jesus came to be baptised, John was initially reluctant to do so. Today, he points Jesus out to the people that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world – (Jn. 1:29).

What John the Baptist is saying is that the whole of salvation history culminates in Jesus. He is the redeemer, the saviour who brings God's message of salvation to humanity.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, we are serving and worshipping the same God. Just as God called Isaiah, Paul and Jesus and sent them to bring his message to his people, in the same way he has called you and me. Are you prepared to be a good instrument or a good channel of God's message of salvation? As a Christian, do people see and experience Christ in/through you? As a follower of the Lord, do you bring happiness, comfort and solace to others?

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to be mindful of our calls and be channels of God's salvation.

# Third Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY HELP.**

**Readings: Isaiah 8:22 – 9:3; 1 Cor. 1:10-13, 17; Matt. 4:12-23**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, last week among others; I said that even though God is omnipotent, – all mighty and all powerful and can do anything and everything without any human assistance, – when we look through scriptures and the history of the world, God almost invariably comes to human beings through the medium of other human beings.

## Message

Last week in the readings, we saw how God made use of the Prophet Isaiah, St. Paul and Jesus to bring God's message of salvation to God's people. The readings of today continue in the same vein.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks of God's message of hope and restoration to the people of Israel. He says, *The people who walked in darkness have seen great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined – (Is. 9:2).* The prophet Isaiah explains it further when he says *For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Median. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire – (Is. 9:4-5)*

In the gospel, Jesus launches his public ministry after the arrest of John the Baptist. He inaugurates the kingdom of God and identifies himself with the coming of the kingdom. For Jesus,

the prophecy that says *the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned* – (Matt. 4:16). For Jesus since the kingdom of God has come, there is the need to repent and enter into it. He, therefore, sends the invitation to all to move away from our dark and secret ways of living and enter into Christ – the light of the world which has dawned on humanity. To help him to spread this message of repentance and renewal, Jesus calls the first four (4) of his disciples. They were fishermen. As the reading tells us, they willingly accepted the call, abandoned their trade and profession and followed him.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, just as Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and his brother, in the same way God is calling you. God may be calling you to a higher profession, or God may be calling you to remain in your profession but to bring his message of the kingdom to your family, to your friends or to you colleagues at the workplace.

When we talk about the kingdom of God, as St. Paul explains, we are not talking about *food and drink but righteousness (justice), and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* – (Rom. 14:17). He goes on to say, *The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up building* – (Rom. 14:18-19).

It is in this light that St. Paul in the second reading condemns the decisions and factions that had crept into the Christian community in Corinth.

My dear brother/sister, as somebody who has been called by God to preach the message of the kingdom, do you pursue justice? Do you work for and promote peace or you are the cause of division/factions in your house, at your work place or in the church

because you practise ethnicity/tribalism? Do you bring God's message of hope and joy to others?

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to be true ambassadors of God's message of hope and joy to the world.

# Fourth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: LIVING OUR LIVES AS CHRISTIANS  
ACCORDING TO THE BEATITUDES.

Readings: Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; Matt. 5:1-12

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, it is often said that *Birds of the same feathers flock together. Our elders also say that ɔkɔtɔ nnwo anoma* – literally a crab does not beget or bring forth a bird. The bible tells us that as human beings, we were created in the image and likeness of God – (cf. Gen. 1:26). Consequently, we have a very special relationship with God. In speaking about our relationship with God, St. Augustine noted what makes us resemble God is that we can distinguish between good and evil or right and wrong.

## Message

The readings of today talk about the qualities or values we need to have/cultivate in order to be God-like and live accordingly. In the first reading, the prophet Zephaniah delivers God's message to the people of Israel. He encourages them to seek the Lord, in their humble heart. He tells them *seek righteousness, seek humility* (Zeph. 2:30). In the opinion of the prophet, the humility of heart on the part of the people may save them from the wrath of the Lord. Furthermore, due to their humility and simplicity of life, the Lord will dwell among them – (Zeph. 3:12).

In the second reading, St. Paul writes to remind the Christian community at Corinth, where they were coming from (Paul is at this time under house-rest in Rome waiting his trial. He has



heard a lot about the church that he founded in Corinth which was dear to him). Factions and divisions have raised their ugly heads in the community. As we heard last week in the second reading, Paul wrote to condemn such factions and divisions.

The issue that Paul is addressing today in the second reading is that some members of the community are claiming to be superior or more important than others. Paul takes such people on when he said, *Consider your own call, brothers and sisters, not many of you are wise by human standards, not many were powerful, and not many were of noble births. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God* – (1 Cor. 15:26-29). What Paul is teaching is that everything is by grace. There is, therefore, no room for boasting on our part as Christians. In fact, a Christian who is boastful and proud is a contradiction in terms. St Paul says it all, when he says *what do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, who do you boast as if it were not a gift?* (1Cor. 4:7b).

In the gospel, Jesus gives us the beatitudes which forms part of the Sermon on the Mount – which is considered to be the “*Magna Carta*” of Jesus’ ministry on earth. In the beatitudes Jesus teaches us how to live our lives in order to be blessed or to be happy. Among other things, we are to be poor in spirit – poor in spirit; – not meaning that we should go about in tattered clothes or rugs. Rather, it means putting our whole life in the hands of the Lord and acknowledging that we are nothing without the Lord. We are called upon to be meek, righteous, merciful and peaceful just like the one who made us in his own image and likeness.

Dear sisters/brothers, as people made in the image and likeness of Go, do we exhibit God-like qualities? Are we humble and simply of heart and accept people as they are? Or are we boastful and proud and turn to look down on people as followers of Jesus Christ, do we live by the beatitudes?

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to be more like Jesus in his humility and simplicity of life. For he tells us, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls* – (Matt. 11:29). God bless us all.

# Fifth Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: YOUR LIGHT MUST SHINE BEFORE OTHERS  
SO THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS  
AND GIVE GLORY TO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER.**

**Readings: Isaiah 58:7-10; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Matt. 5:13-16**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, last week in the readings, we were reminded of our identity as people created in the image and likeness of God – (cf. Gen. 1:2b) consequently, our attitudes and our manner of doing things must be God-like.

## Message

In the readings of today, we are called upon to let our light shine as people of God.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah delivers God's message to the people of Israel and tells them what they must do to win favour from the Lord. They must share their bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless; cloth the naked and not turn their back on their own – (Is. 58:7). These are some of the corporal works of mercy that are pleasing to the Lord when they are carried out. As noted by the prophet Isaiah in the first reading: *Then, that is to say in doing these corporal works of mercy, their wound shall quickly be healed; their vindication shall go before them, and the glory of the Lord shall be their rear guard* – (Is. 58:8). He concludes by saying, then (that means when they have done these). *They shall call, and the Lord will answer, they shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am!* – (Is. 58:9).

Dear people of God, I am the first to admit that it is very difficult to practice some of these corporal works of mercy today. This is because there are many charlatans, fraudsters and tricksters moving from place to place with all kinds of concocted stories. They are cheaters and full of deceit. We need to be on the alert and look out for such people and not allow them to abuse our generosity and hospitality. Notwithstanding all these, as Catholic Christians, we need to carry out the seven (7) corporal works of mercy:

1. Feeding the hungry
2. Visiting the sick
3. Clothing the naked
4. Sheltering the homeless
5. Welcoming the stranger
6. Visiting the imprisoned and
7. Burying the dead

These are the criteria that the Lord will use to judge us on the last day when we appear before the judgment seat of God when we would say *so long as you did it to the least of my brothers/sisters, you did it to me* (cf. Matt. 25:40) *and so long as you neglected to do it to the least of my brothers/sisters, you neglected to do it to me* (Matt. 25:45).

In the gospel, Jesus uses two (2) common things in our lives to teach us some lessons: salt and light. We all know about the importance of salt: to make food taste nice and palatable and to seasoned things. In using metaphor of salt, Jesus is teaching us that as Christians, we are to bring joy and gladness to those around us. Secondly, we are to help others from being corrupted

and consumed with evil. Failure to do that means we are useless and of no value.

The second metaphor he uses for us is light. The importance of light cannot be overemphasised. As Christians, we are to shine wherever we are so as to enable others to follow.

My dear sister/brother in Christ, as somebody called upon to be God-like; do you practice the corporal works of mercy? Can you in all sincerity describe yourself as salt of the earth? Are your actions bright enough before others so as to enable them to give glory to God?

## **Conclusion**

Let us ask for more grace to be kind, generous and charitable as God ask us to and to be salt and light for others. God bless us all.

# Sixth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **HAPPY ARE THEY WHO  
FOLLOW THE LAW OF THE LORD.**

Readings: Sirach 15:15-20; 1 Cor. 2:6-10; Matt. 5:17-37

## Introduction

Dear people of God, can you imagine a community/society where there are no rules or regulations? What would the result be? Needless to say, the result would be catastrophic. It would be chaotic. Rules and regulations are very important in our lives. They are for the promotion of law and order. They maintain peace and tranquillity. It is for this reason that we have rules and regulations in our homes, in our halls, in our work places.

## Message

In the same way when we come to the church, there are commandments and laws. These commandments and laws are not to take away our freedom. Rather, they are to direct us to God who is the source of our life.

In the first reading Sirach says, *if you choose you can keep the commandments; it is loyalty to do his will. There are set before you fire and water; to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man is life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him* – (Sir. 15:15-18). What Sirach is saying is that God has given us the freedom to choose. Even though God is all powerful, God cannot force us to do anything. We have the power to choose. Whatever choice we make has a consequence. It may either lead to prosperity that is eternal life in God or to destruction. This is symbolised by the images of fire and water; life and death.

In the gospel, Jesus emphasises the fact that he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets. Rather, he came to fulfil them – (cf. Matt. 5:17). For Jesus, the commandments are indispensable as far as spiritual journey towards eternal life is concerned. This is what he means, when he says, *of this much I assure, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter of the law, not the smallest part of a letter shall be done away with until it all comes true* – (Matt. 5:18).

In addition, Jesus is calling us to a new standard higher than the old – *I tell you, unless your holiness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of God* – (Matt. 5:20).

To help us to obey and observe the commandments properly, Jesus is asking us to go to the root causes of sins.

1. For example to avoid murder Jesus is saying, control your anger. Do not use abusive language because uncontrolled anger may lead to murder
2. To avoid adultery, practice custody of eye; control your eyes and be careful about things you look at because letting the eyes loose may lead to lustful thoughts and desires.

Dear friends in Christ, life in the kingdom is priceless; it is valueless. Nothing can be compared to it. We must do everything, therefore, to possess it; even if it means losing some part of our bodies....

Dear brother/sister in Christ, what is your attitude towards the commandments of God? Do you allow them to guard and guide you or you see them as infringing on your freedom to choose? Is it leading you to God or away from God? Listen to what Ecclesiastes 11:1 says.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace always to choose God and do things that lead to God. Secondly let us pray for the grace to always allow the commandments of God to guard and guide us in our spiritual journey.



# Seventh Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: YOU MUST BE PERFECTED AS  
YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT.**

**Readings: Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18; 1 Cor. 3:16-23; Matt. 5:38-48**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, from time immemorial God has been described as loving and merciful. However, these are not only the attributes which describe the nature of God. God is also just and holy. Very often we do not talk about or focus our attention, our reflection on the justice and holiness of God.

## Message

The readings of today focus our attention on the holiness of God. It reminds us that holiness or perfection is one of the attributes of God. Therefore, if we want to be with God, then we need to live holy lives.

In the first reading. God through Moses speaks to the people of Israel on the need to emulate him (God): *Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy* – (Lv. 19:1). Israel is called upon to be holy just like God, because of the special covenant relationship existing between them. In this particular reading, God spells out what constitutes a life of holiness: *you shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow man, do not infer sin because of him* – (Lv. 19:17). God goes on to say: *Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countryman. You shall love your neighbour as yourself* – (Lv. 19:18)

What the Lord is saying is that holiness of life is not theoretical. Neither is it abstract. Rather, it is very practical. It is existential and experiential. Holiness of life has both vertical as well as horizontal dimensions. It is not just a matter between you and your God. It involves other human beings. That is to say you cannot claim to be living a holy life when you hate somebody. You cannot claim to be living a holy life when you are bearing a grudge against your fellow human being. You cannot claim to be living a holy life when you cannot let go and forgive and love to take revenge.

In the gospel, Jesus continues to challenge us to a new standard of life which is higher than the old. Last week in the gospel, he told us without mincing words that *unless our holiness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees, we cannot enter the kingdom of God* – (Matt. 5:20). To help us to achieve that Jesus admonished us to tackle the root cause of sin so as to live this new and higher standard of life. Among other things he says to you and to me: *You have heard the commandment, 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. But what I say to you is: offer no resistance to injury. When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other. If anyone wants to go to law over your shirt, hand him your coat as well* – (Matt. 5:38-40). He goes on to say, *You have heard the commandment, "You shall love your countryman but hate your enemy, my command to you is: love your enemies, pray for your persecutors. This will prove that you are sons of your heavenly Father, for his sun rises on the bad and the good, he rains on the just and the unjust* (Matt. 5:43-45).

My dear friends of God, these teachings are not only challenging but also difficult. But for Jesus this is what holiness of life entails. It is not a matter of staying long hours in church or in the presence of Lord. It also means being on good terms and right relationship with our fellow human beings. It means being builders and promoters of peace.

The message to live holy lives comes up again in the second reading. St. Paul reminds us that holiness must not be sought anywhere. Our very bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We must, therefore, not desecrate them. For to do so, will incur the anger and punishment from God.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to live holy and decent lives so that just as our heavenly Father, we also may be perfect – (Matt. 5:48).

# Eighth Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: SEEK FIRST HIS KINSHIP OVER  
YOU, HIS WAY OF HOLINESS, AND ALL  
THINGS WILL BE GIVEN YOU BESIDES.**

**Readings: Isaiah 49:14-15; 1 Cor. 4:1-5; Matt. 6:24-34**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, our human existence is dependent on God. This is because God created us in God's own image and likeness – (Gen. 1:26). However, there are certain things that we cannot do without as human beings. These things are basic and they are necessary for our human existence. They are food, shelter, clothing and proper medical care. We spend most of our time working towards these things. In search for these things, some people have put their creator aside and turn these necessities of life into gods. There are other people who are anxious, desperate and worried in their search for these things.

## Message

The readings of today teach us to set our priorities right. That is to seek God first and put faith in him.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks to the Israelites. He talks about the tender love and care of God. The people of Israel are in difficulty. They are anxious and worried. They are desperate. They even feel that God has forsaken them; that God has abandoned them. It is at this stage that Isaiah uses the image of mother to teach the people of Israel – *Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you (Is. 14:15).* What Isaiah is

doing is trying to calm Israel down. He assures them about the love and care of the Lord.

The same message of not to be anxious, not to be worried is re-emphasised in the gospel reading. It is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount which we have been hearing for the past weeks. What Jesus is saying is that our attempts to cater for our basic needs, some people at times forget their creator. Others also have put these things on equal footing with God. Therefore, they are serving two (2) masters. It is for this reason that he says, *No man can serve two (2) masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be attentive to one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and money – (Matt. 6:24).*

My dear family of God, Jesus is not saying that we should be lazy and idle around. He is not saying that we should not **plan** and **think** about food, shelter and clothing. These are things we need for our earthly existence and survival.

What he is teaching is that we should not be **anxious** and **worried** to the extent that we forget God, our creator and the sustainer of our lives. His message is as simple and clear as that *seek first the kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides – (Matt.6:33).* He uses the image of birds and the lilies to buttress his point.

These ordinary creatures are catered for by God, how much more would God not cater for you, you who were created in his own image and likeness?

My dear brother/sister in Christ, what is your attitude in life? Have you set your priorities right? Is God first in your life and dealings? Or in your attempt to acquire possession, position and power you have set God aside?

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to seek God always and put him first in our lives. Secondly, let us pray that we may realise that God is ever faithful and sure and that God will never abandon us.

# Ninth Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: NONE OF THOSE WHO CRY OUT,  
'LORD, LORD', WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM  
OF GOD BUT ONLY THE ONE WHO DOES  
THE WILL OF MY FATHER IN HEAVEN.**

**Readings: Deut. 11:18, 26-28; Rom. 3:21-25, 28; Matt. 7:21-27**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, the dignity and the respect of each and every human being is something we need to acknowledge and promote at all times. The human person, we know is endowed with knowledge and intelligence. Furthermore, we have been given the gift of freedom to choose. However, the freedom to choose is not a license or visa to do whatever we like. More so, as Christians, to choose the path that leads us away from God.

## Message

The readings of today talk about the options that we have; the need to make good and correct choices and be held responsible for the choices that we make.

In the first reading, Moses calls the people of Israel to attention. They have not been faithful and steadfast as far as their worship of Yahweh is concerned. Moses, therefore, takes them to task, to declare their stand, either to serve Yahweh or follow their own pursuit. In doing so, they should be mindful of the consequences of their choice – *I set before you here, this day, a blessing and a curse: a blessing for obeying the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I enjoin on you today; a curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, but turn aside from the*

*way I ordain for you today, to follow other gods, whom you have not known – (Deut. 11:26-28).*

My dear sister/brother in Christ, how do you exercise the freedom that God has given you? Do you use it to choose God and get closer to God? Or you use it for your pursuits and by so doing move away from God? What do you want from God, – a blessing or a curse? The choice is yours! If you want a blessing from the Lord then listen to the admonition of Moses in the first part of the first reading, *when he says, Take these words of mine into your heart and soul. Bind them at your wrist as a sign, and let them be a pendant on your forehead – (Deut. 11:18).*

In the gospel, Jesus also challenges us to live authentic and genuine Christian lives. We cannot be Christian in name. Christianity is not theoretical. Rather, it is experiential. It is practical. We cannot claim to be Christian and live as we like, instead of doing the will of God. This is what Jesus means when he says – *None of those who cry out, ‘Lord, ‘Lord’ will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven – (Matt. 7:21).*

My dear sister/brother in Christ, can you imagine yourself, who claim to be a Christian but Jesus telling you to the face. *I never knew you, out of sight, you evildoers – (Matt. 7:27).* How would you feel and what will you do? This will happen to us if and only if we have not been faithful followers of the Lord. In order to avoid this embarrassment there is the need to put our house in order and live for the Lord.



## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace not to abuse the freedom that God has given us but that we will use to freedom to do things that lead to God. Secondly, we pray for the grace to lead good and authentic lives so that we will build our lives solidly on rock. God bless us all.

# Ash Wednesday

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**THEME: IF TODAY YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART.**

**Readings: Joel 2:12-18; 2 Cor. 5:20 – 6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18.**

## Introduction

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, in our ordinary lives, we love to celebrate our anniversaries – like our birthdays, graduations and marriage anniversaries. In celebrating these anniversaries we usually look forward to them and make adequate preparations toward them and when they come we celebrate them in joy and happiness. As Christians, Easter is the greatest of feasts in our Christian calendar because on that day Jesus Christ triumphantly rose from death and entered into his glory. With his resurrection, Christ has given us a sure hope that one day we shall also share in his resurrection.

## Message

To help us to enter more deeply into the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus on Good Friday and Easter, the church has given us this Lenten period of forty days beginning today, Ash Wednesday. During this period, we are encouraged to turn inward and examine ourselves with the view of repenting and being reconciled with God. In doing this, three spiritual acts have been proposed for us to critically look at as we seek our renewal and reconciliation with God. They are: Prayer, Almsgiving and Fasting.

In the gospel Jesus shows us how to carry out these spiritual acts so as to benefit from them and receive rewards from our

heavenly Father. He says *when you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward* – (Mt. 6:2). Rather, what Jesus teaches is *when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you* – (Mt. 6:3-4).

On prayer, Jesus admonishes us *not to be like the hypocrites who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward* – (Mt. 6:5). He goes on to teach *when you pray go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you* – (Mt. 6:6).

On Fasting, Jesus has this to say – *when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you they have received their reward* – (Mt. 6:16). To get the best out of fasting, Jesus goes on to say *when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you* – (Mt. 6:17-18).

Dear friends in Christ, when we fast we are trying to tell God that it is not because we have food and drink or it is not because we have a good life that we are serving or worshipping God. We are telling God that even on empty stomach we are still ready to worship God. In fasting, we are trying to mortify ourselves in order to control our evil tendencies so as to do good. However, if for medical reasons or as a result of advanced age, we cannot fast we can still try to give up the bad habits in our lives which disturb our relationship with God and others – habits like over indulgence in food, drink and sex, gossiping, tearing people

apart, looking down on people, carrying out acts of injustice and disturbing the peace of others.

In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that *now is a very acceptable time; it is a day of salvation* – (cf. 2 Cor. 6:2). We are encouraged to take advantage of this period so as to benefit from the Lord. It is not that this is the only time that we carry out the three spiritual acts. No, however, it is the time that we intensify them. The purpose is to renew ourselves and return to the Lord. This is what the prophet in the first reading calls the people of Israel to do when he says, thus says the Lord, *return to me with your whole heart, with fasting and weeping, and mourning; Rend your hearts, not your garments and return to the Lord, your God* – (Joel 2:12-13a). He goes on to assure them, *for gracious and merciful is he, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment. Perhaps he will again relent and leave behind him a blessing* – (Joel 2:13b-14a).

## Conclusion

My dear People of God, we have begun the Lenten season. It is a time of preparation for the celebration of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What are you going to do this Lenten season so as to benefit from the season?

We are called upon to die to ourselves especially in this season in order to share in the resurrection of Christ. We pray for the grace to do good and avoid evil.

Secondly, we pray that since this is a very acceptable time; a time of salvation, we may hear the voice of the Lord and not harden our hearts – (cf. Ps. 95:8).

# First Sunday of Lent

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THEME: **BE MERCIFUL, O LORD,  
FOR WE HAVE SINNED**

Readings: Gen. 2:7-9, 3, 1-7; Rom. 5:12-19; Matt. 4:1-11

## Introduction:

Dear Friends in Christ, as you know, we have begun the season of Lent. Lent is an old Middle English word which referred to the spring season. Spring is a period when flowers and trees begin to blossom and grow new leaves.

The season of lent originally was only a few days of preparation for the celebration of Easter. Later on, it was extended to 40 days to correspond to the 40 days and 40 nights of fasting by Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a period that we are to die to ourselves, die our sins so as to rise up with Jesus on Easter day.

## Message

As we begin the season of Lent, the church wants us to go back to how it all begins. So in the first reading we hear about the early beginnings of human beings – *The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being* – (Gen. 2:7). The Lord God did not only form the human person in God's own image and likeness, God placed in a garden. The image of a garden depicts the calmness, the serenity and the peaceful atmosphere in which the human being was made. In short, the human person was created to be in the presence of the Lord and be happy always.

Unfortunately, the devil who had rebelled and been waging a relentless war against God decided to hit God where it would

hurt God the most and therefore attacked the human beings who were created in the image and likeness of God. So as we heard in the first reading, the devil succeeded and deceived our first parents. They listened to the lies and the deceits of the devil and were disobedient to God. The sin of disobedience is what caused the downfall of human beings.

In the gospel, Jesus who comes to rescue, redeem the human person is confronted by the devil. The devil subjected Jesus to all kinds of temptations. In all the temptations, the devil was trying to make Jesus doubt his identity and his relation with God. He offered Jesus all kinds of power and glory to make him go against what he came to do on earth – that is to do his father's will.

In spite of all the tricks from the devil, Jesus remained obedient and did his Father's will. Jesus succeeded because he fortified himself and was spiritually strengthened through his 40 days of fasting. Secondly, Jesus succeeded because he knew the scriptures.

The second reading puts it nicely when it says "Through one man's disobedience, sin entered the world and with sin death, but through the obedience of Jesus, grace and salvation have come to us. What our first parents did not obey Jesus has undone through obedience. Adam's "NO" is rectified by Jesus' "YES".

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, just as the devil tempted our first parents and Jesus, in the same way, he would continue to tempt you and me because he wants to hit God hard where it would hurt. Are you ready to fight and resist the devil and all his machinations? Are you spiritually fortified and armed like Jesus? Do you fast and read your bible militantly? The season of Lent is an opportune time for you and me to sit up and resist the devil.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for grace so that this season will be a time of blessing and grace for all of us by caring out our Lenten observances seriously and remain obedient to God like Jesus.

# Second Sunday of Lent

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THEME: **THIS IS MY BELOVED SON ON WHOM  
MY FAVOUR RESTS. LISTEN TO HIM.**

Readings: Gen. 12:1-4; 2 Tim. 1:8-10; Matt. 17:1-9

## Introduction:

Dear friends in Christ, our human nature is such that we need motivation from time to time to rise to the occasion and achieve great results. This motivation can either be internal or external. Take the case of a student to obtain first class honours and bask in the glory associated with it may be the motivating factor for his/her strenuous and long hours of studies without disregarding a secured and a prosperous future life. As Christians, our purpose in life is to attain beatific vision with God at the end of our lives. That is to say, to see God face to face when our lives end here on earth.

## Message

Today is the second Sunday of Lent. We continue with our Lenten practices. To help us and motivate us in our resolve to repent, be renewed and reconcile with God, we have been given the Transfiguration story of Jesus Christ. In the story, the identity of Jesus is established clearly. He is the one who comes to complete and fulfils the law and the prophets. This is what the appearance of Moses and Elijah means in the story. Moses represents the Torah (Law) and Elijah the prophets – (cf. Matt. 17:3). In addition to that, Jesus' identity as the son of God is affirmed without doubt. This is demonstrated by the voice from heaven which says, *This is my beloved Son on whom my favour rests. Listen to him* – (cf. Matt. 17:5).



My dear family of God, we are told in the story that Peter and the other two disciples were fascinated and awe-struck by the transfiguration of the Lord. *His face became as dazzling as the sun, his clothes as radiant as light* – (Matt. 17:2). This compelled Peter to say, *Lord, how good it is for us to be here? With your permission I will erect three booths here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah* – (Matt. 17:4). Peter is so much thrilled with the spectacle that he wished to stay as it was. However, the voice from the Father is to assure Peter that they would enjoy that beatific vision if and only if they listen to Jesus who is the beloved Son on whom the Father's favour rests.

My dear sisters and brother in Christ, this transfiguration story is not meant for Peter, James and John alone. It is meant for you and me as well. What God is saying to you and me is that if we accept Jesus as his beloved Son and listen to him, we will experience the very same spectacle that Peter, James and John saw. The story, therefore, is to motivate us in our Christian life and spiritual journey so as to resolve to listen to what Jesus is telling us during this Lenten season.

In the first reading, we have Abraham giving to us as our Father in faith. He listens to God, put his faith and trust in God and his humble disposition to listen and obey God, he receives many blessings from the Lord. My dear sister and brother in Christ, do you want to be blessed by the Lord? Do you want to receive blessings from the Lord like Abraham? Then listen, trust and obey the Lord. Do you want to experience the glory of Jesus, like Peter, James and John? Then listen to Jesus, especially during this Lenten season. For us as a Christian, there is no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey – Catholic Hymnal 416.

## Conclusion

May God help us all to be motivated and listen to Jesus so as to be blessed.

# Third Sunday of Lent

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THEME: IF TODAY YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS.

Readings: Ex. 17:3-7, Rom. 5:1-2, 5-8; Jn. 4:5-15, 19-26; 39:40-42

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, we are almost half-way through our Lenten journey. We know the Lenten season is an opportune time that we are encouraged to turn inward and examine our relationship with our God and respond positively to the invitation of God to come back to him.

## Message

We all know about the importance of water. Water quenches our thirst and refreshes the body. It cleanses and purifies us both physically and spiritually. Look at how we suffer when there is no water! Such was the situation that the people of Israel had to go through when they left Egypt. As we heard in the first reading, they grumbled and rebelled against Moses and by so doing against God.

Consequently, God intervened and provided water for them. The provision of water though satisfied their thirst, it was more symbolically spiritual. Water we know is life. It means that God is the one who provides and sustains life. This means that if anyone wants to have life one must always stay in touch with God. St. Augustine captures it beautifully when he said that God is the author and sustainer of life. When one turns his/her back to God it means one is moving away from the creator and

sustainer of it. The result is that one is heading towards death and destruction – (City of God).

The image of water being used as a sustainer of life comes up again in the gospel reading. In the encounter between Jesus and the Woman at the Well, Jesus tells her without mincing words, – *Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within him leaping up to provide eternal life* – (Jn. 4:13-14). This prompted the woman to say, *Give me this water, Sir, so that I won't grow thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water* – (Jn. 4:15). It can be seen that Jesus and the woman are not on the same levels/planes. They are on parallel lines. While Jesus was speaking about spiritual matters, the woman was on material/physical things.

Consequently, Jesus zeroed in on the personal life of the woman by asking about her husband. When Jesus revealed to her some of her past life, she realised that Jesus was not an ordinary person – *I can see you are a prophet* – (Jn. 4:19). When she went to report her experience with Jesus to her town people, she said, *Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did! Could this not be the Messiah?* – (Jn. 4:29). As a result of the report of the woman at the Well, many people came to believe in Jesus.

This woman who had led some kind of life of debauchery has become an “apostle” to her town people due to her encounter with Jesus. The morale/lesson from the story is, one does not encounter Jesus and remain the same. Encounter with Jesus, must lead:

1. To renunciation of sin or past sinful life
2. Renewal or being born again in Jesus

3. To proclamation/sharing our new life in Jesus with others.

In the second reading, St. Paul says “Now that we have been justified by faith, we are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Through him we have gained access by faith to the grace in which we now stand and we boast of our hope for the glory of God – (Rom. 5:1-2).*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, what has been your experience with Christ? Have you encountered him personally? Has that encounter led to repentance, renewal and reconciliation with God? Do you share/proclaim your new found life in Jesus with others like the Woman at the Well?

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to make the responsorial psalm our own so that as we hear his voice, we may not harden our hearts.

# Fourth Sunday of Lent

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**THEME: I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD,  
SAYS THE LORD: THE MAN WHO FOLLOWS  
ME WILL HAVE THE LIGHT OF LIFE.**

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

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, we are entering into the fourth week of Lent. We have passed the half-way mark of our preparation towards Easter. Last week, we read in the gospel, the story of the woman at the well who was a Samaritan. From the story, it came out clearly that no one encounters Jesus and remains the same. Encounter with Jesus, must lead to a new way of life. It must lead to the proclamation or sharing of the newness of life in Jesus with others.

## Message

Today the readings talk about light and being able to see things as God sees them.

In the gospel, we have the story of the man born blind. He encounters Jesus and his life is never the same. He receives a newness of life by seeing things the first time. Following this, he proclaims or shares his new life from Jesus with his neighbours. When the people were wondering whether he was the blind man who used to beg, he told them, *I am the one, all right* – (Jn. 9:9). When they wanted to find out how it all happened, he told them, *That man they call Jesus made mud and smeared it on my eyes, telling me to go to Siloam and wash. When I did go and wash, I was able to see* – (Jn.9:11).

The man born blind did not share his encounter with Jesus only with his neighbours but also with the religious authorities. When they inquire about how he had recovered his sight, he told them, *He put mud on my eyes. I washed it off, and now I can see.* (Jn. 9:15b).

When they called him a second time after talking to his parents, he said to them, *I would not know whether he is a sinner or not. I know this much; I was blind before; now I can see* – (Jn.9:25). When the religious authorities persisted on their line of questioning, he told them without mincing words, *I have told you once, but you would not listen to me. Why do you want to hear it all over again? Do not tell me you want to become his disciples too* – (Jn. 9:27).

It can be seen clearly that the man born blind is sharing his new life in Jesus with others and nothing can prevent him from doing that. He now sees light and he is bearing testimony to that.

On coming into the world, Jesus said, *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world* – (Jn. 9:5). We are followers of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus is the light of the world, then it follows that we too must be light for the world. It is for this reason that Jesus says to you and me, *you are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven* – Matt. 5:14-16.

My dear people remember where you are coming from as St. Paul talks about it in the second reading – *there was a time when you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Well, then live as children of light* – Eph.5:8.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, have you encountered or experience the Lord Jesus in a more personal way? Are you proclaiming/sharing your new life in Jesus as the man born blind did?

Are you a light in the Lord for others or you are still living in sin and darkness?

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray that God may open our eyes to see things clearly as God sees them and judge them as God does as the first reading teaches us. Secondly, let us pray for the grace to be a light for others.

# Fifth Sunday of Lent

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**THEME: I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE  
LIFE, SAID THE LORD; HE WHO BELIEVES  
IN ME WILL NOT DIE FOR EVER.**

**Readings: Ezk. 37:12-14; Rom. 8:8-11; Jn. 11:1-45**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, it is often said that life is precious. It is invariable. It is for this reason that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantee life for all. Article three (3) states, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." According to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, Article thirteen (13), Clause one (1) "No person shall be deprived of his/her life intentionally except in the exercise of the execution of a sentence of a court in respect to a criminal offence under the law of which he has been convicted".

As human beings all things being equal we are all very particular about life. We want good and decent lives. Furthermore we want a life that is secured. For these reasons, we buy all kinds of insurance policies. As Christians, in addition, good decent and secure lives here on earth, we want a life that is everlasting after our deaths. Unfortunately, no human being or human institution can guarantee this everlasting life. It is only God who can offer his life to us.

## Message:

All the three (3) readings of today talk about life. The first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel is part of story about the dry bones. Israel as a nation through their sins and their turning



from God, the author of life are considered dead. Hence the image of the dry bones. God the giver of life assures them a new life – *Thus says the Lord God; O my people, I will open your graves and have you rise from them, and bring you back to the Lord of Israel..... I will settle you upon your Lord; thus you shall know that I am the Lord. I have promise, and I will do it, says the Lord* – Ezk. 37:12-14. The promise by God that He would put his spirit in the people of Israel so that they may live resonates very well with creation story. According to Gen. 2:7, *The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed unto his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.*

The theme of God as the giver of life comes out strongly in the gospel reading. Listen to what Martha says to Jesus when Jesus goes to their home on hearing about the death of Lazarus – *Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died. Even now, I am sure that God will give you whatever you ask of him* – (Jn. 11:21-22). What Martha is saying is that in the presence of Jesus who is God there is no death. This is affirmed when she says further, *I know he will rise again, in the resurrection of the last day* – (Jn. 11:24).

This compels Jesus to proclaim: *I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, though he should die, will come to life; and whoever is alive and believes in me will never die* – (Jn. 11:25-26).

My dear sister and brother in Christ, we are in the 5<sup>th</sup> week of Lent. Next Sunday, we enter into Holy Week which will be the last week for our preparation to celebrate the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How have you lived your life? Is it a new life in Jesus? Or you are dead like the dry bones in the first reading?

Did you listen well to the second reading, when it says; *Those who are in the flesh cannot please God?* – (Rom. 8:8). Furthermore, it

*says if anyone does not have the spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

*If Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, while the spirit lives because of justice, if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the death will bring your mortal bodies to life also through his Spirit dwelling in you – (Rom. 8:11).*

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to die to our sins and allow Jesus to give us new lives.

# Passion/Palm Sunday

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**THEME: CHRIST BECAME OBEDIENT FOR  
US EVEN TO DEATH, DYING ON THE CROSS.  
THEREFORE, GOD RAISED HIM ON HIGH AND  
GAVE HIM A NAME ABOVE ALL OTHER NAMES.**

**Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7, Phi. 2:6-11, Matt. 26:14-27:66**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, for the past five (5) weeks, we have been preparing ourselves spiritually through prayer, fasting and almsgiving for the celebration of the Death and the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this week, Holy Week, our preparation reaches its climax. As it was said at the beginning of the Lenten Season, we cannot share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if we do not die with him by doing away with sin.

## Message:

We have just read the long Passion Narrative – depicting to us what Jesus went through in order to redeem and save us.

This Sunday has been restored to its proper name – Passion Sunday. Passion comes from the Latin word, “Passio” which means – to suffer. When Jesus was entering Jerusalem, he knew that he was going there to suffer. Suffering is not something that we want to endure and wish for ourselves except masochists. We do not want to suffer because we were not created for that. Suffering as we know was not created by God. It came into the world as a result of sin. Since the call of our first parents, suffering has become part and parcel of our lives as human beings.

In the first reading, we heard part of the song of the suffering servant. Here was somebody who was very committed, dedicated and faithful to God. Yet, he had to go through suffering. *He says, I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; my face I did not shield from buffets and spitting* – (Isa. 50). In the midst of all these sufferings, the suffering servant knows that he was not alone. God was with him – *The Lord is my help; therefore I am not disgraced; I have set my face like flint, knowing that I shall not be put to shame* – (Isa. 50).

The image of the suffering servant in Isaiah fits Jesus Christ very well. As we heard in the passion narrative, he suffered greatly. In all his suffering, he knew his father was with him. Before he died, he said, “Into your hands Father, I commend my spirit”.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, the death of Jesus did not end on the cross. He rose again and entered into his glory. This is a great lesson for you and me. It teaches us first that “No pain, No gain – No thorn, No crown – No Good Friday, No Easter”.

The passion of Jesus must motivate us to reach out to others. As the second reading tells us, though he was rich, he emptied himself and came to our assistance so that we may share in his riches. We must do the same. In the passion narrative, we read about Simeon of Cyrene, Veronica, Joseph of Arimathea. These people reached out to Jesus and ministered to him.

We are called upon to reach out to the despised, marginalised and those who suffer in our communities.

## Conclusion

Let us pray that through our celebration of these mysteries, we may die with Christ and rise with him so as to share in life in him.

# Holy Thursday

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**THEME: AS OFTEN AS YOU EAT THIS BREAD  
AND DRINK THIS CUP, YOU PROCLAIM THE  
DEATH OF THE LORD UNTIL HE COMES**

**Readings: Exodus 12:1-8; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; John 13:1-15**

## Introduction

Every human society or culture has some cherished or indispensable institutions. You touch or destroy these institutions you touch or destroy the very core of the society or culture. As Catholic Christians we have some institutions that are very central to us as a faith community. These are the institutions of Eucharist and the Priesthood. In the Liturgy of Holy Thursday, three events are commemorated, namely: the institutions of Eucharist and Priesthood and the washing of feet.

## Message

In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that the Eucharist was a tradition that was bequeathed to the early Christian communities from the apostles. He tells us that it was instituted by Jesus Christ himself and he shows us how he did it – *on the night he was handed over, took bread, and broke it and said, This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me* – (1 Cor. 11:23b-24). He goes on to say *in the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes* – (1 Cor. 11:25-26). It must be noted that the institution of the Eucharist which is at the center of Catholic theology and spirituality did not happen out of the

blue. It was instituted in the context of the celebration of the Jewish Passover.

The Passover is very central to the life of Jews. It marked the end of their slavery in Egypt and the beginning of their exodus into freedom and prosperity in Canaan – the Promised Land. God gave them specific instructions on how the Passover was to be celebrated among the Israelites. This is what we read in the first reading. They are told never to forget that experience – *This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution – (Ex. 12:14)*. Just as the blood of the lamb on the door posts saved the Jews where they were from being killed by the angel, in the same way, the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist saves us from death into eternal life.

The second event we commemorate today is the institution of the priesthood. Jesus is the priest *par excellence* even though he was not from the Levitical priesthood. He is the priest *par excellence* because the sacrifice he offered which is himself on the cross is the most perfect and ultimate sacrifice which rescued and redeemed sinful humanity and once again reconciled us with God. Consequently, all priests take their priesthood from Jesus Christ but they cannot duplicate or replace him. Francis Cardinal George of the Archdiocese of Chicago nicely put it when addressing priests of the Archdiocese at the Chrism mass of 2010 at the Holy Name Cathedral when he said, *as priests we are always to focus on Jesus Christ. Our duty is not to duplicate or replace or represent or exemplify Christ. Rather, we are to participate in him*. The need for priests to focus on Christ is more urgently needed these days more than ever with the priests sexual abuse haven generated crisis all over the world. Priests must resolve to lead good and moral lives in order to avoid scandal in the church and in the world. The laity on their part

must pray and support their priests to be holy and faithful in their ministry.

The third event we commemorate today is the washing of feet. As we read in the gospel Jesus stoops so low to wash the feet of his disciples – the work of servants and slaves – and by so doing sets an example for us to follow – *Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master’, and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the ‘teacher’ and ‘master’ have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do – (Jn. 13:12b-15).* Washing of feet is a call to service. Jesus wants us to be of service to one another. Are we prepared to do this? Or we are full of ourselves that we want others to serve us?

## Conclusion

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we have begun the Easter Triduum. Our long preparation to celebrate Easter in joy and glory since Ash Wednesday has reached its climax. Let us actively and fully participate in the events so as to rise up with Christ at Easter.

# Good Friday

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**THEME: CHRIST WAS HUMBLER YET, EVEN  
TO ACCEPTING DEATH, DEATH ON A CROSS.  
BUT GOD RAISED HIM HIGH AND GAVE HIM  
THE NAME WHICH IS ABOVE ALL NAMES.**

**Readings: Isaiah 52:13-53; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1 – 19:42**

## Introduction

Dear people of God, our elders say: “the past has something to say, it has something to teach us. So learn from it.” Last Friday, we were not here at this time. We were somewhere else. Perhaps, we were at the workplace, at the market, at the Lecture Hall, at home or some other place. Next week, at this time, we will not be here. God only knows where we will be. Today, we are here and we are for a purpose.

## Message

We are here as you all know to commemorate and celebrate the suffering and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This Friday is special in our lives as Christians. It is special because on this day, Christ suffered and died for us. This day stands out because it is the day that Jesus Christ redeemed us. It is the day that he rescued us and gave us salvation. It is the day that he reconciled us with the Father. It is for this reason that the day is referred to as Good Friday, even though Jesus suffered and died on that day.

The suffering and death of Jesus Christ is not an ordinary event that we just call to mind. Rather since it is an important event, we need to relive it. It is in this light that we trace the footsteps



of Jesus' as far as his end of life story on earth. Yesterday, we participated in the last supper event. Today in the morning, we prayed the Stations of the Cross. This afternoon, we have paid attention to the passion narrative according to St. John. Very soon, we shall venerate the Cross. There is no doubt that the cross is a symbol of a shameful death. It was criminals and notorious people who were killed that way. However, with Jesus, it is a different story. Jesus on the cross shows us or depicts the extent that God will go to save humanity.

It demonstrates to us the unfathomable love of God. As St. John testifies, *For God so loved the world that he gave His only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life* – (Jn.3:16). The cross of Christ is indispensable in our lives as Christians. It is the sign with which we are received in the church when we are baptised. It permits throughout our lives; before and after meals, when we come upon a fortune, it is the sign with which we begin and end the Mass, in fact, the sign of the cross is the last sign that will be made over us when we are finally laid in the grave.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, as Catholic Christians, let no one dissuade/persuade us about the place of the cross in our lives. For as St. Paul says, *The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* – (1 Cor. 1:18).

## Conclusion

Jesus Christ suffered and died because of our sins. If we are reliving these events so as to benefit from them, let us not go back to our sinful ways. Rather, let us repent from our sins, be renewed so as to be born again and have reconciliation to God.

# Holy Saturday

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THEME: **THE LORD'S RIGHT HAND HAS TRIUMPHED;  
HIS RIGHT HAND RAISED ME UP. I SHALL NOT  
DIE. I SHALL LIVE AND RECOUNT HIS DEEDS.**

**Readings: Gen.22:1-18; Is. 54:5-14; Rom. 6:3-11; Matt. 28:1-10**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, for six weeks now we have prepared ourselves in order to celebrate Easter, the “Mother of all feasts” in the Christian Religion. We have intensified our preparation for the past three days by participating actively and fully in the events that Jesus went through before his death on the cross. Tonight, we have assembled here to keep vigil in anticipation of the Resurrection tomorrow.

## Message

Tonight's vigil is full of symbols and these symbols are supposed to speak to us. The celebration is divided into four (4) parts:

1. A brief service of light
2. The liturgy of the Word
3. The liturgy of baptism
4. The liturgy of the Eucharist.

In the brief **service of light**, a fire was blessed and the Paschal Candle symbolising Christ was lit. On the candles are the Greek symbols Alpha and Omega and the current year. They mean that Christ is the beginning and the end and all things belong to

him. Five (5) incenses were inserted to indicate the five (5) main wounds that Jesus suffered when he was crucified. The church was in darkness when we entered. This was to indicate to us the state of humanity before Jesus came into the world. With Christ came light into the world. It is for this reason that Jesus says, *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world* – (Jn. 9:5). It means that if we are followers of Jesus Christ, then we must always walk and live in the light and shun deeds of darkness.

In the **liturgy of the Word**, we listen to many readings. We traced our salvation history. How it all began: Creation, the Fall; the promise of salvation through the prophets and then finally the Redemption, the restoration and the reconciliation with God.

The third part is **baptism** of new members and the renewal of our own baptism promises. This is to indicate to us the new life we have acquired in the Resurrected Christ. This means that having died with Christ through our renunciation of sin and deeds of darkness, we are assured of a share in glory of Christ,

The fourth is the **liturgy of the Eucharist**. Having been born anew and having become adopted sons and daughters of God, we sit at table with the Lord. In sitting at table with the Lord, we need to consider two (2) things:

1. What is on the table?
2. Who are at the table?

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, these are the mysteries, we are celebrating tonight. This night is very special and it stands out among all nights. As the Exultet (Rejoice) indicated, at the beginning of the service:

1. This is the night when first you (God) saved our fathers; you freed the people of Israel from their slavery and led them dray-shod through the sea;
2. This is the night when the pillars of fire destroyed the darkness of sin.
3. This is the night when Christians everywhere, washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement, are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.
4. This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.

## Conclusion

My dear family of God, as we enter into this wonderful season of Easter, we need to rejoice and be happy. At the same time let us be mindful of what Pope St. Leo the Great once said, *Christians, recognise your dignity and know who is your head and whose members you have become. Now that you have been washed of your sins, do not go back to your former way of life.*

May God who has begun these saving works in us; bring them to a successful end.

# Easter Sunday

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**THEME: SINCE YOU HAVE BEEN BROUGHT BACK TO TRUE LIFE WITH CHRIST, YOU MUST LOOK FOR THINGS THAT ARE IN HEAVEN; WHERE CHRIST IS, SITTING AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND.**

**Readings: Acts 10:34; 37-43; Col. 3:1-4; John 20:1-9**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ have you taken a loan before or have you borrowed money from somebody before? If you have never done that, think of yourself, being in dire need of money and therefore have to go to a friend in order to borrow. Unfortunately for you, as the day you said you would pay approaches, you are not able to pay. The day goes beyond and you are not able to pay. Days turn into weeks, weeks into months and you are not able to raise the money. How would you feel? What would you do? Needless to say you would not be yourself. You would feel embarrassed and start playing hide and seek with your friend.

After some time, another friend of yours intervenes and settles the debt for you. How would you feel and what would be your reaction? The answer is yours.

## Message

Today, we know is Easter Sunday. The day Jesus rose triumphantly from the dead after his crucifixion. This is considered to be the greatest feast in the Christian religion. How it all happened is recounted for us in the gospel of today.

In talking about the Easter event, the role played by Mary Magdalene cannot be over-emphasised. Some scripture scholars describe her as the woman from whom Jesus expelled the seven (7) evil spirits. Others also considered her to be the woman who came to Jesus when Jesus was in the house of the Pharisee, wet his feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair and anointed them with a costly perfume whose fragrance filled the whole room.

It was this Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb early that Sunday morning and discovered the empty tomb. The bible tells us that she went there early in the morning when it was still dark. Remember that Jesus had been hurriedly buried on Friday because the Jewish Sabbath was approaching. Mary Magdalene went there early with some spices to make sure that Jesus' body did not decompose. She did not know what had happened, so she went to inform the apostles who had gone into hiding. Mary Magdalene has encountered Jesus earlier on and has turned back on her former way of life. Her focus in life was then on Jesus. She was among those who stood by as Jesus died on the cross.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ like Mary Magdalene we too have been saved from our sins. We have been redeemed. We have been ransomed. Our debt has been paid. We have been set free. We have been saved. Like Mary Magdalene, we must turn our back on our former way of life and keep our focus on Jesus and look for Jesus always. It is in this light that God in the second reading admonishes us.

*Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when*

*Christ is revealed – and he is your life – you too will be revealed in all your glory with him (Col. 3:1-4).*

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace so that the Easter season will be a true blessing and grace for us all.

# Second Sunday of Easter

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**THEME: YOU BELIEVE BECAUSE YOU  
CAN SEE ME. HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO  
HAVE NOT SEEN AND YET BELIEVE.**

**Readings: Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter. 1:3-9; John 20:19-31**

## Introduction

My dear people of God, as human beings, many of us like to mark important events in our lives – events like our birthdays, graduation days and days that we got into marriage.

In the same vein, when we come to our religious or spiritual life certain events stand out – the greatest of these is Easter. The importance of Easter cannot be over-emphasised. It is the event that redeemed, rescued and reconciled humanity once again with God. It is for this reason that six (6) weeks are used to prepare for this all important event. Furthermore, it is not a one day event. The Easter season lasts for fifty (50) days.

## Message

Important as it is, many people have tried in the past to discredit the Easter event with the intention to destroy Christianity. It is true that nobody, no human being witnessed the resurrection per se. What Mary Magdalene saw was the empty tomb. However, even though Jesus was crucified, died and was buried in the tomb which was well secured with security guards on duty, three (3) days later, he was appearing to different people at different times.

In the gospel of today, he appears twice to his disciples on two (2) different occasions. On the first occasion, Thomas was not



present. When he was later told that Jesus indeed had risen and had appeared to them, he did not believe. The second time, he came, Thomas was present. Jesus chastised him for his incredibility and invited him to examine him critically.

Dear friends in Christ, it is very important to notice the changes in Jesus' life after the resurrection.

1. After the resurrection, Jesus enters into rooms when the doors are locked. This is because his body has undergone a radical transformation. This is to teach us that as people who shares in the resurrection of Christ our bodies will undergo a complete change at the end of our lives.
2. After the resurrection, Jesus' greetings always is "peace be with you." As followers of Jesus who shares in the resurrection of Christ, our newness of life must be based on peace. We must be builders and promoters of peace.
3. Jesus' encounter with Thomas, makes Jesus' issue a very profound statement, "You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe."

This statement refers to you and me. We have not seen Jesus with our naked or physical eyes. Yet, in faith, we have come to accept him as our personal saviour. As people who are considered Happy/Blessed, we need to live as such.

One aspect of the Easter experience is the sharing of the Good News. This is what we see the early Christians doing in the first reading. The Easter event has changed them completely.

With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they are bearing witness to others. This is what we are to do as Christians: To share with others the Easter joy and message.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to be mindful always of our identity as sons and daughters of the resurrection. Secondly, let us pray for the grace to share the joyful news with others.

# Third Sunday of Easter

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**THEME: LORD JESUS, EXPLAIN THE  
SCRIPTURES TO US. MAKE OUR HEARTS  
BURN WITHIN US AS YOU TALK TO US.**

**Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-33; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, it is said that great minds talk about ideas; average minds talk about events and mediocre minds talk about people. However, some events and the roles some people play in the world are so important that everybody talks about them. One of such events is the Easter event and the person involved is Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The discovery of the empty tomb three (3) days after the crucifixion, death and burial of Jesus was news that spread like bushfire in harmattan season. What added to the mystery of the Easter event was Jesus' appearance to some disciples at different times. Today, we read about one of such appearances.

## Message

The gospel talks about Jesus' appearance after the resurrection to two (2) of his disciples who were on their way to Emmaus. Naturally, they were talking about the Easter event which was the latest news at that time. A stranger out of the blue joins them on the way. The stranger asks them what they were talking about. The two (2) disciples are so surprised that the stranger did not know what had happened at the time. So they ask him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem? This question made Jesus asked for more information and by so doing entered into a more intimate relationship with the two (2) disciples. It was for this

reason that they pressed on him to stay with them for the night and invited him for supper.

Dear people of God, the Emmaus story has about four (4) lessons to teach us:

1. The need to pay particular attention to strangers we meet. The two (2) disciples did not know initially that the stranger they were talking to was Jesus. The bible tells us how some people like Abraham in the past ministered to angels without knowing it. Yes, these days we must be careful about fraudsters and tricksters but that does not mean we do not have to reach out to strangers.
2. The need to pay attention to scriptures. We are told that Jesus took his time to explain to the two (2) disciples all that concerned him from scriptures. As Christians, we cannot follow the moves that God is making in our lives, without paying attention to scriptures.
3. The need to be very particular about the Eucharist. It can be seen that after the Easter event, many a time that Jesus appeared before his disciples, there is a breaking of bread. This is to teach us that after the resurrection, Jesus can no longer be seen physically. He can only be experienced in the breaking of bread. Secondly, it teaches us that when we come to the Eucharist, we must not only consider what is on the table but also who are at the table.
4. The need to pay attention to the missionary aspect of the ministry of Jesus. After the two (2) disciples encountered and experienced Jesus in the breaking of the bread, they returned to Jerusalem and recounted their experiences. The lesson is that once we have encountered and experienced Jesus, we need to bear witness on his behalf.

This is what we see Peter and the other apostles doing in the first reading. They are now completely changed after the Easter event. They have experienced Jesus and they are now convinced that he is the saviour of the world. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they are now bold enough to bear testimony for Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Let us ask for the grace to know Jesus in more personal way and by so doing bring him to others.

# Fourth Sunday of Easter

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THEME: I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD,  
SAYS THE LORD; I KNOW MY OWN  
SHEEP AND MY OWN KNOW ME.

Readings: Acts 2:14, 36-41; 1 Pt. 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, as human beings we believe that God is a Spirit. For this reason, God can be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. However, to comprehend and experience God in a more human and personal ways, we use various images and symbols to depict the nature of God. Consequently, human images and symbols like a parent, a king, a hen and others are used to describe God. One image that has been used to depict the nature of God is shepherd. This image demonstrates the tender love, care and concern of God for us. Thus, we read in *Psalm 23*, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me..... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

The image of the shepherd is what Jesus used comfortably during his ministry on earth. He avoided titles like – king, messiah or the anointed one because of their political connotations. As we read in the gospel, he referred to himself as the good shepherd. As the good shepherd he knows his sheep and the sheep know him. They listen to him and follow him wherever he goes. As a good shepherd, he feeds and cares for the sheep. He protects

them from predators and does not lead them astray. On the contrary, he leads them to greener pastures. This is the import of Jesus' statement: *I came so that they may have life and have to the full* – Jn. 10:10b. This message of Jesus is in fulfilment of what God had promised to the people of Israel through the Prophet Jeremiah when God said, *For sure I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope ..... I will let you find me with all your heart and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I send you into exile* (Jer. 29:11-14).

Dear people of God, the message of Jesus being the good shepherd who comes so that *we may have life and have it to full* is not for any particular group of people but for all nations of the world. It is a message that must be carried to the four (4) corners of the world.

This is what we see Peter and the other apostles doing in the first reading. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they are bearing testimony on behalf of Jesus. They invite people to report from their sins and believe in the risen Lord. That is the only way that they can “have life and have it to the full”.

My dear sisters/brothers in Christ, is Jesus our true shepherd? Do we listen to him and follow him always? Once we have encountered and experience him do we share the message with others?

## Conclusion

Let us pray for the grace to make Jesus, the true shepherd in our lives, listen to him and follow him always. Secondly, let us share Jesus and his message with others. May God bless us all.

# Fifth Sunday of Easter

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**THEME: DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED.  
TRUST IN GOD STILL, AND TRUST IN ME. THERE  
ARE MANY ROOMS IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE, IF  
IT WERE NOT, I SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU.**

**Readings: Acts 6:1-7; 1 Pt. 2:4-9; Jn. 14:1-12**

## Introduction

My dear people of God, as human beings, we love to be motivated – either internally or externally. Once we are motivated we strive as best as we can to achieve whatever we have set before us. As Christians, what is motivating us or what should motivate us is to be with God in heaven at the end of our lives here on earth?

## Message

This is not a theology of the church. It is not something that the church has concocted for itself. It is a promise by our Lord Jesus Christ himself. In the gospel reading, Jesus tells you and me, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am now going to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepared you a place, I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too.”* – (Jn. 14:1-3).

This promise of Jesus Christ to his disciples was not an empty promise. It was very dear to his heart. For this reason, before his ascension, he prayed earnestly to his heavenly Father. Among other things, he prayed, *Father, I desire that those also whom you*



*have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. – (Jn. 17:24).*

It was this promise by Jesus Christ which made the faith of the early disciples stronger. It motivated them to do things that did as recorder in the Acts of the Apostles. In the first reading of today, the number of the followers of Jesus is increasing due to the preaching of the apostles. The good news have been preached to non-Jews. They have also become converts. Unfortunately, there is a disputed/disagreement between the dominant groups as far as the distribution of food to widows is concern. The twelve (12) Apostles are very mindful of the command that they received from the Lord. *Love one another. Just as I have loved you. You also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another – (Jn. 13:33-35).* They therefore solved this problem by appointing seven (7) people to take care of the ministry.

What the apostles did has a lot of lessons for us today. It teaches us that:

1. Prayer and preaching the Word of God are so important that they can never be compromised. Nothing can take precedence over them.
2. Taking care of the welfare needs of the Christians is very important.
3. Ministry in the church is not for any particular group of people. Different people are called to ministry in the church as needs arise.
4. We must not allow ethnicity or groupings destroy the oneness/unity of the church.

My dear sisters/brothers in Christ are you worried or disturbed by the challenges and difficulties in this life? Are you downhearted because of the sickness/illness that has befallen you on the death of a loved one? Do you think your world has ended and lost all hope? Listen to what the Lord is saying to you: *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me (Jn. 14:1).*

# Sixth Sunday of Easter

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THEME: **IF ANYONE LOVES ME HE WILL  
KEEP MY WORD, AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE  
HIM AND WE SHALL COME TO HIM.**

**Readings: Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; 1 Pt. 3:15-18; Jn. 14:15-21**

## Introduction

My dear people of God, it is often said that whatever has a beginning, has an end. Our Christian faith teaches us that Jesus Christ came into this world, not to do his own will but the will of his Father. The will of his Father is that he preaches about the Kingdom of God and invite people to enter into it (cf. Mk. 1:14-15). From the beginning of the church's liturgical year, we have celebrated the coming, the incarnation, the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We have just celebrated the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is about to ascend into heaven where he came from. The gospel reading points to that effect.

## Message

Today's gospel reading is a continuation of last week's reading. It is part of Jesus' farewell discourse with his disciples. Last week among other things he encouraged us *not to let our hearts be troubled and that we must trust in God still and trust in him*. He assured us that there are many rooms/places in his Father's house. He promised us that he was going to prepare a place for us and that after he has prepared the place, he will come back and take us to where he is, that is where he wants his disciples to be – (cf. Jn.14:1-3).

In today's gospel reading, Jesus demands commitment, dedication and loyalty from his disciples. He has come to realise that many were following for various reasons. Some were following because he fed them with the loaves of bread. To these people, Jesus said *do not work for food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you* (Jn. 6:27). Others followed him because they thought that as the Messiah, he will lead them to fight the Roman dominion/ rule that the Jews were under. To such people, Jesus moved away from them – (cf. Jn.6:15). Still others followed him because of the miracles that he performed. It was on these bases that Jesus challenged his disciples about their commitment, their dedication and their loyalty to him. For Jesus the criterion or the yardstick of their fidelity to him was how they keep or obey his commandments – (Jn. 14:15). Keeping the commandments of the Lord is try to live as Jesus lived and spread the message of the kingdom of God and invite people to enter it.

This is what we see Philip doing in the first reading. He went to a Samaritan town and proclaimed Christ to them. The people united in welcoming the message. As the reading pointed out there was great rejoining in that town – Acts 8:5-8

My dear sister/brother in Christ, as followers of the Lord Jesus, how do we show our commitment, our dedication and our loyalty to the Lord? Do we allow the commandments and the Word of God to guide us in our deliberations and daily lives? Like Philip and the earthly disciples, do we spread the message of Christ in homes, in our families, at our workplaces by the way we live and by the way we do things?

As God through St. Peter in the second reading notes, *Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have* – (1 Pt. 3:15).

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to remain faithful to the Lord by following his commandments. Secondly, let us pray for the grace to share him with others.

# Pentecost Day

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**THEME: COME, HOLY SPIRIT, FILL THE  
HEART OF YOUR FAITHFUL AND KINDLE  
IN THEM THE FIRE OF YOUR LOVE.**

**Readings: Acts 2: 1-11; 1Cor. 12: 3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23.**

## Introduction

Pentecost from its Hebrew roots means Fifty (50). Originally, it was a Jewish Agricultural feast. On this day, all Jews make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast.

For us Christians, Pentecost Sunday is the day that the Holy Spirit descended on the early disciples in the form of tongues of fire when they were gathered in the Upper Room—Acts 2:1-21. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Technically, biblical scholars refer to it as *glossolalia*. This was to the amazement of all those who had come from the four (4) corners of the world for the agricultural feast. They were deeply amazed because they could hear the testimony of the disciples in their own native language—cf. Acts 2:7-13.

## Message

It must be noted that after the Ascension of the Lord, the disciples were locked up in the upper room waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This was a command from the Lord—cf. Acts 1:8. Once they received the Holy Spirit, they were empowered and went outside to proclaim boldly the message of the resurrection. As they did so, about three thousand people were added to their number—cf. Acts 2:41. It is for this reason

that the Church teaches that Pentecost Sunday is the birthday of the Church. It was on that day that the Church was out-doored.

As we celebrate Pentecost Sunday, the emphasis is not on the speaking of tongues. On Pentecost day, it was for a purpose. Furthermore, as St. Paul teaches, it is the least of the gifts of the Spirit—cf. 1 Cor. 12:1 ff. On this day, what we need to pay attention to, is how to rekindle and renew the Holy Spirit whose temple is in our hearts—cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17. We cannot do away with the Holy Spirit. For as St. Paul tells us, *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God* —Rom. 8:14. We need to be filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The seven (7) gifts of the Holy Spirit are: Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding, Courage, Counsel, Piety and Fear of God.

In addition to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit are: love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control—Galt. 5:22.

## Conclusion

As we celebrate Pentecost, may we be rekindled and renewed so that whatever we do as Christians may be under the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit.

# The Blessed Trinity

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**THEME: GLORY BE TO THE FATHER AND TO THE SON AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT. AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW AND EVER SHALL BE, WORLD WITHOUT END. AMEN.**

**Readings: Ex. 34:4-6, 8-9; 2Cor. 13:11-13; Jn. 3:16-18**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, some weeks ago, we celebrated the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, the day Jesus Christ went back to his Father. Whilst he was here, Jesus said that he came not to do his own will, but the will of his Father. In the course of his ministry, he said that he and the father are one – (Cf. John 10:30). Before his Ascension, Jesus promised another person, the Holy Spirit. He said *When the advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning* – (John 15:26-27).

## Message

Today, we are celebrating the solemnity of the Blessed Trinity. One particular place in the bible where we experience a picture or image is where Jesus is being baptised, and the heavens opened, and the holy spirit descended on him like a dove and a voice was heard saying, *You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased* – (Lk. 3:21).

From time in memorial, people have tried to explain the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. One of such people is Augustine.



Trinity comes from two Latin words, *Tres* – which means three and *Unus* which means one. Trinity, therefore, means three in one. It was a term coined by Tertullian, an African theologian who lived in the third century. He coined it to explain the Godhead. Tertullian was trying to explain the Christian belief that there is only One God but in this One God, there are three (3) divine and distinct persons. It means that the Godhead is a community or a family.

It must be pointed out that the word *Trinity* per se cannot be found in the bible. However, what the word connotes permeates throughout both the Hebrew bible or the Old Testament and the New Testament – cf. Gen. 1:1-2; Prov. 3:22-31; Matt. 28:19-20; Lk. 3:21-22; Jn. 10:30; Jn. 16:12-15.

The Trinity is one of the mysteries of the church. As a mystery, we cannot comprehend or understand it as human beings. Yet, we believe it because it has been revealed to us by God in the scriptures. Since the Trinity is a mystery, all that we can do is to believe in it for problems are to be solved but mysteries are to be lived.

Even though, the Trinity is a mystery and therefore cannot be understood, it permeates the whole of our lives as Catholic Christians. Among other things, it is in the Trinity that: we are received into the Church; baptized; begin and end all our liturgical celebrations; begin and end all our private devotions and prayers; and commit ourselves to when we die. In short, the Trinity is the origin, the sustainer and the end or goal of Christian Life.

## **Conclusion**

As we celebrate Trinity Sunday, we need to recommit and rededicate ourselves to God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and live lives worthy of the Blessed Trinity.

# Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi) – Food for our Soul

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THEME: DO NOT WORK FOR FOOD THAT PERISHES,  
BUT FOR FOOD THAT ENDURES FOR ETERNAL  
LIFE WHICH THE SON OF MAN WILL GIVE YOU.

Readings: Deut. 8:2-3, 14-16; 1Cor. 10:16-17; John 6: 51-58

## Introduction

The importance of food cannot be over-emphasised. We need to eat in order to grow and live. However, we do not eat any food. We pick and choose what we eat. We eat food that is good and nutritious. This is to enable us stay healthy bodily. As human beings, we know that the human person is made up of body and soul. Consequently, since we eat good and nutritious food in order to grow, live and stay healthy, in the same way, the soul also needs good and nutritious food to stay healthy. The food for the soul is the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ which in Latin is *Corpus Christi*.

## Message

Jesus does not mince words when it comes to the need to eat his Body and Blood. He teaches: *Do not work for food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal. – John 6:27.* He goes on to teach, *very truly, I tell you unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day, for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink*

*my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever. – John 6:53-58*

This teaching of Jesus Christ has been held on to throughout the history of Roman Catholic Church. Speaking on the significance of Jesus' work of redemption and the Eucharist, St. Thomas Aquinas says, *He offered his body to God the Father on the altar of the cross as a sacrifice for our reconciliation. He shed his blood for our ransom and purification, so that we might be redeemed from our wretched state of bondage and cleansed from all sin. But to ensure that the memory of so great a gift would abide with us forever, he left his body as food and his blood as drink and wine – (The Liturgy of the Hours, Vol. III, p.610).*

According to the teachings of the church, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ through the invocation of the Holy Spirit during the celebration of Mass at the consecration. After the consecration, the elements of bread and wine change to become Body and Blood of Christ respectively. The substance of the bread and wine is changed and transformed. This is theologically termed, **Transubstantiation**. Secondly, what the bread and wine signify also changes and they are transformed. This is called **Transignification**. Thirdly, the final end of bread and wine also changes and it is transformed. This is also termed **Transfinalization**.

The Body and Blood of Christ symbolises our oneness in the Lord. It is for this reason that before receiving communion, we offer each other the sign of peace to show that we are one and do not harbour any grudges against one another. Even though the body and Blood of Christ symbolises oneness, it has become a source of disunity among Christian denominations. At the

Reformation in the sixteenth century, when the Roman Catholic Church was teaching that the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, the reformers were teaching that it is a sign and symbol of Christ. They taught that the bread and wine is **like** the Body and Blood of Christ.

This is the difference between the teaching of Roman Catholic Church and other Protestant denominations as far as the Body and Blood of Christ is concerned.

As Catholics, we have great reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ. It is in this light, that when Mass is being celebrated after consecration, the body and Blood are lifted high for people to adore. Secondly, from time to time, the Body of Christ is exposed in a monstrance for adoration and benediction. Finally, Corpus Christi processions are held through principle streets on special feast days.

## **Conclusion**

As we celebrate Corpus Christi, let us continue to show our reverence to the Eucharist and receive the Body and Blood of Christ worthily, for that is the food for our souls as we journey towards eternal life.

# **The Sacred Heart of Jesus – A Symbol of God’s Love for Humanity**

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**THEME: SHOULDER MY YOKE AND LEARN FROM  
ME, FOR I AM GENTLE AND HUMBLE IN HEART.**

**Readings: Zach.9:9-10; Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matt. 11:25-30**

## **Introduction**

The whole Christendom celebrates the Paschal mystery (suffering, death and resurrection) of our Lord Jesus Christ. The paschal mystery culminates the salvation history of humanity. It redeemed, ransomed and reconciled strayed humanity with God. The place of Jesus Christ in our salvation history is indescribable.

## **Message**

Station of the Cross says when Jesus was been lead to his crucifixion, a woman named Veronica, seeing that he was drenched in sweat and blood, offered him a towel to wipe his face. This resulted in an imprint of Jesus’ face being left in the towel. This imprint of the face of Jesus was kept and after the resurrection devotions to it began.

Since the paschal ministry is very central to our salvation and redemption, in the cause of the History of the Church, devotions to the various parts of the physical body of Jesus Christ started. Even though they all died down in the course of time, devotion to the Heart of Jesus remained.

In about 1850, Jesus appeared to St. Margret Mary of Alacoque in France and showed her his Sacred Heart. In the course of conversation with her, Jesus told her about his heart which has loved humanity so much but has been loved so little and very often offended. Consequently, he asked her to make reparations for sins committed against him. Since then devotions to the sacred Heart of Jesus has spread to the four corners of the world. The Roman Catholic Church has instituted a day on its calendar when the church throughout the world celebrate it. It is solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus which is celebrated on the Friday after the second Sunday of Pentecost.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is a symbol of the love that God has for humanity. It teaches us the extend that God will go to save the world. St. John says it all, when he notes, *For God so love the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him May not perish but may have eternal life – John 3:16.*

If God has loved as so much, then we need to reciprocate or return that love for as William Shake-speare once said. *Ingratitude is a crime, more despicable than revenge, which is returning evil for evil, whilst ingratitude is returning good with evil-(The Power of Truth).* We reciprocate the love of God by doing good and avoiding evil.

## **Conclusion**

Let us always strive with the grace of God to show devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which a symbol of God's love.

# Fourteenth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **BLESSED ARE YOU, FATHER, LORD OF  
HEAVEN AND EARTH, FOR REVEALING THE  
MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM TO MERE CHILDREN.**

**Readings: Zachariah 9:9-10; Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, as you all know, our human history has passed through many eras or periods. We passed through the stone, the bronze and the iron ages. We are now in the computer age. Many things have changed and human lives have improved tremendously all things being equal. Unfortunately, human crimes and atrocities continue to occur in our communities and societies. Crimes such as defilement, abuse (verbal and sexual), murder and other crimes against humanity. We abhor these crimes because they are anti-human. They are not pro-life. They are against our nature as human beings. In Ephesians 1:1-4a, it states, *Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through in his presence.* This is our nature and this is the purpose for which we were created: to be holy and spotless and live in the presence of the Lord.

## Message

The readings of today remind us of what would happen to us if we do not live holy and spotless lives in the presence of the Lord.

The first reading is a piece taken from the exilic period. It was a time that the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. They had

been unfaithful to the Lord. They had abandoned the ways of the Lord and followed their own pursuits. God, therefore, left them to do their own things. The consequences were the destruction of their country and their prominent citizens sent into exile. It was after some years, that the Lord took pity on them and sent them the prophet Zachariah to speak these words of comfort and consolation to them. *Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion! Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem. See now, your king comes to you he is victorious, he is triumphant, humble and riding on a donkey* – Zachariah 9:9. (Christians will later on use this very text to apply it to Jesus).

Dear people of God, it is often said “*a word to the wise is enough.*” Do you want to experience the same thing that happened to the people of Israel because of their waywardness to the Lord? Do you want to be swept away from the presence of the Lord? If your answers are no, then, heed to the admonition that God giving us through St. Paul in the second reading: “*your interests are not in the inspirational, but in the spiritual, since the spirit of God has made his home in you.*”

In fact, unless you possess the spirit of God you would not belong to him and if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own natural bodies through his spirit living in you. He concludes by saying, *So then, my brothers, there is no necessity for us to obey our unspiritual selves or live unspiritual lives. If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die; but if by the spirit you put an end to the misdeeds of the body you will live* – Rom. 8:9, 11-13.

My sister/brother in Christ, Do you want to be doomed after death and sent to a place where you would weep and gnaw your teeth? Or do you want to live in the presence of the Lord after your death? If you want to live with the Lord, then start living



holy and spotless. It means always live and walk in the presence of the Lord life.

This is what Jesus is telling us in the gospel that it is not known to many people including the wise and the so-called learned people in our world. It is only those who know who have been touch by grace of God who knows this.

## **Conclusion**

Let us ask the Lord for grace to live holy and spotless lives and to come to the Lord always for he is the only home who can give us rest.

# Fifteenth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **SPEAK, LORD YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING;  
YOU HAVE THE MESSAGE OF ETERNAL LIFE.**

**Readings: Isaiah 55:10-11; Romans 8:18-23; Mathew 13:1-23**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, we all know the importance of words. Words uttered from the mouth of a person say a lot about the person. Words can be comforting, consoling and therapeutic. It can be motivating and uplifting. On the other hand, words can be demoralising. It can hurt and dump the spirit of a person. With regard to God's words they are creative and powerful.

## Message

The readings of today speak about the importance of the word of God and how human beings respond to it.

In the first readings, the prophet Isaiah uses the image of rain and snow to pinpoint the effectiveness and powerfulness of the Word of God. According to the prophet, rain and snow come for a purpose. They come to water the earth in order to make the earth fertile and fruitful. In the same way, the Word of God comes from God for a purpose. It does not return to God empty. When the Word of God emanates from God, it comes to perform the function for which it was sent. God says, *As the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and growing to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do – Is. 55:10-11.*

In the gospel, Jesus teaches about how human beings respond to the Word of God. He uses the parable of the sower. A sower went on his way to sow seeds. Some of the seeds fell on the road side which were quickly picked up by birds and eaten. Other seeds landed on rocky grounds. When they started to germinate, they died out quickly because their depths were shallow. Still other seeds fell among thorns. After growing up to a certain level, the thorns choked them. Consequently, they could not bear fruit. The final category of seeds fell into good and fertile soil and as a result bore fruits. Among those which bore fruits, they were in different categories-thirtyfold, sixtyfold and hundredfold.

Being a good teacher, Jesus takes his time to explain in details the true meaning of the parable. Jesus is teaching us that those who hear the Word of God can be put into four (4) different groups:

1. Those who hear the Word of God and do not care about it.
2. Those who in hearing of the Word of God accept it for a time but when temptation or challenges and difficulties come they easily give up.
3. Those who hear the Word of God and accept it. However, they allow the world's allurements and worries to choke and destroy on the seed and do not bear fruits.
4. The fourth group consist of those who hear the Word of God and cherish it. They work hard on it and it bears fruit. Even in this group, they fall in to three categories – those who bear 30%, others 60% and still others produced 100%.

This category of people teaches that people have different capabilities and talents. Each person will be required to give

account on stewardship only of his/her talents. There must, consequently, be no room for envy and jealousy.

It must be pointed out that cherishing the Word of God and making it bear fruits needs lots of work. It may call for great mortifications and sacrifices. It may demand dying to some bad habits and sinful inclinations that have become part and parcel of our lives. As St. Paul tells us in the second readings, the suffering that we encounter here on earth cannot be compared to the glory to be revealed. We must, therefore, strive to surmount challenges and difficulties that may come our way in view of what lies ahead of us in heaven.

## **Conclusion**

Let us ask the Lord for the grace so that the Word of God that comes to us may take deep root in us and produce more fruits that are good and edible.

# Sixteenth Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: THEN THE VIRTUOUS WILL SHINE LIKE  
THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THEIR FATHER.**

**Readings: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Romans 8:26-27; Matthew 13:24-43**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, we read from Mark 1:14-15 that on coming into the world, Jesus said that he came to preach about the kingdom of God. He went on to call people to repentance so as to enter the kingdom of God. This kingdom of God is a mystery. As a mystery, we do not understand it. It is for this reason that St. Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us that *the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval* – (Rom. 14:17-18). To help us to understand the mystery about the kingdom of God, Jesus uses many images, metaphors and parables to teach us great and important lessons about the kingdom of God.

## Message

Today in the gospel reading, Jesus gives us three (3) parables in order to explain the kingdom of God. They are the parable:

1. About the wheat and the weeds,
2. The mustard seed
3. The yeast and the flour.

The parables about the mustard seed and the yeast and the flour depict the early and the small begins of the kingdom. In

other words, what Jesus is teaching is that the kingdom of God starts in a very small way and gradually spreads its tentacles to encompass people from the four (4) corners of the world. The morale of the parable is that the kingdom of God is not reserved for any particular group of people. All human beings are invited and encouraged to enter into it.

The parable about the wheat and the weed teaches us that in spite of God's good intention for humanity, Satan/Devil is strongly at work trying very hard to destroy the hand work of God. So the devil goes about sowing seeds of discord, planting counterfeits among God's people. It is for this reason that God through St. Peter warns us about evil machinations of the devil when he says, *Like a roaring lion your adversary, the devil, sprawls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith* – 1 Pt. 5:8b-9a.

In case you have any doubts about the parable of wheat and the weed, pay attention to the last part of the gospel reading where everything is explained vividly. The parable is about ending time. It is about accountability. It is about damnation and salvation on the judgement day.

The first reading points to us that nature of God that God is kind and merciful, that God governs us with great eminency that after sin, God grants repentance.

My dear sister/brother in Christ, as Catholic Christians, how do we respond to these attributes of God? Do we take them for granted? How do we see ourselves? Are we among the wheat that will be put into the barn of the Lord? Or we are the weeds that will be bound and burnt? Are we led by the Spirit of God or we are in league with the devil or the evil one?

## **Conclusion**

As the second reading notes, we used to be influenced and led by the spirit of God, for it is the spirit of God who helps us in our weakness and even intercedes for us. Let us pray for the grace to sever any relationship with the evil one and live for God so that we may shine like the sun in the kingdom of our Father and not be dammed.

# Seventeenth Sunday in the Year

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**THEME: THE ANGELS WILL APPEAR AND SEPARATE THE WICKED FROM THE JUST TO THROW THEM INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE, WHERE THERE WILL BE WEeping AND GRINDING OF TEETH.**

**Readings: 1kgs. 3:5, 7-13; Rom. 8:28-30; Matt. 13:44-52**

## Introduction

Dear friends of God, last week among other things, we said that Jesus came into the world purposely to preach about the kingdom of God and invited people to repent and enter into it – (cf. Mk. 1:14-15). To help us to understand the message of the kingdom of God since it is a mystery, Jesus used many parables to teach us about the kingdom. Last week, he gives us three (3) parables.

## Message

Today, Jesus continues in the same vein. He continues to teach us more about the kingdom of God. As it is characteristic of him, he gives us three (3) parables:

1. The treasure hidden in the field
2. The merchant looking for a fine pearl
3. The dragnet

The import of the parable of the dragnet is similar to the parable of weeds/darnel among the wheat. It teaches us that;

1. There will be an ending time



2. There will be judgement and separation
3. Some will rejoice while other will be damned and suffer the consequences.

My dear sister/brother in Christ, do you get the message of the parable? Are you a good fish that will be put into the basket of the Lord or you are a bad one that will be thrown away? Do you want to rejoice with the Lord or you want to weep and gnash your teeth? The choice is definitely yours!

In the other two (2) parables – the hidden treasure and the merchant looking for a find pearl, Jesus is teaching us about the value of the kingdom. He is saying that the kingdom of God is priceless. It is valueless. Nothing can be compared to it. In view of the fact that it is important and priceless the Christian must not allow anything to come between him/her and the kingdom. Everything must be done in order to possess the kingdom of God.

Dear friends in Christ, be mindful of the fact that the kingdom of God will not be handed to us on a silver platter. We need to prepare for it. We need to work for it. We need to make some sacrifices in order to enter into it. This is what Jesus meant when he said *the road that leads to damnation is wide and broad and many choose it, but the road that leads to eternal life is narrow and only a few find it* – (Matt.7:13-14).

In the first reading, we are told that when King Solomon had the opportunity to ask the Lord whatever he wanted, he did not ask for long life. Neither did he ask for riches and wealth. Rather, he asked for wisdom; a discernment of Spirit so that he would be a good king. The Lord was pleased with him and granted him his request and even added other things.

It is in the same vein that Jesus teaches us to *strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well* – (Matt. 6:33).

My dear sister/brother in Christ, what is your attitude towards the kingdom of God? What are you doing or giving up in order to possess it? Or do you want to weep and gnash your teeth at the end of life? Psalm 95:8 tells us, *Today, if, you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.*

## Conclusion

Let us pray for the grace and ask the Lord to turn everything in us to be good as the second reading tells us.

# Eighteenth Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: MAN DOES NOT LIVE ON BREAD  
ALONE, BUT ON EVERYTHING THAT  
COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.**

**Readings: Isa. 55:1-3; Rom. 8:35, 37-39, Matt. 14:13-21**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, happiness is one thing that we all seek as human beings. But what constitutes happiness may be relative or subjective. Some people think that happiness can be sought from the bottle, so they take to drinking. Others think that they can find it in sex, so they chase as many women as possible. The opposite also applies. Still others think that they can obtain happiness through the acquisition of wealth and properties. All these may give you some happiness temporarily. True happiness can only be obtained in the Lord. This is what St. Augustine meant when he said, *Our souls were made for God and they will continue to be restless until they rest in God.*

## Message

The readings of today call upon us to listen and come to the Lord so as to be fed and enjoy happiness that is everlasting. The Lord is the one who made us and knows what is good for us. He knows for sure that all the created things, the material things that we run after cannot offer us lasting satisfaction/happiness. Therefore, through the Prophet Isaiah, he calls us *come to the water all you who are thirsty: though you have no money, come! Buy corn without money and eat, and at no cost, wine and milk. Why spend money on that is not bread, your wages on what fails to satisfy?* – (Isa. 55:1-2a). He goes on to say, *Listen to me and you*

*will have good things to eat and rich food to enjoy. Pay attention, come to me; listen and your souls will live – (Isa. 55:2b-3a).*

The message of God's love and care for us symbolizes in feeding us comes up also in the gospel reading. Jesus sees the crowd after disembarking from the boat. He sees how dejected and miserable they look. Consequently, he takes pity on them and ministers to them. He feeds them to the amazement of their wildest dreams and imagination. My dear family of God, this is the God we are serving; a God who loves and cares; a God who abides and presides; a God who offers satisfaction/happiness that lasts forever.

My dear brother/sister in Christ, what is going on in your mind now? What is happening in your family? Are you downhearted and feel dejected because of your economic situation? Is your faith shaken because of some sickness or death in your family? Does the Lord not seem to care in your Christian life? If that is your predicament or situation, I will say do not lose hope. Listen to the words from the second reading – *Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes or being threatened or even attacked. These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of Him who loved us – (Rom. 8:35).* All that we are asked to do is to listen and come to the Lord and the Lord will offer us satisfaction/happiness that will last.

## **Conclusion**

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to listen and heed the call of the Lord for it is only by trusting and obeying the Lord that can bring us the true happiness we seek as human beings as captured beautifully in Catholic Hymnal – 416

# Nineteenth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **LET US SEE, O LORD, YOUR MERCY  
AND GIVE US YOUR SAVING HELP**

**Readings: 1 Kings 19:9, 11-13; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, we all know that things by themselves may not be powerful or efficient. However, when well connected, they become more powerful and efficient. Take the case of a pressing iron. When it is not connected to an electric power, it does not iron clothes very well. But when it is connected to an electrical outlet, it straightens all wrinkled clothes and makes them look neat. It is the same in our relationship with the Lord. Since we were created in the image and likeness of God (ff. Genesis 1:36) we can be efficient and successful only when we stay in touch with the Lord. This is what St. Augustine meant when he said, *Our souls are for God and they would continue to remain restless until they rest in God* (*The Confessions Book 1:1*)

## Message

There is the need to seek the Lord and remain connected to the Lord always. The first reading is the aftermath of the context between Yahweh (represented by the Prophet Elijah) and Baal (represented by the prophets of Baal). Baal has been defeated and all its prophets slain. This has infuriated Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab. She decides to hunt for Elijah who flees for his dear life. In his plight, God reveals himself to him and assures him of his support. It is important to note how God reveals himself – not in the strong wind, nor in the earthquake, not in the fire but in a gentle breeze. The lesson here is that to seek and experience the

Lord, we need to have quiet times and moments in our lives from time to time. During these times, we experience and discern the presence of the Lord and what the Lord is saying to us.

The same message comes out strongly in the gospel. The bible tells us Jesus came into the world not to do his own will but to do the will of God (cf. John 6:38). To help him to do this, Jesus always stayed in touch with his Father through prayer. In the first part of the gospel reading, we are told that *after sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray – (Matthew 24:23).*

The second part of the gospel reading teaches us what can happen to us when we cut always from the Lord and what we can do when we stay in touch with the Lord. The apostles are terrified because of the stormy wind on the sea. To make matters worse, they think they are seeing a ghost. Jesus appears and calms down the raging storms. It teaches us that Jesus has absolute power over everything. He can calm down the raging storms in your life – your restlessness, your anxiety, your worries. All that you need to do is to take it to the Lord. See what Peter can do when he is connected to the Lord, he is able to walk on the sea. Once he takes his focus off Jesus, he begins to sink. Are you a man/woman of prayer? Do you spend regular and frequent quiet times with the Lord? Or you go to him only when you are in need?

## Conclusion

Let us pray for the grace to realize that without the Lord, we can do nothing and always stay in touch and connected to the Lord.

# Twentieth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **WOMAN, YOU HAVE GREAT FAITH!  
LET YOUR WISH BE GRANTED.**

**Readings: Isaiah 56:6-7; Romans 11:13-15, 29-32; Matthew 15:21-28**

## Introduction

My dear people of God permit me to begin this reflection with you, by asking you some personal questions: – have you been discriminated against before because of your gender, your tribe, where you come from? Have you been denied justice or fairness before? Have you been neglected or shun before because you were an outsider? If you have experienced any of these before, how did you feel? What was your reaction?

## Message

The readings of today, talk about Justice of God and what faith in God can do for us. In the first reading, God through the prophet Isaiah speaks about justice. We often talk about the love and mercy of God. Rarely, do we talk about the justice and the holiness of God. Today, we are called upon not to neglect these aspects of God. Since we were created in the image and likeness of God – cf. Genesis 1:26, we are called upon to seek the qualities of God. – *Have a care for justice, act with integrity, for soon my salvation will come and my integrity be manifested.* – (Isaiah 56:1). This was a time that Israel as a nation had been destroyed and their prominent citizens sent into exile in Babylon. In this periscope, God promises salvation. This salvation was not for the people of Israel alone as they had previously thought. Rather, those who the people considered as foreigners will also be saved because they also bear the name of the Lord.

My dear sister and brother in Christ, as somebody who profess faith in the Lord, are you just? Are you fair to all? Do you disseminate against people? Do you see all people as equal in the eyes of the Lord? Or you have the tendency to look down on some people?

The gospel reading teaches us about faith and persistency in prayer. It demonstrates to us what faith in the Lord and persistency in prayer can do for us. The Canaanite woman knew what she wanted – healing for her daughter who was tormented by the devil. She would not be thwarted or dissuaded by the obstacles that those around Jesus were putting in her way. She persisted about faith in Jesus. In the final analysis, she got what she wanted when Jesus told her, *Woman, you have great faith. Let your wish be granted. And from that moment her daughter was well again (Matthew 15:28).*

My dear sister and brother in Christ, how would you assess your faith in the Lord – is it strong or weak? In times of sickness, difficulties and hardships, what do you do? Do you throw your arms in the air or put it to the Lord in prayer? Perhaps you need to pay attention to the words of Catholic Hymnal (CH 259), *what a friend we have in Jesus, with particular reference to the second verse: Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful? Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

## Conclusion

Let us pray for the grace to be like God and always put it to practice. Secondly, let us pray for the grace to have strong faith in the Lord and never to give up in the Lord.



# Twenty-First Sunday of the Year

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THEME: WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

Readings: Isaiah 22:19-23; Romans 11:33-36; Matthew 16:13-20

## Introduction

My dear people of God, we are all aware of the fact that human beings are social beings. Therefore, we love to be together. However, we are individuals with our interests, bias and prejudices. For peace and tranquillity to prevail in any community or society, there is the need for some to exercise some leadership roles. However, it must be noted that leaders are not appointed or elected to do whatever they want. They are accountable to their people. Furthermore, leaders are agents of God. They exercise leadership on behalf of God as St. Paul notes, *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except been instituted by God* – Romans 13:17a.

## Message

The first reading talks about leadership and authority in Israel. Shebna is deposed from office. In his place, Eliakim son of Hilkiah is appointed. The Lord of Host promises to invest him with his robe, gird him with his sash, entrust him with his authority; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the House of Judah – (Isaiah 22:20). The Lord goes on to say, *I place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; should he open, no one shall close, should he close, no one shall open. I drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will become a throne of glory for his father's house* – (Isaiah 22:22-23).

In the gospel reading, it is clear that some others were following Jesus based on what others had said about him. Some were

thinking that he was John the Baptist. Others, that he was Elijah or Jeremiah. Still others thought he was one of the prophets – (cf. Matthew 16:14). This made Jesus to ask them their personal experience of him. It was Peter who answered Jesus, *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God* – (Matthew 16:16). This answer from Peter surprised Jesus for him to make this pronouncement, *Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.* – (Matthew 16:17-18). Jesus goes on to say, *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* – (Matthew 16:19).

Dear friends in Christ, the power of the keys refers to the authority given to Peter by Jesus. It puts Peter in a leadership position. This makes Peter the ***Primus inter pares*** – (the first among equals). Peter got this recognition because of his personal experience of Jesus. He knew who Jesus was and what Jesus stood for. In spite of his weakness, Peter was prepared to die for Jesus and this he finally did according to the tradition of the church. He suffered martyrdom in Rome.

The question that Jesus put to the disciples is a question that each and every one of us needs to answer for ourselves. We might have become Christians because we were born into the church. It could be because our parents are Christians.

Furthermore, we might have become Christians because of our friends. At a point in time, we need to answer for ourselves who Jesus is, and what He stands for as far as our relationship with Him is concerned. By knowing Jesus personally, we will be more committed and dedicated in our Christian life.

The second lesson that this gospel story teaches us is that we need to recognise and accept authority and leadership in our lives as human beings. It is God who appoints leaders for us. We, therefore, need to show respect to the lawful and legitimate authority.

In the second reading, Paul talks about the nature of God. He points out the mystical nature of God. God is incomprehensible. No human being can grasp or understand the dealings of God – *How rich are the depths of God – how deep His wisdom and knowledge – and how impossible to penetrate His motives or understand His methods! Who could ever know the mind of the Lord? Who could ever be His counsellor? Who could ever give Him anything or lend Him anything? All that exists comes from Him, all is by Him and for Him – Rom 11:33-36.* This is the God who appoints and destools leaders.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, how do you see your relationship? Do you know Jesus personally? Are you a committed and a dedicated disciple? As a Christian leader, do you exercise leadership according to the dictates and directions of God?

## Conclusion

Let us pray to God for the grace to be true, authentic and genuine disciples of the Lord.

# Twenty-Second Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE A FOLLOWER  
OF MINE, LET HIM RENOUNCE HIMSELF/  
HERSELF AND TAKE UP HIS/HER CROSS.**

**Readings: Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12:1-2; Matt 16:21-27**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, our human nature is such that we go through changes in life. The vicissitudes of life can pose great changes to many people. It is for this reason that it is said that life is war. Life is a struggle. Life can be compared to a series of mountains; you climb and descend. There can be occasions when it may seem that one is always climbing.

## Message

The readings of today are to remind believers that faithfulness to God involves challenges and difficulties.

In the first reading, the prophet Jeremiah voices out his feelings against Yahweh. It is Yahweh who has called Jeremiah for service. As an obedient servant Jeremiah answers Yahweh's call and participates actively and fully in the work of Yahweh. In the course of his ministry, Jeremiah encounters great opposition and rejection. To his utter amazement, Yahweh does not intervene. It seems to Jeremiah that he has been abandoned by Yahweh. He is now on his own. In his desperation, Jeremiah pours out his lamentation to the Lord – *You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself to be seduced. I am a daily laughing stock, everybody's butt* –Jer.20:7.

In view of the opposition and rejection, Jeremiah contemplates given up the work. However, he cannot give it up. He is still compelled to speak on behalf of the Lord – *I used to say; I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name any more. Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restraint it worried me, I could not bear it* – Jer. 20:8-9.

In the gospel, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He is followed by a great crowd. He turns round and speaks to them about his impending suffering and death. Peter is taken back and cannot fathom the idea or thought that Jesus, the son of God should suffer – *Heaven preserve you. This must not happen* – Matt.16:22. Jesus takes Peter on because he sees in him, a stumbling block – *Get behind me, Satan. You are on obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's* – Matt.16: 23.

Jesus uses the occasion to educate his disciples on the cost of disciples. *He says, If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself/herself and take up his/her cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his/her life will lose it; but anyone who loses his/her life for my sake will find it* - Matt. 16:24-25. What Jesus is teaching us is that to be a disciple is not all that rosy. It is challenging and difficult. One must be ready to endure pain and suffer. It is to indicate to the disciple that life can be hard at times. One may encounter terrible things in life such as lose of job, affliction with a terrible disease, some excruciating pain and loss of a dear one. During such occasions, one's faith can be tested and shakened. It may seem as through God has abandoned the person. That is the situation that a disciple can face in life.

Dear sister/brother in Christ, what is your relationship with Jesus Christ? How do you understand your call to discipleship?

In times of life challenges and difficulties, what do you do? How do you feel towards God? Do you still keep faith in God?

In the second reading, St. Paul encourages the Christian to think seriously about his/her relationship with God and worship God wholeheartedly. He continues to admonish Christians not to allow him/her to be attracted by what goes on in the world. The Christian must be exemplary.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray to God for the grace to be faithful disciples of the Lord so that in times of challenges and difficulties we may not give up and lose faith in God.

# Twenty-Third Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **O THAT TODAY YOU WOULD LISTEN  
TO HIS VOICE! HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART.**

**Readings: Ezekiel 33:7-9; Romans 13:8-10; Matt 18:15-20**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, from time immemorial the human persons have been described as a social being. This is buttressed by Akan saying *Wo wo nipa to abusua*, Literally translated – *a person is born into a family*. As social beings, we are bound by societal norms and regulations. This does not in any way negate the freedom of the individual. However, it must be pointed out that freedom is not the license to do whatever we like or want. Whatever we do as human beings must conform to our nature as human beings for peace and tranquillity to prevail in any society or community, there are leaders whose duty among other things, is to see to it all inhabitants adhere to or obey the laws and regulations of the community/society.

## Message

The readings of today talk about fraternal or brotherly and sisterly correction. In the first reading, God through the prophet Ezekiel warns leaders of Israel who hesitate or refuse to warn those Israelites who go wayward. As the readings points out leaders are appointed by God and are therefore to carry out the wisdom of God. One of their responsibilities is call to order those who are incorrigible and recalcitrant. Failure to that will incur the displeasure of God and punishment will be meted out to such leaders for it is the intention of God to save all (1 Tim 2:4). However, if the leader warns such people and they remain

obstinence, they will die in their sins and the leader will not be blamed for their calamity.

In the Gospel readings, Jesus also talks about fraternal corrections, so that there will always be peace and tranquillity among his community of disciples. Before his Ascension, Jesus knowing that the church is a human institution, may from time to time experience disagreements, disputes and quarrels, shows his disciples how to handle such situations when they raise their ugly heads. First attempts must be made to settle the disagreement or dispute between the two parties, themselves, if that does not resolved at that level, then it must be reported to the leaders of the church. If he does not listen then that person cannot claim to be a Christian, a believer of God. Such a person must be treated as a pagan and a tax collector.

According to Jesus, no one can claim to be a Christian and refuse to listen and abide by the teachings of the church. This is what he means when he says, *Truly I tell you, whatever you bound on earth would be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth would be loosed in heaven* – (Matt. 18:18).

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ as heads of families, schools and various institutions, communities, societies and the Church are we able to stand up and be good leaders? Are we able to warn our members who are straying away? Are we firm and speak out against wrong doings and vies among us? As disciples of the Lord, do we forgive when we are hurt and offended? Do we love to take revenge?



## **Conclusion**

The second reading reminds us that love of neighbour is the fulfilment of all the commandments. Let us pray for the grace to often accept corrections and to learn to forgive when we are offended. As the responsorial Psalm says, O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your heart.

# Twenty-Fourth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **FORGIVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR THE HURT HE DOES YOU, AND WHEN YOU PRAY YOUR SINS WILL BE FORGIVEN.**

**Readings: Ecclesiasticus 27:30-28:7; Romans 14:7-9; Matthew. 18:21-35.**

## Introduction

Dear people, our nature is such that as human beings, we are social; we cannot live as islands to ourselves. We need other people to live in communities and in societies. Our elders say, *dua eben no, eno na etwea* – the tree that are close by rob against each other. As long as we live with other human beings, there are bound to be disagreements, disputes and factions.

## Message

The readings of today tell us the need to do away with taking vengeance and learn rather to forgive. This, no doubt, is a challenging and something difficult to do.

In the first reading, Ecclesiastics talks about things that are experiential and personal. He touches our inmost being, that is our emotions, our feels and our wills. These are things that make us who we are. They portray our personality and we cannot hide them or run away from them. What we are called upon to do is deal with them in a more mature way so that they do not lead us astray. According to Qohelet, the preacher, *Resentment and anger, these are foul things too, and both are found with the sinner. He who exacts vengeance will experience the vengeance of the Lord, who keeps strict account of sin* – (Ecclesiasticus 27:30-28:1). He goes on to admonish, *Forgive your neighbour the hurt he does*

*you, and when you pray your sins will be forgiven. If a man nurses anger against another, can he then demand compassion from the Lord? Showing no pity for a man like himself, can he then plead for his own sins? – (Ecclesiasticus 28:2-3).* What the preacher is saying is that anger and vengeance can become obstacle in our prayer life with the Lord. You must therefore, remove them as soon as possible.

The gospel reading is in the same view. It talks about the need to let go, to forgive and not take vengeance. In the opinion of Jesus, forgiving people their offenses is uncountable. This is what he means when he says, *Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy seven times – (Matt.18:22).* This was in answer to Peter's question about how many times he should forgive his brother when he wrongs him.

For Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins by our heavenly father is counting on our ability to forgive others who hurt and wrongs us. He does not mince words about this teaching when he says, *So my heavenly father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart – (Matt. 18:35)*

In the second reading, God through St. Paul brings home to us who we are as far as our relationship with God is concern. He points out to us emphatically, *If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then whether we live or whether we die we are the Lords – (Rom.14:8-9).*

Dear family of God, we are in very special relationship with God. We belong to God. Therefore, we do not do what we want. How do you respond to today's message? Are you angry or at loggerheads with somebody? Are you harbouring a grudge against somebody? Are you prepared to let go and forgive as the Lord teaches?

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to learn to forgive so that when we pray the Lord's Prayer, it will be more meaningful.

# Twenty-Fifth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **THE LORD IS CLOSE TO ALL WHO CALL HIM.**

**Readings:** Isaiah 55:6-9; Philippians 1:20-24, 27, Matthew 10:1-6.

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, it is said among our elders that” *akoto nwo anoma*” – the crab does not beget a bird. In other words, it is not the nature of a crab to give birth to a bird. A crab begets a crab and it is a bird that will give birth to a bird. The previous Sunday mass readings focussed our attention on the need to forgive one another when a brother/sister wrongs us. It was emphasized that if we do not forgive our brothers, sisters, neither will our heavenly Father forgive us when we sin against him.

It is made clear to us that as human beings we were created in the image and likeness of God. Gen. 1:27. The creation of the human being is described beautifully for us in the second creation story. It says, *Thou the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being* – Gen. 2:7. Since our nature is that of God it means that we need to study the nature of God and live accordingly.

## Message

The readings of today help us to have some glimpses of the nature of God. In the first reading, God reveals some element of his nature to us. Among other things we learn:

1. God is not a transcendent being who is far removed from us. It teaches us that after creating the world and us God

did not abandon us and left us to our fate. This is what it means when God says, *seek the Lord while he is still near (Isaiah 55:6)*.

2. God is a forgiven and merciful, God's desire is not to see the death and demise of the human person who was created in the image and likeness of God. What God wants is for the human person to come back to God when he/she has sinned against God. God knows for sure that as the author and sustainer life, turning one's back towards the Lord, means heading towards death and destination. This is what it means, when, God says *let the wicked man abandon his way, the evil man his thought. Let him turn back to the Lord who will take pity on him (Isaiah 55:7)*.
3. Even though we were created in the image and likeness of God, we are not God. Our thoughts and our way of doing things are not exactly those of God. Created in the image and likeness of God means that God is the beginning, focus, the end and the glory for human being.

In the gospel reading, we see again some of the elements of the nature of God. In this case, we see God is both just and generous. The justice of God is seen in given exactly the agreed wage with the workers who were hired first. The generosity of God is pointed out in given the same wage to those who were hired last—"my friend, I am not being unjust to you; did we not agree on one denari? Take your earnings and go. I choose to pay the last-corner as much as I pay you – (Matt 20:13-14). God goes on to say, *Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because am generous? (Matt 20:13-14)*.

My dear sister and brothers in Christ, as a child of God, does the nature of God reflect in your life? Do you exhibit the spirit

of forgiveness, mercifulness, justice and generosity as somebody created in the image and likeness of God? When you sin and go wayward, do you quickly repent and come back to the Lord?

## **Conclusion**

Let us make the responsorial Psalm our own and always remember that the Lord is close to all who call him. Furthermore, as the second reading points out let us avoid anything in our everyday lives that would be unworthy of the gospel of Christ for we were created in the image and likeness of God.

# Twenty-Six Sunday of the Year

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THEME: IF ANYONE LOVES ME HE WILL  
KEEP MY WORD AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE  
HIM AND WE SHALL COME TO HIM.

Readings: Ezekiel 18:25-28, Philippians 2:1-11, Matthew 21: 28 – 32

## Introduction

My dear people of God, last week we talked about the nature of God. Among other things we saw that even though human beings were created in the image and likeness of God, human beings are not God. God's thought and ways of doing things are different from us. Our responsibility is to seek and learn the nature of God and live accordingly. We found out that it is the nature of God to love, to show mercy, to be just and holy.

## Message

The readings of today continue in the same view. The first reading, through the prophet Ezekiel, God challenges the people of Israel on justice and fairness. The intention of God is that all people be saved, God, therefore, shows people what to do and what to avoid, if people do what is good, they will be saved. On the other hand if they decide to do whatever they like and turn away from the Lord, they will surely die. Furthermore, since it is the nature of God to love and shows mercy, God every now and then calls people to repentance. So for God, *when the righteous turn away from their righteous and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die* – (Ezekiel 18: 26). He goes on to say, on the other hand, *when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they save their life. Because they*



*considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live, they shall not die – (Ezekiel 18:27–28).* So for God, justice must be seen in doing what is right and upright. This is what constitutes the nature of the human being.

In the gospel, Jesus continues in a similar way. He uses the story of two people who were asked to go and work in their father's vineyard. The first one responded in the affirmative immediately he was asked but did not go. The second one, when he was asked to go initially refused. On a second thought, he regretted and went. According to the story the one who did what the Father wanted was the second one. The morale of the story is not to pay lip-service when it comes to worshipping God. Rather, we must do what God has asked us to do. If we do that then and only then will be saved. It is for this reason that Jesus says *Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven – (Matt 7:21)*

My dear Brothers/Sister in Christ as children of God, what is our attitude towards God? Do we pay only lip-service to God or do what the Lord calls to do? Do we respond to God's invitation to come back when we go wayward? Or we love our sins more than God? Do we want to be saved or die in sin?

## Conclusion

In the second reading, God through St. Paul calls upon us to let our attitude be like that of Christ who out of humility did the will of God and therefore, was highly exalted and glorified. Let us pray to God for the grace to learn to be humble before God and not do what we like. Like Jesus let us strive and do the will of God so that we too may be glorified.

# Twenty-Seventh Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: I CHOSE YOU FROM THE WORLD, TO GO OUT AND BEAR FRUIT, FRUIT THAT WOULD LAST.**

**Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7; Philippians 4:6-9; Matthew 21:33-4**

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, it is part of our lives as human beings that when you have spent your time, your talent and treasure on somebody or something, you look forward for that person or that thing to produce good results. In short, when you invest in something, or somebody, you expect good dividend. As Christians, we know that God has invested heavily in us as human beings. First, we were created in the image and likeness of God. Secondly, when we sinned and fell from grace to grass, God took pity on us and reached out to us. As St. John indicates, *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish, but may have eternal life* – (Jn 3:16).

## Message

Since God has invested extensively in us, human beings, God expects us to produce good fruits.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks about the covenant relationship between God and the people of Israel. He uses the image of a vineyard to depict the ungratefulness and waywardness of the people of Israel. God has been with them and protected them. There was nothing that God had not done for them. In short, they lack nothing. Rather, they have everything. This is the meaning of the words *what could I have done for my vineyard that I have not done?* – (Isaiah 5:4a).

In spite of all that the Lord has done for the people of Israel, nothing good came from it. The people of Israel wasted all the resources that the Lord has invested in them. As expected, the Lord is disappointed. This is seen in the words *I expected it to yield grapes. Why did it yield sour grapes instead?* – (Is.5:4b). The same message of bearing fruits comes up again in the gospel reading. The land owner has invested heavily in the vineyard. He has made adequate provisions for the vineyard to succeed. Then, he leased it to tenants. His expectation is that the tenants would make sure that the vineyard bear fruits. Unfortunately, the tenants did not fulfil their part of the bargain and to add insult to injury, they even maltreated the messengers and the beloved son of the landowner. My dear family of God, it is often said, *A word to the wise is enough*. As I said earlier on, God has invested a lot to us as Christians. As people in whom a lot have been invested, are we bearing fruit? What type of fruits are we bearing? Are they good fruits or sour grapes? Remember what Jesus tells us, *You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruits, fruits that will last, so that your father will give you whatever you ask him in my name* – (Jn. 15:16).

In the second reading, God through St. Paul is advising us not to worry about anything. If we need anything, we should put it before the Lord in prayer. He encourages us with this admission *Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and the God of peace will be with you* – (Phil.4:8-9).

## Conclusion

Let us pray for more grace to live the gospel values so that we may bear fruits, fruits that will last.

# Twenty-Eight Sunday of the Year

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THEME: IN THE LORD'S OWN HOUSE  
SHALL I DWELL FOREVER AND EVER.

Readings: Isaiah 25:6-10; Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20, Matt 22:1-14.

## Introduction

My dear people of God, as human beings, one thing we seek all the time, is good and decent lives. We want to see signs of good living. One of the signs is sitting at table with friends and dear ones, eating and having a good time.

## Message

The imagery of sitting at table and being fed by the Lord is used to depict good life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah talks about festive celebration with the Lord. He uses the metaphor of a mountain. Mountains are the highest points on the earth. Since we refer to God as living in the sky, the top of the mountain is considered to be the abode of the Lord. He says, *On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-acid wines strained clear* – (Isaiah 25:6). To emphasize the point that it would be truly a time of celebration, Isaiah notes that there would be no element or trace of grieving, mourning or sorrowing. He states, *He will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces and the disgrace of his people he will take away all the earth, for the Lord has spoken* – (Isaiah 25:7a-8). Isaiah in this prophecy makes it clear that this, exciting and wonderful experience would not be for any particular group of people. It would be for all nations or

people of the world. This is what he means when he says, *he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all people, the sheet that is spread over all nations* – (Isaiah 25:7).

In the gospel, Jesus also speaks about the end time and how people will be feted by God in the Kingdom of Heaven. The same imagery of sitting at table and eating together comes up again. A man gave a banquet for his son with these words to those who were invited, *Look, I have prepared up dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered; and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet* – (Matt 22:4).

To buttress the point that celebration and enjoyment in the Kingdom of Heaven is not pressured of any particular group of people, Jesus points out the many people as possible are invited. However, some people refuse and do not honour the invitation. They go about their own businesses and follow their own pursuits. They are adamant to the message of the Kingdom of Heaven. Despite this God still throws the invitation. This means that God does not force anybody to do anything. We have the freewill to respond to God's invitation. However, we must be prepared for the consequences.

Furthermore, Jesus is teaching us that the Kingdom of Heaven would not be handed to us on a silver platter; we need to respond positively to God's invitation and be in the proper disposition. This is what he means, when he says *Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?* – (Matt 22:11)

Dear friends in Christ how are you responding to the invitation of God? Is it positive or you are following your own pursuits? Are you in the proper disposition to meet the Lord?

## Conclusion

Let us pray for the grace to be in a proper disposition so as to dwell in the Lord's house forever and ever.

# Twenty-Ninth Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: GIVE TO CAESAR WHAT BELONGS TO CAESAR AND TO GOD WHAT BELONGS TO GOD.**

**Readings: Isaiah 45: 1. 4-6; Thessalonians 1:1-5; Mathew 22:15-21**

## Introduction

Dear people of God we read from the bible that everything that God created was good. Our human nature is such that we have the tendency to divide the world into two – the sacred and the profane. We see religious articles, objects and things as sacred while all other things are considered profane. We consider these things as profane as if God did not make them.

## Message

The first and gospel readings makes it clear to us that in the eyes of God, there is nothing like sacred and profane. In the reading, the prophet Isaiah points out that even though King Cyrus was not an Israelite, a member of the conventional people of God, God chose him so that through him liberation and freedom will be restored to the people of Israel. This history is that through their stubbornness and hardness of their hearts, God left them to their fate. Consequently they were defeated in war by Babylonians and with their nation destroyed and many of their prominent citizens sent to exile, there arose king Cyrus of Persia who defeated the Babylonians and set the people Israel free. This is what the prophet Isaiah means when he says, *Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus whose right hand I have grease to subdue nations before him and strips kings of their ropes, to open doors before him and the gates shall not be closed....I armed you though you do not know me so that they may know*

*from the rising of the sun, and from the west that there is no one besides me – (Is 45:1, 5b-6).* In the opinion of the Prophet Isaiah, God makes use of King Cyprus as a channel or instrument to achieve God's purpose – and the purpose is to set Israel free and to magnify the greatness and the glory of God.

The Gospel reading follows similar lines. However, the intention of the Pharisees is to set up a trap for Jesus. At that time, Israel was in Roman dominion and they had to pay taxes to Rome, a practice they detested. Israel therefore wanted a leader who would lead them to revolt so that they would no longer pay the taxes. It was a trap because if Jesus had answered either "Yes" or "No", he would have been in trouble. If he had said "Yes", it meant that he was in cohort with the Romans and therefore, he would have incurred the displeasure of the people. On the other hand, if he said "No", he would have been in trouble with the Romans, who would have seen him as a Saboteur, a nation wrecker. Jesus' answer, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" unsettled the Pharisees. They did not know what to do next.

The import of Jesus' answer is that in the eyes of God, all are one-there is no distinction between sacred and profane. Caesar is not an anti-thesis of God. He was to be seen as an agent or an instrument of God. Furthermore, Jesus is teaching us on the need to be patriotic citizens of our country and pay the relevant taxes. Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, as people of God, how do we see the world? Do we see it as sacred or profane or we see the hand of God at work in all things and in all spheres of life? Are we patriotic enough? Do we pay our legitimate taxes?

## Conclusion

Let us pray for the grace to see the goodness of the world and see God in all things.

# Thirtieth Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **YOU MUST LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD  
AND YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF.**

Readings: Ex. 22:20-26; 1 Thess. 1:5-10; Matt. 22:34-40

## Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, according to Akan cosmology, *nnipa nyinaa yɔ Onyankopɔn mma* – all people are the children of God. Furthermore, it is said that *nnipa firi soro reba no, obesii kurom* – when the human person descends from the sky, he/she lands into a town. These wise sayings depict the dignity and the high status of the human person. Secondly, it teaches that the human person is a social being and for that reason cannot live an independent life. In short, every human being by nature, lives in a community or a society.

## Message

The message from the readings of today encourages us to promote good human relations. We are to develop good neighbourliness and reach out to those in need in order to promote peace and harmony.

In the first reading, we are encouraged to have a positive attitude and mindset towards the stranger, the widow, the orphan and the poor. These are special people and they occupy a privileged position in the sight of God. Consequently, we are to approach and deal with them with uttermost care. This is what God meant when He says, *You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me,*



*I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans – Ex. 22:21-24.*

Concerning the poor, this is what the Lord admonishes, *If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not extort interest from them. If you take your neighbour's cloak at dawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbour's only clothing to use as cover in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbour cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate – (Ex. 22:25-27).* It can be seen clearly from the reading that the Lord has a preferential option for the poor. In other words, when it comes to dealing with the stranger, the widow, the orphan and the poor, the Lord has a soft spot for them.

As children of God, what is our attitude towards strangers, widows, or orphans and the poor the same as the Lord? Do we treat them with dignity and reach out to them? Do we see God in them? – (cf. Matt. 31:1-4b). Or we treat them shabbily and do not provide their needs? In the gospel reading, we have Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees. They were always after him and so they asked him many difficult questions with the intention to trap him. In this particular instance, a Lawyer asked Jesus about the commandments. In the opinion of Jesus, the commandments can be summarised into two (2) – love of God and love of neighbour. There is no choice here. The two (2) go hand in hand.

It is for this reason that St. John notes, *Those who say, I love God, and hate my brothers or sisters, are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. – (1 Jn. 4:20).* Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, the commandment to love God and our neighbour

enjoins us to reach out and do good to people especially strangers, widows and orphans.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to allow the commandments to guide and guard us so that we may love God and our neighbour as ourselves.

# Thirty-First Sunday of the Year

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THEME: **SPEAK LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING.**

Readings: Mal. 1:14 – 2:2, 8-10; 1 Thess. 2:3-9, 13; Matt. 23:1-12

## Introduction

My dear people of God, from time immemorial God has been described as omnipotent – almighty which means that God can do anything and everything without the assistance of any human being. However, if you study the scriptures and go through history that is not how God has dealt with human beings in the world. Almost invariably, God has appointed or chosen other human beings as channels, or instruments in order to minister to or reach out to God's people. One group of people who have been chosen to minister on behalf of God are priests.

## Message

The word priest comes from the Latin word *pons* – *pontis* which means bridge. The priest, therefore, acts like a bridge between God and God's people. In other words, the priest is a mediator between God and God's people. However, as Francis Cardinal George, the Archbishop of Chicago once noted, "the priest does not replace, nor replicate, nor even represent Christ. Rather, the priest participates in the priesthood of Christ.

The readings of today are principally about priests. The words in the Alleluia verse for today, "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening*" are words spoken by young Samuel when he was being called by God for ministry. These are the words that must be on the lips of every priest throughout his ministry. However, what do we see in some priests in the past and even today.

In the first reading, God laments about the attitude and the lifestyle of some ministers of God. They do not listen to the Lord. The worst part is that they lead the flock astray. God, therefore, decides to punish them and make them a laughing stock in the eyes of the people. God says *O priests, this command is for you, if you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, then I will send the curse on you and I will curse your blessings* – (Mal. 2:1-2). God goes on to say, *You have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi; and so I make you despised and abased before all the people inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction* – (Mal. 2:8-9).

In the gospel, Jesus warns his disciples about the hypocritical attitude of the Pharisees. Their words are very weighty but their deeds are few. They are only interested in imposing themselves on the people and not living to expectation.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, I am the first to admit that many of us priests and ministers of God have not lived to expectation. In many cases, some of us have not listened to God. We have lived despicable and scandalous lives. We have been irresponsible and in some cases like the Pharisees, we have used our positions to take advantage of the people and deceived them. This, no doubt, displeases God and makes God sad.

## Conclusion

Please, do pray for us and support us by correcting us and offer us pieces of advice when we go wayward. May God help us, like young Samuel to say, “*Speak Lord; your servant is listening*”

# Thirty-Second Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: STAY AWAKE AND STAND READY,  
BECAUSE YOU DO NOT KNOW THE HOUR  
WHEN THE SON OF MAN IS COMING.**

**Readings: Wisdom 6:12-16, 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Matt. 25:1-13**

## Introduction

Dear people of God, it is often said that whatever has a beginning equally has an end. Ecclesiastes 3:1-3 puts it well when he says, *there is a season for everything, a time for every occupation under heaven: A time for giving birth, a time for dying, a time for planting, and a time for uprooting what has been planted.*

Today is the thirty-second Sunday of the Year. In about three (3) weeks time, we will enter the season of Advent, a new Liturgical season or year. At the end of next month, we shall enter into a new Calendar Year. The passing away of one season to another, from one year to the next is to tell us that time is not on our side. Furthermore, it is to teach us that life is transient. We must, therefore, not be complacent and allow ourselves to be taken by events.

## Message

Before his Ascension, among other things, Jesus said, *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me. There are many rooms in my father's house, if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I have gone and prepare you a place, I shall return to you; so that where I am you may be too – Jn. 14:1-3.*

My dear family of God when this is going to happen remains a mystery to you and me. We do not know when this is to happen and we cannot hasten or delay its coming. All that we can do is to open our eyes and stay awake. This is the import of the readings of today. In order to teach us about the suddenness and unexpectedness of the kingdom of God, Jesus gives us the parable of Ten (10) Virgins or Maids. We read that while five (5) were wise, the other five (5) were foolish. The foolish ones did not prepare adequately for the coming of the Bridegroom and were, therefore, not welcome to the banquet. They saw the other five (5) virgins seated and enjoying themselves with the bridegroom. They shouted to the groom, *Lord, Lord, open the door for us. But he replied, I tell you solemnly, I do not know you.* – Matt. 25:12.

My dear sister and brother in Christ, can you imagine yourself being told by the Lord on the last day that he does not know you? What will you do when you find your friends and colleagues being feted by the Lord in the kingdom of God, while you find yourself thrown out of the banquet hall? Do you want to be a gatecrasher? These will happen to you if and only if you do not live in the Lord and for the Lord.

You will find yourself outside the banquet hall of the Lord, when and only when, you do not stay awake and allow yourself to be consumed by the world and live a life unbecoming of a child of God. Let the theme of a message of the Praisydram 2011 *Worship the Lord in Spirit and in Truth* – Jn. 4:3 be a lesson for you and me.

To enable us to do this, we need to seek wisdom as portrayed in the first reading. *Watch for her early and you will have no trouble, you will find her sitting at your gates* – Wis. 6:124-15.

## **Conclusion**

Let us pray for the grace to think of our own deaths as St. Paul talks about in the second reading and stay awake so that we may not be found wanting when the Lord finally comes.

# Thirty-Third Sunday of the Year

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**THEME: WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL  
SERVANT, ENTER INTO THE JOY OF YOUR MASTER.**

**Readings: Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31; 1 Thess. 5:1-6; Matt. 25:14-30**

## Introduction

My dear friends in Christ, last week we said that whatever has a beginning has an end. It was noted that as the seasons go by and the years move on, it means that time changes and as that happens, it teaches that life is transient and this world would one day pass away. We were encouraged to stay awake and not allow ourselves to be taken by events as far as the second coming of the Lord is concerned.

## Message

The readings of today follow the same line of thought. They talk about the second coming of Christ and the need to be prepared to give accounts of our stewardship here on earth.

The second reading deals specifically with the second coming of Jesus Christ. St. Paul teaches us that the second coming of Christ will be sudden. It will take many people by surprise. He uses the images of thief in the night and a woman in labour to buttress his point.

However, for the faithful disciples of the Lord, they should not worry about it. After all, they are not living in darkness for that day to catch them off-guard and unawares. No, they are sons and daughters of God. They do not belong to darkness but rather to the light.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, in all sincerity, can we say that we are not living in darkness? Do we not engage ourselves



in deeds of darkness? Are we truly living in day light as sons and daughter of God? One thing that is certain about the second coming of Christ is that it will be a time of accountability. We will all appear before the judgement seat of God and one by one give accounts of our stewardship. This is what St. Paul means when he says, *We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord: so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's – Rom. 14:7-8.* He goes on to say, *So then, each of us will be accountable to God – Rom. 14:12.*

To help us to understand Jesus' emphasis on accountability when he comes again, he gives us the parable in today's gospel reading. The three (3) servants were given different sums of money to work with as their master travels abroad. On his return, he calls the servants to render accounts. As we heard in the gospel reading, the first two (2) were highly commended because of their entrepreneurship while the third one was condemned for lack of initiative and his inertia.

What Jesus is teaching us is that it is not enough to call ourselves Christians and remain aloof. We must put the grace that God gives us to a better use. We must work with it and gain more.

My dear sister and brother in Christ, what will be your stand when Jesus comes? Will you be commended or condemned? You will be condemned if and only if you do not prepare and give proper account of yourselves.

## Conclusion

Like the faithful and virtuous wife in the first reading, let us strive to be faithful to the Lord that when he comes he will say to us *Well done, good and faithful servants, come to your master's joy.*

# Thirty-Fourth Sunday of the Year

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## SOLEMNITY OF CHRIST THE KING

THEME: **THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD;  
THERE IS NOTHING I SHALL WANT.**

**Readings: Ez. 34:11-12, 15-17; 1 Cor. 15:20-26, 28; Matt. 25:31-46**

### Introduction

Dear friends in Christ, as human beings, we have established some institutions. These institutions are to help us so that there will always be peace and tranquillity in our communities in order for us to develop and grow. One of these institutions is Kingship and Queenship. Many cultures had it in the past and many still do have it, though its influence in modern times has dwindled. In Ghana, we still revere our kings: such as the Asantehene, the Awomefia, the Ga Mantse, and the Bolga Naba, to mention but a few.

### Message

Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. It ends one Liturgical Year. As Catholic Christians, we believe and accept Jesus Christ as the King of our lives. Today, in many places around the Catholic World, Christ will symbolically be paraded through the principal streets to indicate the fact that Christ is the Universal King.

It must be pointed out that the people of Israel at first did not have the kingship institution unlike all the surrounding nations around them in the ancient times. For them, God was their leader who cared for them. To buttress this point, they used

the image of a Shepherd. As noted in the first reading, God sees himself not as a King but a shepherd for the people of Israel. He says, *I am going to look after my flock myself and keep all of it in view. As a shepherd keeps all his flock in view when he stands up in middle of his scattered sheep, so shall I keep my sheep in view* – Ez. 34:11-12a. God goes on to say, *I shall rescue them from wherever they have been scattered during the wits and darkness. I myself will pasture my sheep, I myself will show them where to rest* – Ez. 34:12b-14.

It was for this reason that an Israelite could say *Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing. In meadows of green grass he let me lie. To the waters of repose he leads me; there he revives my soul* – Ps. 23:1-3a. The Psalmist continues, *Though I pass through a gloomy valley I fear no harm; beside me your rod and your staff are there, to hearten me* – Ps. 23:3b-4.

Even though the people of Israel initially did not have kingship, they adopted it from neighbouring countries at the behest of God and the prophets – cf. 1 Sam. 8:1-22. When the people insisted, God gave them Saul as their first king.

Their belief was that the king of Israel was only a viceroy of God who was considered their king “*par excellence*”.

When Jesus began his ministry, he avoided the title king because of the misunderstandings and misconceptions attached to that designation.

The bible tells us that at one instance when the people wanted to force him and install him king, he ran away – cf. Jn. 6:15. Jesus prefers titles like Son of Man, Lord and good Shepherd.

It must be pointed out that during his trial, Jesus told Pilate, *Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being*

*surrendered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this kind – (Jn.18:36).*

In the gospel, Jesus sees himself as king in his glory when he comes a second time for the final judgement.

Dear sister/brother in Christ, who is Christ to you? Do you see and accept Jesus Christ as the king of your life? Is he the king of your heart? Do you listen and obey his instructions? Are you prepared to give account of your life when Jesus appears and sits in his glory?

## **Conclusion**

As we celebrate the solemnity of Christ the King, let us pray for the grace to continue to acknowledge Jesus as our king and enthrone him in our hearts.

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