# Wednesday 18th February ASH WEDNESDAY.

Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

"Beware of practicing 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?

# Thursday 19th February

Lk 9:22-25

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 straightaway, to eat more of what you do not like, and less of what you love; to do the dish-washer when it is not your job, to smile at that annoying person, not to complain, to tidy your room, not to put off tasks that you don’t like and do always first what you like, not to answer back, and many others...

# 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 on? 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 in the Cross; and think: \_*Am I generous enough?*\_

# Saturday 21st February (St Peter Damian)

Lk 5:27-32

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 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 that need conversion.

In the apparitions of Our Lady of 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 to 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?

# 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, 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?

# Monday 23rd February

Mt 25:31-46

"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 live 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!**\*

# 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).

# Wednesday 25th February

Lk 11:29-32

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 to this God-given mission to Jonah is 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 go 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.

# 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!

***Every one 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 on 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 not ready to request\_. @****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).

# Friday 27th February

Mt 5:20-26

Everyone 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, that we 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, insensitiveness, laughing at the mistakes of the others, indiscretions, rudeness, ungratefulness, sarcasms, ironies, gossip, bearing grudges, impatience, and so many other names for selfishness...

My Lord, help me always to 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.

# 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 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*\_.

# Sunday 1st March

Mk 9:2-10

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).

# 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 is her name- everyone was *formidable*: "*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 are 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 verdict usually?

# Tuesday 3rd March

Mt 23:1-12

Then said Jesus 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 boast, she recognizes 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 lets himself become the centre of attention. Saints are humble people that 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?

# 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 than to see God-man washing the feet of His disciples. We should keep always 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, in the school... everywhere?

# Thursday 5th March

Lk 16:19-31

“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 some one 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 some one should rise from the dead.'"

Let’s examine our omissions. Imagine the rich man before the Judgment of God, listening that he can’t enter Heaven. The man protests, “\_*But what did I do? I didn’t do anything!*\_” —“\_*Exactly*\_,” could reply God.

# 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 the tenants wanted to keep the vineyard and get rid of the mission; and keep the grapes as well as the vineyard for themselves.

God has given you talents and mission, a mission to save souls, and they both come together. But he has left you as @***free***@, as he left the tenants: He is not snooping into, because He @***trusts***@ in you; and He is ***patient*** (as He was with the tenants after their first mistake).

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

# Saturday 7th March

Lk 15:1-3, 11-32

"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. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. 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 late to come back! Thank you, Lord, for you never give up on me! Help me to return to You as many times as I need.