

1.

The first words of Jesus in Saint Mark's Gospel are, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel". At the heart of Jesus' message is the need to repent; let us not have a narrow view of this saving word. The Greek word is metanoeite, which means to change one's mind, to change the inner man. At the heart of the Gospel is the call to be changed from the roots, radically, from the Latin, radix. And we all need to be radically changed. Why? For Jesus is the goodness and purity of heaven, God's way is Jesus. We all sense, surely, our need to be made holy.

To say that Jesus is heaven must prompt us to listen to Him. Jesus calls Himself the Bread from Heaven. He is a divine eternal Person, Who, in such mercy, condescended to take on our human nature and flesh; to heal it, perfectly, and then take it, glorified, to heaven. Our whole person needs to freely recognise the sublime holiness and goodness of our heavenly Lord and that we long for Him.

There is also nothing complacent in Jesus. Jesus has come to call us to change. Ponder upon His words from Saint Luke, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!"; or, from Saint Matthew, "if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell". He challenges us in case we only

listen to Him with one ear, or with a sleepy eye, barely open, or with a heart that turns to Him for a while and then turns forgetfully back to stuff. By learning to open ourselves to Him constantly, He will effect the wonderful and necessary purifying change.

In the Gospel today, Jesus says, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it". A call for clear change, for metanoeite, for joyful repentance. Repentance, change, is the path to one's mind, heart, and indeed body being made holy, whole in grace from heaven. Here is the true path of joy.

Jesus comes with heaven which is so different from this earth. He wants us to know Who He is, "but you", he asked, 'who do you say that I am? ". Saint Peter answers the Christ. Here Jesus realises that they do not understand Who and What the Christ is. The Christ, the Anointed One, is not here to bring an earthly rule to the Jews against the oppressing Romans. That is man's way, not the eternal Lord's. No, Jesus comes to divinise us. He comes to teach us Who He is, and that we must be changed by Him for heaven is His victory alone over sin and death. Do we see with shimmering joy, the glory of Who Jesus is?

Jesus, in mentioning His Death and Resurrection, reveals the path by which heaven is only made possible for us. The first reading, from

Isaiah, is taken from the collection known as the Servant Songs. The climax of these Songs refers to the One Who will give His life for the salvation of the many, "He was despised and rejected by men; But he was wounded for our transgressions; and with his stripes we are healed". That God would do this for us, reveals such joy in God, we are made to be changed by this invitation for ever, from glory into glory. May we so repent, so be changed by the risen Lord Jesus, that we act as torches, as beacons for others. A burning faith in Jesus will change us, will make holy our every thought, word, and good work. Come, Lord Jesus.

2.

The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus is heavenly medicine for every soul, heart, mind, and body.

Last week we heard the first of three times, in Saint Mark's Gospel, when Jesus prophesies His suffering and rejection, His death, and that He will then rise again from the dead. You remember how Saint Peter ignored Jesus' incredible rising from the dead, but just wanted to shield Jesus from the suffering and death. And Jesus, very sharply, told Saint Peter and the disciples that they were blind to God's way.

The disciples failed to grasp, to ponder how Jesus' suffering and dying, and then incredibly rising from the very dead was necessary for His

saving mission. The suffering and death of Jesus reveal that God is willing to enter, to carry our darkness, our sin, and shatter them on Easter morning. The extent to which we therefore open ourselves to Jesus Christ in this life will affect our sanctity, our becoming saintly, even now.

In, at least, four texts from the Old Testament, there is a prediction of the suffering of the Just One: read Zechariah 12, our first reading today from Wisdom, Psalm 22, and most powerfully Isaiah's seventh Servant Song. All these texts, which would have been so well known to the disciples, were not truly understood by them, they did not grasp how the suffering, dying and resurrection of Jesus is necessary for their being saved, redeemed, made truly healthy for heaven.

Here, this week, we have the second time that Jesus predicts His suffering, dying, and rising from the dead. And, again, the disciples fail to understand what Jesus is teaching them. This teaching is making them feel uneasy, afraid. Are they beginning to sense that following Jesus will demand as much as Jesus is giving to them; His very self?

After this prediction, Jesus took a little child to Him. A child at the time of Jesus had very little status, many did not survive until adulthood. A child is totally dependent upon his or her parents and family. A child knows that his or her parents have the final word. A child's heart and mind is innocent, is open to being taught, is open to trusting. This is

how we need to become. Jesus in Saint Matthew's Gospel says, "Truly, I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

We need to understand, to grasp, that Jesus' suffering and death is to secure, to merit for each of us a new heart and mind, a heart truly fit for heaven; the Spirit begins that work now. The second reading from Saint James is explicit in describing the woundedness, the murky ambitions, which are found in every human heart. Jesus, in the Gospel, holds an innocent child in their midst because He knows that the disciples' hearts are full of their own ego-dramas, rather than being open to the purity and outstanding beauty of His Sacred Heart.

Jesus suffered, died upon the wood of the Cross, and rose, to offer each of us the only remedy for every sinful thought, every sinful deed, every sin of omission; He entered into death and suffering to defeat our hopelessness. The grace of Jesus, the Victorious One, is the only medicine truly able to heal every open heart in every situation, and then lead it forward. His grace purifies; His love is the treasure. Only made possible to us through His suffering, death, and resurrection.

3.

Gifts. We receive gifts from the Lord. How we recognise and honour our gifts is the heart of every human life.

Whilst every other physical creature finds its purpose in life by merely responding to its surroundings, we are so different. Every single one of us is created to be changed, transformed by Beauty. We are created to be astounded by the rational order of the universe. And by examining creation, with the divine spiritual gift of reason, we discover staggering design, which necessarily points beyond itself to the Creator.

We, humans, are created with a longing which can never be truly satisfied by any physical object, any possession, by wealth, even by loved ones. Our hearts and minds are only truly fulfilled, only find their goal in the eternal Lord, the Lord Who is the Author and Sustainer of all creation. And we have been gifted with reason, understanding, will, and passions first and foremost, to choose Him, to find utter joy in Him. Our rational souls are gifted that we might know the Lord.

But, we see, in studying human history, that men and women have not honoured these gifts for which they were created - to cherish reason and knowledge with humility, to serve in gratitude, to be willingly transformed by God's love. Holy Scripture teaches a first historic human sin, an actual moment in history which has had an irreversible consequence for all creation. Indeed, we all recognise within ourselves a wound, a propensity to turn away from the Light of God. The reading from Saint James speaks of people who have become so enamoured of, so bound by wealth, power, and its trappings, that they have become

wickedly indifferent to others, to their fellow brothers and sisters in the one human family. How we see this wounded heart in our world today.

In both the readings from Numbers and the Gospel we see how Joshua the son of Nun, and the Apostle, Evangelist, and Beloved Disciple Saint John, both of whom will become such great and holy leaders, are, at this point, envious of God's gifts being shared with unapproved others; the wounded heart again. They fail to see that God's gifts are essentially a call to bring the human family together for God. Wealth, intellectual gifts, strength, beauty, in whichever ways we have been blessed, these are not meant to lower our gaze from God, to preserve our own comfort, no, divine gifts are for all and for His glory. God comes to us freely with His gifts, the greatest: Jesus, in Whose suffering, death, and Resurrection we lift up our hearts and minds to be truly healed, gradually.

The Gospel continues with Jesus then emphasising to His disciples that they are to focus less on how others act, but rather whether they, whether we, are truly acting responsibly with the gifts that have been bestowed upon us. The Lord asks each of us whether we are encouraging the young to truly grow and discover the most important gift: faith, which is a gift from heaven. Jesus is truly stern in making each of us aware of our responsibility to encourage little the ones by holy living.

May we see that the crowning gift is to live in Jesus' redeeming love. We are blessed with reason and will to dedicate ourselves to this highest call. Saint Paul, so aware of the call made to each of us, writes to the Romans, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen." Are we living our gifts from the Lord with truly open hearts and humble obedience?

4.

We are all called to marriage. The Lord Jesus refers to Himself as the Bridegroom. A bridegroom comes for his bride. Marriage is a central theme throughout the Holy Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Marriage is the ground of our relationship with God: the Mass is a wedding banquet, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb" - the supper of the Lamb is the eternal wedding banquet. We are to be purified by the love of the Bridegroom.

We need to wear the wedding garment of grace, which is woven for us at Baptism, and which we are to put on every day, particularly Sundays, until we are called to meet the Lord Jesus at the end of our days on this earth. We remember the importance of the wedding garment from Saint Matthew's Gospel, "and again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 'but when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you

get in here without a wedding garment?" And he was speechless". It did not end well for the false wedding guest. We are given the Bridegroom, Who makes a Marriage Covenant with us, sealed in His precious Body and Blood? How do we honour this Covenant? The Mass is Jesus keeping His vows to us, do we keep ours?

To appreciate marriage correctly we must begin with God. God is an eternal communion of Three divine Persons. In Genesis, when God is creating human persons, God refers to Himself as us, "let us make man in our image, according to our likeness." These sacred words point to the Trinity, us, and so teach us something about us humans, made in God's image and likeness. God is eternal unbroken relationships. And we are called to become like this; for husbands and wives, in a truly sacred way, it starts here on earth.

In the reading from Genesis, after naming all the other creatures man truly knows he is alone, and it is not good for-man to be alone, as he made in the image of God.

Holy Scripture teaches that men and women are of the same substance, that woman was fashioned by God, too. The joyous exclamation from Adam, "this at last is bone from my bones, and flesh from my flesh," is a covenantal bond, a bond of marriage. And Jesus' words in the Gospel teach us that it is God Who unites men and women. This is crucial. Marriage between men and women must be rooted in heavenly grace,

and in a child-like sweetness, as we see in the Gospel; for we had become unteachable, as Jesus says to the Pharisees.

The Original Sin of our first parents is at the root of Jesus describing the Pharisees as being unteachable, the wounded heart. And so we need the victorious grace of Jesus, Who for a short while was made lower than the angels to become, by His suffering and death, the perfect sacrifice. Now, in His risen glory, our hearts, minds, and bodies can become recreated, we can be united to God again, through the Bridegroom.

We are all called to marriage in His grace. Some to become one flesh, united by the Lord in His purifying grace, and to bring new life to children; some as single people preparing for the heavenly wedding banquet; some as sisters, nuns, as brides of Jesus Christ in this life, preparing for the heavenly Wedding Banquet. To be united with God, we all need the Bridegroom, Jesus the Lord, Whose love purifies us for the eternal wedding covenant. How are we honouring and following His sacred covenant of marriage with each of us?

5.

Wisdom is at the forefront of all the readings today.

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, we must reflect on the nature of being human. No other known creature can know who they are, or be so moved by beauty or repulsed by hideousness that a rational, conscious choice can then be made. No other creature can knowingly grow in understanding or, and this is on a supernatural plane, wisdom.

The question the man asks, "what can I do to inherit eternal life?" is truly human. The spiritual power of reasoning, understanding, and freely choosing - knowing oneself - does not come from any material atom or cell or molecule; what is spiritual does not originate from what is material. It is, of course, the other way round. From nothing material the Lord created the universe. And we humans truly share, participate in the gift of intelligence from the Lord.

The man senses a yearning beyond natural pursuits, pleasure, power, the things of this passing world. And rightly he asks the type of question for which ultimately we are created to ask? How often do we ask such questions? Do we, in our workplaces, in our interactions with others, witness to the reality, the demands of eternal life? Have we smothered the possibility of such questions by placing our hopes first and foremost in this world? Jesus has come from eternity and never stops teaching about eternal life.

The man is sincere in his quest for wisdom. The first reading from Wisdom shows how, at least at the beginning of his reign, King

Solomon desired, prayed for, entreated to receive wisdom from the Lord. The gifted king values wisdom above everything - thrones, sceptres, riches, jewels, gold, health; beauty, light - everything worldly. Such single mindedness, yet we understand him, for we, too, are made with this hunger, this yearning for wonder.

The reading from Hebrews teaches that the word of God -which here refers to both the Holy Bible and the Word of God, Jesus - are to be encountered in reading the Scriptures. The eternal Lord is so willing to teach us, to purify our every intention, but are we listening with our hearts?

Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French Catholic mathematician, physicist, inventor, philosopher and writer, speaks of humans needing to rise above merely their bodily, sensual desires, to the higher plane of the mind, the rational, and then, finally, to arrive at the heart, the very core of the human.

Jesus confirms this understanding in the Gospel. Our Lord engages with this man's desire for eternal life. Jesus confirms the Commandments, the fundamental, binding good laws from which we can flourish and become truly human. The man is able to see above the sensual, he is thinking, knowing himself rationally, but there it stops - the heart has not been flooded with divine grace. Has not learnt to love from the eternal Lover, Jesus. Listen to that line again, "Jesus looked

steadily at him and loved him." Jesus knows that this man is not ready to yet to open the innermost core of himself to God.

The disciples; however, are on the way, on the path to giving their all for the God man. They will sacrifice bodily comfort, they will allow their natural reason to be transfigured by Jesus, Whose love is radically moulding their hearts for eternal life. Wisdom for man utterly is rooted in Jesus.

6.

The Entrance Antiphon for this Mass says, "guard me as the apple of your eye; in the shadow of your wings protect me". In these holy words from Psalm 17, what is the psalmist asking protection from?

What does the phrase "the apple of your eye" actually mean? The Hebrew, from which this phrase originates, literally means, "the little man of the eye." This refers to the little reflection of ourselves in the person's pupils we are looking at; we are asking to be in the centre of the Lord's eternal eye. We are expecting eternal care from the Lord. But are we truly open, in every way, to receiving this eternal care?

"In the shadow of your wings protect me." Here we think of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings to protect them from danger; she, herself, will take on the suffering so that her chicks will be saved.

In both these examples we see that the human expects the Lord to guard us, to save us from real harm.

What is this harm, from which we need such powerful protection? In essence it is evil, both within and without, it is everlasting death, and separation from God. With Adam and Eve being banished from paradise to stop them eating from the Tree of Eternal Life and so remaining eternally in sin; with Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders ascending Mount Sinai to eat as invited guests in the presence of God before their horrendous idolatry with the man-made Golden Calf; and with Isaiah prophesying a new heavenly and eternal earth where all nations, who hope in the Lord, will live in peace and glory; and with the Prophet Ezekiel speaking of the Holy Spirit resurrecting from the dead the dead bones of the Israelites. In these few instances, and there are so many others, we see God's plans always lead to eternal life. Are we living in ways - emotionally, intellectually, physically - which are turned to receiving God's eternal and saving love?

The very first words from Jesus in Saint Mark's Gospel are, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel". We see that God is serious about His saving love. Isaiah's prophecy, the first reading, speaks of God's holy servant being crushed to justify us. We are truly the apple of the Lord's eye, He will extend the shadow of his wing to protect us from eternal death by dying for

each of us. How do Jesus' actions for us affect our daily choices, our actions?

The second reading, from Hebrews, reveals that this crushed Servant of the Lord, Jesus - because we are the apple of His eye, because His wing has covered us - has now taken with Him glorified humanity: flesh, heart, mind, and soul into heaven. Are we ready to understand, to fathom this glory for us, from the throne of grace? He wishes us to grow in this glory, to become Saints.

James and John, and the other disciples too, are wanting the glory and power of heaven but without understanding what divine love must accomplish. The cup, the Baptism to which Jesus refers is His suffering and dying for us. Unstoppable divine kindness. By acknowledging concretely how we truly are the apple of His eye, that the shadow of His wings protects us, let us ponder on how we are to grow in His holy grace? The last lines of Isaac Watts' hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, puts it like this, "love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." How are we learning to live in this divine love and encourage others?

7.

Living the Christian life, the Godly life, is impossible without supernatural gifts. By ourselves we cannot earn or merit them. Jesus

often speaks of heaven as a wedding banquet, how we must be invited by Him and wearing the right wedding garment.

The opening prayer implores the Lord to, "increase our faith, hope, and charity." These three gifts are necessary for a human being being made ready, being rightly vested for the eternal wedding banquet.

Faith, hope, and charity, in their fullest truth, are the Theological Virtues. They are divine gifts, from God alone. Without them life with God, for any human, is impossible. A true and right human life is necessarily supernatural. The human soul receives them objectively at Baptism and they can never be washed away. Divine seeds are sown; the life of heaven is planted. As with all seeds, they can be neglected, treated as unimportant. Further, God's gifts are not only confined to His Sacraments; however, He teaches that Baptism is the clearest way to receive the Theological Virtues, the gateway to true discipleship and, God willing, the eternal Wedding Banquet of heaven.

Faith. Faith has a bond with the spiritual gift of reason. The Theological Virtue of Faith helps us grasp, understand the Scriptures and teachings of the Faith. Jeremiah, in the first reading, knowing the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, knows that the Lord has always promised to save His people. Jeremiah's words here are extraordinary for his prophecy is given just before the destruction of Jerusalem. Bartimaeus, in the Gospel, cries out, shouts all the louder, "Son of

David." This declaration reveals that the blind beggar knows, has faith in the prophecies contained in the Scriptures, for in 2 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, and Psalm 89, the Son of David is prophesied to reign for ever. Bartimaeus, like Jeremiah, reveals the workings of the Theological Virtue of Faith.

Hope. The Theological Virtue of Hope, which springs from memories and wonders of the past, believes that, in the Lord, the future promise is one of complete peace and glory. Jeremiah is on the cusp of seeing Jerusalem, the true centre of the universe, destroyed; and yet, he is prophesying, in unshakable hope, a miraculous return. Bartimaeus has hope in the wonders of the Lord, that his sight can be restored. The disciples exhort Bartimaeus to courage. The Greek word - *tharsei* - refers to an emboldening from within. The Blind beggar is truly filled with the Theological Virtue of Hope, indeed he throws away his worldly support, his cloak. His Faith and Hope in the Lord is a divine gift.

Saint Paul to the Corinthians writes, "so faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." God is love, as Saint John writes. The love of God that we experience now will never pass away, but will be magnified in humility. Faith and hope, which guide the committed and obedient steps we take through the gift of life, will come to an end, when, God willing, we are granted a seat at Jesus' wedding banquet. But the love of God never passes away. And through Jesus

Christ the High Priest, by His sacrificial offering of Himself, Love Himself is given to us at Mass; Love is poured into us by His Spirit, at Baptism and throughout the life of the faithful and hope-filled disciple. Faith, Hope, and Charity, they are the supernatural air we must breathe, fill our lungs with, that we may, finally, and for all eternity, sing and worship the eternal Saviour and King, Jesus Christ.

8.

Every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation we recite the Creed: I believe in one God. These words flow from the Shema, our first reading, and Jesus, Himself, quotes it.

The Shema was to be said, flowing from the heart, at least twice every day by the Israelites, in the morning and in the evening. The very first word is, "Shema," which commands us to listen or hear deeply, a call to obedience. The very first word of the Rule of Saint Benedict, one of the pivotal texts for Europe from the middle of the 6th century onwards, is also, "listen", "obsculta". Adam and Eve did not listen with open, tender and faithful hearts, and from their first historical sin creation was wounded in such a way that the Lord's creation cannot heal itself unaided.

In listening, with the ear of our hearts, as Saint Benedict teaches, Moses then addresses who he is speaking to: Israel. Israel, the name is

inseparable from meaning one who wrestles with God, for it was Jacob's new name, after his struggle with the Angel of the Lord. So truly listening to God, and we are the new Israel, implies a wrestling with the Almighty, because of our wounded nature, our reluctance to truly obey the one eternal Lord. We must learn to listen with our hearts. How blind are we not to see the goodness to which we are called; oh, that we would discard Our cloaks and cry out like Baritmaeus, "Son of David, let me see again?"

We are told that, "the Lord our God is the one Lord." This word "one" is epic. He is the One, there is no competition, no other power Who is Lord, Who is God. Indeed, everything else, all creation, is but a footnote to God. Everything passes away, but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And we have been created to be in communion with the one God, a communion rooted in living and burning hearts, not sloppy or self-centred hearts, "you must love the Lord your God with all your heart". Let us be truly human then, and ponder in our hearts, which are the centre of who we are, like Mary, the Lord's teaching. Pope Francis in his recent encyclical - on the Sacred Heart of Jesus - speaks of the centrality of the heart in being human.

Listen to his words, "Yet living as we do in an age of superficiality, rushing frenetically from one thing to another without really knowing why, and ending up as insatiable consumers and slaves to the

mechanisms of a market unconcerned about the deeper meaning of our lives, all of us need to rediscover the importance of the heart."

In pondering upon the eternal, the complete and utter simplicity of the one eternal God, the Lord commands us to love Him with everything we are and at all times. The heart is crucial, for it is the meeting place of our reason, our thoughts, our understanding, and our physical desires, our urges. Our hearts must combine and wed these seemingly contrary experiences, in the love of Jesus' own Sacred heart. We, each of us, must evaluate whether we are following this divine Commandment to love the Lord our God with every part of our person. This is the absolutely necessary foundation from which everything else can only find its true place.

Even though our hearts have been wounded by the Original Sin and our own sins, we have, in Jesus Christ, the perfect living remedy; we have His Sacred Heart, that poured out its blood as the one perfect and saving sacrifice. Listen to the Lord our God in your heart. We sing "Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord". Let us mean that.

9.

Remembrance Sunday has its roots in the official ending of the First World War on 11 November 1918, when the armistice was signed near Compiègne, north of Paris. Every year since 1919 solemn gatherings

have taken place to remember and commemorate, especially, the sacrifice of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in all wars since the First World War.

That the human family should ever have had to resort to war, to the killing of our brothers and sisters from the one human family, is a sign of the deep woundedness found in the human heart, and of the wiles of the evil one, of whom the Bible and Jesus speak most clearly. From Cain and Abel to our present day, man's inability to respect God's gift of life remains hideously visible to all.

The Royal British Legion, which aims to provide life-long support for ex-serving personnel and their families, speaks of Remembrance as honouring those who serve to defend our democratic freedoms and way of life. This teaches that, at times, some wars are regrettably necessary: an aggressor, who imposes themselves destructively upon another state or people, needs to be repelled; the recipients of this unwelcome intrusion must defend themselves. And into this vile fray, the mess and unpredictability of war will deeply affect the moral decisions of all, and take the lives, from this world, of many souls.

It is, especially, at this Mass, that we pray for the repose of the souls of all British and Commonwealth servicemen and women who have died in service; and because the Lord Jesus is the Saviour of every human person, body and soul, that has ever been loved into creation by the

Lord, we pray too for the souls of all who have lost their lives in the scourge of human conflict.

In the first reading from Job, written about 1,800 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, we see one of the first instances where bodily resurrection is explicitly prophesied. We read that the Avenger of death will cause us to look at Him from our own resurrected flesh. Job speaks of an intimacy between the Lord and himself.

This prophecy of Job fills us with real wonder at the promises of Jesus. The bodily resurrection of each of us is the teaching of Jesus, and we pray it every Sunday in the Creed. Let us live with this wonder and so pray for the departed in war, that they may too know that their Redeemer liveth and that He will, on the last Day, raise their bodies to glory at the Final Judgement. The evils of war, the seemingly hopeless loss of life at man's unnecessarily cruel hands, is not the last word.

Saint Paul, that former killer of Christians, who now having experienced the risen and glorious Lord Jesus is, also, like Job, emphatic that in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, the human body is made for eternal life, for love eternal, and for bodily resurrection to see the Lord in glory for ever. May this hope permeate the very way we live? Guarding and cherishing faith in the eternal resurrection teaches that nothing in this life ever has the last word. It is the word of the Lord that endureth for ever.

In the Gospel, Jesus teaches that if our souls, which are the lamps, are oiled in His grace then He will know us. The more anointed we are by Him, the more awake we become, longing like Saint Paul for the living God.

The Psalm sings, "my head you have anointed with oil; my cup is overflowing". In all things the Lord will lead us through the valley of darkness. Saint Mary Magdalen, our Patron, anointed the feet of Jesus with precious oil, in response to the oil of the Holy Spirit which the Lord had lavished upon this great Saint.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, our prayers become as precious as the oil with which Saint Mary Magdalen anointed Jesus. Our prayers, illumined by grace, have true power to lead souls from purgatory to heaven in preparation for the final day of Resurrection, so pray we must for the departed. May we too, we who live in this world, value ever more devotedly the Lord of eternal resurrection, Who wishes to anoint us for the heavenly banquet. Let us stay awake for Him.

10.

"It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever, the Lord will reign for ever, Zion's God, from age to age." Love is the source of the Lord's eternal faithfulness and His eternal reign; love. How does He reveal this?

There is absolutely nothing that we can ever do to change the Will of the Lord, for He sees all history, every person, every deed, every prayer, in one view, all simultaneously; and it is in His eternal love that He will bring perfection to all things. When Job questions the Lord's ways, the Lord replies, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements – surely you know!"

The Lord alone is One. The Trinity, transcend all creation, transcend all worldly projects, and yet we, in the spiritual roots of our being, are made to know this eternal God. We are wonderfully made, partly material creatures, but our deepest, most important core is spiritual, is immaterial, is moral. It is our rational souls which animate our flesh, our bodies. Our souls are created uniquely by the Lord alone for Him.

Because God is unchanging, there is nothing we can do to ever change or destroy His love for us. It is there; and so the life and death question, the heaven and hell question is whether we will accept His love on His terms? We are created to love Him, ponder this in our hearts, we must. Have our hearts and minds become too deeply entombed in our own country's current worldly perspective to see that life is for God? Is a blazing work of the Holy Spirit waiting to erupt in each of us? The heavens and the earth is the Lord's, not ours.

We speak of the Lord as eternal and Love, and that is right. But how does He reveal His love? The other verses of today's Psalm speak of how the Lord feeds the hungry, upholds the widow, all these and more miracles we know from the Bible. They teach us that the Lord's love is indeed practical, concrete, historical. But the Letter to the Hebrews is higher, more sublime. Jesus' entrance into heaven is as the Lamb of God. This is crucial. For all eternity, He is the Lamb of God. And as the Father casts eternal adoration, in the Spirit, on His Son, on Jesus, the Father beholds our glorified human flesh, our glorified human blood, a glorified human soul; creation redeemed has been brought into eternity, into heaven. Jesus is the Way. And for all who actually welcome the wedding garment of Jesus' grace, keeping His covenant, they will be admitted to the heavenly Banquet. Yes, the Lord has revealed His eternal faithfulness and love.

The two poor widows in the readings both, in the face of impossible situations, reveal a willingness to be faithful to the Lord. The widow of Zarephath does not know who Elijah is, she is not Jewish, and yet she has faith in the great love of the Lord. The Lord knows this widow's love. The poor widow at the Temple, gives from all that she has, her faith, her love of the Lord is purifying for us. The Lord, too, knows her love.

We humans are created especially to know and be transformed by the eternal love of God, definitively revealed in Jesus. And so we are to

love the Lord our God with everything we are and in everything. Something both the women in the readings knew and tried to fulfil. Saint Therese of Lisieux, whose call was to become love in the heart of the Church, wrote "merit does not consist in doing or giving much. It consists in loving much." How are we growing in the love of the Lord, Who is faithful and reigns unto eternity?

11.

"In those days, after the time of distress, the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory; then too he will send the angels to gather his chosen with great power and glory." Jesus, in saying these apocalyptic words, refers to the Prophet Daniel.

Later in the same Gospel, the following dialogue takes place: "Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments, and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophesy!" And the guards received him with blows."

Again Jesus refers to Daniel. The book of Daniel is heady. It contains dreams, prophecies, and visions of the Apocalypse. "There is going to be a time of great distress, unparalleled since the nations first came into existence." Heady words. The word Apocalypse does not literally mean end times. But from the Greek it means the uncovering, the unveiling, the revealing; hence, we refer to it as Revelation in the Holy Bible. The Apocalypse is the final unveiling of God's kingdom and Jesus is, by His own words, Lord.

Jesus, in both the above quotations from Saint Mark, refers to Himself as the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. Jesus is telling the disciples, telling the high priest and the Council who He is and He refers to Daniel, listen to the prophet: " I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

As Jesus is declaring Himself to be this divine son of man, one in divinity with the Ancient of Days, the high priest demands Jesus' execution on grounds of blasphemy; for Jesus is proclaiming Himself to be Lord of all nations, of an eternal kingdom. Do we in our heart and mind bow down to Jesus as Lord of all nations?

In the book of Daniel there are also two sets of dreams which point to Jesus: Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a statue made of four materials and this statue is destroyed by a divine stone, uncut by human hands. Four kingdoms are destroyed by one which is both divine and part of creation. Daniel, too, dreams of four great and fearsome beasts, which are kingdoms, which, too, are destroyed by the Ancient of Days, and all dominion is then given to one Who is like a son of man - again a Person Who is both one with God and sharing in creation, like a son of man.

Jesus is claiming to be this Son of man. He is Son of Mary - part of creation - and Son of the Father - eternal divinity. He is the stone in creation, but uncut by human hands. He is one with the Ancient of Days and yet like a son of man, like us. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, and all judgement is His. May we truly discover in this life that to obey, to love, and to follow Jesus is the path to the eternal vault of heaven.

12.

The Solemnity today is of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. The glory of Jesus Christ's kingship is the key.

On this Sunday we read from the Prophet Daniel which prophesies the King of all creation, as a son of man, coming in glory and power. Jesus, in the holy Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, explicitly refers to Himself as this son of man, coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory at the final unveiling of the Kingdom of God. Our reading from the Apocalypse also refers to the eternal risen King, the Lord Jesus coming on the clouds in great power and glory.

These prophecies refer to Jesus coming again at the end of time in eternal glory, which He revealed at the Transfiguration. These prophecies speak of the gateway to eternity. Jesus is the First and the Last. The Alpha and the Omega. Eternal glory is essential to the kingship of Jesus.

The reading from the Apocalypse teaches us further aspects regarding the kingship of Jesus Christ. It says, "He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood, and made us a line of kings, priests to serve his God and Father." The Kingship of Jesus Christ, then, is also to lead His subjects, us and, indeed, all creation, into being made royal, being made holy. Do we permit our hearts to see how this is bursting with glory?

The readings today are relentless in their focus on the glory of the Lord, and how the truly faithful are to share in His glory. Think of the glorious artwork of the Counter-Reformation Renaissance period in Rome during the 16th century and beyond. Those painted ceilings which

disappear into infinity with Saints and angels being carried into glory upon glory. Glory and wonder are an inescapable part of friendship with Jesus. The glory which Jesus brings is divine love willing to die for our sins and then rising victorious above all created slavery, so that we may touch, may live in His glory and begin to be changed by Him.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of His Kingdom as not being of this world, not defended by earthly soldiers, this is to lead Pilate toward the eternal Kingdom in truth and wonder.

The Kingship of Jesus is the glory of the risen crowned Lamb of God. When we look at a Crucifix, when we hear the words, "Behold the Lamb of God", we are seeing Love. We are looking at those very living words from the Apocalypse, "He loves us and has washed away our sins with his blood." It is the unquenchable love of God which every human person must discover, for therein lies true Life. This is the challenge for society: how each and every person can be brought to Jesus' love; for in His risen Spirit, we are offered the glory by which we become truly royal and priestly - the required citizenship for heaven. We become fully human.

The human person who willingly welcomes the fire, the glory, the moulding of Jesus' love, is being made into a royal person, a priestly person. To become royal like Jesus, we must willingly receive His royal crown of holy thorns, we must pick up our cross in service of the Good,

the True; and to be priests we must then offer this royal way as a living sacrifice, body and soul, in His Spirit, and so share in Jesus' own eternal offering to the Father in the Spirit. This is incredible. It is in the very act of the Sacrificial Lamb of God that divine love reigns and heals all creation, now and for ever. So we implore the King to teach us how to be royal and priestly in His glory.

13.

We are at the beginning of a new year. A new year of praise, in which we are to learn how to serve and love the Lord with greater focus and simplicity. What are the holy resolutions that each of us has chosen this year, in this year of grace, in preparation for the Advent of the Lord.

Advent has a number of meanings. Not only does it mean the prophecy of Jesus' birth, and His coming at the end of time, but also the having already come, His being with us now.

In some ways this Advent begins where we have just left off. For on the past two Sundays we have had readings from the prophet Daniel and have reflected upon how Jesus refers to Himself explicitly as the Son of Man Who will come at the end of time and rule in glory and total sovereignty. And here in the Gospel today Jesus again refers to Himself as the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

So the Gospel reading for this first Sunday of Advent looks to the final coming, the Second Coming of the Lord. We are to stay awake for this, hence Advent is truly the right time to make holy new year's resolutions. To really take stock. What is more important? Football, gymnastics, other worldly activities on Sunday at the expense of the Mass? Have our hearts really become so weighed down, as the Gospel says, so inhuman, that we really think that this is right? Are we even telling the Lord how He should accept us?

Saint Paul experienced the risen glorious Lord, a great Advent, the Lord, in glorious majesty, touched Paul. Saint Paul had therefore experienced a great arrival of the Lord Jesus, and so is now exhorting the Christians in Thessaloniki to hold fast to the glory of the Lord now, for He is with us. Saint Paul is passionate in encouraging these Christians to keep their hearts and minds open to the utterly faithful Lord, for He has come, His advent is now, He has arrived. Yes, we receive Him in the Sacraments, in prayer, in repentance.

The first reading from Jeremiah prophesies the birth, the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Here Judah is in the midst of a terrible siege in Jerusalem, which will end in the destruction of the first Temple, and Jeremiah is prophesying a time when from the House of David a Saviour will come. In Scripture the prophecy regarding the coming of a great righteous Son of David is very clear. Think of Isaiah, "There

shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse" - Jesse was King David's father - or 2 Samuel, where the Lord says to Nathan, for him to tell David, "I will raise up your offspring after you, and I will establish his kingdom, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever." Jesus, through Mary and his foster father Joseph, is of the Davidic House, and, by His teachings, His miracles, has revealed that He is this prophesied, Righteous One.

So this First Sunday of Advent, we are preparing to celebrate the birth of uncreated Light in human flesh, as prophesied by Jeremiah. We are, with Saint Paul, too, deeply acknowledging that Jesus has already come. His Advent in our hearts, in our minds, and in our bodies is true, and so we must allow this living salvation to mould us, to make us holy. And we are preparing for the Advent of His Final Coming at the end of time, as in the Gospel. Jesus never changes, but this world and its phases pass away. Jesus never changes. We must learn how to place the anchor of our souls in Him. That is the greatest holy resolution ever and Jesus commands us to do this.

14.

"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.'" Isaiah's imperative words

are found in two of our readings today. Such is their importance. In Baruch we heard, "for God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God".

In Saint Luke's Gospel, Saint John the Baptist calls all to repent to meet the Lord, "As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways."

In these passages we read of the demanding work which must be done to prepare a way for the Lord: serious heavy digging and arduous moving of earth are necessary to level ways, to make paths straight. Real work, real change is demanded. Too, there is a concrete aspect to these words: Baruch is addressing directly the Israelites following their exile to Babylon and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, and Saint Luke is explicit in the historical time of John the Baptist. Scripture is placing these messages in the lives of concrete people. As concrete as any of us. The Collect prayer today also exhorts us to prepare a way for the Lord: "may no earthly undertaking hinder those who set out in haste to meet your Son". This Second Sunday of Advent is so focused on our response to Jesus' Advent, His Coming.

Heavy Digging, moving earth, and levelling ground, are serious metaphors for a substantial commitment on our part to prepare our souls, minds, hearts, and bodies for Jesus. The Scriptures are asking us to have a real detoxification. That majestic opening line from Baruch is so instructive, "take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on for ever the beauty of the righteousness from God".

Baruch is inviting us to acknowledge, to admit to the garments which we each of us freely put on every day which obscure the Lord, which dull our minds and hearts, and can lead to sin. Isaiah commands that we enter the wilderness of our hearts and minds to hear the Lord, to meet Jesus, from where we will be shown, from the inside, where we need to dig in our lives, where we need to make crooked paths straight by actual choices. Advent is the time to take stock, to continually turn back to the Lord. By turning back, we see how our minds, hearts, our souls are created for Him. He is more real than anything. This living treasure must be dug up and discovered with our hearts burning, it alone makes our paths straight.

Last week we discovered that Advent is threefold: The Coming of Jesus' Birth; His Coming at the end of time; and His Coming now in the Sacraments, in His glorious grace. So this week, as we feed on and drink from Jesus, in prayer, in Scripture at Holy Mass, may we then dig with a holy energy, move earth with pure good zeal, and thus make

straight roads to our hearts, that He may then come and reign more powerfully every day. Listen to His voice we must, "prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

15.

Advent is a joyous pilgrimage to the Birth of Jesus. Departing on the first Sunday we explored the three Comings of Jesus Christ: His Birth; His 'God-with-us-now' in grace, in the heavenly sacraments, leading us to; His Final Coming in power and glory. Foundations truly set for rejoicing.

Last Sunday we were then commanded by the prophet Isaiah, by the prophet Baruch, and by the last prophet, Saint John the Baptist, to, "prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." For as the Lord Jesus is with us now, it is then our turn to turn to the Lord, to make a straight path for Him by levelling hills and mountains in His grace, so that he can enter our minds, hearts, souls, and bodies. We need to make the paths straight so that He can come and rejoice with us!

And so this Sunday we are commanded to rejoice! For we have truly begun to make, guided by His grace, a straight path for the Lord to enter within. The crooked within each of us is, by His sublime grace, becoming straight, and so we listen to the Scriptures this Sunday with joy: "Sing aloud, O daughter of Sion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult

with all your heart!"; and "With joy you will draw water from the springs of salvation. Sing to the Lord for he has wrought wonders; let this be known through all the earth"; and "Brothers and sisters: rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." Now, this rejoicing is deep, alive, and active. Built upon the living Rock it must be; no storm can destroy it.

And so we must explore aspects of this rejoicing. As soon as Saint Paul commands us "rejoice in the Lord always" - always - he then writes, "let your reasonableness be known to everyone." This is crucial. True rejoicing in Jesus Christ is not irrational, is not cappuccino froth, is not a squeaky seesaw going up and down. Reasonableness, the capacity to assess and make judgements is spiritual and originates in and from God. And so true reasonableness can only truly flourish when it is open to its living source, its Creator, otherwise it only stays earthbound, becomes distorted, and ultimately false.

But our reasonableness does not rely on thinking alone. No, look at the lives and deaths of Saints Peter and Paul, which sing to us of the risen joy of Jesus Christ, Who has taken away the judgments against us, as Zephania writes; Peter and Paul rejoiced to die for Jesus, they rejoiced to die of Jesus. And Mary, the Blessed-ever-Virgin: consider Lourdes, Fatima, Knock, Guadalupe - such sources of concrete miracles, and thus for rejoicing. When we reason deeply, with both hearts and minds

willing to be pierced by sublime truth from heaven, deep joy cascades into our souls, and no earthly calamity can destroy this rejoicing.

A more recent example of this soul-deep rejoicing in Jesus can be seen in the life of Saint Titus Brandsma, a Carmelite Friar, who was killed by the Nazis in 1942. Titia, one of the so-called nurses at Dachau, who later returned to the Catholic Faith, explained at the Tribunal for his Canonization how he gave his rosary to her shortly before his death. She said how she laughed at the gift, that she could not pray, and did not need to, but still the dying priest persisted in telling her to pray. Titia told the Tribunal she would never forget the gentle face of the Carmelite Saint as the final lethal injection was administered to him. There we see deep, deep rejoicing in Jesus. "Do not be anxious about anything, " Saint Paul writes. May we, in this holy season of Advent, dare to let the eternal victorious love of Jesus fill our hearts, minds, souls, and bodies with the deepest longing to rejoice, always.

16.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent leads us to discover how the very Birth, and indeed, the very Life of Jesus is, in essence, cruciform, like a cross.

The Angelus, in our church, is rung every day, three times: 9am, noon, and 6pm. The Collect prayer, this Sunday, is the final prayer of the Angelus and this prayer is cruciform, it takes the form of the Cross.

First it considers the descent of the Angel, the descent of the Holy Spirit to Mary: the vertical beam, from Heaven to earth.

Let us now consider what the horizontal beam can signify. Time, space, creation all move forward as a single entity. The continuing history of the universe is a horizontal reality: time began and will cease, like a horizontal beam from left to right. It starts and it ends. And into this horizontal reality, the created universe, history, the eternal Son of God descends. But, He is fully visible, physical, and thus limited by creation: for Jesus is fully man whilst always remaining the eternal Son of God. Jesus is the meeting point between eternity and time; between He Who is uncreated and also created human nature. He is where the vertical and the horizontal meet. Jesus is in essence cruciform.

Back to the Angelus prayer. As soon as we have prayed the descent from heaven, the vertical axis, the prayer immediately mentions the Cross and Passion. The Cross and Passion are the horizontal axis. How? For God, by entering creation fully as a man, is then perfectly placed to offer Himself, in this one act upon the Cross, as the perfect sin offering for all creation, and rise as its eternal King. The intersection, the meeting of these two beams is the point from where glory, and peace Himself flows. Think of Celtic crosses: they have a perfect circle surrounding the meeting point of the two beams, accentuating the meeting point.

In the reading from Hebrews Jesus is the prepared Sacrificial Body, born by she who was in labour - as we read in Micah. No more mere lambs or burnt offerings, but now God united with His creation - Jesus the God Man. Further, Jesus has freely chosen to be the Sacrificial Lamb by His human Will. So imagine what the resurrected Jesus, by His Spirit given to us, can accomplish for our bodies and our wills. Because humanity - the horizontal - has been perfected and taken to heaven - the vertical - in the risen Lamb of God, we, in Jesus' Spirit, are, even now, being prepared for eternal glory. The prophet Micah speaks of a Ruler Who will be the strength of the Lord - the vertical. And that this Ruler will be born in a small village, as a small baby, part of history - the horizontal. The horizontal and vertical meet in Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel we see the cruciform plan in Mary and Elizabeth, for both these women are part of history, they are related to each other - the horizontal beam. But in their wombs are growing One Who is God and the other Who is filled with the Holy Spirit - vertical beams from heaven. Yes, Christianity is essentially cruciform. And what of each of us? We are a family, bound together by blood and friendships in time - horizontal; and we are also recipients of Jesus' grace from heaven - the vertical. In Jesus, by the meeting of the two beams on the Cross, creation is flooded with God's loving victory. And we, whilst living in the horizontal beam of history and creation, and, at the same time, filled with heavenly grace - the vertical - we are to bring Jesus' joy and light

to history, to creation, thus revealing that the Cross is, in fact, the Tree of eternal Life. We are truly cruciform in Christ.

17.

Listen to some words from the first reading: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, but you shall be called My Delight is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

We are here this evening to thank the eternal God, from the immeasurable depths of our hearts, for the birth of His eternal Son in the flesh - the Incarnation of God the Son. So you are; therefore, asking yourselves, why does our Mother, the Church, to whom we must listen, give us a reading, from Isaiah, about marriage? Why do we read about bridegrooms and brides when Christmas is about the Birth of the Son, the Birth of Jesus? Why not, for instance, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace," Why not this prophecy, also from the great Isaiah?

The reasons are wonderful. First, when you look at a painting of the Baby Jesus, when you look at the Baby in the Crib, what are we looking at? We are gazing at the wedding between heaven and earth. For Jesus is both fully God - eternal, outside of time and space, wholly spirit - and Jesus is flesh, with a human mind and a human soul. In Jesus both are fully present - behold the irreducible magnificence of Jesus. Truly, the greatest wedding is visible here in this little child. He; therefore, rightly commands our attention and obedience.

God enters fully into His creation, that means that the humanity of Jesus is fragile. The humanity of Jesus can suffer. God - eternal Spirit, without beginning or end, all knowing - is willing to be for ever united to - to be for ever married to - creation, a created human person. We must grasp the staggering humility of God to act like this. And here is the definition of love: He will give Himself totally for our true good. He will sacrifice Himself to offer us entry, to transform us, to heal us, that we may attend the eternal wedding banquet of heaven. The invitation is offered this very night, Jesus is the living invitation to heaven. How we choose to live is our response to His invitation.

The psalm for this evening speaks of the Lord's covenant with His servant David, "I will establish your descendants for ever, and set up your throne through all ages." Throughout the Holy Bible the Lord our God has established covenants: marriage with Adam and Eve, also with Noah, with Abraham, with Moses, with David, and finally through the

Son, Jesus. The unbreakable covenant of marriage between Adam and Eve in Genesis, finds its fullest meaning in the marriage between Jesus, the Bridegroom, and His Bride, the Church. And this is only possible because of what we celebrate today: God has united Himself to us, born in a manger, born in Bethlehem.

A guest at a wedding is always invited to eat. Bethlehem means house of bread in Hebrew, and house of meat in Arabic. A manger is where animals come to eat. Jesus, the Lamb of God, gives us His divine, heavenly, glorious Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in Holy Communion. He is the eternal covenant with us. May we be faithful to His Covenant, His Commandments, and so, in the fullness of time, delight in the eternal wedding banquet of heaven. This is made possible tonight, for the Son of God, Son of Mary, is born this evening.

18.

We have placed the Baby Jesus in the crib. We have seen the great Light. Let us learn more about this great Light?

The reading from Isaiah starts with a people walking in darkness and into this land a great Light is born. Isaiah speaks of a Child, Who is the Light, being born into a world of unrest. And that this Child will have to carry a burdensome yoke around His neck, and a staff and rod which

are used against Him. But these verses culminate in the victorious line: "you have broken as on the day of Midian."

Then we are given a description of the tumult of a battle, of tramping warriors' boots and human garments blotted with blood. But, again, these violent words are not the end, and they culminate, as in the previous lines, with a new future, for these warring garments "will be burned as fuel for the fire." These two verses then lead to the stupendous prophecy of the Divine Child being born to us.

So why is the Day of Midian mentioned, why is it so extraordinary? The Day of Midian refers to the book of Judges, to a battle in which Gideon totally obeys the commands of the Lord. In this battle the Lord our God has whittled down the Israelite army to a mere three hundred men in comparison with the vast army of the Midianites. Further, Gideon was to arm his few soldiers each with only a torch, a clay jar, and a trumpet.

At his command the Israelites broke their clay jars, held their torches, their fires aloft and blew into their trumpets producing a great sound. This caused the Midianites to flee in a frenzy. The Lord had thus truly shown to Gideon and Israel that He Himself had given them this victory. He had delivered them from certain death, as certain as when Israel was led through the Red Sea, away from Pharaoh and his grand

army. And the Lord required from His people openness of heart and faith in Him, to live as He was teaching them.

So Isaiah, by referring to the Day of Midian, is teaching that the Child, Who will be born, will accomplish an utterly astonishing victory solely through His divinity, through His being God; indeed, Isaiah describes this Baby as, "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

And now to the actual Birth of this prophesied Baby. Saint Luke places the Birth of God within the historical context of the supreme world power, at that time, the Roman empire. Like the unequal armies in the battle of Midian, the overwhelming power of Roman might against a mere Baby is obvious, but, some two thousand years later, this Baby continues to reign, whereas Rome does not. Isaiah also prophesies that this Baby will carry the burden of a yoke, that a staff will be put on His shoulder, that He will know the rod of His oppressor. These significant words point to the Cross. Even from the moment of His sacred Birth, Jesus' saving and compassionate mission upon the Cross is prophesied.

As Midian was a sign of the glorious and total authority of the Lord, so the overthrowing of the yoke, the staff on His shoulder, the rod of His oppressor - the Cross of Jesus - also revealed the eternal glorious and total authority of God in the Resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is the eternal Light of God born this very night, born of Mary, and born to heal, to

teach, to offer salvation to the human family. Come, let us acknowledge how we need our Saviour, and that He is come.

19.

Christmas Day, which started yesterday evening, at the Vigil Mass, has different readings at each of the four Masses. The Masses are linked to the time of the Day, the light becoming gradually clearer: Vigil, Midnight, Dawn, and during the Day. This is the fourth Mass, and so we have come into the full light of the Day. We are then, at this Mass, to grasp a truly panoramic view of Jesus in the full light of the Day.

Both Hebrews and Saint John's Gospel start by teaching of the eternity of the Son, Who is thus Spirit, like the Father. Hebrews speaks of the Son Who is the exact imprint of God's nature, through Whom all is created, and by His word all the universe is upheld. Saint John also speaks of this divine Person as the eternal Word, through Whom all things are made. We recall how in Genesis it is the power of the Lord's words which brings ordered creation into being, and this concurs with Jesus' authority over nature - when He speaks it happens - and, with those who have faith, He heals immediately at His word.

Thus to understand Who Jesus is, as we find in the readings at this Mass, we start before time, before creation comes into being through the Word. We begin to see why these readings have been explicitly

chosen for the Mass during the Day, for having emerged from the darkness of the night, we are to see clearly who Jesus is.

Hebrews then plunges us straight down into Jesus making purification for sins; the Cross. Further the reading from Isaiah, in the very next verses, speaks of Him Who was pierced for our transgressions, a man of sorrows. He also writes that, "kings shall shut their mouths because of him," in awe at things that they did not know or understand. This also has a deep resonance at Christmas, for the kings will indeed come and worship the Christ Child in awe and reverence: one of their gifts being myrrh, used for embalming the deceased, and as pain relief, as was offered to Him in the form of gall, when He was on the Cross, which He refused.

Hebrews, after the Cross, then takes us to heaven, to resurrected glory, where Jesus sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high. The eternal Son, Who took flesh from the Blessed Ever-Virgin Mary in time, in creation, has now returned Home. The Son, Who took on our sin, has risen victorious. The humble flesh, the little arms and feet that were wrapped in swaddling bands, which grew and were pierced on the Cross for our salvation - the greatest of all gifts - these same arms and feet are now beautiful upon the mountain of the heavenly Jerusalem, the heavenly Sion. Yes, the Baby Jesus bared his holy arm in the manger, again he bore it upon the Cross, but now - as the Psalmist sings, "His right and his holy arm have brought salvation." This Mass truly

brings us into the full light of Jesus Christ, through the darkness into the light of the Day.

To the truly contrite and open person, Jesus giving His grace, His wisdom, giving His very living Self in Holy Communion, will make us holy, like Him. His gifts are miraculous. And so at Christmas, like Jesus, we, too, give: we give our time, our service, our patience, our wealth, our dedication to others, and, too, we receive with simple heartfelt gratitude; and we do all this because Jesus is Lord, and we long to live in His radiant light. Jesus is the eternal source, the ever flowing mountain stream, in which all can become children of God. May we each be open to receive a most blessed and holy Christmas from our Lord.

20.

Each of the four Masses at Christmas have different names: their names correspond to different times of the day. The readings for this Mass are *at Dawn*. Dawn is the moment when new light, new created light, paints new hope across previously darkened skies as the birds begin to sing with joy.

An important theme in the Christmas Dawn Mass is the contrast between natural dawn and the dawn of the uncreated Light of the Saviour.

Our Gospel reading starts at natural dawn and the shepherds are now going to find the Saviour, Christ the Lord, in Bethlehem. Before that, at the Midnight Mass, surrounded by the darkness of the hills, the shepherds were stunned, indeed were made fearful when the glory of the Lord shone around them. The shepherds saw, and witnessed to Light which was not natural. Light which did not flow from stars, moon, or the rising sun. They were sore afraid.

This heavenly light then grew and became more intense, more immense as a multitude of the heavenly host appeared, praising God. At the heart of this heavenly light, this unnatural glorious light was the proclamation of a Saviour. You recall how at the beginning of Genesis we read, 'And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good'. This light, of which Genesis speaks, is created light, natural light. But the light of which the Gospel sings is eternal light, it is the fearsome glory of the Lord. It is of an entirely different essence. And at the centre of this eternal Light is the announcement of the Saviour, Christ the Lord.

Saint Paul, in his letter to Titus, also speaks of the appearing of the Saviour, and that in His grace alone - which is heavenly light - we are justified. The first from reading from Isaiah also speaks of our salvation coming, and that the Saviour comes with His reward, His mighty victorious work, and that we are redeemed, sought out by Him.

So the light from heaven has come to save. Has come to offer us light which never dies, the true Sun Which never sets. Heaven opens its doors and offers us the Way. The eternal Son has come. In the fullness of time, this Baby will leave His safe wooden manger and ascend the wood of the Cross to become the perfect sacrifice, the powerful all atoning Lamb of God, Who alone is able to take away the sins of all His world. He offers His grace, eternal light from heaven, to justify us according to his own mercy, as Saint Paul writes. This utter Light is our true home.

So behind the created lights of the tree, the flickering flame of our candles, the natural stars in the sky, and the early morning sun at dawn, look into your hearts and acknowledge that your hearts, minds, and soul are created for a light which is altogether deeper. Truly of a different essence. In the Gospel, Mary, who had heard, with all the others who were present, the wondrous tellings of the shepherds, realises that the vital response to the Lord is one where we treasure and ponder in our hearts the saving Light of Christ, from heaven.

There are so many different types of joys at Christmas, different people, different gifts, different celebrations, and trials, too, but the eternal glory of the Lord, Light which is eternal, never sets, never changes. How will each of us, this year, worship the Light of the world, for the Lord is born for us.