

Chapter 1

At night, when it is clear, are we not drawn to gaze into the night sky and marvel at the constellations of stars. On Christmas Day, and we are still in Christmas Time, in the Gospel from Saint John, we read how the Eternal Son, the Word, “was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him”, thus as we gaze into the heavens we are to acknowledge the hand of the Creator at work in His creation.

The wise men were open to the possibility that God could and would reveal Himself in creation. For wisdom to be received the recipient must be open to truth which transcends what is only empirical, for this we are made. There must be a genuine turning to What or Who is greater than ourselves, to eternal mystery. This is a movement of the mind and heart, it is deeply connected to religious stirrings, and is truly human. The wise men were outside the faith of Israel, but as pursuers of Truth they would have been aware of prophecies regarding the ruler of the world coming from the House of Judah.

There conviction in this would have been further strengthened by the historical pagan prophet Balaam in Numbers, who being unable to curse Israel, as requested by King Balak of Moab, in fact blessed Israel and delivered this prophecy, “I see him, but now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel”. Although the star which led the wise men to Jerusalem has been interpreted by some as having solely theological significance - as the words, “went forward, and halted over the place where the child was” can be seen in a poetic light - Babylonian, eastern astronomy was a highly developed science; and in our own day too, it is proposed that at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, there was a conjunction in the heavens of the planets Jupiter and Saturn, and Saturn, for the Babylonians, was the cosmic representative of the Jewish people. Jesus, the eternal Son, is seeking these wise men through their Babylonian sciences, through their knowledge of His creation, to bring them to salvation.

Jesus, King of the cosmos, from His birth in a manger, calls all peoples to Him. The star is a light which guides open souls to the Truth. It heralds the Epiphany of God, shining forth in a manger for all nations. The reading from Isaiah comes from the end of his Book. There we discover how, at the end of time, all nations, who seek salvation from the Lord, will be able to make their home in the heavenly Jerusalem. This prophecy is revealed at Jesus’ birth, Who is the Son born for us. In Isaiah, there are also references to transformative light; the presence of camels, gold and incense remind us of the wise men as described by Saint Matthew. The reading from Ephesians emphasises that in Christ, grace has been extended to all nations who will accept Him. This is constantly alluded to in the Old Testament,

but as to how this was to take place was unknown until the Epiphany, the birth of Jesus Christ, the “King of the Jews” as the non-Jewish wise men call him.

Let us return to the wise men. These men were open to God; their hearts and minds thirsting for the Truth. Are we living with that same thirst for Truth, for God, what are the distractions we must relinquish? And when they discerned His call, they made haste, reminiscent of Our Lady making haste to visit Elizabeth. Do we order our lives in holy haste for the Light of Jesus, or is there something more important than His love, His salvation? And when the three wise men encounter resistance in the presence of King Herod and Jerusalem they themselves are not perturbed but persevere in their pilgrimage. Do we persevere with fortitude when tested, do we continue on our pilgrimage even in the rain, wind, in hunger? They present to the baby Jesus the best they have, not only in their dedication but also in their material offerings; do we give to Jesus the first fruits of our lives, do we dedicate all we are and have to Him? And after encountering Him they are led by a different path, for Jesus changes everything. Listen to the words of the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”.

The wise men take a new decisive direction. As Christians, our living must always take a new decisive direction, for the Light of the world is breathtakingly new. Or have we become too dulled, too clogged up with the relentless self-referential speech of our times, to even look up for the star? Let’s put down what holds us down, and leave it there, and reach up to the star, to the hands of the risen Jesus, and not let go. O Christian, look to the light!

Chapter 2

BEING A CHRISTIAN IS HEROIC, NOT NICE. The reading of ISAIAH and the Gospel focuses on the sower and the seeds that are sown. On the one hand, all this may seem very simple to us: the seed is planted and with it grows the help of the heat of the sun, the nutrients of the earth and the water. We could see this as a metaphor for spiritual life: the seed of the Word is sown in our hearts, minds and bodies and with the help of grace-divine light and water from heaven-we become saints. But how sadly and misleadingly inadequate is this understanding: in reality, that metaphor would be profoundly anti-Christian. Life is not a “beautiful” life, it is rather HEROIC; purifying; sublime; holy; sacrificial. Aspects of the Christian life seem really sweet and cute: think of little children

making their First Communion, or a newly baptized baby wrapped in white fluid. Yet these touching external aspects point to an internal fire of sacrificial and suffering love, whose resurrected life is capable of victoriously dismantling sin and death. And we, each of us, are called to enter that life. Take these lines from St. John: “And JESUS answered them: The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you: unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; if instead it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life “(In 12:23-25). These words are also addressed to each of us. Then this seed, the word of GOD, which is sewn into our soul, is the way, the narrow door (Mt 7,13-14) through which hearts pass – and this is entirely concrete, a physical transformation (think of as the grace of JESUS physically touched the hearts of Saints Teresa of JESUS and Philip Neri – they can cry out with Saint Paul: I think that what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory, not yet revealed, that awaits us” (Rm 18,8). The seed sown in our hearts is the resurrected life of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, who suffered, died and rose again to eternal life. It brings a splendor that is not of this world (In 18,36) indeed, it breaks every false attachment to this world. We need His Light, so that He can further magnify His love within us. **SO HOW WILL WE RESPOND AND THEN LIVE?**

Chapter 3

The Collect Prayer for the Holy Family speaks of the “shining example of the Holy Family, that we may imitate them in the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity”. Let us explore the shining example of the Holy Family in the Scriptures for this Mass, that we may learn something of their good habits, virtues, to be practised within our own families.

The Gospel today is the Presentation. This moment in the life of the Holy Family takes place when Jesus is only forty days old. So, at this time, the life of the Holy Family is being told specifically from the viewpoint of the parents. It is the faith of Mary and Joseph which is shining brightly. Mary and Joseph go to the Temple to fulfil the customs regarding ritual uncleanness after birth, they observe what was followed by all faithful Jews. Mary and Joseph, despite knowing that Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, having received shepherd at the manger and kings, do not exhibit any false pride; there is absolutely no sense that they should be treated any differently. Jesus, the Son of God, is going to be brought up within a home which is entirely faithful to the practices of the Jewish faith, in which pure, golden obedience is the manner of life.

The two birds reveal that they were quite poor, as this offering was suggested for those who could not afford a lamb. Joseph and Mary place the practice of their faith above any concern of how others might judge them. Their actual wealth, treasure in heaven, is revealed by the faith which is seen in their deeds. We begin to see something of the virtues which God would like to see in all families: the virtue of a lived faith as the priority in family life, this is the family in which the Father has chosen for His Son, Jesus.

The first reading from Genesis again has its primary focus on the parents. The growth in faith for Abram and Sarai is a challenging journey. You recall how, at one time, both Abram and Sarai doubted the power of the Lord to bring about the promised heir. This led to a deep animosity between Sarai and Hagar, the servant woman, who became the surrogate mother for Abram's son, Ishmael, for Abram and Sarai thought that they would need to help the Lord along by securing an heir through their own plans. This presumptive act would result in the covenant of circumcision, to perpetually remind Abraham and Israel of the dangers of not trusting in God's promises, and would further purify Abram's and Sarai's faith in the utter power of the Lord to bring His own designs to fruition in His own time and manner.

The second reading, Hebrews, continues with the history of Abram and Sarai, and how, despite their surprise at the promise of an heir when they are both so advanced in years, the Lord blesses Sarah with the conception of Isaac. The faith of these parents by this time has been moulded, purified. The Lord then makes it known that he requires the sacrifice of Isaac, the long awaited and only son and heir of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham, at this point knows and loves the Lord with every fibre of his being. His faith in the Lord sees, as clear as day, that if the Lord commands something which he, Abraham, cannot understand, still the Lord will bring His perfect and great will to bear for the glory of His holy name. The words from the Psalm amply express something of the invincible faith and willingness to sacrifice which must have soared through Abraham's mind and heart, "be proud of his holy name, let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice".

We also see in Hebrews that Isaac, the long-awaited son, does not revolt against his father's will. Here we see something of the faith which must have permeated the entire household of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac was no baby, but a young man, when he carried the wood up to Mount Moriah and lay down on the sacrificial altar. Never forget that scholarship has revealed that Mount Moriah is where Jerusalem would later flourish, and that some 1800 years later another Son, the perfect sacrifice, would carry the wood on which He would be sacrificed, for the salvation of all sin.

The readings offered to us on this Feast of the Holy Family have a deep penetrating focus on the role of the parents' faith in the life of a family. Abraham and Sarah were gradually prepared in faith and sacrifice for the birth of Isaac, who foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus. Joseph and Mary are the embodiment of humble obedience to the Lord in faith, which, too, will involve great sacrifice. This is the family home, which the almighty Father chose for the Baby Jesus. May we parents, who are spiritual and biological, be open to our own necessary conversions and purifications, so as to reveal by our faith and sacrifices the unchanging and true wisdom of God. May our families shine with holy faith and sacrificial virtue.

Chapter 4

With the Resurrection of Jesus, all is new. With the Resurrection of Jesus, suffering and death have been overcome. We human beings, let us think about this, are specifically created to enter into this luminous, this gleaming relationship with the risen Son of Man.

In every moment we are choosing certain goals, there is a purpose to our every decision. The Lord wants us to consider His presence at all times, to follow Him. The Psalm sings, "Lord, make me know your ways. Lord, teach me your paths. Make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour". We are unique creatures, human persons, whose depth of soul is made for, is created for unfathomable light, the light of the risen Son, light which simultaneously humbles, purifies and ennobles us. At Morning Prayer on Tuesday last week, some parishioners and I prayed those great words from Psalm 42, "deep is calling on deep". This line speaks of the meeting between God and man in our depths. We are made for this, we need this to live truly human lives.

And our choices, our desired goals, form habits that either strengthen or weaken our flourishing, our joy, as we grow in either virtue or vice. Are we following Him or not? I am sure that many of us hear it said, indeed, we might even say it ourselves, "I couldn't help myself", but the Lord Jesus teaches so differently. He is no slave, and He stands within each of us, in His Spirit, knocking, calling, correcting - in the name of His victorious love. From the risen Lord's light, the Spirit gives His victorious freedom, and we are to live in this. "Lord, teach me your paths. Make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour". What are the thoughts and deeds that need to be removed, healed, to become more illuminated by the Lord's ways, to follow Him?

The reading from Saint Paul is direct: “the world as we know it is passing away”. This great Apostle, who experienced the risen ascended Jesus in glory, understands that we are truly made for this Light, this risen Jesus, Who will never pass away. And so Saint Paul longs for the Lord to make him know His ways, to walk in His truth. Saint Paul was expecting the Second Coming of Jesus imminently, hence the call to all: focus on what is eternal. As we are made for eternity, it is there that true joy will flow, and flow abundantly.

The growth in holiness, to which each of us is called, without exception, is rooted in the Holy Spirit sifting through the layers of our souls, He will teach us how and why we are to surrender all to the Lord ways, to follow Him. As He works within us, He will stir areas up, areas where repentance is needed for true growth. Saint John of the Cross likens the path to holiness as a log in a fireplace. The log at the start will be warmed by the fire, it will feel cosy, embraced, safe. The next stage is that the log begins to splutter, to smoke, to crackle, to smell, this period reflects the challenges, the areas where repentance is needed. The final stage is where the whole log has been transformed into something new, something which gleams with the intensity and perfection of God’s fire, His eternal love.

In the reading from Jonah we are presented with the men, women, children, even the animals are mentioned: all of Nineveh repents and they do it with great speed, for the Lord is eternal. Saint Paul to the Corinthians is also expecting them to see the immediate importance of the eternal over what passes. Jonah, though, was not willing to repent, to follow the Lord. As you recall, he refused to do the Lord’s bidding in Nineveh and almost caused the sinking of an entire boat, before being swallowed and drowning in a great fish’s stomach. He was a tough nut to crack. And even after he did accept the Lord’s will, he still regretted the compassion and mercy which the Lord extended to the Ninevites. Jonah wanted all on his terms, following the Lord’s ways was not for him, and yet still the Lord continues to call him to repentance.

Saint Mark, by telling us that Saint John the Baptist has now been arrested, shows a later time in the relationship between Jesus and the Apostles. During this time the Holy Spirit has truly been sifting, opening, wooing their hearts and minds with the sheer wonder of Jesus. Now they follow at once. Dearest brothers and sisters in the risen luminous Jesus Christ, will we repent at the slightest prompting of the Holy Spirit like the Ninevites, or will we be sadly stubborn like Jonah. Are we growing like the Apostles in a deep desire to follow the Lord, are we becoming that log, gradually gleaming with the divine fire of the Spirit? May we walk in His ways, follow His paths, may the power of the Holy Spirit transform us into fishers of men.

Chapter 5

The importance of Moses cannot be underestimated. In Exodus 33 we read, “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend”. This does need a bit more clarification, and a few lines later we read, “you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live.” And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.” We see that, for a mortal man, Moses was truly honoured in His intimacy with the Lord.

We also recall how it was to Moses that the Lord revealed His holy presence in the Burning Bush and that at this miraculous happening the Lord, in answer to Moses’ request for a name to take to the oppressed Israelites, gives as His name a name which is not a name at all, but a statement of existence, a statement of being. The Lord our God declares that He is, “I AM WHO I AM”. This title for the Lord God teaches that the Lord is the one eternal necessary Being from Whom all creation, all time, receives its existence.

Moses was also the one to whom the Lord gave the Ten Commandments and in whose name the entire Torah, the first five books of the Holy Bible, has been traditionally attributed. These accolades reveal that Moses was truly one of the most remarkable of all the Old Testament leaders. And yet, Moses speaks of another who will come, who will speak the very words of the Lord and to whom we must listen.

For someone to speak the very words of the Lord, words which will be in the very mouth of this new Prophet, and Who will command all that the Lord teaches refers to Someone Who is one with the eternal Lord. We are looking at a prophet Who shares with the very essence of the Lord God Who is the I AM WHO I AM. Jesus in Saint John’s Gospel utters words which reveal that He absolutely identifies Himself with the I AM WHO I AM.

Apart from the seven times He refers to Himself as I am: I am the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the door (10:7), the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the resurrection and the life (11:25), the way, the truth, and the life (14:6) and the true vine (15:1), there is a final instance which is even more explicit from Saint John’s Gospel, “the Jews then said to him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? ‘Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they took up stones to throw at him”. In this section we see how Jesus explicitly teaches that He is the I AM WHO I AM, the

eternal Lord. The Jews, understanding what Jesus is implying, seek to kill Him for blasphemy.

In Saint Mark's Gospel, Jesus has recently returned from the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan and defeated His wiles. Satan's power has thus been bound by Jesus, and subsequently all Satan's army, his fellow evil angels know this. As Jesus enters the synagogue, the unclean spirit knows only too well that this is not merely a prophet, even as great as Moses, but one Whose words, one Whose commands are absolute. This is one to Whom all are to listen as prophesied by Moses. Remember how on the road to Emmaus Jesus teaches the fearful disciples that all the prophets point to Him, starting with Moses.

In Saint Mark's Gospel we learn that Jesus taught with an authority which was unlike the scribes. To understand this authority we need to look at the Greek word for authority in the text: it is exousian. Ex means 'out of' or 'from', ousian is from the verb to be, so it refers to the very Being of Jesus, the very I AM at the heart of God. In other words, Jesus' presence and all His words flow from the very source of Being itself, from which the entire universe receives its existence and is sustained. This is why His authority was like no one else.

Every word that poured from His lips would have flowed from the eternal Being of the immortal Lord, the I AM WHO I AM. As the Lord by whom all things visible and invisible were made, Jesus would have horrified the evil spirits at work in this world, for here in their midst is the eternal Being of God united with human flesh, human nature, united to creation. The evil spiritual world recognises the eternal Lord, do we? Are we willing to listen, body and soul, to the eternal words of the Lord? His authority is the only one given to truly teach and save. Let us listen to Him.

Chapter 6

Saint Mark's Gospel has a strong emphasis on Jesus driving out demons. Jesus, in the wilderness, bound up Satan's power and all his fellow unclean spirits know exactly Who Jesus is, and so it is always right and just for us, children of the holy Gospel, children of the risen victorious Christ, to live lives of profound worship.

The Entrance Antiphon for this Mass says, "O come, let us worship God, and bow low before the God who made us, for he is the Lord our God". Do we bow low before the Lord?

Do we sometimes forget that we are created to adore the living Lord? We are the only species made to find our true purpose - spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical - in the living God. As we grow older, how are we adults falling more in love with God's eternal life of goodness, how often do we, "bow low before the God who made us, for he is the Lord our God", as the Entrance Antiphon sings? Every morning would be a just way to start the gift of each day.

Do we have a tendency to place many of the world's goals and objects before our young people, as if those things are truly going to bring them lasting joy? As we heard on the Sunday of the Word of God, in Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, "the world as we know it is passing away", this leads us to reflect that human beings are actually called to the eternal Good, not merely to a good in creation; that we are called to know, to reflect upon the eternal Truth, not just what is true in things. We humans are called to intimate friendship with the Lord, to holiness with the Lord. Do our choices reflect this good call?

One of the reasons why the Lord is so important, one of the reasons why we, "bow low before the God who made us", is because He is the Giver and Sustainer of Life. In the first reading from Job, we are presented with the relentless unhappiness of Job. Job has experienced worldly calamity, and has given up on their being anything worthwhile in the gift of his life. He has become so centred on his own self that he has closed himself off from the eternal Lord, the Lord in front of Whom we should all bow low.

Men and women, we creatures, can never find our true goal, our true peace by looking for it on our own terms. The Lord's world will never discover actual peace until it opens its hardened heart and mind to the peace that flows from the Lord. His wisdom, His reconciliation is the only way for us, His beloved creatures. We are to bow low to the Lord, as, indeed, the Lord Jesus bowed low down to us on the Cross.

At the end of the Book of Job, the Lord speaks to Job, and it is there that Job, at last, comes to his senses, reminding us of the Prodigal Son, who eventually comes to his senses. After experiencing the Lord's presence, Job utters these great words, "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I repent in dust and ashes".

Job has truly placed the Lord at the centre of his soul, his mind, his heart, his body. Job, as in the Entrance Antiphon, bows low and worships the God who made us. Saint Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, reveals how the presence of the Lord freed him from his driveness to capture and persecute Christians.

Saint Paul has truly encountered the total importance of bowing low before the God who made us, for Jesus bowed so low on the cross and has now risen in heavenly splendour. It is only in this Jesus that the way to eternal peace has risen, and Saint Paul cannot delay this proclamation for a moment. Do our young people see we adults endeavouring to live this unchanging truth and joy with integrity and humility? Do our young people see us bowing low to the great and adorable Jesus Christ? If not, why not?

Jesus is the ultimate terror of all devils, of all demons. His life is risen joy and victory, He is the divine healer for all. The bread and wine which the Lord gave to sustain our natural life, has become the Sacrament of eternal life. Do we adults place this fact as the source and summit of our lives? Do we awaken every day with the need to bow low in front of the Lord our God? Our children, our young people, are in the greatest need to see, like Job, Who the Lord is. Our lived faith, how we adore the Lord, is foundational to our future. Let us learn to live lives which bow low, which look with such radiant gratitude to He Who frees us for eternal life.

Chapter 7

The sheer determination of the leper touched Jesus. There was no person, no disease that was going to stop this man from approaching the one person in the history of the universe Who could heal the leper with the will of His mind, the words of His lips, and the touch of His hand. Do we recognise our own leprosy? It might not look like leprosy, and it might be all the more deadly for not looking so unappealing to the naked eye.

On the cusp of Lent, as we prepare to take up additional ways in which we can grow in repentance and love of God, like reading a good Catholic spiritual book; as we prepare to deny ourselves certain foods and certain ways in which we spend our time, let us not be unfocused or mediocre in our response to the radiant love of God, Who suffered so freely for each of us on the Cross.

In considering whether we are approaching our journey of purification and healing this Lent with adequate resolve, let us consider the case of the leper. As we heard in the first reading from Leviticus, lepers were forced to live outside the camp, they would have been banished from religious and social gatherings, which were at the heart of Israelite life. To wear torn clothing and disordered hair was a visible sign that this person was to be shunned. Their appearance was designed to shock and to warn all, in close proximity, they had to cry, “unclean, unclean”.

The seriousness of leprosy (*Mycobacterium leprae*) resulted in, even as recently as the 20th Century, men, women, and children living in leper colonies til death. On Molokai, an Hawaiian island, once a person had been diagnosed with the condition they were then sent to this island and declared legally dead by the State. No one was permitted to visit them. A Belgian priest, Saint Damian of Molokai, went there to minister to the lepers; he died of the disease at the age of 49. To him these were not destitute lepers but human persons, made for the redeeming love of the risen Lord Jesus, as we see in the Gospel.

The leper in the Gospel, although in full knowledge of the Levitical regulations, nevertheless approaches Jesus. This would have taken audacious courage. The faith of the leper in Jesus is absolute, and he acknowledges that Jesus' healings are not achieved for public glory or that Jesus can ever be manipulated. Jesus brings a kingdom not of this world to every word, every action, every miracle He offers. The leper, pleading on his knees, bowing low - as the Entrance Antiphon exhorted us to do last week - accepts whatever judgement will flow from the sacred lips of Jesus. His faith tells Him that in Jesus a future is possible. Do we live as if a future beyond our deepest imagings is possible from the words and actions of the living Son of God, Jesus the Christ?

The whole mission of Jesus' earthly life is the Cross. Frequently we hear Him speak that His hour has not yet come; too, He frequently tries to prevent others from trumpeting what He has done for them, for they are missing the crucial point. Jesus has come to pay the wages of sin as the perfect sin offering by His suffering and death. To enter into His glory, He suffered and died. We, too, my dearest brothers and sisters are called to follow this same path. As Saint Paul says to the Romans, "and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him".

Jesus did not heal everyone, for that is not the way to salvation. The way to salvation is the defeat of sin and death, which is given through Jesus. Learning to live for Christ in the world demands astute choices and holy perseverance, in response to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

The leper came to Jesus, baring his disease openly, looking for healing, and not losing hope. This Lent, let us approach Jesus, place ourselves in His hands, embracing His way through suffering and death into eternal life and glory. Our translation says that Jesus felt sorry for the leper. The Greek is far stronger, it teaches that in His very inward parts - His heart, lungs, liver, and kidneys - He was moved. He was moved by the faith, by the suffering, by the dignity of His brother Whom he has come to save.

Dearest fellow Christian, the tenderness of Jesus exceeds any human measure. Saint Damian of Molokai lived a transformed life in this unflinching tenderness. Lent is the time to discover anew the tenderness of Jesus which is the power that purifies us and makes us truly and fully human. Will we avoid Jesus this Lent, or will we approach Him, like the leper, in confidence and admitting our need of His heavenly glory?

Chapter 8

The reading from the prophet Joel has been prayed by Christians entering into Lent for over 15 hundred years. These words call the whole community - from elders to infants at the breast - to turn to the Lord anew.

Joel exhorts us to have broken hearts not torn garments. Last Sunday we heard from Leviticus how lepers were to wear torn garments, a visible sign of disease. Joel is teaching that the Lord is truly looking deeper than a torn garment. He is looking deeper than any garment of clothing, whether it be rich or poor; He is looking deeper than all appearances. “Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning’. Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn”.

We see in the Gospel that Jesus continues with this necessary interior change. The giving of alms must be done from a heart that weeps for the sufferings of others; the alms giver is first concerned with the other, they are so self-forgetful they cannot differentiate between their own hands. And so the grace of the Lord is weaving an interior garment of truly unselfish compassion.

The person who prays to the Lord without drawing attention to themselves in public discovers the Lord at work within them, their will is being united to the Lord's cleansing will; again, they are welcoming the Lord's handiwork, Who is creating an interior garment of perception for what is holy.

The person who truly fasts wisely for the Lord is astonished by the joy in denying some bodily food, for then the Father can robe His beloved with an interior garment of physical and spiritual maturity. Their soul is being fed with what is imperishable. We are to be clothed in an interior garment of holiness. Our hearts must be broken.

As the Lord is victorious, as He is risen from the dead, turn, we must, to Him. But how do we turn to Him? Jesus gives us almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Each is capable of breaking self-centred, merely sentimental hearts, hearts of stone, as the prophet Ezekiel describes us. The human heart, created first for divine love,

created for the Lord, must be freed from all enslaving attachments. Dearest brothers and sisters - from elders to infants at the breast - we must be outstandingly astute in recognising what are our enslaving attachments. For Christians, called to become the goodness of God - as Saint Paul teaches in today's reading - hearts must be broken away from what leads only to dust, to death. Do we hear the Lord's words?

Our God, Jesus Christ, rose from the dead. Death and sin have been defeated. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one can come to the Father except through Him, as Jesus explicitly teaches in Saint John's Gospel. In Baptism we have each received the grace of God; the risen life of Jesus. Saint Paul teaches us not to neglect the grace of God. In Confession, in Confirmation, in Matrimony, in the Eucharist, in the Anointing of the Sick, in Holy Orders - in the Sacraments we receive grace upon grace. Let us not neglect these priceless gifts from heaven, gifts won through the limitless tenderness of Jesus, Who suffered and died for each of us.

““Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning’. Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn”. We will shortly, each of us, be adorned with an outward sign of deep inner repentance. May the blest ashes bring our hearts to their senses.

Without ongoing repentance, without assiduous, astute, and holy choices, we will never allow the Lord to break our sneaky wounded hearts. But if we repent, if we say yes to His quiet but exquisite invitation, then he will reveal His tenderness, His compassion, His graciousness, as the Prophet Joel teaches. He will weave within each of us the necessary interior garment of salvation.

We are the chosen people of the Lord, won by His precious Blood, come let us turn back to Him. Let us live lives which reflect who we truly are: the most fortunate, the most blest, the light of the world for all. Dust we are, but in Jesus, this dust is called to His glory. Turn to Him and live.

Chapter 9

We are at the beginning of Lent. The readings take us to the beginnings of God's covenants with us. These covenants point especially to the Sacraments of Marriage and Baptism. We shall see that they find their meaning and power in Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, the wooden cross. We begin Lent by looking at the Cross, that it is as it must be. Let's begin well.

The Gospel describes Jesus, in the wilderness, being tempted by and defeating Satan. The name wilderness points to the havoc of sin that has ravaged God's creation, following the Fall of Adam and Eve. Satan, before the Fall, met Adam and Eve in Eden, a paradise garden; a place where Adam had named all the wild beasts; a place where Adam and Eve and their descendants could have lived for age after age, in sublime harmony, until the assumption of all the Lord's sinless children into the unchanging light of heaven. This did not happen. Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptations of Satan: they sought to possess what was not theirs; they delighted in the look of something which was forbidden; and, in pride, grasped at the impossibility of equality with the eternal Lord. The Original Sin had taken place, the original graces gifted to them had been destroyed.

It is apt that the Communion Antiphon for this First Sunday in Lent also takes us to Jesus' temptation and victory in the wilderness over Satan, but now from Saint Matthew's Gospel. We read Jesus' response to Satan: "one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God". In the wilderness, Jesus defeats the control which Satan had over humanity by Adam and Eve's Original historical Sin, into which all humanity is born. Hope has dawned.

Scripture readily confirms the reality of Original Sin. The Prophet Jeremiah says, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? Psalm 51, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me". Saint Paul to the Corinthians, "for as in Adam all die". Here is the dilemma: how can heaven be opened again to us? Who can take away the guilt and punishment due to the Original Sin and all personal sins? How can it happen, too? How can grace flow again from heaven?

Saint Peter, in his letter, teaches that the flood is a type of Baptism. Through the flood in Genesis, the Lord cleansed His world of human evil, for a while, by the power of water; but, too, it was the water that carried the wooden ark to the new covenant with creation. The covenant with Noah was a new beginning, but still the wound of Original Sin remained in the hearts of Noah and his family. It is the Sacrament of Baptism that destroys the wound of Original Sin, through Jesus Christ's own suffering and dying for us, for He is the eternal Son, the perfect sin offering; the Sacrament also confers the risen glory of Jesus. Where the flood waters temporarily destroyed human evil and supported the arrival of the new covenant, the holy waters of Baptism destroy the guilt of sin and death, and give life from heaven even now.

The wooden ark actually points to the wooden cross. Whereas the wooden ark is not destroyed by the powerful flood waters, neither is the wooden cross destroyed by the power of sin. As the wooden ark rises above the waters and settles to bring new life on earth, the wooden cross is the way by which the Son rises from the

dead to bring life from heaven. The wooden ark evades death and leads to a new life, but the wooden cross of Jesus Christ, a greater ark, defeats death and sin, and leads to eternal life. The waters of the flood truly find their deepest meaning in the sacred waters of Baptism.

The original covenant between Adam and Eve, as husband and wife, is also fulfilled by Christ. Where Adam, the bridegroom, failed to protect his wife, Eve, from temptation, not giving his life for his bride; Jesus, after defeating Satan in the wilderness, delivers His final defeat on the wooden cross. For on the wooden cross, the new Adam, Jesus, will give His sinless life for His Bride, His holy and spotless Church, before rising to clothe us with an imperishable wedding garment. Christian marriage draws so much of its holiness from the Bridegroom, Jesus, sacrificing His life for His Bride, us.

Understanding the power of Baptism and Matrimony aright points to the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross: which is the Eucharist. The Sacraments all flow from the sacrifice upon the wooden cross. Our purpose in Lent is to enter into the power of the Cross. The Good News of the Cross - the destruction of evil and enslavement to sin, and the promise of life everlasting. To enter into these deep and inexhaustible mysteries, Jesus is clear: “the time has come and the kingdom is close at hand. Repent, and believe in the Good News”.

Chapter 10

The Opening Prayer asks God to nourish us inwardly by His word, and to make our spiritual sight pure, so that we may be joyful in seeing God’s glory. In coming to Mass, we acknowledge that an event of heavenly power is about to unfold before our senses, before our souls. In the Mass, the readings and prayers, the prayers of consecration, Holy Communion, all these elements have, as their goal, our sanctification: to nourish us inwardly by God’s word and to make our spiritual sight pure. Are we grasping this?

In the Gospel, Jesus reveals His eternal divinity to Saints Peter, James, and John. The Transfiguration is an event of light, but what sort of light? At the Transfiguration, the Father announces His love for Jesus; at the Transfiguration the Holy Spirit covers the Apostles in a shadow, as the Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin Mary at the Incarnation. The Holy Spirit is nourishing the Apostles inwardly with the eternal Word; the Holy Spirit is purifying their spiritual sight.

At every Mass, the priest will elevate the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. There, in the priest’s consecrated hands, raised high, as on the mountain of the

Transfiguration, is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ. From the priest's unworthy hands, rays of heavenly light will cascade down from this sanctuary and fill the whole church. At this moment, this heavenly event, the Holy Spirit, as at the Transfiguration for the Apostles, will overshadow each of us, and the Father will delight in all those who will listen to His Son, who will consent wholeheartedly to be nourished inwardly by the Word of God, to have their spiritual sight made holy. Do we grasp this?

Mass is the event when God the Father, Who did not even spare His Son for us, will, in the Spirit, offer to nourish us by His Son's Word and purify our spiritual sight. God gives first. He, unchanging Light, is willing to give us His Son, under what looks merely like humble bread and wine. The eternal Lord is so great as to give Himself to us in this way, to place Himself in our hands, on our tongues. This utter vulnerability reveals Who God is, given for us. The trust that the Lord has in us is ever hopeful. Are we ready to sit bolt upright and declare before the Lord, our need to be nourished inwardly by the glories of heaven, to have our spiritual sight made holy?

The light that the Apostles see is the light which proclaims the Son's eternal love of the Father in the Spirit, for that is heaven: heaven is the life of the Trinity, Love is communion. And it is opened to all who have been deeply nourished by the Word and whose spiritual sight has been washed truly pure. And this work starts now for each of us. It is the heart of the Mass, it is for what we pray. Being Catholic is first receiving light from heaven, to be a Saint, and then living in such a holy way that others are brought into this light by the manner of our lives, by our charity.

Jesus is love of the Father in the Spirit. The light of the Transfiguration sings with the joy of humility, for to love demands humility. To love another, necessitates serving what is truly good for the other. I have come to serve. Yes, the light of the Transfiguration reveals the Son's eternal love of the Father; but, too, He reveals it to us, for He wants to nourish us inwardly with His word, He thirsts to purify our spiritual vision. Jesus wants to bring us into communion with heaven here in Whetstone. Being a Catholic is, first, lofty and exalted - the light of the Lord is eternal - we are then to live this light with and for others.

The Apostles are frightened. Never have they seen light of such power, beauty, love, glory. Our translation of the Greek word *kalon* has Saint Peter saying it is wonderful. It is also true to translate *kalon* as beautiful, a beauty flowing from an inward good. Thus the light of the Transfiguration, revealing Who Jesus is, is purifying, it is an inwardly nourishing light. It calls for the Apostles, for us, to be changed by the Lord.

The Apostles receive this gift as best they can. It is beyond everything in creation. At every Mass, the presence of Jesus on the Altar, given to us, is beyond everything in creation. Saint Peter will, in the momentous days that follow, deny Jesus. This shows that to become holy demands conscious effort to live in such a way that asks for the Lord to nourish us inwardly, to purify our spiritual sight. Saint Peter will, in time, consent to be fully changed by the Lord. Neither does Abraham hide from his testing to become holy, to become a blessing to all the nations of the earth. We have come to Mass to be nourished inwardly, to be spiritually purified by the Lord. “You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven”.

Chapter 11

The Ten Commandments are to be lived in joy by the grace of Jesus. In Saint Matthew’s Gospel Jesus declares, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”. This passage emphasises the necessity of Jesus’ grace to truly live the Commandments.

The moral law, encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, is binding for all humanity. Morality concerns how we choose to live in relation to the unchanging Lord and with each other. Human life is moral, we choose what we do through reason, and then will it into reality. A society which is uncritically swayed by emotions, highly individualistic, and prone to relentless distractions, will exhibit an ignorance regarding the gift of reason. Where do we go for the content of our moral formation? How do we practise reasoning with the Lord? As beloved creatures of the Lord, who experience feelings, emotions, and who possess reason and will, we depend on the moral teaching and grace from the Lord to direct the powers He has given us to their proper end. How right the Psalmist is, “the law of the Lord is perfect, it revives the soul. The command of the Lord is clear, it gives light to the eyes”.

When the Lord our God, out of love, made us in Their image and likeness, it is, first, in the spiritual gifts of intellectual reasoning and will that we share in Their eternal Being. Reason opens the door to knowing and understanding the Lord and

His creation, and our will enables us to express this knowledge in acts which reflect our God-given dignity. Reason and will are at the core of the human rational soul, they are given to lead us to the Lord.

The creation of Adam in the Sistine Chapel is not about his physical creation; no, Michelangelo is depicting the moment when Adam receives his rational soul, and the gifts of reason and will; he becomes a human person. God touches Adam and Adam knows He is a man and knows that he is in a relationship with the Lord; and by his will, seeing the greatness of the Lord, he can choose to adore the Lord. Adam is free to will this relationship to flourish or not, like us.

Morality is rooted in justice, for justice refers to relationships: our relationship with the Lord, toward ourselves, and with each other. At the beginning of all the Prefaces at Mass, the priest says, “it is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God”. Because the Lord has given and sustains all life, it is unjust not to honour the Lord with the first fruits of our life. Our intellect, created by Him, finds its first and ultimate purpose in pondering upon God; our bodies, hallowed by the Incarnation, need to be honoured, never treated as mere objects. And our souls, our rational souls, need to be kept pure in Jesus’ grace: here the Sacrament of Reconciliation is vital, and fed in weekly attendance at the Holy Mass. Jesus wishes to give Himself, His grace that we may live the Commandments from the inside out, in His grace, in His justice, and in joy.

Jesus, later in Saint Matthew’s Gospel, will take the Commandments to a new level, hear His great words: “You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgement’. But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement”; “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart”. Jesus is revealing the necessity of his grace for holy morality, for holy justice, for human joy.

In the Gospel today, Jesus teaches that it is in His very Body, by His Spirit, that the human person receives grace. To live for the Lord rightly demands not merely an external following of the Commandments – for I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven – but living from one whose emotions, whose feelings, whose reason, whose intellect, and will have been and are continuing to be purified by the grace of Jesus. This Lent, may we remove the cattle and money changers from our lives, and be fed on Jesus’ grace, flowing from His sacrifice, so we can love the Lord and our brother and sister in justice. Jesus commands this.

Chapter 12

“The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert”. This passage finds its full meaning in Jesus Christ.

The reference to Moses lifting up the serpent takes us to Numbers, the fourth book from the first five of the Old Testament, called the Torah, the Law, traditionally associated with the authorship of Moses. At this point in the life of the Israelites, they have been liberated from slavery under Pharaoh by the leadership of the great Moses, with great signs from the Lord: the Ten Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea. But still the Israelites moan and complain, and even want to return to the slavery of Egypt, they cry: “why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food”. So there clearly was some food. Their continual moaning against the Lord, their lack of trust, and idolatry - worshipping false gods - needed to be held to judgement, to account.

A good wise father always corrects his children, for we are created to understand, to reject evil, and choose goodness. And then he will offer healing, a path to intimacy, to communion. This is at the heart of the first reading: despite the terrible choices of His people, the Father will hold them, and us, to account in truth, and then always offers reconciliation, a way forward. We see this throughout the Bible, and in our readings during Lent.

When Adam and Eve freely sinned, God judged righteously, and then opened a way to new life, for the Lord prophesied a time when a mother and her Son would defeat the evil one who defeated Adam and Eve. After the flood, just punishment for an incorrigible human family, the Lord offered a new covenant to all His creation. And after the long testing and growth in faith of Abraham - in which Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his only son - the Lord bestowed a blessing for the whole human family who share in Abraham’s faith.

And this week the Gospel reminds us of Israel’s punishment for its continual lack of faith, for the Lord sends fiery serpents to chastise His stubborn and hard hearted people. Then for their healing, the Lord commands Moses to, “make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live”. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live”. So why the serpent? By looking at the serpent, the Israelites would have been confronted with their sin, their rebellion against God.

By truly acknowledging their sin to the Lord, the door to contrition, from which healing can flow, would have been opened. Humble acknowledgment and contrition open the door to pardon, peace, and maturity. In the Gospel, Jesus links this lifting up of the serpent, this lifting up of a sign of their sin, with the lifting up of Himself upon the Cross. For when we look up at the Cross, we see that our sin, every human sin, has put the only Son of God up there, for us. To look up at the Cross is to acknowledge our sin; and in contrition, in repentance, we open our souls to receive Jesus' divine pardon flowing so freely from His Body, one of the reasons why the Divine Mercy image is so glorious. Pardon light pours out. Jesus came to die for our sins, to offer reconciliation with God and with each other. He must be accepted.

Throughout salvation history, the Lord has sent men and women to be His mouth, by word and deed. The Lord prophesies, too, the coming of His Son. Moses prophesies the One Who will be the actual Word of God. And in Isaiah, we read of the saving Suffering Servant who, "shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high."

We know from Sacred Scripture, and from science, that our universe was created from nothing, that it started at the dawn of time. We are thus compelled to ask by Whom, Who are They Who existed before time, thus without beginning or end, and have filled Their universe with unimaginable order, unimaginable beauty? The immensity of the Christian claim is that this eternal One, the Word, was born of Mary in a stable. He Who is - I AM WHO I AM as the Lord told Moses - is Jesus. Fully God, fully man.

The Father truly never ceases to gather His children to share in His family life, the Trinity, He sends His Son: Love incarnate, Light incarnate, Truth incarnate. No mere lamb here, for only God can atone for all sin. And so He does. Look at the Cross, look at Him, do not only see the wages of our sin, do not see condemnation, but see grace flowing from His side, to make us God's work of art. Rejoice deeply!

Chapter 13

The pouring of blood is a sign of the suffering and death which atones for sin on earth. These sacrifices find their fulfilment in Jesus upon the Cross. It teaches us about the seriousness and the holiness of God's life. A physical remedy for a physical sin. When we choose to sin, we effectively choose death, and thus there needs to be a death to restore us to Life. The way to heaven is inseparable from our physical lives, we are soul and body.

But Jeremiah speaks, too, of a New Covenant, the only time it is mentioned in the Old Testament. He speaks of the Lord actually writing His Law onto our hearts. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances”. We are moving away from an external, physical circumcision toward a circumcision of the heart.

It is the Holy Spirit, alone, Who is able to pour into human hearts the risen glory and atonement won for all humanity by Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Lamb of God, not a mere animal. His Blood is precious beyond compare, it is eternal life-blood. Jesus is the wheat grain whose falling to the ground and dying - being taken down from the Cross and buried - has produced a harvest for all men. The reading from Hebrews speaks how Jesus became the perfect sin offering through His suffering and dying, through the atoning pouring out of His Blood.

Yes, the heart can be, as Jeremiah teaches, deceitful, desperately corrupt; however, the new and eternal covenant accomplished in the Blood of the Son fulfils the prophecy from Jeremiah, “I will forgive their iniquity and never call to mind their sin”. The Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ, that we receive at Mass, has atoned for our sins and leads the humble Christian to be healed in heart. The Third Eucharistic prayer says, “grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ”. How important was the spilling of His precious Blood? How important is it to receive, now, His heavenly Body and Blood at Mass? It truly is a matter of the heart.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? ‘I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings’”.

In these words, Jeremiah teaches that the human heart is wounded and also that the Lord’s judgement will focus on our hearts. This is daunting, for our hearts, Biblically understood as the centre of our emotions and reasoning, are frequently discordant. A person growing in truth and wisdom will readily admit that their hearts are a meeting point of conflicting motives. And so we inhale with a little trepidation when we hear those words of warning from Jeremiah: that the Lord will judge us by our hearts.

In the reading today, also from Jeremiah, we learn that the challenge of the human heart has long been at the forefront of the Lord’s reaching out to us. The Lord has extended His divine Hand repeatedly through the creation of covenants with us.

A covenant calls both parties to unswerving integrity; and Jeremiah specifically refers to the covenant made at the foot of Mount Sinai, before Moses ascended the mountain to receive the 10 Commandments written on stone.

At the forging of this covenant, this family bond, we read from Exodus, “and Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient’. And Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

The sacrifice of animals and the pouring of blood, strange to our sensibilities, is an integral part of a covenant rite. Blood is seen as carrying life. It also signifies that if we break the covenant, then what has happened to this animal will happen to us. Blood was poured out in the covenants with Noah, with Abraham, at the Passover meal before the Exodus, with Moses, with Kings David and Solomon in the Temple, at the annual feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and finally on the Cross, Jesus being the sacrifice.

Chapter 14

A central theme on Palm Sunday is the humility of Jesus.

Saint Paul to the Philippians states that Jesus’ state was divine and refers to His equality with God. The Creed confirms what Saint Paul has just said, that Jesus is “God from God, consubstantial with the Father”. Jesus in the passion narrative also declares His divinity, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven”. Jesus, here, is referring explicitly to the prophet Daniel, where we read, “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”.

The immediate response and actions from the high priest confirm that Jesus has just declared Himself to be God, and the priest says, “what need of witnesses have we now? You heard the blasphemy.” and they gave the verdict: he deserved to die”.

Jesus is God. Jesus is King, as we read in Daniel. It is when we see how the prophesied King behaves, that we begin to grasp something of the humility of

Jesus. But there is more. For humility is the essence of God, the essence of the Trinity.

God the Father, in sending His Son, bows down to us in humility. God the eternal Holy Spirit, by overshadowing the Blessed Ever Virgin Mary, and in appearing in the form of a dove at the Baptism of Jesus, breathes humility. And Jesus, the eternal Son in our flesh, is, as Saint Paul writes, “humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross”. God is, in essence, humble. But of course, for Love is humble. Love is the self-offering of one’s self to the other for their true good. Love is not, in essence, a bundle of changing feelings, but service, commitment, integrity given for the other. Jesus’ words and actions are Love incarnate. Everything He is and does is for us. Humility in human flesh.

The Scriptures prophesied the coming of the King on a humble colt. In the first Gospel reading from St Mark, Jesus starts His ascent to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives; Zechariah prophesies that the Messiah will enter Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. Before arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus

sends his disciples to bring Him a colt. In Zechariah, we also read, “Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass”. In Genesis, from Jacob’s last words to his sons about the Messiah, we read again of a colt, “and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Binding his foal to the vine and his ass’s colt to the choice vine”. Remember Jesus’ words - I am the vine you are the branches - Jesus, the vine, binds Himself to His mission by way of a humble colt.

Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a humble colt, His is not the military entrance of an earthly sovereign - Psalm 20 sings, “some put their trust in chariots or in horses, but we in the name our Lord, our God”. Jesus enters Jerusalem rejoicing with Jews and others from the surrounding towns of Jerusalem, He does not seek the approval of appointed men, or royal dignitaries - Psalm 146 sings, “do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help”. Jesus, the King, enters Jerusalem in jubilation, in peace, and in humility.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”. These words from Psalm 22 in no way express a moment of divine existential angst, a moment of separation from the Father: Jesus declares “the Father and I are one”, and there cannot be a break, a hiatus in the eternal truth that God, the Trinity, is love, is communion. Rather, it is another glimpse of divine humility. Here Jesus, so humbly, enters into the reality of every man and woman who will ever experience total helplessness, for He alone can defeat despair, and darkness, through the sheer wonder of His divine humility to die for us and then rise victorious. Zechariah’s

prophecy is so true, “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a colt”.

There is one person who stands out in the Passion narrative whose once broken heart has now been so utterly transformed by the humility, by the victorious love of Jesus. She anoints him; and Jesus, Who sees into the hearts of all, praises her epically. Many have said that she is none other than our patron, Saint Mary Magdalen. May the humble majesty of the King so penetrate our hearts, too, that we will anoint Him in how we practise and live the Faith. This Holy Week, will we seek humility to follow Him?

Chapter 15

“He cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out’. The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go’”. This description of the raising of Lazarus by Jesus, witnessed by Martha and Mary - that venerable tradition tells us is Saint Mary Magdalen - and the disciples, gives us an example of what many expected when Jesus spoke of His own rising from the dead.

All those Jesus raised from the dead - the widow of Nain’s son, Jairus’ daughter, and Lazarus - would all have subsequently died again. It is likely that Jesus’ disciples and those, like Saint Mary Magdalen, who had become so deeply devoted to Him, were expecting His coming back from the dead to also be finally subject to the laws of nature, that Jesus’ coming back from the dead would not be for ever.

When Saint Mary Magdalen visits the tomb, and we see how eager she is to come to the Body of Jesus for she is coming as soon as the Sabbath has ended - it was still dark, she is expecting to find His dead Body. In Saint Mark’s Gospel she comes with spices to anoint His dead Body. We see that Saint Mary Magdalen had, as yet, no real grasp of what Jesus’ resurrection from the dead could mean. But then no-one did or could.

Her heart at that point had not been awakened to the utterly incredible and eternal power that is the Resurrection. Never again will Jesus die. If each of us truly lived our lives in the power of the Resurrection, would we choose differently? It took Jesus, in Saint John’s Gospel, to call Mary by her name before she realises that He is risen. In a state of joy and superabundant love she cries, “Rabboni”, which means teacher, and tries to touch Him. But Jesus wants Mary Magdalen to learn

that He is, now, more than ever, truly destined for heaven, where humanity will be glorified for all eternity through Him.

Earlier, Saint Mary Magdalen made haste to tell Saints Peter and John that the tomb is empty. On arrival at the empty tomb, they note how the linen cloths are lying in the tomb. The Greek text, in describing the cloths that encased His Body, gives the impression that He has just risen up out of them, leaving them now deflated, empty. They are left in the position where His dead Body had lain, before His miraculous Resurrection.

The Resurrection of Jesus has transfigured his previous mortal Body, imbued it with powers which hitherto it did not reveal. He is now also able to walk through walls, as we read in Saint John's Gospel, so rising through these linen cloths would present no challenge. This new heavenly splendour which graces His presence is partly the reason why people do not recognise Him until He touches their souls, their hearts. This was the case with Saint Mary Magdalen and also with the disciples heading to Emmaus, away from Jerusalem, even after they had heard of the tomb being empty. He longs for each of us to have a truly focused and attentive faith in the utterly risen splendour of the Son of God.

The Resurrection of Jesus though is totally rooted, makes no sense, unless we grasp that it is His victory over our sin. All that is evil, all that is divisive has been shown to be actually impotent in comparison with the victorious love of God. Christianity is the true religion, for heaven has literally come down to earth, and God, the Trinity, then sends the Holy Spirit to recreate humble obedient souls for heaven. The Resurrection is not merely the historical event of a man rising from the dead. It is victory over our sin which frees humanity from everlasting decay.

Saint Paul who experienced the risen Jesus, after having previously been a vicious persecutor of Christians, now teaches with such passion that we must die with Christ to sin, to live in heaven. When Saints Peter and John arrive at the tomb and enter, note, it is Saint John who believes. Saint John that most contemplative and visionary of all the Disciples. And Saint Peter, who had, a few days earlier, denied Jesus, and thus sinned against his Lord, truly begins to understand why Jesus had to die. For in the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Peter proclaims now how they ate with the risen Lord and that only in accepting Jesus' forgiveness for our sins will we inherit the saving power of God. Saint Mary Magdalen had been delivered from seven demons by Jesus before His Crucifixion. Now risen, she realises that her deliverance was from the eternal glory of heaven, opened to her by her risen Lord, Saviour, and friend. How are each of us going to live for the risen Jesus, Who has died once for sin and is now risen?