



# LENT

## HOW TO USE iPRAY

This little booklet is designed to help you improve your friendship with Jesus Christ by using His Gospel, which is the best book for prayer. By following Him, His life, His words, His actions, you will fall in love with Him.

You learn to walk by walking, to speak by speaking, and to pray... by praying. Have a daily time to chat with God and you will be closer to Him each day. He wants you to be his intimate friend. He wants you to become a saint. If you have this personal relationship with Him through prayer, then you will also be able to bring other people closer to Him, and they in turn will discover the joy of friendship with Jesus and the call to holiness.

*"How to pray? This is a simple matter. I would say: Pray any way you like, so long as you do pray." (St John Paul II)*



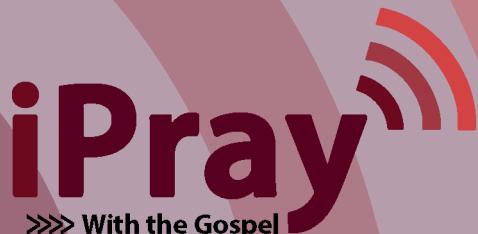
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# iPray

»»» With the Gospel

PRAYER RESOURCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

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## Prayer of St Josemaría for the families:

O God our loving Father,

Creator of all things, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, into the home of Mary and Joseph forming the Holy Family of Nazareth; inspire us by their example to imitate their selfless charity in our family life.

Through the intercession of St. Josemaría, help our families to be united in the heart of Christ, enjoying a loving communion with each other; recognizing and upholding the sacredness of marriage, generously welcoming the gift of life, and valuing the inestimable gift of each family member.

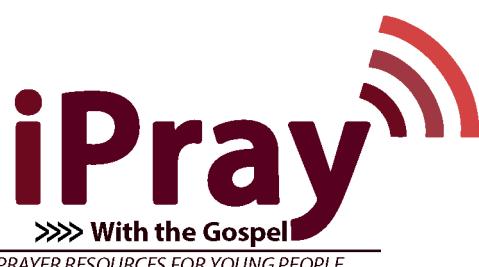
Help us dedicate ourselves in generous service to our families and to reflect the love that Christ had for Mary and Joseph, making our family a true domestic Church with Christ at its centre.

Teach us to find Christ in the crosses that occur in family life and help us to find joy in them and write them to him.

Watch over and protect our family so that each member will be faithful to the Gospel and never stray from the path of holiness. We ask you, through the intercession of St.

Josemaría, to grant us the favour of (make your request). Amen.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we give our hearts and souls to you.



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#### **Morning offering:**

O Jesus, through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer you all the prayers, works, sufferings and joys of this day, for all the intentions of your Divine Heart. Amen.

#### **Memorare:**

Remember, O most loving Virgin Mary, that it is a thing unheard of, that anyone ever had recourse to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession and was left forsaken. Filled therefore with confidence in your goodness I fly to you, O Mother, Virgin of Virgins. To you I come, before you I stand, a sorrowful sinner. Despise not my poor words, O Mother of the Word of God, but graciously hear and grant my prayer. Amen.

#### **Blessing before meals:**

Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord, Amen.

#### **Grace after meals:**

We give you thanks, Almighty God, for all Your benefits, who live and reign, world without end. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

#### **Act of contrition:**

Oh My God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you, and by the help of your grace, I will try not sin again. Amen.



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## Common prayers

### Visit to the Blessed Sacrament:

**V**I O Sacrament most holy! O Sacrament divine! R/ All praise and all thanksgiving, be every moment Thine!

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...

[After repeating this three times, we repeat the aspiration 'O Sacrament most holy...' and then say the following Spiritual Communion]:

I wish, Lord, to receive You, with the purity, humility and devotion with which Your most holy Mother received You; with the spirit and fervour of the saints.

### Angelus:

**V**I The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, R/ And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary.

**V**I Behold the handmaid of the Lord, R/ Be it done unto me according to your word.

Hail Mary.

**V**I And the Word was made flesh, R/ And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary.

**V**I Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, R/ That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech You, O Lord, Your grace into our hearts: that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ Your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

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## How should I do my mental prayer?

Don't worry. To do your mental prayer is very easy. Wherever you are you can speak with Jesus, but try to find a calm place where your siblings do not distract you: for example your room. The Introductory prayer serves to tune in to Jesus; say it slowly, understanding what you are asking. Then read the holy gospel of the day and ask yourself what Jesus wants to say to you in this passage of his life. Jesus is going to tell you great things in the interior of your soul. Let him speak to you. At the end of your mental prayer you can say the Closing prayer, giving thanks to Our Lord for the good resolutions that inspired you. It is easy, isn't it?

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## **Introductory prayer**

*My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence, I ask you for pardon of my sins, and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Mother Immaculate, Saint Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.*

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## Closing prayer

*I give you thanks, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask you for help to put them into effect. My Mother Immaculate, Saint Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.*



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Jesus said to his disciples: "Beware of practising your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, ... when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you".

Today we start Lent, a time of preparation for Easter. Lent has three legs: prayer, sacrifice and charity. If one of the legs is missing, Lent cannot stand. So our Lenten resolutions should be in these three areas. Maybe we do not need to pray more but to pray better, to offer our usual mortifications with more awareness; to be more generous when I give, and always give with a smile... *Jesus, help me to be generous this Lent.*

"Lent should suggest to us these basic questions: Am I advancing in my faithfulness to Christ, in my desire for holiness, in a generous apostolate in my daily life, in my ordinary work among my colleagues? Each one of us, silently, should answer these questions, and we will see that we need to change again if Christ is to live in us, if Jesus' image is to be reflected clearly in our behaviour" (St Josemaría).

Think: What can I do during Lent that will make a big difference to my prayer life?

There is no Mass today

On Holy Saturday the Church watches at the Lord's tomb, meditating on his suffering and death. The altar is left bare, and no Mass is celebrated. The earth is in silence. Heaven is in silence too, for the angels have not forgotten what men did to God yesterday... The King is sleep. Even animals are still, birds don't sing today; the wind doesn't blow as it did yesterday.

His disciples are grief-stricken. Christ lies in the grave, and you and I sit by in mourning. His cold, dead Body still bears the scars of intense suffering, mortal wounds on His Body that will remain visible for all eternity, marked with *the price of my sins*. See on that Face the wounds received to erase our sins. See there the marks of the blows received in order to refashion our warped nature in His Image. On that back see the marks of the scourging endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon our shoulders. See those hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for us; the holes on those feet that walked the earth bringing repentance.

Let's accompany Our Lady today. Still in sorrow as she recalls her Son's Passion, Our Mother watches with a serene face, in hope. With her we will hold her Son's body: "*I will press my arms tightly round the cold Body, the corpse of Christ, with the fire of my love...; I will un nail it, with my reparation and mortifications..., I will wrap it in the new winding-sheet of my clean life, and I will bury it in the living rock of my breast, where no one can tear it away from me, and there, Lord, take your rest! Were the whole world to abandon you and to scorn you... serviam!, I will serve you, Lord*" (St Josemaría).

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So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ... When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." ... But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), "I thirst." A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

"If you really want to love Jesus, first learn to suffer, because suffering teaches you to love" (St Gemma Galgani).

"The angels envy us just in one thing: they cannot suffer for God. Only suffering let us say with all certainty: My God, look how much I love You" (St Pio of Pietrelcina, Padre Pio)

Jesus said to his disciples: "The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." And he said to all, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

It is very plain and clear: there is just one way to follow Jesus: *with the Cross*. To try to follow You, Lord, while avoiding sacrifice would be like a bird trying to fly without wings. We do not like to go to the dentist, but we do like to have clean and healthy teeth. Christians do not like pain or suffering for the sake of suffering in itself. We seek it as a means to improve.

I want to follow You to the bitter end, no matter how bitter it is. And during Lent I have a list of sacrifices that I intend to fulfil so as to be close to You. Jesus, You are on the Cross; and I follow You to the Cross with my mortifications.

But let's be practical: choose *useful* mortifications; wake up straightforward; eat more of what you do not like, and less of what you love; do the dishes when it is not your job; smile at that annoying person; avoid complaining; tidy your room, don't put off tasks that you don't like and do always first what you like; don't to answer back, and many others...

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Friday 20th February

Mt 9:14-15

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.

There is a time for celebration – such as a wedding – and a time for mortification – such as Lent. Today is the third day of Lent; how is my mortification so far? Is there anything I can improve in? Can I be more generous or consistent in my sacrifice? Let's be really generous!

Jesus didn't accept the Cross half-heartedly and nor should we. Besides, mortification doesn't harm your health, if anything it makes you stronger. Carthusian monks offer many sacrifices every day, among them, not eating meat on any day of the year. When Pope Urban V (1310-1370) was told about this harsh diet, he decided it must stop because it would give the monks *health* problems. Ten Carthusians were sent to visit the Pope and explain their sacrifices; the youngest of them was already over 90 years old. Another approached the Pope walking without any help or stick and told him: *–I'm over 100 years old... What do you mean by health?* The Pope then understood, and the monks were allowed to continue with their diet. Carthusians haven't changed their diet in 1000 years!

How generous am I in my sacrifices? Let's look at Jesus on the Cross; and think: Am I generous enough?

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Jn 13:1-15

Maundy Thursday  
Thursday 2nd April

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

This is the introduction to the washing of the dirtiest feet in Jerusalem (including Judas') and the Institution of the Sacrament of the Eucharist: He loved us to the end. Think about it: He couldn't give us more, He gave Himself to us in the Eucharist.

Love is repaid with love; He loved you to the end... How do you love Him? Today is a day to watch before the Eucharist: "remain here, and watch with me" (Mt 26:38).

"When you look at the Crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host you understand how much Jesus loves you now" (Bl Teresa of Calcutta).

"Do you realize that Jesus is there in the tabernacle expressly for you - for you alone? He burns with the desire to come into your heart...don't listen to the demon, laugh at him, and go without fear to receive the Jesus of peace and love... Receive Communion often, very often... there you have the sole remedy, if you want to be cured. Jesus has not put this attraction in your heart for nothing... The guest of our soul knows our misery; He comes to find an empty tent within us - that is all He asks" (St Therese of Lisieux).

"God's love for his creatures is so boundless and our response to it should be so great that time ought to stand still when Holy Mass is being said" (St Josemaría).

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There is a time for celebration – such as a wedding – and a time for mortification – such as Lent. Today is the third day of Lent; how is my mortification so far? Is there anything I can improve in? Can I be more generous or consistent in my sacrifice? Let's be really generous!

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How generous am I in my sacrifices? Let's look at Jesus on the Cross; and think: Am I generous enough?

10

Jn 13:1-15

Maundy Thursday  
Thursday 2nd April

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

This is the introduction to the washing of the dirtiest feet in Jerusalem (including Judas') and the Institution of the Sacrament of the Eucharist: He loved us to the end. Think about it: He couldn't give us more, He gave Himself to us in the Eucharist.

Love is repaid with love; He loved you to the end... How do you love Him? Today is a day to watch before the Eucharist: "remain here, and watch with me" (Mt 26:38).

"When you look at the Crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you then. When you look at the Sacred Host you understand how much Jesus loves you now" (Bl Teresa of Calcutta).

"Do you realize that Jesus is there in the tabernacle expressly for you - for you alone? He burns with the desire to come into your heart...don't listen to the demon, laugh at him, and go without fear to receive the Jesus of peace and love... Receive Communion often, very often... there you have the sole remedy, if you want to be cured. Jesus has not put this attraction in your heart for nothing... The guest of our soul knows our misery; He comes to find an empty tent within us - that is all He asks" (St Therese of Lisieux).

"God's love for his creatures is so boundless and our response to it should be so great that time ought to stand still when Holy Mass is being said" (St Josemaría).

51



Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver ... When it was evening, he sat at table with the twelve disciples; and as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful, and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "...The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Is it I, Master?" He said to him, "You have said so."

What has happened, Judas, to your soul? How have you become so miserable? You, an *apostle*, one of those who Jesus met and told: *'Come, follow me'*. And you did follow Him! You saw the miracles, and surely, you loved Jesus for a while. The best moments of your life happened in the company of Jesus. The days in which you could go to sleep smiling were ones when you had seen and heard wonders. You were so privileged: "*many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you saw, and did not see it, and to hear what you heard, and did not hear it*".

"*Then after the morsel, Satan entered into*" you, for the door had been opened wide little by little, when you started neglecting the time spent with Jesus, and you became inattentive to His Words; thinking about yourself, and your future, your plans, your life... Your drama was pre-announced when you stopped praying, when you stopped telling Jesus what was going on in your soul.

And Jesus cried for you, because He loved you so much!



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Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus came to seek those who need conversion, and He wants your help and mine to reach out to them. We can help sinners to realise that Jesus has given His Life for all of them. No one can be left behind. That is why we are apostles. And so, one of the reasons we offer more sacrifices during Lent is to pray for those sinners who need conversion.

In the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima (in 1917) she asked the three children: "**Pray, pray very much and make a sacrifice for sinners, because many souls are going to hell because no one offers sacrifices for them.**" The three children started to look for ways to mortify themselves. Lucia found a rope one day and suggested it be cut into three pieces so each of them could wear it continuously around their waists. Pleasing as it was to God, Our Lady had to ask them not to use the rope at night, for they couldn't sleep. They also gave their lunches to poor children they met along the way, or would spend all the daylight hours without drinking a single drop of water.

The children were aged 10, 9 and 7! What are you doing?



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The children were aged 10, 9 and 7! What are you doing?



Sunday 22nd February

Mk 1:12-15

The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."

It is always a great relief to see You, Lord, going through the same things we all have to go through. You were a perfect man, but you did not 'cheat': You suffered all that we suffered and *much more*. You even let yourself suffer temptations, just like us.

For that reason, Jesus, it is a great joy to see You overcoming the enemy. I love to see the enemy defeated. The same happens to a football team. When it is really good, people start to think it is *unbeatable* and everyone dreads having to play them. Then, one day, the *invincible football team* is defeated, and from then on, no one thinks they are *invincible* anymore, for the once dreaded enemy has been beaten; and so, they think... *We can beat it as well!*.

You, Lord, have overcome the devil, and now we know that You can beat him again and again, helping us when we go through temptation. We will never fear him; he should fear us, for we don't fight on our own, but with You. Remind me, my Jesus, in times of trial, to turn to You for help, and then... then I will be *invincible* for you are *The Invincible One*.

Do I go to Jesus when I am going through a time of temptations?

12



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12

Jn 13:21-33, 36-38

Tuesday of Holy Week

Tuesday 31st March

Jesus said, "'Where I am going you cannot come.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, where are you going?' Jesus answered, 'Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward.' Peter said to him, 'Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' Jesus answered, 'Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times.'

Peter did love, but he was weak. He was convinced of what he would do for Jesus, but didn't know himself well. He would use the sword against the guard of the High Priest and tremble before a little servant. Peter the Rock, the head of the apostles denied Jesus three times, swearing by God that he did not know Him, just to save his own skin. He was not the only one. St Matthew and St Mark explain in their Gospels that the other disciples said the same about dying with Him but the rest of the apostles, except John, took to their heels and abandoned him.

We also told You, Lord, that You could count on us, and then, so often we failed to be generous. We forgot, like Peter and James and Andrew and the others, that we are weak if we are not humble. We are weak when we don't ask You for help, when we try to do something on our own.

Help me Lord to never trust myself; remind me to go to You anytime I want to do something for You, because without You I can't please You. Jesus, never leave me alone, even if I fail to ask You for help. Don't leave me because without Your grace I'm lost!

49



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49



Monday of Holy Week  
Monday 30th March

Jn 12:1-11

Mary took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. Jesus said, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

Judas didn't like Mary's generosity towards Jesus; he didn't like money being spent on Him; he didn't like Jesus; he didn't like Mary... he didn't like anyone but himself!

Everywhere was filled with the fragrance of the ointment, and the face of Jesus was full of gratitude. Mary's love made Jesus very happy, even though His Passion was near. The first Good Friday was close at hand. How good to be among friends! Let us not forget the solitude of Jesus during these days.

Mary, for her part, was filled with joy when she saw that Jesus smiled because of what she had done. She loved Our Lord so much that nothing was too much for Him. *"If we stop to contemplate this scene for a few minutes, we can see the joy that comes from the generosity in the happy face of Mary, who has just made good use of a small treasure. And on the other hand, we see Judas filled with sadness, the sadness resulting from the lack of generosity"* (Cfr. Fernandez Carvajal, The Day That I Changed My Life; 2009. Sinag-tala).

48



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48

Mt 25:31-46

Monday 23rd February

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, ... He will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'"

Lent is a time for charity. And charity is something we should pray about. When you talk to Jesus about your family members, your friends... you discover things that you can do for them. If we don't pray for them, we do nothing and spend our lives missing opportunities to practise charity with people that need us. I can imagine You, Lord, smiling when You told your followers about the Last Day, thinking of the millions of billions of act of charity that people would do for Your sake until the end of time.

One day Bl Teresa of Calcutta was recorded for a TV programme doing her tasks, caring for some lepers. Leprosy can be very disgusting in the final stages. But Bl Teresa was washing the leper with the affection of a mother with her baby. The reporter, unable to restrain her repugnance, said aloud: *"I wouldn't do that for a million dollars!"* To what Bl Teresa answered: *"Neither would I!"* Only for Christ.

Jesus: I imagine Your look and the expression in Your face when I go to You at the end of my life and You will smile at me and Your lovely voice would say, in front of all the angels and of my Mother: *"You did it to me!"*

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13



Tuesday 24th February

Mt 6:7-15

"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven..."

You told us to say: *Our Father*, and not simply *Father*; and in the four last petitions we say: "give us ... forgive us ... lead us not ... deliver us". For You love it when we are united in prayer, when we pray together and we pray for each other, as a family.

During Lent I can go slowly over the Prayer that You taught us. In her autobiography, St. Therese of Lisieux says "Sometimes when I am in such a state of spiritual dryness that not a single good thought occurs to me, I say very slowly the 'Our Father,' or the 'Hail Mary,' and these prayers suffice to take me out of myself, and wonderfully refresh me." Well, let's think about it. How many times do I pray these prayers every day, and how many times do I not know what I am saying? Pray the Lord's Prayer with St. Therese, slowly, to get the most out of it, rather than rattling it off on auto-pilot, as we all do sometimes!

"Slowly. —Consider what you are saying, who is saying it and to whom. For that hurried talk, without time for reflection, is just noise, the clatter of tin cans. And with Saint Teresa, I will tell you that, however much you work your lips, I do not call it prayer" (St. Josemaría).

14

Mk 14:1-15:47

Palm Sunday

Sunday 29th March

And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Elo-i, Elo-i, lama sabach-thani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Today our prayer is on Calvary. Go there with your imagination and comfort Our God, Who is hanging on the Cross, looking down at you. Stay there with Mary, consoling her who is our Mother too. Lord, never let me separate myself from You!

47



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47



Saturday 28th March

Jn 11:45-56

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him; but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."

When someone doesn't want to believe, he won't believe, in spite of all the miracles he might see. Read the entire chapter 11 of St John, if you can, to get the idea: Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead after being buried for four days in his tomb. Everyone saw the miracle but some went to inform the Pharisees, who decided to kill Jesus for performing miracles!!! Can you believe it?

Anyway, Jesus came to give His life freely. Tomorrow we start Holy Week; a week of intense prayer to be spent with Him. Jesus won't die on the Cross alone this time: You and I will be there: "*My Lord and my God, under the loving eyes of our Mother, we are making ready to accompany you along this path of sorrow, which was the price for our redemption. We wish to suffer all that You suffered, to offer you our poor, contrite hearts, because you are innocent, and yet you are going to die for us, who are the only really guilty ones. My Mother, Virgin of sorrows, help me to relieve those bitter hours which your Son wished to spend on earth*" (St Josemaría).

46

Lk 11:29-32

Wednesday 25th February

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation ... The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

God needed someone to preach in Nineveh, and decided that Jonah was 'the man for the job'. But you know the story, don't you? The instructions were simple: *Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it*. Amazingly, the reaction of Jonah to this God-given mission was to **flee in the opposite direction** from Nineveh. *God has His plans, may have thought Jonah: but I have mine...*

God knows what we can do, so we can be sure that He will never ask you 'more' than what you can give... But He will never ask you 'less'. Nineveh could have been condemned if God had not gone after Jonah to 'convince' him (in a very persuasive way), that the people of Nineveh needed him. When eventually he complied and did what God had asked for, the result was clear: All the people of Nineveh converted and turned to God.

What would have become of those thousands of people if Jonah had not come back? What will become of your friends if you do not do anything to help them? Jesus, I beg You to come and *fetch me* if ever I run away from those who need me.

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Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him; but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all; you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish."

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Anyway, Jesus came to give His life freely. Tomorrow we start Holy Week; a week of intense prayer to be spent with Him. Jesus won't die on the Cross alone this time: You and I will be there: "*My Lord and my God, under the loving eyes of our Mother, we are making ready to accompany you along this path of sorrow, which was the price for our redemption. We wish to suffer all that You suffered, to offer you our poor, contrite hearts, because you are innocent, and yet you are going to die for us, who are the only really guilty ones. My Mother, Virgin of sorrows, help me to relieve those bitter hours which your Son wished to spend on earth*" (St Josemaría).

46

Lk 11:29-32

Wednesday 25th February

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation ... The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

God needed someone to preach in Nineveh, and decided that Jonah was 'the man for the job'. But you know the story, don't you? The instructions were simple: *Set out for the great city of Nineveh, and preach against it*. Amazingly, the reaction of Jonah to this God-given mission was to **flee in the opposite direction** from Nineveh. *God has His plans, may have thought Jonah: but I have mine...*

God knows what we can do, so we can be sure that He will never ask you 'more' than what you can give... But He will never ask you 'less'. Nineveh could have been condemned if God had not gone after Jonah to 'convince' him (in a very persuasive way), that the people of Nineveh needed him. When eventually he complied and did what God had asked for, the result was clear: All the people of Nineveh converted and turned to God.

What would have become of those thousands of people if Jonah had not come back? What will become of your friends if you do not do anything to help them? Jesus, I beg You to come and *fetch me* if ever I run away from those who need me.

15



Thursday 26th February

Mt 7:7-12

"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"

**Everyone who asks receives.** Everyone means everyone. As fathers give their children what they need, **how much more** will your Father God give you what you need! Have you ever prayed slowly about those words: "how much more"?

Your Father God is only interested in giving you the best, and not just 'something'. St Augustine explains that when our prayers are not heard it is because we ask "**aut mali, aut male, aut mala**" [St Augustine was African but he wrote in Latin]. **Mali**, because we are bad and are not ready to ask. **Male**, because we ask badly, with little faith or without perseverance, or with little humility. **Mala**, because we ask for bad things, or they are, for some reason, not suitable for us".

God is not a 'vending machine' that you insert prayers and get what you fancy. He's a Father that only gives the best. And so, our best prayer is to ask: Your Will be done, for that is the best for me, always.

"Shame on human laziness, for God's desire to give is greater than our desire to receive" (St Augustine).

16

Jn 10:31-42

Friday 27th March

The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of these do you stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we stone you but for blasphemy; because you, being a man, make yourself God." Jesus answered them, "... do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?' If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."

Poor people! No matter how many miracles they saw, they would not believe: they were blind because they didn't want to see. They always got the wrong end of the stick: they want to stone Him because *being a man*, He *made himself God*, when it was exactly the opposite: *being God, He made Himself a man!*

They thought Jesus had a problem and wanted to kill Him, when the problem was theirs. They thought Jesus wasn't sound, but it was they who were deaf:

An old man thought that his wife had a hearing problem. So, while she is sitting in her lounge chair, he went behind her and said softly: "Honey, can you hear me?" He got no response. He moved a little closer and repeated: "Honey, can you hear me?" No response. Finally he moved right next her and said: "Honey, can you hear me?" This time she looked up with surprise in her eyes and replied: "For the third time, Henry, Yes, I can hear you!" Who really had the hearing problem, the man or his wife?

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Jn 8:51-59

Jesus said to the Jews: "Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never see death." The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, as did the prophets; ... Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you claim to be?" Jesus answered, "It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is your God. But you have not known him; I know him ... Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." The Jews then said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.

You, Lord, didn't say: 'before Abraham was, I was', but 'I AM'. Now, that was quite something! «I AM» is the name of God that no Jew would ever dare to pronounce. And you, Lord, not only said it, but said it of Yourself! In other words: You told the Jews: '**I am GOD!**' No wonder they took up stones!

They have heard You saying: "*I am the Bread of Life, the Light of the world, the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the true Vine*"... but never before had they heard anyone say 'I AM' except God himself.

At the trial before the Sanhedrin, the High Priest asked You if You were indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God: "**I AM**", was Your unmistakable answer. And that was the end of the dialogue; there was no other way to understand Your words, Jesus, than with their real meaning: The High Priest tore his clothes and You were sentenced to death.

Let's make many acts of faith: *Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God, that You are the King of the Universe.*

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Mt 5:20-26

Friday 27th February

Every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Few things wound the heart of a father more than to see his children quarrelling. And few sins wound the Divine Heart of our Father God more than bitterness among His children. The virtue of Charity, which we are trying to grow in during Lent, is always the most important virtue. So much so, that He warns us: "*if ever you come to offer anything to Me*", as we do in the Holy Mass, or even if you just want to talk to me in prayer, make sure that you are at peace with my other children first. If you aren't, then *leave your gift there before the altar and go*, for I will not accept your offering until you are reconciled to your brother.

Some people think that only Cain, with his hands stained in blood, would be forbidden to pray in front of the altar. But there are so many ways to harm the others! Indifference, scorn, insensitivity, laughing at the mistakes of the others, indiscretion, rudeness, ungratefulness, sarcasm, irony, gossip, bearing grudges, impatience, and so many other names for selfishness...

My Lord, help me to always be charitable towards everyone, so that, at any time of my life, I will be able to stand before Your altar, with my offering of peace, joy and love.

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17



Saturday 28th February

Mt 5:43-48

"I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ... You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect".

To hold a grudge is like building a prison, and locking oneself inside, and throwing away the key. We have to ask Jesus to be able to love everyone no matter what they do or think or say. That is to be like our *heavenly Father*: Perfect in Love. St John of the Cross has given us a great piece of advice: "*Where there is no love, put love—and you will find love.*"

*If you love those who love you, what reward have you?* That is very easy! But to love those who despise you, who scorn you, who insult you... That is very '*virtuous!*'

There was once a boy who persistently bullied a classmate who was also his next-door neighbour, but the neighbour always took it with a smile and said nothing. Eventually the bully grew impatient and asked him: —*Why do you always smile?!* —*Because I know that your parents are going through a hard time, and so I pray for your family every time you insult me.* It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

Lord, help me to get to know the others as You do, and I will love them as You do, and be perfect, as my *heavenly Father* is perfect.

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18

Lk 1:26-38

The Annunciation  
Wednesday 25th March

And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus".

Today we celebrate the Annunciation, which is the Incarnation. God becoming Man. Jesus was already in the world nine months before Christmas, but only Mary and St Joseph knew it. Jesus was not in a hurry, you see? As perfect Man, he spends months in the womb, just as we did. He didn't have to; but He wanted to. He didn't want to be an exception.

Every time we say the *Hail Mary*, we remind Our Lady of the happiest moments of her existence, and she always listens to her children through this prayer:

A priest was asked by a hospital sister to visit patient number 7 in Ward 3. When he got there he found that the man hadn't received the sacraments for many years, but had always kept up a promise made to his mother on her deathbed: to pray three *Hail Marys* every night. Eventually the man made his confession and received the Eucharist with great devotion. Leaving the Ward, the priest met the sister and found that he had been in Ward 4, and the patient 7 in Ward 3 was still waiting for him! This was soon put right, but the priest felt thankful for the mistake. He felt still more thankful when the following day he found out that the man in Ward 4 had died suddenly that night.

*Now and at the hour of our death...*

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43



Tuesday 24th March

Jn 8:21-30

Again he said to them, "Where I am going, you cannot come ... You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." They said to him, "Who are you?"

Isn't it sad that those who had been with Him for so long even now ask "Who are You?" Don't you feel sorry for all those who seek Him, but don't find Him? Souls! So many of them! Saints had that passion (it's called *zeal*) to reach out to everyone and explain to them who Jesus Christ is, and where He is so that they can go to Him. To tell them that Jesus has died for them and that it is, in actual fact, He who is looking for each one of them.

Jesus asked Bl Teresa of Calcutta to take His love to all souls in the streets. To do that, she had to overcome many difficulties and was a bit afraid of taking that final step of leaving her convent walls; but Jesus was in a hurry to reach all those souls, and was spurring her on to go for those souls that weren't finding Jesus and didn't know Him yet: 'You have come to India for me. Are you now afraid to take one more step for me? Has your generosity cooled down? Am I only secondary for you? You did not die for souls; that's why you don't care what happens to them. Your heart was never drowned in sorrow as was my Mother's heart. We both gave up ourselves totally for souls. What about you? ... Will you refuse?'

She didn't refuse, as you know, and brought Jesus to thousands of those souls. Now we have a similar mission: *Will you refuse it?*

42

Mk 9:2-10

Sunday 1st March

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to say, for they were exceedingly afraid. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

How good it is to be with You, Lord; and to be able to talk to You as Elijah and Moses did, face-to-face! And we still listen to the echoes of the Voice of the Father giving us a commandment: *listen to him!*

How I would love to listen to You as Moses did, as Elijah, and Peter and James and John...! And to Peter, who did not know what to say I answer: —*Say nothing! It is time to keep silent and contemplate.* We have to learn from the contemplative silence of Mary and Joseph. Keep interior silence and you will hear His voice: *For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, thy all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne*, we read in the Book of Wisdom (Wis 18).

*We need to find God, and God cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence* (Bl Teresa of Calcutta).

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19



Monday 2nd March

Lk 6:36-38

"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

We are very good at seeing other people's mistakes and not quite as good at recognising our own. We need to ask You, Lord, to see things with Your eyes.

The real measure of a person is how they measure others. Those who see the best in their relatives and friends are probably nice people who are fun to be with. Someone who is always criticising and cynical usually have a lot wrong inside. They try to find in others what they don't want to see in themselves.

In the letters of a girl who died from cancer at the age of fourteen, there is something remarkable. Apparently, for Alexia -that was her name- everyone was wonderful: "The hospital is a wonderful place. The nurses are so kind, so loving! Then doctors began arriving, all of them charming, and everyone was nicer and more adorable than the previous one". Even the city "is a small town, very nice. Everyone is lovely, very friendly, and endearing." It takes a very clear soul to see the world so brightly. You have to be charming to discover that everyone around you is charming too. The dirt is there, and it is not a crime to notice it. But those who constantly talk about dirt might be in need of an 'interior clean'.

Do you judge others? What is the usual verdict?

20

Jn 8:1-11

Monday 23rd March

The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" ... And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again."

How beautiful is the Mercy of God. He didn't come to condemn, but to save. He forgives everything, always. And once forgiven: those sins exist no more. Confession erases everything as long as there is contrition.

Mother Angelica was walking by the sea when suddenly, a huge wave crashed at her feet. Then she saw a small drop of seawater on her hand and she returned it to the sea. Then she heard the voice of Jesus: "Angelica, have you seen that drop of water?" — "Yes, Lord," she answered. — "Those drops are like your sins, your weaknesses, your feebleness and your imperfections. And the ocean is like my Mercy. If you search for that drop, will you be able to find it?" — No, Lord. — "No matter how hard you try, won't you be able to find it?" — "No, Lord." — "Very well, then, why are you still searching for it?"

41

Monday 2nd March

Lk 6:36-38

"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

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Sunday 22nd March

Jn 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus.

Do you see? These Greeks have probably heard all sorts of stories about Jesus, but they don't want to listen to other people talking about Jesus when they can actually meet Him. But they didn't dare to approach the Master directly, so they looked for a good intercessor: the Apostle Philip, because they know that Philip is His friend: "we wish to see Jesus." Philip himself wants to bring Andrew with him when he introduces these people to Jesus.

"We wish to see Jesus", people of our times cry as well. And when they see His disciples, they ask for Jesus. If we are friends of Jesus, people will come to us to get to Jesus. That is the mission of the apostle.

"We wish to see Jesus", people say; and we, Christians are the ones responsible for making sure they do. If Philip hadn't brought them to Jesus they would have never met and loved Him. And if we do not bring souls to Him, they will remain in darkness.

You and I have a mission: the crowd want to see Jesus; they may not say it or even know it, but their hearts long for Him. And we will go to them and break the good news: —*You know what? He is there, in the Tabernacle, and wishes to see you! He has desired to see you for centuries and is waiting for you.*

Don't make Him wait anymore. Don't make them wait anymore!

40

Mt 23:1-12

Tuesday 3rd March

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice ... They do all their deeds to be seen by men ... He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

The best example of humility is God Himself: being God He became man for us. The second best example of humility is His Mother: being the only woman who could rightly boast, she recognized that all the good in her is a gift from God. The third example of humility is St Joseph: being a man gifted beyond comparison, he never let himself become the centre of attention. Saints are humble people who know how to remain in the background and let people see God instead. That is what holiness is about: you see? Holiness and humility are proportionate.

When we try to bring friends to God, do not rely on words, but on example. In the lifetime of the Holy Cure of Ars, St John Mary Vianney, people came from distant places to listen to his homilies. Elsewhere in France at the same time was another famous preacher who also attracted many people with his brilliant sermons. One day someone asked this preacher which of them was the better preacher. —*Most certainly he is!*, answered the man: *For when people listen to my homilies they say: "How good is this preacher!", but when they listen to Vianney they say: "How good is God!"*.

Do people see God through your actions?

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## Wednesday 4th March

Mt 20:17-28

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." ... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

There is no better example of service that to see God-man washing the feet of His disciples. We should always keep that picture in mind when service becomes a burden. Lent is time of service which is charity, and the disciples of Jesus follow His footsteps and example.

"If we let Christ reign in our soul, we will not become authoritarian. Rather we will serve everyone. How I like that word: service! To serve my king and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve, for only by serving can we know and love Christ and make him known and loved" (St Josemaría).

How do I serve others, at home, at school... everywhere?

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## Jn 7:40-53

Saturday 21st March

The officers then went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this man!" The Pharisees answered them, "Are you led astray, you also? Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed."

Joke: The optician asks the lady: 'Which letter do you see in the screen?' -"A", answers the lady. 'Please, concentrate', insists the annoyed optician: 'Which letter do you see there?' -"A", repeats the lady. 'Come on, Madam!' the exasperated optician asks once more: 'Try again!' -"A", she insists. The optician turns around to the screen, puts his glasses on and exclaims: 'Gosh! You were right!'

Pharisees, like the optician, didn't check before jumping to conclusions. These people were divided into two groups: those who listened to Him, and those who persecuted Him. Why didn't the Pharisees believe in Jesus? Because they didn't listen to Him. And today it is the same for those who do not read the Gospel: "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" said St Jerome. The power of the Word of Jesus! Those officers 'lost the battle' when they allowed themselves to listen to Jesus.

Jesus, I want to read your Gospels everyday; to listen to your Voice, to get to know You, to get to know myself!

"I advised you to read the New Testament for some minutes every day, and to enter into each scene and take part in it, as one more of the characters. This is so that you incarnate the Gospel, so that it is 'fulfilled' in your life... and 'make others fulfil it'" (St Josemaría).

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39



Friday 20th March

Jn 7:1-2, 10, 25-30

Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? Yet we know where this man comes from; and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord; he who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."

"We know where this man comes from..." They are perplexed: they are waiting for the Messiah; they think that Jesus might even be He, in view of the miracles He works and the doctrine He teaches; but they are not sure... because it doesn't match with what they "know". Oh, no! You can't fool them for "they know"!

They loved to classify people. They know where Jesus was from and therefore, they thought they knew everything about Him. The Messiah was right in front of them... but they know that the Messiah can't be from here or there... But there is more than meets the eye. What they couldn't see, we in our prayer can know. We want to know You Lord, better each day with our prayer. May we be able to say one day: "I know Him!"

"Many people do not know or do not want to know who Jesus Christ is, and they remain perplexed and disconcerted... The great tragedy of history is that Jesus is not known, and therefore is not loved, not followed. You know Christ! You know who he is! Yours is a great privilege! Always be worthy and aware of it!" (St John Paul II)

38

Lk 16:19-31

Thursday 5th March

"There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.... And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'

Let's examine our omissions. Imagine the rich man before the Judgment of God, being told that he can't enter Heaven. The man protests, "But what did I do? I did nothing!" —"Precisely," God could reply.

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Friday 6th March

Mt 21:33-43, 45-46

"Hear another parable. There was a householder who planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the season of fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, to get his fruit; and the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did the same to them. Afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

This is called "*breach of contract*". When God gave them the vineyard, he gave them a mission: to produce grapes. Vineyard and mission came together. But this people wanted to keep the vineyard and get rid of the mission. Keep the vineyard and the grapes for themselves.

God has given you talents and a mission, a mission to save souls, and they both come together. But He has left you **free**, like the tenants: He **trusts** in you; and He is **patient** (He did not destroy them after their first mistake).

But He will ask you for fruit as well...

24

Lk 2:41-51 ...

St Joseph  
Thursday 19th March.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; ... and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.

St Joseph, "Good and faithful servant", husband of Mary and father of Jesus, my father and lord, always in the background. You were the protector of the Holy Family: protect our families in this special year.

"Go, then to Joseph, and do all that he shall say to you; Go to Joseph, and obey him as Jesus and Mary obeyed him; Go to Joseph, and speak to him as they spoke to him; Go to Joseph, and consult him as they consulted him; Go to Joseph, and honour him as they honoured him; Go to Joseph, and be grateful to him as they were grateful to him; Go to Joseph, and love him, as they love him still" (St Alphonsus).

Jesus "was obedient"; that's what He had learned at home, from Joseph: obedient to God's Will. "I like St Joseph very much. He is a strong man of silence. On my desk I have a statue of St Joseph sleeping. While sleeping he looks after the Church. Yes, he can do it! We know that. When I have a problem or a difficulty, I write it on a piece of paper and I put it under his statue so he can dream about it. This means please pray to St Joseph for this problem." (Pope Francis). Do I ask St Joseph to pray for anything I need?

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"Go, then to Joseph, and do all that he shall say to you; Go to Joseph, and obey him as Jesus and Mary obeyed him; Go to Joseph, and speak to him as they spoke to him; Go to Joseph, and consult him as they consulted him; Go to Joseph, and honour him as they honoured him; Go to Joseph, and be grateful to him as they were grateful to him; Go to Joseph, and love him, as they love him still" (St Alphonsus).

Jesus "was obedient"; that's what He had learned at home, from Joseph: obedient to God's Will. "I like St Joseph very much. He is a strong man of silence. On my desk I have a statue of St Joseph sleeping. While sleeping he looks after the Church. Yes, he can do it! We know that. When I have a problem or a difficulty, I write it on a piece of paper and I put it under his statue so he can dream about it. This means please pray to St Joseph for this problem." (Pope Francis). Do I ask St Joseph to pray for anything I need?

37



But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working still, and I am working." ... "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel ... "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Today's Gospel follows immediately on from yesterday's account of the healing of the crippled man by the pool. Apparently some Jews thought that healing on the Sabbath was a bad idea. But You, Lord, answer that Your Father is working on the Sabbath, and You are too, for You do what He says.

You are a Good Son, always doing what Your Father wants; in perfect unity with Him. That is what good children do: they learn everything from their father. They take after their father in the way they move, they speak, they act... Sometimes it happens that someone tells me: "you remind me a lot of your father."

That was Your mission, Jesus: "*to remind us of Your Father*", so that we become good children of God the Father, because we learn from You to do always and in everything the Will of the Father. Jesus: May I always do what You want!

"It only takes a second. Before setting about anything, ask yourself: What does God want of me in this? Then, with divine grace,... do it!" (St Josemaría)



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"There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine ... But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."'" And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you' ... But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

It is never too late to go back! Thank you, Lord, for you never give up on me! Help me to come back to You as many times as I need to.



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Sunday 8th March

Jn 2:13-25

Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for thy house will consume me."

How painful it is for You, Lord to see that people do not care for You (do not love You) in Your own House!

Bl Manuel Gonzalez went to preach a mission in a small town near Seville. He wrote about his first, and very painful impressions: "My faith and my values had to make great efforts," he wrote, "to prevent me from running back home!" But he did not run away: "I stayed there a while longer, and there I discovered the plans of my mission and the help I needed to undertake it... There, on my knees, before that pile of shreds and dirt, my faith saw Jesus, through that small, termite-eaten door. There He was: so quiet, so good, so patient, looking back at me...."

During those moments I spent before the tabernacle, I saw a new occupation: to become the priest of a town that did not want Jesus Christ, so that I may love Him in the name of all the people; to use my priesthood to take care of Jesus Christ in the needs that His life in the tabernacle demanded, feeding it with my love, warming it with my presence, entertaining Him with my conversation, protecting Him from abandonment and ingratitude..."

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Jn 5:1-16

Tuesday 17th March

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Bethzatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed. One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked.

38 years!!! 38 years stubbornly trying to be healed in that pool and all to no purpose. He was resolute. He had seen many others get healed that way and he was going to try time and again until he got it himself: a *hopeless case*. No one helped him. But he had never asked help from the only Man that could have healed him.

But You, Lord came without being called, and gave him a solution that he had never imagined. How many times we are obsessed with one single solution to a problem, when You, Jesus have a better one! That man spent 38 years trying to be thrown into the pool, and eventually was healed without a drop of water.

But the complaint of the man gives us something to think about: "Sir, I have no man...", not a single man helped him; no one ever told him: Listen, forget the pool, go to Jesus, who is more effective, and would love to help you... **Not a single man!**

Do I help people to ask Jesus for help? Am I embarrassed to speak to my friends about Him?

35



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## Monday 16th March

Jn 4:43-54

At Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Jesus therefore said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way. As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was living.

It is true that many people loved to see Your signs, Lord: they were spectacular! Blind people started to see, deaf to hear, paralytics to walk around, loaves and fish were multiplied... But these signs were always in Your presence. The miracle in today's Gospel is different:

Jesus, it is as if you are telling the crowd: 'Those of you who came looking for miracles are going to be disappointed. However, this man had the faith to know I would answer his prayer without any external sign' – the official didn't need to see it. That is the faith that You love, Lord; the faith that I'm asking for.

Do you remember Indiana Jones in "*The Last Crusade*"? He has to get across this seemingly bottomless chasm. His dying father, Sean Connery, is whispering "You must believe boy, you must believe." And so Indiana Jones does: he courageously extends his foot out and then, thud, his foot lands on solid ground. The camera pans around and you can see a rock bridge that had been invisible to him before. Indiana Jones had summoned up enough faith to get across the chasm.

34



Lk 4:24-30

## Monday 9th March

And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away.

Imagine the 'Poets' Society of Stratford-upon-Avon' suing Shakespeare for publishing his work without their approval: it would have been ridiculous! Well, the people of Nazareth were about to throw Jesus down the cliff just because He was chosen by God without *their* permission. They couldn't believe that God would choose the "Son of Joseph" instead of one of 'them'. And because they don't like what He says... they want to kill Him!

There are some things that people just don't want to listen to, or are not interested in knowing or changing. They could have told Jesus: 'Listen, it is fine if You perform miracles here... we love that stuff... but do not try to give as lessons in this or that, because You are the son of Joseph'.

Every disciple of Jesus always finds resistance. People may let Christians teach some parts of the Gospels or some commandments, but not *all of them*. But Jesus does not change His message; and we Christians can't either: "But passing through the midst of them he went away."

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Tuesday 10th March

Mt 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

Jesus tells the parable of the man who was forgiven his debt by his master, but he didn't forgive a fellow debtor, and in the end his own debt is claimed again because he didn't have mercy on his fellow servant. "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

How many times we ask God: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us'. We do not ask Him to forgive 'all my trespasses', or 'my trespasses according to Your Mercy', or 'because you are Good'. We persistently say: Jesus, forgive me if I forgive, but if I do not forgive... please, do not forgive me!

On Good Friday, 1003, a young man named John Gualberto surrounded by his gunmen, came across the murderer of his only brother, on their way to Siena. The criminal had no escape. In a sudden outburst, the villain dismounted, knelt down, and said: "Today is Good Friday. For Christ, dead for us on the Cross, spare my life!" John was about to strike the fatal blow when the man muttered: "Jesus, Son of God, at least you forgive me." Upon hearing this, John threw the sword away, raised the murderer and embraced him saying: "For Christ's sake, for His blood poured out on the Cross for US, I forgive you."

Forgiveness opened his heart: Soon after, John entered a Benedictine monastery... and became St John Gualberto.

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Jn 3:14-21

Laetare Sunday  
Sunday 15th March

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Today we celebrate Laetare Sunday: "Rejoice, Jerusalem! Be glad for her, you who love her; rejoice with her" we hear in the Entrance Antiphon. Why does the church invite us to rejoice in the middle of the penitential season of Lent? Because God so loved the world that he gave his only Son: salvation is just around the corner!

In 1456, while he was printing the first Bible, Gutenberg's little daughter, Alice, came into the printing press and picked up a discarded sheet with only one line of print. It read: "God loved the world so much that he gave..." So Alice put the paper in her pocket thinking about the fact of God being so loving, and her face radiated with joy. Her mother noticed her changed behaviour and asked Alice what was it and Alice showed her mother the paper. Her mother read it and said, "So, what did God give?" "I don't know," said Alice, "but if God loved us well enough to give us something, then we need not be so afraid of Him."

Sure enough, Alice, it was not just something..., God has given us **His Son!** What else do we want?

Thank you, Lord. Thank you so much!

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## Saturday 14th March

Lk 18:9-14

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

How ridiculous the prayer of the Pharisee is! He likes to compare himself with others to prove that he is good! How ridiculous it would be if we prayed like this: 'Thank you, Lord, for I'm not like the others: I use the iPray, go to Mass during the week, pray my 3 Hail Marys and do the washing-up on Tuesdays... but other people of my class, well, they lie, copy their homework, cheat in tests..., they do not go to Mass even on Sunday!...' We cannot compare because we are all different and only God fully knows the different circumstances of each person. Lent is a time for penance and atonement, a time to ask for forgiveness for we are sinners.

They say that one day Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, visited a prison and talked with the inmates. Apparently all of them were innocent and imprisoned by mistake. Finally the king stopped at the cell of a convict who remained silent. "Well," remarked Frederick, "are you an innocent victim too?" "No, sir, I'm not," replied the man. "I'm guilty and deserve my punishment." Turning to the warden the king said, "Here, release this rascal before he corrupts all these fine, innocent people in here!"

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Mt 5:17-19

Wednesday 11th March

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

How easy it is to water down the Gospel and make it less demanding! How easy it would be to get disciples if you only taught the nice bits of the Gospel, and took out any reference to the Cross or the demands of becoming a real disciple of Jesus! But the Gospel is the Word of God-the whole Gospel-, and no one has the right to change so much as one letter of it.

A bishop returned to his home town – which was mostly non-Christian–soon after ordination. In the welcome speech, the people expressed how happy they were that one of *them* had now direct access to God. They promised him they would all embrace Christianity if he would use his power to suppress one of the Ten Commandments for them. Before they could say which of the Commandments they had in mind, the young bishop shocked them explaining that the Commandments are from God and, therefore, unchangeable. The celebratory mood turned into disappointment and the bishop had to make a hasty departure from his own people.

But His words are clear: "not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished"; God doesn't make mistakes.

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Wednesday 11th March

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

How easy it is to water down the Gospel and make it less demanding! How easy it would be to get disciples if you only taught the nice bits of the Gospel, and took out any reference to the Cross or the demands of becoming a real disciple of Jesus! But the Gospel is the Word of God-the whole Gospel-, and no one has the right to change so much as one letter of it.

A bishop returned to his home town – which was mostly non-Christian–soon after ordination. In the welcome speech, the people expressed how happy they were that one of *them* had now direct access to God. They promised him they would all embrace Christianity if he would use his power to suppress one of the Ten Commandments for them. Before they could say which of the Commandments they had in mind, the young bishop shocked them explaining that the Commandments are from God and, therefore, unchangeable. The celebratory mood turned into disappointment and the bishop had to make a hasty departure from his own people.

But His words are clear: "not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished"; God doesn't make mistakes.

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Thursday 12th March

Lk 11:14-23

Some people said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons"; ... But Jesus said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? ... When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace; but when one stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted, and divides his spoil."

Evil is not an impersonal force that just happens. It has a name (actually has many: 'satan', 'Beelzebul, the prince of demons', 'the deceiver', 'the father of lies', 'Lucifer', 'the fallen angel') and it seeks to master every heart and soul by sin.

He who habitually gives in to temptation leaves the door of his soul unlocked and allows the devil to come in and 'make himself at home'. It is easy to defend oneself from inside a house; especially if one is *fully armed* as the devil is. But Jesus is stronger: stronger than doors, locks, walls and windows, and stronger than the devil and his weapons. Let's repeat it often: *the devil has no chance against me if Jesus is with me!*

But we need to go to Him in time of temptation and ask for help; otherwise we will have no chance. A Christian facing temptation who doesn't ask Jesus for help is like a gladiator in the arena, surrounded by ten hungry and angry lions, and armed... with a tea spoon! He has no chance. However, with the help of Jesus we are like the same gladiator but inside a tank: the lions have no chance. Jesus, do not leave me alone when the enemy comes; and if I ever forget to ask you to help me, help me anyway!

30

Mk 12:28-34

Friday 13th March

And one of the scribes came up and asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

The man asked for "*the first commandment*", but Jesus answered quoting "*the first and the second*". There is a poem written by Leigh Hunt about a man called Abou Ben Adhem who woke from his sleep one night and saw an angel writing in a book the names of those who love God. "*And is mine one?*" inquired Abou. "Nay, not so," replied the angel. "I pray thee, then," said Abou, "write me as one who loves his fellow men." The following night the angel came again and displayed the names of those who love God and Abou Ben Adhem's name topped the list, making the point that true love of God and true love of our neighbour are like two sides of the same coin.

The persecution of Jesus and his followers was championed by well-meaning religious people motivated by what they believed to be love for God. The people who ask about the first commandment are the same ones trying to entrap and kill Jesus. If they are so concerned about the love of God, why are they so insensitive when it comes to love of neighbour? "*Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their 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).

31

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