

# 1.

To enter into the mystery of the Holy Family we must begin with God. On Christmas Day, the Gospel chosen for the Mass During the Day, is from Saint John's Gospel. There we hear that the eternal Word is God and that the Word was with God. Later, Saint John will teach us concerning the Holy Spirit, Who is eternal bond between Father and Son, one in Their knowledge and power. So, the one eternal God is three Persons. The heart of God is eternal communion, is family.

Saint John, Genesis, Hebrews, and other books in the Bible, all teach that ordered and intelligible creation, at the actual dawn of time, was brought into existence by the Word. Saint John teaches that the Word became flesh, Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus' mastery over creation - His every miracle - confirms this; His words bring into reality what He commands. He commands 'see', and sight is restored; walk, speak, be healed, your sins are forgiven you, even the elements obey His word - His word restores life. He is the Word, born as a human Baby, born as the Son of Mary, born to be the foster Son of Joseph, born in the heart of a human family.

There is God surrounded by two earthly parents. In Genesis, the Scriptures teach us how the Lord created man and woman to come together as one in a binding covenant and to have children. Indeed, Jesus confirms this teaching in the Gospels of Saints Matthew and

Mark. The Commandments teach us to honour father and mother. And Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, writes, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Our families are to give glory to the Father in Jesus, by the Spirit.

In grasping that the Trinity is a type of family, understanding that God has created every human to be rooted in a family, and that He would send His eternal Son to be born as part of a human family, we see how the Lord is to be so deeply present in the life of every family. A family only discovers its true strength, its purpose and generous life to the extent that it is rooted in the living Lord, in the Spirit, Who Has been given to us, as Saint John writes.

Hannah, in the first reading, had longed for a child and when he had been weaned, both Hannah and her husband, Elkanah, offered their long-awaited son to the Lord, to grow up and serve in the Temple at Shiloh. In these parents we note how the first and deepest of all loves is for the Lord, the Lord Who is the source and sustainer of all life. Mary, herself, the Mother of God, tradition teaches, was, also, a long-awaited child, and in utter gratitude, Saints Joachim and Anne, her parents, also offered their daughter to the Temple in Jerusalem, as a consecrated virgin, until her betrothal to Saint Joseph.

In the Gospel, we discover a family for whom the Lord and religious observance is of the highest priority. Jesus, Who is submissive to His earthly parents, nevertheless cannot equate His service and love of them on the same plane as that for His eternal Father. And Mary, in hearing her Son's sacred words, opens her heart to the majesty and unfathomable depths of the Lord's will for her family's life. That must come first. May we, on this Holy Family Sunday, appreciate, anew, the Lord's right and just call to be the centre of every family. In humble family bonds the Trinity Itself can sing through our hearts.

## 2.

In the Gospel we are presented with two opposing responses to God's prophecies and to His Light.

Herod the king and those who form his set are troubled by the arrival and the questions of the wise men. The Greek word for troubled, and its Hebrew equivalent, is to be terrified and agitated. This is a fearsome moment for them; it reveals much that is in their minds and hearts when faced with the Lord's unchanging will.

Their response, with the wise men's, points to there being, in the final analysis, two sorts of humans, the final judgement of which only the Lord can make definitively. There are those who say to the Lord, "Your

will be done," and those who say to the Lord, "my will be done." Ultimately there is no grey. During this life, the Lord never ceases to invite us back to His will. And from us, He requires true contrition and sincerity in following Him. He will do the rest, He will purify and heal us, making us fit for His glorious Heaven.

Saint Matthew quotes only two sources of Scripture to show that the Birth of Jesus is indeed prophesied: Micah regarding Bethlehem - the place; and 2 Samuel regarding the eternal Shepherd from the House of David. But, there are others: in Numbers, the Gentile prophet Balaam is ordered to curse Israel by the Moab King Balak, but he cannot. Indeed, he delivers this prophecy: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." Our Psalm, too, delivers a prophecy regarding Gentile kings coming from foreign lands to worship the Lord. And Isaiah prophesies wealthy travellers from foreign lands coming with particular gifts to worship the Lord.

These texts would have been known to Herod and the ruling Judaens, and sages, too, from other lands. Furthermore: the Greek texts of the Hebrew, the Septuagint, had been translated some three centuries before Christ, thus extending the scope of God's teachings to those way beyond Israel. The Lord has truly come for all nations and the wise long for the true God.

Herod and his political leaders are glued to their earthly power, to their domineering egos, to a closed understanding of the gift of life, they are blind to the risen glory of the Lord, terrified of being changed by the Great One, of being humbled in the presence of the I AM WHO I AM. In the next few verses in Saint Matthew's Gospel we read how king Herod planned the murder of the baby boys in Bethlehem, who were born at the same time as Jesus. Herod believes, at some idiotic level, that he can thwart God's prophecies. Truly, great stupidity can lead to great wickedness. His actions fit the prophecy from Isaiah: "for behold, darkness shall cover the earth."

The Three Kings are the reverse. Their openness to the Lord, their pure disposition to rejoice exceedingly over the holy star is edifying and healing. In the humility of the wise, they grasp that God calls all to Him, and they are willing to travel any lengths for Him; with everything else in second place. They are longing to drink from the Spirit, Who, as Saint Paul teaches, is for all who will receive Him.

Everyday we are free to follow the Star to Life. The Three Kings graciously chose to follow Jesus, guided by the Spirit. We are free to do the same. The glory of the Lord has arisen upon us. It is with our eyes, hearts, minds, and souls, that we must see His Light. We, too, must make this journey.

**3.**

In the past few weeks we have opened our hearts and minds to the holy Birth of the Baby God; we have honoured the Holy Family at the Crib; also Mary, the Mother of God, at Jesus' Circumcision, eight days after His Birth; and we have rejoiced exceedingly at the Gentile wise men, the magi, who travelled so far - guided by the Holy Star - to worship God in the flesh - Jesus Christ. These celebrations gaze at the God Who comes to save.

And one week later we are celebrating the Baptism of the Lord, Jesus is now thirty years old. We ask ourselves how we have arrived so quickly at the Baptism of Jesus? An answer can be grasped by looking at the Epiphany. Listen to the antiphon for Evening Prayer on the Epiphany: "Three wonders mark this day we celebrate: today the star led the Magi to the manger; today water was changed into wine at the marriage feast; today Christ desired to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation, alleluia."

The Church, in choosing to place these three historic events together, is interested in their meaning, in teaching truth, and chronology, at times, is put into second place.

In this antiphon for the Epiphany, three historic events are to be considered together: the Magi coming to the Son of God; the wedding feast at Cana when the Son of God turns water into wine; and the Son

of God being Baptised in the River Jordan. Indeed, next Sunday the Gospel is the Wedding Feast at Cana. So the importance of the Epiphany is to be felt over three weeks.

These historical events are signs of God's power coming to save us by the glory of the Cross. One of the Magi brought myrrh, used for embalming bodies for burial; this points to the Cross, the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice for all nations. The Baptism of Jesus - greeted with such rejoicing from His Father and the Holy Spirit - is the sign when Jesus willingly accepts the beginning of His public ministry, His ministry to all nations and the entire cosmos, which will culminate in His saving sacrifice upon the Cross for all. The Wedding at Cana, where Jesus was originally only a guest, reveals that He is the actual divine Bridegroom, bringing the wine of God's blessing for the heavenly Wedding Banquet. We attend the eternal Wedding Banquet in the grace of Jesus, through the Cross.

Jesus - the sinless Lamb - did not need to be baptised. What is called the Baptism of Jesus is really the Baptism of all creation by the Son. He serenely chooses to become totally bound to saving creation, to offering salvation to human persons by publicly committing Himself at His Baptism - He is the true Shepherd prophesied in Isaiah, He is the true Bridegroom revealed at Cana. No wonder the Father and the Spirit rejoice in the Son, for here the Way to glory for all creation is offered

by Jesus. Under natural waters He commits Himself to us and so fills the waters with the Holy Spirit He comes to save.

The Psalm chosen for this Mass ends with, "you send forth your spirit, and they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." Isaiah also speaks of the Lord making creation ready for the Lord, to receive the eternal Shepherd, Who will gather His lambs. John the Baptist knows deeply that Jesus is Lord, from heaven, and is stunned at such humility that comes down, for us, to be immersed in the waters of a darkened creation. But Jesus is the saving Light, Who comes to save. His Baptism is thus a gift of glory, how do we honour such a gift?

#### 4.

Christianity is the fully revealed religion from God. Revealed means that it is essentially given to us from heaven. We do not make it, we do not decide how the Lord should be, no, He, the Lord, comes to teach and save. Complete and perfect. Radiant and risen. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb 13:8). It is only in the risen Redeemer, Whose Light is eternal - thus totally eclipsing the created light of our phones and iPads, which can so easily distract us from facing our innate need for the perfect love of God - it is only in the risen Redeemer that every human, who has ever existed and will ever exist, is able to find the utter goal and wonder of our souls. The dazzling Gift has been revealed it has been given and is given. And so all the readings



exhort us to discover anew, with greater adherence, that our hearts and minds have, first, been created to know, love, and serve the Lord in this life and in the wonder of the next.

Saint Paul to the Corinthians describes Jesus as the first fruits. A deeply Biblical term. What does this mean? In Exodus and Leviticus we find instruction that Israel was to offer the first fruits of a harvest, including sheafs, grain offerings, wine, oil, and an unblemished lamb. These offerings would be sacrificed in faith that the Lord would, indeed, then bless the entire remainder of the crop, the entire forthcoming harvest.

Jesus, then, is the true First Fruits, Who, in the power of His resurrected glory, is the promise, the prior-radiance of all the redeemed at the final harvest at the end of created time. Jesus, as revealed at the Resurrection, is the future life for all humanity and all creation: He is the Way to glorious Life; hence, He is Truth. We do not create our way through self-help books, or by a pick and mix mentality. Jesus is the given splendour, the unchanging truth that every human has been created to know, love, and serve, and thus find total fulfilment and flourishing. We are to be changed by Him.

Because Jesus knows Who he is, He is emphatic in His teaching that we must follow Him. Jesus commands us to call Him Lord, He commands us to obey God's Commandments, He commands us to sin no more. There is total clarity and radiance here. In the Gospel today,

from Saint Luke, Jesus preaches His Beatitudes. The Beatitudes point to the hearts and minds of persons who are becoming, rightly so, more and more focused on He Who is Life and so healthily detached from passing things. Saint Paul has these helpful words to say to the Philippians, "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him" (Phil 3:8-9). The essential light behind the Beatitudes is good detachment. Nothing must be placed above the revealed gift of Jesus Christ. Every member of every family constantly needs to discover Who Jesus is. Sunday is the Lord's Day of His gift and radiance for all.

Saint Ambrose of Milan, the fourth century Bishop, who also baptised Saint Augustine, saw in these Beatitudes the importance of practising the Cardinal Virtues. Temperance - freedom from indulgence in things - is found in the blessed poor; Justice - an active response to the dignity of all persons - is found in the blessed hungry, for they share what they have with others; Prudence - the right use of things - is found in the blessed who weep for the misuse of the Lord's creation; and Fortitude - the strength to carry on through storms - is found in those who, even though reviled, worship and follow the eternal and sacred Son of God, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. The gift has been given, Jesus pours out saving grace, He is the First Fruits, how are we being changed by Him?

"It is the Lord who forgives all your sins, who heals every one of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with mercy and compassion." These words are taken from today's Psalm. It continues with similar words, "He does not treat us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our faults. As far as the east is from the west so far does he remove our transgressions".

This Psalm, a Psalm of David, written some 1000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, teaches and prophesies, that the Lord will do something so tremendous, and that His actions will vastly exceed the limits of our own natural powers: we will rise from death, from the grave. This thing that the Lord will do will utterly eradicate all our transgressions as far as the east is from the west. Do we see how perfect, how epic this is? Every sin of every man and woman will be removed.

The pivotal and central act of the entire history of the universe is Jesus' atoning act upon the Cross. Jesus suffering and dying upon the Cross, out of divine love, is the atoning key for all creation. How is it that this one act of Jesus is able to cause such gifts, such renewal: the rising from the graves, the complete healing of every open human heart?

Saint Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*, which he started in 1265 and was left unfinished at his death in 1274, devotes the third and last book solely to Jesus Christ. In considering how Jesus atones for all sin he raises three points. The first: as Jesus is the God Man, this means

that everything Jesus does and says is inseparable from God. The infinite dignity and value of Jesus dying on the Cross is thus superabundantly able to atone for every sin and still have gallons more grace, like the Wedding at Cana, for His value is infinite. The God Man.

The second aspect of Christ's limitless power to atone for all sin is found in His divine Charity. For into the reality of human disobedience to the Lord; human lack of justice toward God and others; and human lack of compassion, Jesus freely, obediently, and lovingly pours out His Life-Blood, His eternal compassion, from His burning Sacred Heart into this vast abyss of human failings. And in His Spirit, divine love heals, it is the renewal of all creation, of every human. Jesus' love heals and calls us to a new joyful obedience.

In the reading from Samuel, David reveals how his mind and heart were, at that time, truly open to the promptings of the Spirit. He obeys the Lord's will. And Saint Paul to the Corinthians teaches how it is the Spirit of the Lord Who will raise us from the grave, the Spirit is Jesus' love at work.

The third aspect which Saint Thomas Aquinas refers to is the intensity and greatness of Our Lord's willing suffering and grief on the Cross. Jesus, in His divine human knowledge, could see at once the full extent of all human sin and thus knew such sorrow, such mourning for us. And His grief in love, His contrition on our behalf heals open hearts

who will receive Him. And so in the Gospel we are taught by the Lord to offer His limitless compassion to our enemies, to those who wrong us. Whatever the right judgments might be, our final word must be that in Jesus, in His charity, everyone is offered divine healing by which all transgressions can be removed as far as the east is from the west. Jesus' atoning divine love on the Cross is the source of all new life. May we turn to Jesus and discover anew the loving power of the atonement which His Cross has opened, for us, and for all peoples.

## 6.

Only by remembering from where we have truly come, can the right future unfold before us.

Jesus, in the Gospel, is on the cusp of His public ministry. He begins with an important defeat of the devil. Jesus' three victories are correcting the three failures of Adam and Eve. The Lord God originally set right limits for His beloved creatures, forbidding the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But then Adam and Eve saw that the forbidden fruit was good to eat; now Jesus, having fasted for forty days, would also have felt the desire to change stone into bread and eat. But where Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord God, Jesus has come to reject the father of lies and place the spiritual life higher than the bodily.

Next, Adam and Eve see that the forbidden fruit is a delight to the eyes, it would be desirable to possess, and they fall for the second time. Taken higher, Jesus, "in a moment of time," -which means that all the powers of the world through all time are shown in one view - Jesus, is offered all worldly power, He is offered possession of all creation for His own gratification. But no, His Father, from Whom He is eternally begotten, is Jesus' perpetual adoration and obedience. So Adam and Eve fell for the second time for the passing thrill of possessions, but Jesus rises to reject the passing in favour of eternal blessed communion with His Father.

Lastly, Adam and Eve sought to grasp the eternal wisdom of the Lord God on their own terms. The pride of this human act. And Jesus, now taken to the pinnacle of the Temple, is tempted to place Himself before the eternal generosity of His Father. Jesus is being tempted with self-centredness. But the Good Lord, will never put Himself before His Father. Saint Paul to the Philipians puts it like this, "he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Jesus is the perfection of obedience in love, the pride of Adam and Eve is now scattered.

Jesus, in the Gospel, is bringing each of us back to our first parents, from where we have truly come, to the Original Sin, then He invites us to new life in His victorious grace.

In the reading from Deuteronomy, we learn how the now vast Israelite nation is being oppressed by Egypt. And we see that the Lord delivers His people with wonders, a sort of Baptism in the Red Sea. They do not deliver themselves. Too, the chosen people were then tested, purified in the wilderness for forty years before being led into the Promised Land. Do we see how utterly we depend on the Lord to be saved?

The Lord God saved and purified His people to enter the Promised Land, a new life. The Lord Jesus offers to deliver us even further: He battles victoriously against the original sin, of Adam and Eve, our first parents to offer us, in His purifying grace, victory over sin and death, and life eternal. So today we see our roots, from whence we have truly come. Are we learning from them that we may now go forward in the Lord's power and love? Lent is the time to discover who we actually are, to discover our endless need of the Lord's grace, Who is the Life and the Resurrection. Jesus is our life and future. Are we ready to accept our utter need of His grace?

It is out of the abundance of the heart that each man or woman speaks. Those words: abundance of our hearts. They teach, that the heart is a place of great depth, depths which always remain an awesome mystery, a mystery of such beauty; for the human heart has been created for intimacy with the divine Sacred Heart of Jesus. We fail to understand humanity if we negate or deny the significance of the human heart. The heart always needs watering, the heart always needs a guide.

For Biblical writers the notion of mind versus heart is simply untrue. Some say, "my head says one thing, my heart another"; again, this is superficial and runs away from human maturing; it is a reductionist view in contemplating the wonder of being human. For Biblical writers the human heart, being more centrally placed in our bodies, is the meeting place for reason and emotion, where soul and body meet, encountering each other, and so where our motives are shaped, from where our longings emerge into something which reveals who we are. The abundance of our hearts will be heard and seen in all our fruits, moment by moment.

And the readings today focus on that most important part of every human person: the heart. Jesus, in the Gospel, with his catalogue of examples, teaches that a human person's heart is always following a particular path: for good or for evil. The soil of our hearts is very deep and the formation of our hearts is the true pilgrimage of this life, of which the Lord is taking and will take account. Jesus in Saint Mark's



Gospel says, 'What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts.'" The Lord Jesus speaks to awaken us from any complacency, to be open to the true fruits of our hearts and to act. Ponder on those great words from Saint Polycarp, "when you can do good, defer it not." Our hearts need to be alert to our choices.

The reading from Sirach, is just as pointed as the Lord Jesus: it is in a person's words, in his thoughts, in his reasoning that the truth of his heart will be revealed. These teachings from Jesus and Sirach leave us crying out, "but where, then, is the holy manure that can cultivate the soil of our hearts? Who is the Way by which we can begin to, as the Psalm sings, "bear fruit when we are old, still full of sap, still green?"

The true healing cultivation of the human heart depends utterly on divine gifts. The Law, as Saint Paul teaches, has shown us that we are, by ourselves, incapable of living in righteousness without divine assistance. Jesus' victory over sin, and its wages: death, was achieved in divine charity, flowing from His Sacred Heart, by which He floods humanity with His Spirit. The infused gifts of Faith, Hope, and Charity - bestowed upon us objectively at Baptism by the Spirit, thus sewing seeds, and confirmed and strengthened through the Sacraments - are totally efficacious in transforming our hearts, healing our wills. But God, the Lord, is not a magician. Because He loves us, He wills us to freely explore the transformation of our minds, our reasoning, our

emotions, in the abundant depths of our hearts, with Him as the true Guide.

The Psalmist sings as one whose heart is so rooted in the eternal goodness of the Lord, "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to proclaim your loving mercy in the morning, and your truth in the watches of the night." The Psalmist is freely turning his heart - the seat of his full dignity as a person - to the Lord at all times. May we discover anew the abundance of our hearts and open them to Jesus, the only true Shepherd.

## 8.

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," daunting words from the Letter to the Hebrews, about the necessary trials of faith. Growth in faith does require purification, entering into darkness where only the light of God will bring us into a new place. Ultimately it is the path of crucifixion to resurrection. We must pick up our cross.

Our response to the gift of faith needs to be tested and purified in holy fire. As human persons we can become caught up, enslaved even, in physical things, the only things that our modern empirical sciences can focus on. But there are deeper, truer sciences. Saint Paul to the Philippians is aghast that some of them are more focused on created things rather than our offer of eternal citizenship in heaven through Jesus.

As humans we are gifted with the spiritual powers of reason, of conscious understanding. These powers do not emerge from unconscious atoms or molecules, they are entirely different in essence from the rest of creation. And every human person can see that creation has been endowed with, has received laws, ordering, and beauty from One Who was before all creation. We humans are utterly and especially made to contemplate eternity, for it is our home; and faith is the purifying journey through which we begin to grasp, and rejoice, too, in the eternal Persons of the Trinity.

Abram, later Abraham, is a man who is open to having his faith tested and purified by God. It is with regards to the future gift of land that Abram is troubled. Abram has great faith in his offspring numbering as many as the vast array seen in the constellations, but it is in something physical from the Lord that he doubts. How about us? Does our response to the gift of faith doubt the promises of the Lord? Let us be honest.

Abram then, at the Lord God's instigation, falls into a deep sleep, in fact, he falls into dreadful and great darkness. Remember Hebrews, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." The halved animals and the fire and torch signify a binding covenant. The Lord God is leading Abram down into a new level of faith. A level which is,

at the outset, dark, deep, dreadful. We, too, must not run from such moments. These moments are purifying.

The Transfiguration is a gift from God, from Jesus, to strengthen the Disciples, Peter, John, and James, in light of the impending Crucifixion, that deep and dreadful test of their faith. Note again their heavy sleepiness. And when Saint Peter fumbles to contain the brilliant and staggeringly divine presence of Jesus in a tent, the eternal Father envelops them in darkness, in cloud, they are overshadowed. The Greek means terrified, full of dread. Yes, a time of purification. Remember, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

However, the psalmist sings with glistening faith, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; whom should I dread? Wait for the Lord; be strong; be stout-hearted, and wait for the Lord!"

For all, the gift of faith must be purified. Saint Peter writes, "so that the tested genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." This Lent, let us not avoid the holy darkness, the deep sleeps, even dread in the Lord, for this purification leads to joy, to living holiness. The Crucifixion led to the Resurrection. From darkness we are led to His eternal Light.

When we approach the Lord we must remove our shoes. What are some of the meanings behind this command from the Lord God to Moses?

To be shoeless has a prominent role in the Religious Life of the Church. There are some Orders which specifically identify with being shoeless or discalced, coming from the Latin word for shoe: *calceus*. There is a branch of the Carmelites who openly call themselves Discalced Carmelites; and many Franciscan friars and Trappist monks wear sandals instead of shoes. This undertaking reflects something of the vulnerability of Moses, who would now, without his shoes, not be able to walk wherever he chooses: for being barefoot we become aware of the fragility, the nakedness of human flesh. We are awakened to our limitations, particularly in the presence of the eternal God: the I AM WHO I AM. We need to remove our fancy footwear and layers of worldly armour, with which we clad our bodies and hearts, if we are to truly come into the presence of the eternal Lord God.

The Entrance Antiphon for this Holy Mass reveals the prayer of someone who is truly discalced in heart and mind: "my eyes are always on the Lord, for he rescues my feet from the snare. Turn to me and have mercy on me, for I am alone and poor." Hear how this soul acknowledges that the Lord rescues the humble feet and not the impenetrable army boot. Saint Paul to the Ephesians also envisages peaceful footwear: "Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of

truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace." And to the Corinthians, in today's reading, he warns anyone who is standing in their own self-importance, rather than with uncovered feet and humble hearts in the presence of the Lord. What are the layers we must remove?

In the Prophet Isaiah we read those joyful words, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns". There is something so innocent in these feet which bring salvation. And in the very next few verses we read of the One, Who, "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed."

Jesus' sacred feet were naked, his soles were sorely humbled when He carried the Cross, and wounded upon the Cross. Jesus' willingness to humble Himself before the Father is for our salvation. He is the teacher in humility. As the living Sacrifice, the naked lamb of God, He reveals the true emptiness of our pride, He demands that we remove our shoes, that we stand open before the Father in His sinless humility. And so, in His Spirit, we are to enter His Way.

In the Gospel, Jesus is exhorting those Jews who are present to discard any ideas about who is guilty of what. Rather He wants them to repent now, time is of the essence. They must remove their shoes, a metaphor for a hard heart. Jesus' parable of the fig tree taught the Jews that they needed to repent, they needed to discover the absolutely necessary nakedness and vulnerability in approaching the eternal Lord, the I AM WHO I AM. The fig tree is a prophecy regarding the actual historical destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem because of Israel's hardness of heart. Have we removed our shoes, are our hearts becoming truly intertwined with Jesus"?

## **10.**

During Lent we especially purify the heart. It is, therefore, good for us to go back to our roots, to Adam and Eve, for it was from their Original Sin that the human heart was profoundly wounded, and from which all subsequent history has been tainted. So by returning to our roots, we recognise the fragility of all human hearts, for the heart is the source of all our decisions and responses during this life: the heart. The heart needs to be healed, but how?

Salvation history is the Lord God revealing, through time, and with ever greater majesty, His eternal love and how He will save us. He promises new hearts to His faithful.

So, I would like to take the Gospel back to the start of the Bible, to our roots. The eternal Father, through His Word, has created Adam and Eve, and the angels. I will focus on just two beings, who I will compare with the two sons of the parable: Adam and the serpent. Adam, like the first son in the parable, wanted his share of God's riches immediately, and took and ate of the apple, as he hungered after the Father's wisdom, thinking himself equal to the glorious and divine Father.

As the son leaves the father, wanting to follow his own desires, so Adam must leave Eden, for he, too, preferred his own will to that of the eternal God. The son squanders the gifts lavished upon him both in body and in his heart, and, eventually seeing how low he has sunk, wishes to return to his father in a new way. Adam, before his departure from Eden, showed no repentance for his sin; but after the murders perpetrated by his son Cain, and by his grandson Lamech, both East and West of the Church have held that Adam, and Eve, deeply repented of their sins. This has been dramatically depicted in art. The icons of the East show Christ raising our first parents from their tombs, extending His arm to them, and in the West, Fra Angelico depicts Christ liberating them from hell, whilst the devil is trapped, comically squashed, in a ridiculous manner, under the door to hell.

In the Gospel, the other son has resented the authority of his father deep in his heart. And he detests his father's great forgiveness and generosity to his brother. Satan, like this other son, is full of rage, jealous that God



the Father has opened the gates of heaven in perfect forgiveness to all humanity, offering the healing of every contrite human heart through the Supper of the Lamb, the definitive Passover, the feast of rejoicing.

The first reading from Joshua reminds us how the Passover sacrificial meal was offered at pivotal times in the life of Israel. Here it is offered as Israel is about to enter the Promised Land. A new life is being gifted. Rejoice! Israel will be at home, at last, and will feast from the Land. For forty years they have waited, whilst the Lord was purifying them, preparing them. And in the Gospel, a great feast is offered with rejoicing: the father's son has repented, and returned.

The Passover and the feast in the Gospel teach us how God wants to bring us to new life with Him. He will supply the sacrifice, He will supply the gifts, and from us He asks for open and contrite hearts. And at the Mass we are offered more than a new life: we are offered heaven. Thus we cry, "blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb." Our first parents have come to the Lord with golden repentance; the first son, too, comes to his father with golden repentance; may we follow, and come to Supper of the Lamb with golden repentance, that we may become a new creation, as Saint Paul writes, with hearts truly being healed.

The value of the Mass. To believe in the great miracle that happens in every Holy Mass, the word of Jesus is more than enough. In fact, pay attention: "Jesus who said this is my body and this is my blood; it is He who said to a paralytic of Nazareth: take up your bed and go home; and the paralytic was healed immediately to the great amazement of all". Jesus who said: this is my body and this is my blood is He who said to the furious wind and the agitated waters of the lake of Galilee: stop; the wind and the waters obeyed promptly. The apostles exclaimed "who is this that the wind and the water obey? Jesus who said this: this is my body and this is my blood is the one who said to a blind man who was asking for alms at the gate of Jericho told him to get his sight back, and the blind man immediately regained his sight and began to follow Jesus praising God. Jesus who said this is my body and this is my blood is the one who at the wedding at Cana in Galilee said to the servants, fill these large containers with water and then serve the guests, and the water miraculously became wine and very good. The word of Jesus fulfills what it says: because Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus who said this is my body and this is my blood is the one who turned to Lazarus who had been dead for 3 days and said "Lazarus come out and Lazarus came back to life and came out of the tomb, with the uncontrollable emotion of the sisters and the people who had witnessed the miracle. We can continue with many other episodes in which the word of Jesus punctually does what it says. Because we are certain that in the Holy Mass the words of Jesus perform the miracle of making present on the altar the body and blood of Jesus, that is, the infinite act of love that

Jesus accomplished and this pulsating love becomes our nourishment, becomes the nourishment of the new life that was given to us in holy baptism "the life of infinite love."

## 12.

The prophet Isaiah gives us the Lord's words, "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

We are now in Passiontide. The veiling of all the statues has taken place. This hiding of the familiar robs us of comfort and pushes us toward the unknown. "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." The readings for this Sunday work on many levels, Christ's new things work on many levels in each of us.

The Gospel teaches that this dear woman had been caught in adultery, breaking one of the Ten Commandments, this is deeply damaging sin. The Law of Moses teaches that, with at least two witnesses, a stoning in this matter is legal. The power of Jesus is able to effect extraordinary healing in all. He can heal physically, but, too, He heals in the deepest spiritual and intellectual levels of our beings. Jesus never forces Himself upon us. He, as a Person, a divine Person, does look for our actual commitment to Him, as we expect in our other relationships.

Jesus commands the woman to sin no more. We know nothing of her past, her family life, her work. In Jesus she receives, now, true healing to go forward. Yes, memories and previous wounds will surface in her mind and heart. But Jesus' divinity poured into her will strengthen her, she will need to persevere in His grace. Jesus has not come to condemn. He has come to free those who long to be freed.

I hope that as a human family we can all see how damaging many distractions are to the growth and maturity of human souls. Our souls, our hearts are made for such limitless nobility and greatness, but we can and do become hijacked, enslaved by lesser goods and evils. With the endless chatter and 'feed' that our devices parade in front of us, we can and do forget that we are made in the image and likeness of God. This unfathomable greatness must come to the fore for each of us more and more often. The statues are veiled, we are to enter the wilderness where the Lord will open His way for us, rivers in the desert will flow.

Saint Paul, who, as a young man, was so deeply educated and fed by the Scriptures, presents himself to us as someone who is further on in the pilgrimage to Jesus than the woman in this life. Saint Paul, in answer to the Lord's question from Isaiah: "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?", is truly able to answer, "I press on towards the goal for the price of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ." Saint Paul sees with great clarity that many, many things must be put to a lower place if we are to become the new creation

to which Jesus is calling us. At every holy sacrifice of the Mass we exclaim, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

These are words that the woman would have felt, that Saint Paul would have felt; they are taken from the centurion's words from Saint Matthew's Gospel. And they are truly to become our words, too. The newness of Jesus is always dazzling. The Resurrection of Jesus is such newness that really we can say nothing but adore, to fall down in gratitude, to realise that Jesus does not condemn but commands us to walk in His grace without sin. "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

### **13.**

The Kingship of Jesus is both earthly and Heavenly. The Scriptures prophesy how the One from heaven will come to earth bringing living Salvation. Jesus's mission on earth is thus never merely an earthly affair, but is Heavenly, as prophesied in the Scriptures, working amongst us. Nothing that is created, whether of spirit, man, beast, or matter, can ever deflect Him from the ways of Heaven. And so we always look beyond the historical and visible events of Jesus's life for their deepest meaning, a meaning rooted in Scripture.

Jesus' heavenly mission is inseparable from Scripture. To understand Jesus aright, we must grow in our knowledge and love of Scripture. In the reading from Isaiah, one of the Servant Songs - these Songs' importance is integral to Holy Week - we heard the words, "therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame," these words are utterly fitting for Jesus as He enters Jerusalem in joyful peace, and as He prepares to be betrayed.

In the first Gospel, there are references to Numbers (19:2) and 1 Samuel (6:7), in the sense that the colt which is selected for Jesus had not been ridden before, this befits Jesus as the holy sacrificial Lamb of God and the eternal Ark of the Covenant. Then Jesus leaves from the Mount of Olives, as prophesied by Zechariah (14:4), on the coming Day of the Lord in glory, and further, from Zechariah, Jesus enters on a colt, "Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." The crowds who had travelled with Jesus, knowing intimately the Scriptures, cry out, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" from Psalm 118 (v. 26). The Pharisees try to stop the crowds from hailing Jesus as the Messiah. But no, for the Lord of the universe, of all creation, is present, and those who are humble do see it.

The great Psalm for this Mass is from 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is the response. This Psalm, whilst prophesying actual events which took place leading to and at the Crucifixion,

teaches us not how the Lord, how Jesus was forsaken by His Father, for that is impossible for God, Who is love, but rather, how Jesus takes on the words of this Psalm which describes the journey of a man from desolation to joy in the Lord, Who will deliver him.

Jesus, in the Passion narrative, refers to Isaiah, to a later Servant Song, when He describes Himself as being numbered with the transgressors. Too, in the presence of the elders, chief priests and scribes, and to their great disgust, Jesus refers to the Prophet Daniel, that He, Himself, is the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of the power of God. And at the moment when Jesus chooses to die, he cries out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," from Psalm 31 (v. 5).

In these multiple references to Scripture, and others, Jesus teaches that He is the fulfilment of Scripture. He is thus truly Heavenly. Promised. Peace. Too, we note, that Jesus never acts or plays with worldly or earthly power struggles. He is mocked, challenged, and beaten, but nothing that His fallen creation hurls at Him deters Him from being God truly in flesh, truly the Word made flesh, the key to all Scripture.

As we, again, enter into the celebration and passion of Palm Sunday, as we enter Holy Week, may our venerable liturgies, our listening to the proclaimed Sacred Scriptures, lead us into an ever deepening adoration and service of the Promised One, Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.

## 14.

When the resurrected Jesus had revealed himself to his disciples, and they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

This later Gospel passage from Saint John's Gospel teaches the imperative of love in Christianity. Jesus commands His Church to be built on and live in His love. What we do not see in our English translation are the different words chosen for love in the original Greek. Jesus, twice, asks Saint Peter whether he agapas Him, whether he loves him with a love which is sacrificial, unconditional, moral, and compassionate. And twice Saint Peter responds with I philo you. This word for love, philo, is used for friendly or brotherly love, for warm affection and kindness, it is less than agapas. So we see clearly here how the loving that Jesus commands is total - "he loved them to the end," as our Gospel this evening says. And the word for loved is



agapesas, the same root as before. The third time Jesus asks Saint Peter whether He loves Him, Jesus changes from agapas to phileis, the same root as Saint Peter had previously chosen. Jesus meets Saint Peter where He is at that time, and Saint Peter is heartbroken for knows that he must grow in Jesus's sacrificial love. Later, of course, Saint Peter will be transformed by the Holy Spirit to offer the Lord agapas love - sacrificial love - instead of philo love - friendly love. We see this when Saint Peter gives the gift of his life in love, pouring his life out in love for others, and after the manner of the Lord Jesus Christ upon a cross.

In the Gospel this evening, Saint John shares with us the washing of the disciples' feet. Saint Peter, here, too, is grappling with the depth of love which flows from God. The washing of feet was the job of a humble house servant. It was demeaning. Jesus teaches His disciples that if they are to share in His ministry of love: forgiving sins, healing, teaching, shepherding they must be like the servant Lord. They must share in His way.

Saint John is sublimely precise in his use of Greek. He uses the same verbs to describe Jesus laying down His life on the Cross and picking it up again at the Resurrection with Jesus, here, laying down his clothes, before the Washing of Feet, and then picking up His clothes after. The love, the agapas, which Jesus is teaching His disciples is that of personal sacrificial love which flows from Him, this brings the law of

Heaven, the law of divine love offered to the human family at the Last Supper.

During the Washing of Feet, the choir will sing 7 antiphons, the 7th is, "Let faith, hope, and charity, these three remain among you, but the greatest of these is charity." Charity is an English equivalent for the Greek agape. It sings of the truth of Who God is. The sacred Food we consume at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is Love Himself, eternal life, it is Jesus Who comes to teach us, heal us, shepherd us, and forgive us. He comes, Love comes to show us how to do likewise. We are made to grow, flourish, and serve in the agape, the actual love of Jesus Christ. The love of God truly dwells within us.

## **15.**

The Great Vigil Mass of Easter offers us a pilgrimage of inspired readings to lead us into the life of the risen Christ. On starting a pilgrimage we consider the route, and we limit what we will travel with; we put aside some of our usual supports and comforts during Lent in order that our hearts and minds may be widened by the supernatural gifts the Lord gives to us.

The first reading from Genesis takes us to the great test of Abraham's and Isaac's faith. For here, at last, is the long awaited, beloved son, Isaac; through whose progeny the Twelve Tribes will be born. And

Isaac has such sweet faith in his father, as he carries the wood on which he will lie, and Abraham has unshakable faith in the Lord to supply the lamb. What is central to the story is faith in the Lord. For it is through faith that we become sons and daughters of Abraham, not by blood. Jesus, in Saint John's Gospel, teaches that to be a son or daughter of Abraham is not about physical lineage but through faith in the all glorious Lord.

The second reading from Exodus teaches us to have hope in the Lord, Who can achieve such great signs of power. For if the Lord can perform such wonders then what will He do for us at the end of this pilgrimage? The sheer spectacle of the wonders in Egypt, and now the parting of the Red Sea, would have filled many of the Israelites' hearts and minds with a new brilliant hope. Here, a people, against all odds, were delivered with supernatural magnificence. The Lord has called a people to be His very own, the Chosen People. Why would the Lord dazzle them with such glory if not to bless them? What hope must have risen within them?

The final Old Testament reading from Isaiah is a celebration of the Lord's eternal love that will especially flower through the everlasting covenant He has made with the throne of King David, the, "sure love for David." This love is open and bountiful, it is for all who will incline their ears to the Lord; to His Heavenly ways and thoughts, which are

not ours. The reading speaks of a love which is unstoppable for those who assent to receive the ultimately joyous word of the Lord.

In our three readings from the Old Testament, we note the presence of signs pointing to what we call the three Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Love. Our true forefathers and mothers in faith were men and women who would have known and experienced aspects of these Virtues. But now in Christ they are offered and given in their fullness for it has been revealed that in the risen Jesus Christ all the virtues for their goal in Him, when this earthly pilgrimage draws to an end.

Supernatural Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus leads us to rejoice, for no suffering, even death, can ever have the last word, ever separate us from Jesus. Faith in Jesus is the healing of our entire person, He always leads us up to new realms, where there is no room for dull cynicism. Supernatural Hope springs from Faith, for Hope is the growing excitement of Jesus's promises to us. In Jesus our hope becomes so exalted, ecstatic. We see glimpses of this hope-filled glory in the beauty of our churches, in our worship, in holy lives. Supernatural Love is eternal. It is communion in the very life of God. The heart that was pierced now bathes us in the loving joy of the Trinity. And let us rejoice greatly, for Faith, Hope, and Love will be poured into our friends, who are to become, this very night, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us, then, strive to live in the new life which pours from Christ Jesus our Lord, Who is risen from the dead. Alleluia!

## 16.

For the Resurrection of Jesus to have the great impact on our hearts, minds, and lives, that it deserves, we must be prepared to truly engage with the meaning of Jesus rising from the dead. There are objective facts which point to the Resurrection - the Roman guard stationed outside the tomb, guarding under pain of death; the empty tomb itself; the immediate proclamation of the risen Lord by Christians; and the complete willingness of all the disciples to bear witness, even unto death, to Jesus's Resurrection. The Resurrection of Jesus is the single most important event that will ever happen in the universe - for what is supernatural has recreated what is natural - but are we open to grasping this? It is not a magical phenomenon, or a fancy worldly event, but an act of the eternal God, Whose purpose is always to bring us, we, the most beloved of all His creatures, to salvation, to Heaven. Resurrection and Salvation are inseparable.

Saint Luke's Gospel gives us the account of a poor man named Lazarus, who after dying, is by the side of Abraham in heaven, whilst the rich man, following his death, is in hades, in torment. And Abraham delivers this teaching, "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.'"

This teaching from Saint Luke's Gospel reveals that men and women must possess an openness, a humility to God, if they are to believe in a meaningful way, in a fruitful way, in the Resurrection. Repentance is an unavoidable step to friendship with God. For when a man or woman truly believes in the eternal sovereignty of the Lord, they will, indeed, by the manner of their lives, reflect something of the charity, the eternal goodness which flows from the eternal Lord, Himself, to others. The rich man in the Gospel never concerned himself with the poverty or plight of Lazarus, even in hades he still never addresses Lazarus personally. His heart had become so irrevocably deformed.

But how are the Saints, from our Gospel today, growing in the other-worldly authority of the Lord Jesus's Resurrection? Our patron, Saint Mary Magdalen, the Apostle to the Apostles, runs to tell the Apostles that the tomb is empty; we see that she is unsure, shocked by what Jesus's absence could mean; we also recall how she remained at the foot of the Cross whilst the Lord freely gave up His life. She did not flee. Saint Peter, on the other hand, had deserted Jesus and denied him three times. Indeed, in our Gospel, when Saint Peter arrives at the tomb we are told that he focuses on the externals, the position of the different cloths.

Saint John, the other disciple; however, is different. First, we recall how it was Saint John who rested his head on the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Last Supper. Saint John, too, like Saint Mary Magdalen, remained at the foot of the Cross. Here, when Saint John arrives at the empty tomb, he waits out of deference to Saint Peter, as the Prince of the Apostles, but when he enters this most holy of all sites, he saw and believed. He, too, like Saint Peter noted the physical, the external present but immediately his heart, his humble and repentant heart, was led by the Holy Spirit to believe that Jesus had gloriously risen. Where are our hearts? Where does each of us need to change in our lives? On this most glorious and holy day, let us not be fearful or coy. Let us turn to Jesus, Who is the Resurrection and the life, today and forever.