# 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..."*

# Monday 9th March

Lk 4:24-30

Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. But in truth, I tell you, ... 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. Apparently Jesus’ hometown neighbours 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”.*

# 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 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.

# Wednesday 11th March

Mt 5:17-19

"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 right to change a 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 by 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.

# Thursday 12th March

Lk 11:14-23

Some people said, "He casts out demons by Be-elzebul, 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', 'Be-elzebul, 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!

# Friday 13th March

Mk 12:28-34

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'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).

# 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!...*’ God never compares people, for each one of us is different. 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!*”

# Sunday 15th March. *Laetare* Sunday

Jn 3:14-21

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!

# Monday 16th March

Jn 4:43-54

At Caperna-um 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.

*"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."* It is true that many people loved to see Your signs, Lord: they were spectacular! Blind people see, deaf hear, paralytics walk around, multiplications of loaves and fish ... 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.

# Tuesday 17th March. St Patrick

Jn 5:1-16

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Beth-zatha, 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 pooland 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 of 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!***

Am I embarrassed to speak to my friends about Him?

# Wednesday 18th March

Jn 5:17-30

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 Sabbath was a bad idea. But You, Lord, answer that Your Father is working on the Sabbath, and You too, for You do what He says.

You are a Good Son, always doing what Your Father wants; Always 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 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)

# Thursday 19th March. St Joseph

Lk 2:41-51a

... 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: what a saint! “*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 today 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”*, says the Gospel; 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, January, 2015). Do I ask St Joseph to pray for anything I need?

# 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 love 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

**Saturday 21st March**

Jn 7:40-53

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 don’t 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).

# 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 Beth-saida 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 love 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!

# Monday 23rd March

Jn 8:1-11

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?”*